

Downtown Eastside
**Women's
Centre**



2017/18 Annual Report

Report from the Board of Directors

In March 2018, we were delighted to celebrate the 40th year of The Downtown Eastside Women's Centre (DEWC). DEWC's four decades have been characterized by growth, relationship building, perseverance through tragedies, and the continued empowerment of women in the face of pervasive and systemic forms of oppression. This milestone is meaningful to the Board of Directors, and we have worked hard over the last year to ensure that DEWC is well-positioned to continue providing vital services, programs, and space to women of the Downtown Eastside for decades to come.

Similar to recent years, in 2017/2018, we focused a considerable effort on increasing our fundraising to support programs and services at DEWC. As the cost of food, supplies, and operations continues to increase, and as the demand for services continues to climb, funding from our on-going government contracts does not. While we have secured funding for our shelter renovations as we lead up to 24-hour operation, the drop-in centre, which is the very heart of DEWC, remains unfunded by a regular contract. As such, we have to continue to find ways to ensure sufficient funding in order to meet the needs of the women from the community.

This past year, the fundraising efforts of volunteers (both peer and out-of-area), Elders, staff, and Board of Directors have been very successful. We have seen substantial increase in donations and contributions including from our now annual fundraising gala, *Herstory in Focus*, from charity running/walking events, including the *Scotiabank Charity Challenge* and the *Eastside 10K*, and multiple third-party events.

As a result of these fundraising successes, we have been able to continue to invest in an endowment fund with the Vancouver Foundation. With respect to the long-term stability of DEWC, this investment is critical. As it grows, this endowment will provide

DEWC with the financial security to withstand the risk of rising costs and demands and of deeper cuts to government contracts. The sustainability of DEWC is a key value of the Board of Directors, and this endowment fund is fundamental in realizing this goal.

Also with the goal of long-term stability, the Board of Directors has worked hard to increase its experiential and professional capacity. Several of us have attended workshops to improve our knowledge of governing non-profit organizations such as DEWC. We have also broadened the representation of the board to ensure a solid base of skills, experience, knowledge, and awareness. We've sought to ensure that the board has policy and legal expertise, as well as expertise managing women-serving organizations. We've brought on younger women and more women of colour. These representational endeavors serve to improve the board as a whole, resulting in a more effective organization with increased capacity. It goes without saying that we remain deeply committed to ensuring that women of the community, including Elders and peer volunteers, are properly represented on the Board. Their experiences, expertise, and wisdom are fundamental to the health, well-being, and effectiveness of DEWC.

The Board has also increased participation and involvement in community engagement, seeking opportunities to speak publicly about the important work of the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre and presenting DEWC as a worthwhile organization to support, financially and otherwise. In addition, communication tools such as the spring report have been developed that support us in demonstrating the needs of women in this community to a much larger audience.

This year has been a very difficult year. So many women have become victims of the fentanyl crises, services, programs, and supports continue to diminish or disappear, housing and homelessness in this city is a crisis and as we participate in the National Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry. There is so much more critical work to be done which we can only achieve by working together. We want to take this opportunity to thank our volunteers,

Elders, management and staff, as well as our funders and contributors.

Report from Management

2017-18 has as usual been another busy year for the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre, as the needs and demands for our services and programs continue to grow. Offering a space of safety, and community for women in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside remains our priority mandate.

A long time goal has been to realize a 24 hour low barrier drop-in shelter for women in the downtown eastside. For the past 13 years, DEWC has operated the Emergency Shelter with the restrictions of operating between the hours of 6pm to 9am. Outside of these hours, women are required to leave the shelter without any assurances for their safety, and often have no access to "women only" resources until the DEWC Drop-In Centre opens. A space and funding has been secured and we are now in the midst of renovating the shelter with an anticipated reopening date of November 2018. Once re-opened the shelter will operate 24 hrs/day.

