

MARCH 2025

WISH Newsletter

WISH Drop-In Centre Society is located on the unceded, stolen lands of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) First Nations.



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"Sign" by April dela Noche Milne



WISH
Drop-In Centre Society

CELEBRATING
40 YEARS
OF SUPPORTING
SEX WORKERS

A message from WISH's ED

I joined WISH as Executive Director last September. Returning to a sex-worker centred space felt like a homecoming.

It has been wonderful to connect with WISH staff, participants, partner organizations, and donors who embody genuine passion, fortitude, and community spirit.

It is this spirit that we are drawing on during this time of financial precarity for non-profits, including WISH.



Strong leadership requires compassion. It also requires sound analysis, true teamwork, and decisive action. The recent decision to cutback WISH programming was not taken lightly.

I am proud to be part of a team that was able to make this hard call in order to ensure WISH can continue to serve and engage street-based sex workers well into the future.

As we look towards the eventual reopening of the Drop-In program, we are evolving the ways we can truly centre the women and gender diverse street-based sex workers who make up the heart of WISH.

In addition to providing crucial services, we continue to co-create a space of community and belonging with participants.

WISH just marked our 40th anniversary.

Alongside the celebrations came some stark reflections. The fact that our services are still needed after forty years is a shameful indictment of the systemic and intersecting oppressions street-based sex workers face, especially in the DTES.

This current “normal” is deeply unjust.

WISH provides essential services and connection for people in need, and securing adequate funding requires commitments from government sources, foundations, and individual donors.

This is why your support of WISH is so critical, and so deeply appreciated.

Thank you for supporting WISH, and for pushing back against systemic forces of oppression, as we seek a new normal—one built on care, dignity and respect.

With gratitude,

Kara Gillies

Executive Director
WISH Drop-In Centre



Create lasting change

You are invited to join the WISH Champions!

Right now, there are 239 folks who have made a monthly pledge to WISH.

One of these incredible people has been giving \$10 a month for over 13 years!

Every member of this group helps make WISH happen in a very impactful way. **If that includes you, thank you for being a champion of WISH Drop-In Centre.**

If not, would you consider making a monthly pledge this year?

The day-to-day reality for non-profits is a constantly shifting landscape.

For organizations that count on government funding, changes in political leadership can make or break their annual budget.

For organizations that depend on donations from individuals, most of their annual funding arrives in the last two months of the year.

This uncertainty affects efficiency, and WISH's ability to serve participants.

When donors choose to give monthly, it makes a huge difference!



By shifting from an annual gift to a monthly pledge, you can help ensure WISH participants have reliable access to essential services.

To emphasize how important monthly donors are, and the essential work they make possible, we are launching something new called WISH Champions.

Every monthly donor is part of the club, and every donation helps build stability.

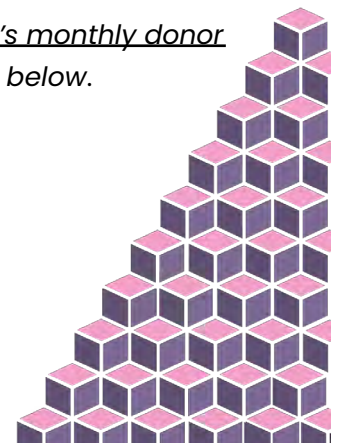


As a WISH Champion, you will continue to get regular updates on WISH programs, and you can also expect reports on the impact your monthly donations make for the people who count on WISH.

You can help WISH build stability.

Become a WISH Champion, make your monthly pledge today!

[Click here to access WISH's monthly donor form](#) or scan the QR code below.



Celebrating 5 years of 1-to-1 support for participants

Quotes below provided by WISH participants, shared with their permission.

InReach at WISH started in January 2020 when two workers began providing individualized support to WISH participants. This proved to be an effective way to connect folks with the programs and services that best meet their needs.

The program currently includes two InReach Workers, a Housing Support Worker, and the InReach Program Manager.

For women and gender diverse people with experience in street-based sex work, **systemic forces like sexism, transphobia and the criminalization of sex work** create barriers to accessing housing, labour rights, health care, and much more.

Wow, usually no one will listen. I've told people so many times this was an issue, but no one actually helped me.

Many participants rely on WISH for access to essential services like food, clothing and showers. Then, once their immediate and urgent needs are met, participants can choose to seek assistance achieving longer term goals.

That's where the InReach team steps in.

Participants can book time with InReach



workers, who help to connect them to WISH programs and other resources within the organization, as well as external agencies and services.

Most one-to-one appointments happen at WISH, but InReach and Housing Support Workers have the flexibility to assist participants in the community as well.

Y'all have saved my life so many times.

High staff turnover in frontline work often leads to a situation where the person seeking services must tell their story over and over. This creates yet another barrier to access, preventing the opportunity to build a trusting relationship.

