TORONTO STAFF REPORT

April 28, 2003

To: Board of Health

From: Dr. Sheela V. Basrur, Medical Officer of Health

Subject: AIDS and Drug Prevention Funding to Street Health Community Nursing Foundation

Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to update the Board of Health on the funding provided to All Saints' Church-Community Centre and Street Health Community Nursing Foundation for its harm reduction activities.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

There are no financial implications resulting from this report.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Board of Health receive this report for information.

Background:

At its meeting of October 1,2 and 3, 2002 Toronto City Council requested the Medical Officer of Health to "submit a report to the Board of Health on the funding provided to All Saints' Church-Community Centre and Street Health Community Nursing Foundation and the appropriateness of funding drug kits".

The AIDS Prevention Grants Program supports community initiatives in providing targeted HIV/AIDS prevention education programs and the Drug Prevention Grants Program was established to build community capacity for local initiatives in drug prevention. Injection Drug Users are priority populations for both grants programs.

AIDS Prevention Grants and Drug Prevention Grants currently fund Street Health Community Nursing Foundation (Street Health). One of Street Health's service locations is All Saints' Church but the AIDS and Drug Prevention Grants do not currently fund All Saints' Church-Community Centre. Street Health also received $8,470 from the City of Toronto Homeless Initiatives Fund for TTC tokens for client transit support and All Saints' Church-Community Centre received $12,725 from the same fund for a 3-month harm reduction research project.

Comments:

In 2002 Street Health received $39,513 through AIDS Prevention Grants to hire a Peer Coordinator and $29,643 from Drug Prevention Grants to hire a Harm Reduction Coordinator. These Coordinators provide services such as evening outreach on harm reduction and HIV/AIDS prevention to street involved adults; harm reduction workshops for service providers; HIV prevention workshops for service users, providers and Street Health's Board of Directors; and needle distribution and exchange. Part of the outreach funded by the City of Toronto involves the distribution of Safer Sex Kits which include condoms and lubricant. Harm reduction kits are also distributed. These kits include syringes, alcohol swabs, distilled water, condoms, ascorbic acid and a tourniquet.

Street Health provides services based on a Harm Reduction approach, which is a proven and effective strategy used in AIDS and Drug Prevention to minimize the adverse health effects of drug use on a high risk and marginalized population. Harm Reduction is also a strategy endorsed by the City of Toronto's Harm Reduction Facilities Working Group and Toronto City Council (June 26,27&28, 2001).

Specifically, needle exchange programs have proven effective in changing needle sharing habits among injection drug users, significantly decreasing the risk of HIV (1993, University of California). While acknowledging the limitations in obtaining reliable information on drug use prevalence, research has also shown that "there is no evidence that needle exchange programs increase the amount of drug use by needle exchange clients or change the overall community levels of non-injection and injection drug use." (1993, University of California).

Most needle exchange programs include the distribution of condoms and supplies for cleaning needles. Users have also come to rely upon these programs as primary sources for information on a variety of health-related issues (City of Toronto Department of Public Health, 1996, p.2). The distribution of harm reduction kits, in addition to providing condoms and needles to decrease HIV, Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C transmission, also enable service providers to make contact with and provide services to a high risk population who generally have difficulty accessing medical care.

Furthermore, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health's position paper on Harm Reduction states that "there is evidence that programs that reduce the short and long term harm to substance users benefit the entire community through reduced crime …in addition to the benefits from the inclusion into mainstream life of previously marginalized members of society. The improved

health and functioning of individuals and the net impact on harm in the community are notable indicators of the early success of harm reduction." (2002, CAMH, p.3).

Research has shown that harm reduction is also cost effective. A recent Canadian federal government Committee reported that the prevention of one case of HIV infection, through the provision of needle exchange services, provides long term savings of $200,000 in medical care costs.

A harm reduction approach, including the distribution of harm reduction kits, is an effective strategy for the City of Toronto to continue to implement in order to minimize HIV transmission and to mitigate the harmful effects of drug use. Funding community groups through AIDS and Drug Prevention grants are an efficient mechanism to provide these services in the community.

Conclusions:

In 2002 Street Health Community Nursing Foundation received $39,513 through AIDS Prevention Grants to hire a Peer Co-ordinator and $29,643 from Drug Prevention Grants to hire a Harm Reduction Co-ordinator. Both projects use a harm reduction approach to minimize HIV transmission and associate adverse effects of drug use on a high risk and marginalized population. A harm reduction approach is a pragmatic and effective mechanism to mitigate the harmful effects of drug use.

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