We have increased specialized services and programming staff positions and hours improving the resources available for women. Of course, we remain tight on space and are looking to move some of the admin team to a different location, freeing up space for staff offices.

We would like to thank the Centre Volunteers who undertake an enormous amount of work to ensure the operations of DEWC. Without the dedication and commitment of the volunteer women, we would not be able to provide the services and programs that we do. We recognize that many of the volunteers live in extremely challenging circumstances including poverty and homelessness, yet consistently show up to contribute to making a safe space for women and to ensuring that DEWC remains reflective of our mission and purpose.

We would like to thank DEWC staff, who continue to provide essential services within a

very challenging environment. Although incredibly busy, chaotic, and stretched for resources, DEWC staff works with commitment and generosity.

We send a special thank you to the Board of Directors. This year there has again been consistent membership on the board, which really supports the work of DEWC. We really appreciate the dedication and hard work of each and every board member. We are also grateful to the Fundraising Committee who have been working to support our long-term goals and priorities.

Finally, a thank you goes to all of the women who access the centre, for contributing in so many ways to make it the special and unique space that it is. Every day, DEWC members are supporting staff or other women: helping to clean up; reaching out to women in distress; sharing food with women who come in hungry; and laughing, joking, singing – creating a welcoming and safe space.

Drop-In Program

The Drop-In program provides a safe refuge and respite for women and children living in Vancouver's downtown eastside. We are open 7 days a week, and for some, we represent the only space of safety. The Drop-In program provides basic needs services such as toiletries, clothing, safe showers and bathrooms, computer and telephone access, and recreational and social activities.

The DEWC Drop-In also serves as a place where women can be a part of a community of women: providing each other with support and the opportunity to share their knowledge and experiences. The women who access the Drop-In represent a diverse group: they are elders, mothers, daughters, granddaughters, aunts, and nieces; they come from all Nations. The Drop-In program facilitates opportunities during the year for women to celebrate together: Summer BBQ, Mother's Day, Chinese New Year, National Aboriginal Day, and Halloween. This past year has seen changes to the community of women accessing the Centre. We said goodbye to some long-time members who have passed on. We have seen many new faces as women leave their home communities and

provinces and come to the downtown eastside area.



Our lunch program is continuing to provide healthy and nutritious meals. On average, we serve around 400 meals everyday, resulting in the kitchen being constantly stretched to its limits. We have a new walk-in fridge that has been a great addition to our kitchen, making it more efficient for ordering food, meal planning and keeping up with food safe requirements. However, the new dishwasher is still the favorite since it makes staff and volunteers jobs more efficient and manageable in the hectic kitchen and drop-in environment.

Emergency Night Shelter

The mandate of the Women's Emergency Shelter is to provide a safe, low-barrier refuge for vulnerable women in the Downtown Eastside. We offer a basic and much-needed program of nightly meals, showers, access to advocates, health supports, victim services and mental health referrals where appropriate. While the shelter can accommodate 50 women for sleeping, we see over 140 women coming through on a nightly basis. Often women come in to access meals, warmth, hot tea/coffee, showers, or simply to talk to our staff and/or their friends.

The shelter continues to benefit greatly from the presence of DEWC housing workers and Advocates who assist shelter staff in the efforts to support women in crisis. Additionally, thanks are due to our in-area volunteers who dedicate up to three hours of their time in the evenings and on weekends to help staff in the general

running of the shelter. Our volunteers' assistance is invaluable, and their enthusiasm is boundless. The volunteers and their Volunteer Coordinator are greatly appreciated and we thank you for all your hard work.

Harm reduction, overdose prevention and Naloxone training have been well received and/or attended. The overdose crisis has brought our shelter program closer to the women we serve as we all work together to prevent overdoses. The shelter now has an in-house Naloxone trainer so that all staff are trained and provided their own kit in addition to the shelter supply. Staff has attended a minimum of 3 overdoses per month providing life-saving breathers and Naloxone both in and around the shelter.

