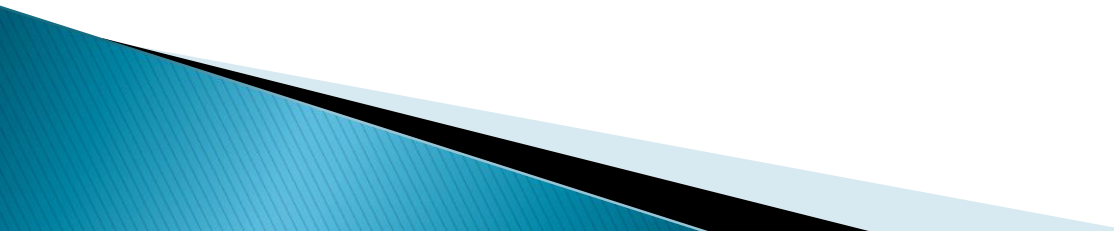


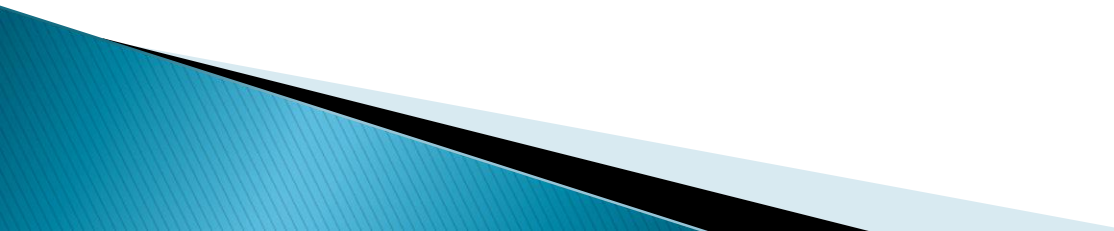
# Inclusive Programs – the Streetworks Experience of Including People with Lived Experience

Shanell Twan  
Marliss Taylor  
Streetworks, Edmonton

# Why is this important?

- ▶ It is about respect, social justice, depth of practice, cultural appropriateness/acceptance, alternative & valid expertise.
  - ▶ These are staff members that have first-hand knowledge and experience of the challenges that people involved in street life face, and are fully aware of the barriers one must overcome.
  - ▶ They easily engage the target population in becoming involved, “spreading the word”, organizing and participating in events etc.
  - ▶ They keep the program authentic and in tune with the needs of the community we serve.
- 

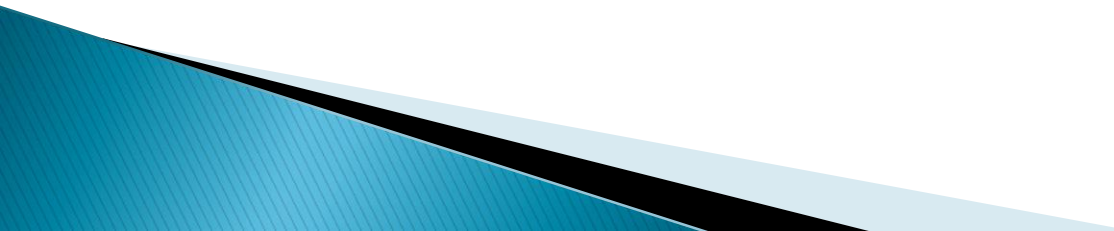
# Streetworks, Edmonton

- ▶ 6 RNs, 2 LPNs, 8 Outreach workers, 1 Social Worker, 1 Data Entry clerk
  - ▶ 15 sites around Edmonton
  - ▶ Operate several programs
    - Core needle exchange
    - Overdose prevention
    - HER Pregnancy team
    - Youth to Youth Drug Education
    - STI Prevention
    - SCS preparation
- 

