



# TRAVELLING THE ROAD TO **CHANGE**

Thunder Bay Drug Strategy  
Community Report



THUNDER BAY  
**Drug Strategy**

May 2012



## SOME EARLY SUCCESSES



Through working together, community organizations involved with the Thunder Bay Drug Strategy have begun to implement programming and services that reflect the strategy actions.

### CANADIAN STUDENTS FOR SENSIBLE DRUG POLICY: THUNDER BAY REGION

Getting young people involved in working on drug policy, prevention and harm reduction means that work can be done by youth for youth. In 2011, the Thunder Bay Drug Strategy hosted the first annual *Pot, Pills & Parties* conference. Over 80 people came out to hear about drug law, safer partying, harm reduction for youth and other topics.

The conference was evaluated, and participants said they wanted to see the conference become an annual event. Caleb Chepesiuk, Executive Director of Canadian Students for Sensible Drug Policy, met with a core group of interested young people and the Thunder Bay region chapter was born! The Thunder Bay Drug Strategy is helping the chapter access funding to host the second annual *Pot, Pills and Parties* conference. A spring forum for youth on substance use was also held on May 24 featuring keynote speaker Donald MacPherson, Executive Director of the Canadian Drug Policy Coalition.

## PROVISIONAL HOUSING PROJECT: SHELTER HOUSE

Early on in the Thunder Bay Drug Strategy development process, Thunder Bay Police Service highlighted the growing issue of public intoxication as a public health problem. In response, the Thunder Bay Drug Strategy helped to educate the community and decision makers about a realistic and evidence based solution. With community and City Council support, the Provisional Housing Project offered by Shelter House opened its doors in March 2012. Offering a home to some of the most marginalized members of our community, the program will work with people who have been homeless for a very long time. This model of care has helped other communities assist people with severe addictions in a way that makes economic sense, and gives hope and dignity back.



## INCREASING THE RANGE OF TREATMENT IN THUNDER BAY

When people think of addiction treatment, often the 28 day stay in a residential program comes to mind. But sometimes people just need something to do, a place to go to be with others, activities that are free and a way to feel like their spirit is connected to good things.

Alphacourt recognized this, and in partnership with several other organizations\* led the way to offer day treatment that is not based on talk therapy. Instead, there is a space where people can come for coffee and companionship, take part in a drumming group or a yoga class, or go for a hike. The services are well attended, and about 75 people take part in the activities on a weekly basis.

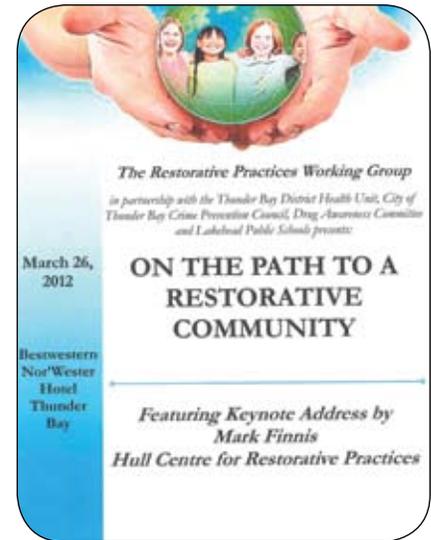
\* Brain Injury Services of Northern Ontario (BISNO), People Advocating for Change and Empowerment (PACE), Dilico Anishinabek Family Care, and St. Joseph's Care Group.

## THUNDER BAY DRUG STRATEGY ACCOMMODATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND SYSTEM PLAN

Many people who use substances have reported difficulty accessing services in Thunder Bay. People with children, people without stable housing, and people who are homeless have all reported challenges in getting support and services.

The City of Thunder Bay has partnered with several key Drug Strategy members\* to examine the accommodation needs of people who use substances, and to create a system plan for substance use related services that makes treatment and support more accessible for everyone.

The research is led by the Centre for Community Based Research in partnership with Confederation College and will gather local information through citizen surveys, focus groups and information sessions. The plan should be ready for presentation to Council and the community by October 2012.



## RESTORATIVE PRACTICES: KEEPING KIDS IN SCHOOL

If you've ever been a teenager or parented one, you'll know that youth culture sometimes includes using substances. And a teen caught using at school usually ends up in the principal's office. What happens next is crucial. Sometimes the teen is suspended or expelled. But what happens then? Students who face suspension or expulsion often fall farther behind, leading to an increasing risk of failure or even dropping out. And they may not get any support for the substance use that landed them in that situation.

Many schools are now taking a different approach. Restorative practices give everyone involved an opportunity to talk, and the youth who is in trouble can make things right in a supported, meaningful way. This way of handling substance use and behavior problems helps youth stay in school, feel connected to their school community and be responsible for each other's well-being. Encouraging schools to adopt restorative approaches is a priority action of the Thunder Bay Drug Strategy. Restorative practices are not new to this region. Several promising programs exist that help other schools learn about the approach.

The Restorative Practices Working Group was formed in August 2011 to bring leaders in this work together. The group quickly gained partners and sponsors, and formed a plan to help the community learn more about restorative principles. What began as a vision for restorative schools has grown to include the idea of restorative communities. In March 2012, the group presented a conference called *On the Path to a Restorative Community*. In April 2012, the working group hosted the touring of a play about restorative justice in Thunder Bay and District. Prevention through restorative justice is moving forward in Thunder Bay!