We are excited to move back to a newly renovated space at 412 E Cordova that we will re-open operating as a 24hr space. No longer will we be closing in the morning asking women to leave in the rain, snow, heat with no where to go. We are excited to offer a safe and functional space that has been designed as a shelter with the added bonus of having in-house support for the women we serve to access advocacy and outreach services.

DEWC Elders



The Elders are an integral part of the Women's Centre. They provide guidance, direction and share with us traditional values, customs, and protocol. A high value is placed on emotional, physical, spiritual, and mental growth. Traditional teachings and protocol makes the elders approachable and engenders a sense of family.

The Cultural Program works alongside the Elders group, planning and facilitating various cultural events and activities such as National Aboriginal Day, sage picking, berry picking, beading, regalia making, and the annual Elder's Gathering. Women at the centre are provided with weekly art activities like crafts, theatre, and art shows.

The Elders participate in social and educational programs to learn and share cultural teachings, medicines, and the importance of cultural awareness and activities in the community and amongst the general public.

Skills Development Program

This year volunteers contributed **17,520 hours** making it possible for the centre to provide many services and programs. For example, volunteers work in the clothing room, at reception, in the kitchen, translators, administration for the volunteer store, workshop facilitators and participate in hiring committees and at fundraising events.

This Skills Development program provides support, training, education, and experience opportunities for women from the DTES, to



support them in making positive long-term changes in their lives. This program facilitates involving women of the community in the activities of the Centre: it helps to build individual and community capacity for change. This is an integral aspect of the Centre that is linked to our principles of self-help, peer support and community building

As well as working regular shifts, women participate in workshops on the topics of life skills development, health and safety, as well as certification programs, such as First Aid and Food Safety. Some women participate in counselling programs offered by the Centre, such as the Battered Women Support Services, Warriors Organizing Women group, and the Healing Circle.

The Skills Development program continues to be a very important part of the Women's Centre. This year, the program has had a particular focus on reaching out to the emergency night shelter to make it accessible for the women who stay at the shelter and to give them the opportunity to be involved.

Power of Women Group

The Power of Women group has about 30 women attending weekly and any and all women are welcome to join! We have dinner from 5-6 pm and then have talking circles, guest speakers, outings, or workshops on issues of social justice, homelessness, poverty, and violence against women, racism, and more. Throughout the year, the group has regularly participated in a range of community justice efforts. This includes: Coalition for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, Women's Memorial March Committee, Our Homes Can't Wait coalition, City of Vancouver's SRO Taskforce and other community justice efforts.

Some highlights of the year including making memorial quilts and signs in memory, and forty drums for the women's memorial march, as well as attending the MMIW National Inquiry in Richmond to give testimony and witness. A collaborative art banner exhibited at Gallery Gachet

As part of a prior POW writing project, three members are published in Keetsahnak / Our Missing and Murdered Indigenous Sisters,



edited by Kim Anderson, Maria Campbell and Christi Belcourt. We hosted meetings and consultations on the provincial Poverty Reduction strategy with the province, City of Vancouver Poverty Reduction Advisory Committee, with BC Government Minister for Multiculturalism, BC Human Rights Commission, BC Housing Minister, and Elders inclusion strategy

Power of Women members have spoken at City Hall, Heart of the City festival, Homelessness Action Week, Site C rallies, BCCLA press conference, UBCIC press conferences, Womens' Memorial march and press conference, Burnaby Mountain, housing rallies in the DTES, UBC and SFU campuses, and more.

We had **68 outings** that included medicine walks, berry picking, art shows, theatre and poetry performances, movies, documentaries, speaking panel events, art journaling, book launches, drumming circles, cedar weaving, storytelling, cultural events, dance shows and protests on a range of issues such as pipelines, housing, reconciliation, violence against women, Indigenous land and water protection, poverty, disability, racism, and more.