We are incredibly proud to share that there has been very little staff turnover in the first 5 years of the program at WISH. When a team member has had to step away, the transition has been handled with great care to preserve the trusted connections they have built.

InReach and Housing Support Workers prioritize self-determination, supporting participants to access what they need in a respectful, non-judgmental environment.

I have options now, thanks to you. Usually, I have to hide or only share certain parts of the information to avoid people knowing stuff. I can tell you anything.

Individualized support is exactly that – determined by the individual. This may include replacing ID, establishing a bank account, or creating an email address.

The InReach team also assists with complex goals like securing and maintaining long-term housing, submitting Federal Indian Day School or 60s Scoop settlement claims, navigating the process to claim refugee status, or preparing for surgery.

The types of support needed are so diverse, InReach Workers have compiled a list tracking the specific requests they have responded to. In the past 5 years, that list has grown to include over 150 different examples of support.

I haven't done my taxes before because I didn't know how to file as a sex worker. I didn't really want to tell the people there I'm a sex worker, because, well, you know what happens then. You made it so easy.

In the WISH community, conditions of extreme inequity exist alongside incredible community activism and resilience.

This program helps to prove that, even

while facing great disparity and discrimination, **women and gender diverse street-based sex workers are transforming their lives through access to free and healthy choices.**

As one InReach Worker said, “when we work one-on-one with folks, we hear about their stories, ambitions and talents. WISH participants are the most incredible, kind, and brilliant people. To support such amazing people through parts of their journey is an opportunity I’m grateful for.”

It's nice when sex work doesn't become my whole identity, my whole thing. I'm a lot more than that. It's my job, it's not everything. People find that out and suddenly that's what you are, it's all you are. Not here, here I can laugh and actually talk to someone who will listen and help me.

While this program provides support through a lot of difficult situations, it also creates avenues for fun and laughter, an integral part of the human experience and an essential element of mental health.

InReach is bitchin' – you're a real one.



Collage made by a WISH participant.

Also facilitated by InReach:

- Red Light Alert
- Sex Worker Circle
- Participant consultations
- Monthly participant birthday parties
- Special event programming (Sex Worker Pride Day, National Indigenous Peoples Day, Orange Shirt Day, Red Dress Day, International Sex Workers' Rights Day, International Women's Day)



InReach program statistics (2020-2025)

One-to-one appointments	3,155
Instances of support	9,047
Internal referrals	3,768
External referrals	4,768
Off-site appointments	160
Housing placements	62
Housing transfers	13
Support through eviction	32

InReach Community partnerships:

- The Ministry of Social Development & Poverty Reduction, Community Integration Specialist
- Kilala Lelum Mobile Health Clinic
- Atira's Early Resolution Community Justice Program
- Rise Women's Legal Clinic, Community Outreach Advocate
- Salal Sexual Violence Support Centre, Victim Services Worker
- Intensive Housing Outreach Team (IHOT)

What does self-determination look like?

Three original illustrations explore solidarity, agency and sex worker rights.

For any organization, reaching the 40th year of operations is an important milestone.

For WISH, it's incredible.

The extraordinary individuals who choose to support WISH—some folks for decades—are incredible. They are informed, compassionate, committed, and proud to stand in solidarity with women and gender diverse street-based sex workers.

Incredible also means hard to believe.

In that sense, it's also incredible that **street-based sex workers are still denied many of their basic rights** as conditions affecting our community continue to worsen.

WISH programs are led by WISH values—acceptance, caring, dignity, and respect—and they support the self-determination of participants. To commemorate WISH's 40th year, we asked, "what does self-determination look like?"

Local illustrator April dela Noche Milne had a beautiful response.



April has been raising funds for local charities, including WISH, for several years through the sale of her Time Shrine Calendars.

Her work in illustration and comics explores "grief and memory, the humour of everyday narratives, and issues of identity," and it was very inspiring to work with her on this project!

April was also inspired, and said, "I really appreciate WISH's respect for the fluidity of the gender spectrum and their commitment to inclusion of trans and gender diverse individuals. **Something important to me, and I think to WISH, is treating those who are most vulnerable with compassion and kindness.** I feel strongly about all women being safe, empowered, and treated with compassion and respect."

The images April created aim to show the diversity within our community, with an emphasis on agency, solidarity, and sex worker rights.

These illustrations help to



envision a future where the health, safety and well-being of women and gender diverse street-based sex workers are not at risk, and a community where we can all give and receive caring support.

Thank you to everyone who has reached out to share their reaction to these

images, thank you to the folks who successfully bid on framed prints of these illustrations at the 40th Anniversary WISH Auction, and especially **thank you April for this incredible work.**

You can see more of April dela Noche Milne's work at aprilmilne.com.



"Agency" by April dela Noche Milne



"Solidarity" by April dela Noche Milne



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