### OVERDOSE PREVENTION WORKING GROUP

In March of 2012, the formula change from OxyContin to OxyNeo shone a spotlight on the issue of opiate use in Northwestern Ontario. Regional Coroner Dr. Michael Wilson reports that for the period of 2010-2011, more adults died of an unintentional overdose than in a motor vehicle collision. Overdose prevention is on the Drug Strategy priority list, and a working group was formed to educate and better protect citizens from the risk of overdose.

The working group has, in partnership with St. Joseph's Care Group, created a brochure that can be handed out by pharmacists to patients receiving prescription opiates. The organizations are co-hosting a community event on opiate use at the end of May 2012.

There are also examining the possibility of increasing access Naloxone, an opiate overdose reversal drug.

### COMMITMENT TO CONTINUED COORDINATION

Research shows that successful community drug strategies have staff dedicated to ensuring the recommendations are implemented and that changes are lasting. An early action was to secure a full-time coordinator position to help make sure the actions are implemented and evaluated. The City of Thunder Bay has agreed to continue leading the coordination for a period of three years in partnership with:

- Thunder Bay District Health Unit (TBDHU)
- Thunder Bay Police Service
- St. Joseph's Care Group
- Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre
- Superior North EMS
- Fort William First Nation
- District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board

Congratulations to City Council and the key partners in recognizing the value of coordinating efforts to continue the work of the Thunder Bay Drug Strategy.



## THUNDER BAY DRUG STRATEGY PRIORITIES 2012-2015



The Thunder Bay Drug Strategy is the official community plan to address substance use in Thunder Bay.

Ratified by City Council in September 2011, the Thunder Bay Drug Strategy Implementation Panel has moved forward and selected 21 priority actions that can be realistically achieved over the next three years.

### **SUSTAIN THE WORK OF THE DRUG STRATEGY WHILE INCREASING LOCAL CAPACITY FOR ACTION.**

- Seek funding partnerships and opportunities to initiate a Centre of Excellence for Addiction Studies in Thunder Bay.

### **IMPROVE LOCAL KNOWLEDGE THROUGH FOCUSED RESEARCH.**

- Conduct an environmental scan to identify resources and gaps in parenting supports and programming for families.
- Compile current community programs and services that provide system navigators, case management providers, and street outreach positions.
- Conduct an environmental scan of programming and campaigns designed for post-secondary students.

### **FACILITATE COMMUNITY EDUCATION ABOUT SUBSTANCE USE AND RELATED ISSUES.**

- Support school boards and families to begin drug education based on supporting positive social and behavioural development at earlier ages.
- Provide caregivers with access to current and evidence-based information and education about how to delay or prevent their children from using substances.
- Educate the community about methadone maintenance therapy and the principles of harm reduction.
- Provide public education about substances, substance use, and legislation about substance use including impaired driving; and promote local helping resources.

### **IMPROVE NEEDLE DISPOSAL.**

- Increase education to the community about how to safely dispose of needles.
- Provide more needle disposal bins at key sites, including not-for-profit housing complexes.

### **IMPROVE ACCESS TO SOCIAL, TREATMENT AND HARM REDUCTION SERVICES FOR YOUTH AT RISK OF SUBSTANCE USE AND RELATED ISSUES.**

- Encourage schools and school boards to develop evidence-based alcohol and substance use policies that use a restorative justice framework.
- Improve the range of treatment options for youth to expand and enhance off-site, school, community-based and early onset approaches.
- Create a working group to investigate the provision of harm reduction services for youth.
- Examine the feasibility of creating a pool of available and screened trustees for youth that access social assistance allowances.

### **IMPROVE HOUSING OUTCOMES FOR PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS.**

- Allocate sustainable operational funding to local emergency shelters based on adherence to shelter standards that promote acceptance and inclusion of persons who use substances.
- Create a personal identification storage program for vulnerable populations.
- Create housing options that follow the Housing First philosophy.

### **RESPOND TO LOCAL, EMERGING AND URGENT ISSUES AS THEY ARISE.**

- Form a working group to examine the implementation of overdose prevention such as the provision of Naloxone, overdose education and institution of a medical amnesty program.

### **SUPPORT PREGNANT WOMEN AND MOTHERS WITH SUBSTANCE USE RELATED ISSUES.**

- Create an interagency neonatal substance use working group to develop strategies for supporting pregnant women, new mothers who use substances and their infants to improve family health outcomes.

### **ENHANCE CRISIS RESPONSE AND OUTREACH SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WHO USE SUBSTANCES.**

- Expand crisis response services to address various types of addiction-related crises.
- Examine the feasibility of partnership programs that match clinical resource teams with enforcement teams to improve health outcomes for people who use substance.



## CONCLUSION



The next three years will be pivotal in taking action to reduce the harms associated with substance use in Thunder Bay. The Thunder Bay Drug Strategy is interested in hearing from community members.

Visit our webpage at [www.thunderbaydrugstrategy.ca](http://www.thunderbaydrugstrategy.ca), join our Facebook group, or follow us on Twitter @TBayDrugStrategy. Thank you to the citizens of Thunder Bay for moving our drug strategy forward.

“So these people have been living on the streets drinking non-palatable things like mouthwash, hair spray, and other things that you can’t even imagine. And now they’re going to have alcohol that isn’t poison, and they’ll actually be able to have somewhere to sleep and be safe, eat and have medical care ... It shows how progressive our city is ... it’s an amazing thing!”

~ Focus group participant