We have also in-house hosted monthly guest speakers from Hogan's Alley Society, Alliances Against Displacement, Pacific Association of First Nations Women, First United Advocacy, Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users, Pivot Legal Society, Urban Aboriginal Peoples Advisory Committee to the City of Vancouver, as well as public speaking and dance and yoga workshops.

We had legal workshops with legal advocates doing know your rights with police, tenants rights, getting on disability assistance, and 60s scoop claims.

I (Harsha) have had the immense honour and privilege of working with women at DEWC for the past thirteen years. I learn so much from all the brilliant leaders of the Power of Women group. I look forward to continuing to work with all you amazing women and to be of service to and in solidarity with in a good way. Thank you for all that everyone offers and brings to the Centre.

Women's Street Market

The DTES Women's Street Market is a community event organized and operated by the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre. This program aims to support, train, and provide economic opportunity to women of the DTES.



The Market ran through the months of June to September on Columbia Street between Cordova and Powell street. The Fair also had the support of local artists and performers who donated their time and artistic abilities to contribute to the friendly, festive, and safe atmosphere.

As the Centre works toward positive changes for women and children, the Women's Market follows the DEWC mandate by providing women with a safe, non-judgmental space, as well as support, skills development, and income generating opportunities.

The vendors have been selling arts and crafts, jewelry, hats, homemade bannock, popcorn, cotton candy, gently used clothing, and houseware items. Seventeen women had been through a training program facilitated by Battered Women Support Services. Women have been employed and participated in training in conflict resolution, customer service, and anti-oppression. The women worked within a peer base framework as peer coordinators, peer guardians, maintenance, and food services workers. Women are actively involved in the operating and decision making of the Women's Market where women feel proud, take ownership, develop their skills, and create extra income.

Mental Health Advocacy

The Mental Health Advocacy program provides advocacy and support to women who require assistance from with the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) as well as the Vancouver Aboriginal Children & Family Services Society (VACFSS), the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction (MSDPR) and the Residential Tenancy Branch. We also assist women on issues and applications concerning Canada Pension Plan benefits, Old Age Security benefits and the Guaranteed Income Supplement.

The advocacy program remains in high demand due to changes in the delivery of services. Women need more support everyday. Of particular note were the changes that the MSDPR implemented to access services via computers as opposed to face to face contact. As different Government Bureaucracies both federal and provincial move to computer access only, this results in a greater need of assistance.

The Women's Centre's advocacy services in the Downtown Eastside continue to rise due to broader systemic factors. In particular, the need for women-specific services (Trans and two Spirit inclusive) is critical as the impacts of the housing crisis, violence against women, inadequate social assistance rates, the fentanyl crisis and colonial legal and child protection systems create barriers to access unique to women.

We are challenged daily by these increased demands. On a sad note but one that deserves mention is the increase in homeless moms and consequentially more children put in care. We do have women waiting on housing lists who can not bring their children home. The Women's Centre has allied themselves with housing agencies whose mandate is aimed specifically for women with children. However, there is still a wait and families suffer as a result.

Despite these challenges of ever increasing need of services, the DEWC advocacy continues to be successful with our women's issues. We have fostered a solid working relationship with our local MSDPR Outreach

and Integration team that has proved to be an essential in our delivery of service model. We continue to work on systemic change and to and to bring women's lives and experiences to the forefront.

We look forward to the next year to engaging in further systemic advocacy and supporting women in this community.

Housing Outreach

The Downtown Eastside Women's Centre's Housing team is comprised of two teams. One is the federally funded Housing First team and the other provincially funded Housing Outreach Program.

The Housing team has exceeded its target outcomes for the federally funded Housing First program. Our housing team is one of 3 teams to work with the DTES population and the only one to work with such large numbers of women. While most teams report that their staff carry a caseload of a maximum of 20 clients, our team averages 38 women each, across the 9 staff. Essentially, the staff are working with over 300 women through this program. In addition, staff work with another 200 women through the Provincially funded Housing Outreach Program.

Our team works to assist over 500 women a year to apply for housing in all spectrums of available housing, including SRO's, social housing and market housing. Without a substantial increase in affordable housing and some form of rent control the HOP and HPS Programs remain a temporary solution to homelessness.

Chinese Seniors Outreach

This program serves about 200 Chinese seniors annually. While the majority of seniors speak Cantonese, we are seeing increasing numbers of Mandarin speaking seniors accessing our centre. This program is designed to reach out to isolated seniors living in the Downtown Eastside and

Strathcona area, many of which are disconnected from their families. The types of issues they face daily include poverty, racism, housing, ageism, isolation, mental health issues, discrimination, domestic and elder abuse, and conflicts arising from language barriers and miscommunication. The program offers accompaniments, translations, advocacy, outreach, support, hospital visits, home visits, referrals, outings, groups and a community kitchen program.

Many Chinese seniors attend DEWC special events such as our spring, fall and Christmas meal, Chinese New Year celebration and DEWC's annual BBQ. The Chinese seniors group participates in community kitchen program, facilitated by the outreach worker that takes place once a week at the Downtown Eastside Neighborhood House. This year we reformed the format of the community kitchen. The new community kitchen will have a week for seniors to socialize and do a meal plan, then the next week; seniors will prepare food to share with a parent group at the neighborhood house. There are a total of 75 seniors participating in the kitchen.

Victim Services Program

The Victim Service program provides support and assistance to women that have been victims of crime. This includes reporting of crime, emotional support, accompaniment to court and referrals to other programs and services. Support is also available for any women who may or may not have reported the crime to the police or be involved with the criminal justice system.

Violence in its many forms - ongoing racism, discrimination, poverty, homelessness, mental health issues, addictions - continue to create barriers for women to safely access services, shelters, and housing. The women continue to live in isolation within layers of social problems which is compounded by their lack of access to community services and programs.

The Victim Service Worker is also involved in the February 14 Memorial March Committee, the SisterWatch Committee, the Missing and Murdered Women's Coalition, and the Victim Services Coordinating Committee as well as

various other projects that raise awareness about the violence perpetrated against women in the community, particularly Aboriginal women.

The resilience of women is incredible and the journey has enhanced our voices to bring public awareness and to educate those who continue to judge them for surviving in a world full of chaos and racism.

Many women in this community continue to deal with extreme violence not only within their community, but at the hands of the police, their dealers, their companion, or someone they know or owe money to. The many stories of survival continue to bring strength, not only to our presence in the community, but also to the voice of injustice. The Victim Service Worker has also been supporting those who are participating in the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

HIV/AIDS Community Case Management

The primary goal of the HIV/AIDS Community Case Manager is to provide client-specific services to women who are living with HIV/AIDS. The women we serve either currently reside or continue to have ties to the Downtown Eastside, and would otherwise not have access to HIV-specific resources. Using the harm reduction model and women-Centred approach, we aim to provide information, support, and care coordination to HIV-specific services and resources. The HIV/AIDS case manager aims to stabilize individuals so that they can live a long and healthy life by providing ongoing case management and support to women living with HIV.

The HIV/AIDS Case Manager's main role is to advocate for women to address barriers to their social support, physical and emotional health, housing status, practical needs, financial and legal issues, mental health/addictions, harm reduction, and nutritional health. The HIV/AIDS Case Manager aims to connect women to essential services in the area and work with them to create personalized care plans and goals. The HIV/AIDS Case Manager also works closely with the Case Management team at Aids Vancouver to provide continuity of

services, and establish connections with other community groups and resources.

Through the M.A.C. Aids Fund, we are able to create the *Community Kitchen for Women Living with Chronic Illness*. This program runs twice a month, with a registered clinical dietitian that attends once a month to teach about healthy eating and living strategies.

By having a presence in the community and continuously challenging the stigmas around HIV/AIDS, we are breaking down the barriers that are still very prevalent in our society. By collaborating with other community organizations, we are enhancing our knowledge of supports and services for people living with HIV/AIDS and connecting women to ensure that they are accessing services available to them.

Fundraising & Communications

This past year has much to celebrate for Fundraising and Communications! We have spearheaded fundraising goals set in motion by the strategic plan, including a new donor database, increased donor engagement and social media presence, and broadening our network of support.

Technology has been instrumental in improving our fundraising processes. This past year, in response to our strategic plan, we implemented an online donor database through Salesforce, a platform specifically built for sales and non-profits. Through this project, we were able to organize our data on donors, funders, and supporters, as well as incorporating direct online donation on our website. Thanks to this, we have vastly improved our donor engagement and our fundraising capacity, and are still learning how to harness this tool for increased success.

Our communications and marketing have brought greater awareness of our organization to the public. We have significantly built up communications and marketing strategies, campaigns, social media use and promotional materials, liaised

with partners in charity events, and improved our website so as to continue to connect supporters with the DEWC community. In light of this, we have seen an increase of new donors and doubled our monthly donors this past year.

We raised over \$25,000 in the Scotiabank Charity Challenge at the Scotiabank Half Marathon & 5K! In a huge team effort, volunteers, Board members, and staff rallied their fundraising energy and made it our best year yet! Thank you to everyone who ran, fundraised, and otherwise participated.



Herstory in Focus, our annual fashion show fundraiser at the Vancouver Art Gallery in the fall, garnered a warm reception from attendees and exceeded our goal, raising \$50,000 for DEWC. Women performed in a fashion show that brought audience members to their feet in applause, Larissa spoke about the Centre, and generous attendees gave to the live and silent auctions. Herstory not only raised important funds for DEWC but celebrated the empowerment of women, making emotional impact for donors and connecting them to our community.

We extend heartfelt thanks to our circle of support - donors, funders, volunteers, staff, Board, and of course, members - for the continual encouragement, stories, hard work and care to ensure continued advocacy for DEWC. Any work of raising support and awareness happens as a community and we are grateful for ours.

Funder Acknowledgement

The Downtown Eastside Women's Centre (DEWC) relies on the base support from government grants, as well as contracts and agreements with foundations and other community groups to support our work. Every dollar coming to the DEWC through grants and donations is appreciated, and supports us to assist the women and children of this community. For the 2017-18 fiscal year, DEWC programming was supported through contracts with, or significant contributions from, the following

Sustaining Helper

Anglican Church of Canada (Anglican Healing Fund)
BC Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation
Catherine Donnelly Foundation
Compassion in Action Fund
Face the World Foundation
G&F Financial Group Foundation
Hockey Helps the Homeless
Innoweave (J.W. McConnell Foundation)
Moffat Family Fund (through the Winnipeg Foundation)
Newman's Own Foundation

Centre Sponsor

BC Gaming Policy and Enforcement Branch
BC Housing
BC Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General
City of Vancouver
Services Canada, Employment and Social Development, Innovative Solutions to Homelessness
Service Canada, Homelessness Partnering Strategy
Vancouver Coastal Health Authority

Community Supporter

Service Canada, New Horizons for Seniors
Vancity Community Foundation

Generous Givers

Central City Foundation
Department of Justice Canada
Service Canada - Employment and Social Development Canada - Canada Summer Jobs

Our Mission

Our mission is to provide for basic needs and to work toward positive change for women and children in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver

Our Purpose

The constitution of the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre was written in 1978 upon incorporation and is still relevant today:

- To provide a comfortable, safe drop-in centre.
- To provide recreation and self-help programs.
- To act as a source of information by assisting women with referrals concerning their needs.
- To provide a social space and facilitate the opportunity for women of diverse backgrounds to interact and build community.
- To educate the public and all levels of government about issues concerning women in the area