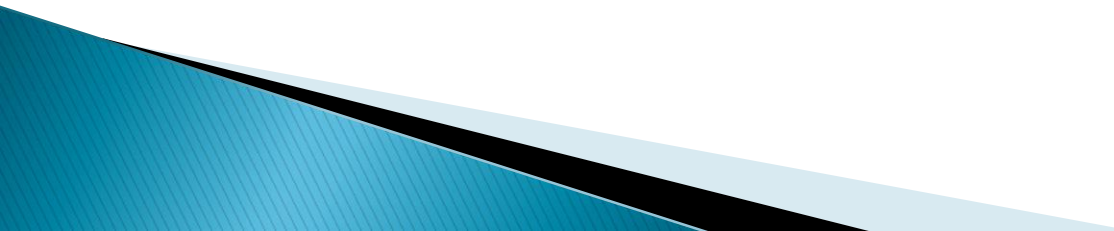
# What is a “peer”?

- ▶ “A person who is equal to another in abilities, qualifications, age, background, and social status”
  - Dictionary.com
- ▶ “One that is of equal standing of another”
  - Merriam-Webster

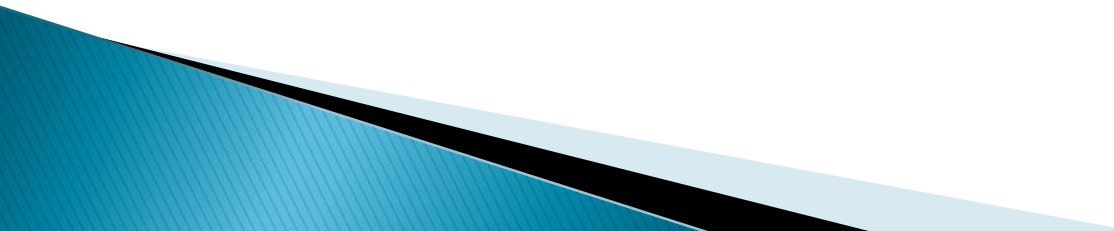
# What do people with street experience bring to the work?

- ▶ A unique perspective
  - ▶ Trust
  - ▶ Real life experience
  - ▶ Staff “who just know”
  - ▶ Community members are more willing to share knowledge, trends, worries, concern for others
  - ▶ Understand “ratting”
- 


# What do people with street experience bring to the work?

- ▶ Better understanding of the nuances of street culture
  - ▶ Understand spoken language, body language
  - ▶ Have the knowledge and experience of mistreatment by systems and other providers
  - ▶ Understand the day to day historical impact on Indigenous communities
  - ▶ Shared common experiences
- 

# What do people with street experience bring to the work?

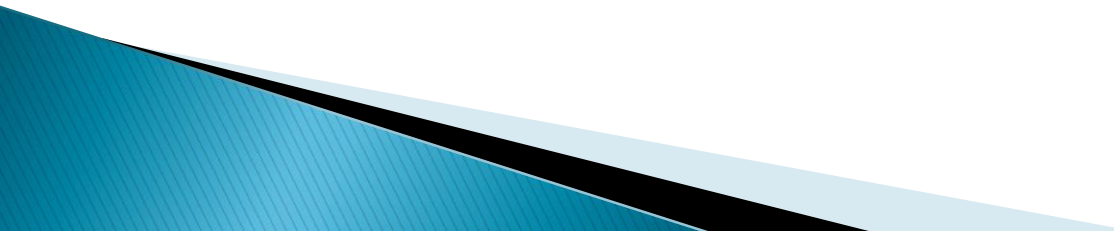
- ▶ Validity and authenticity – “street cred”
  - ▶ Grounds the rest of the team
  - ▶ Easier to build relationships
  - ▶ Provide better advocacy (with heart)
- 

# Negatives

- ▶ Not taken as seriously as the others by other agencies
  - ▶ Heart is often broken
  - ▶ Never leaves the person – personal and work lives are blended
  - ▶ The tape machine in their head never turns off
  - ▶ Past employment abuse makes work stressful
  - ▶ Criminal checks, credit checks problematic for other places
- 




# Challenges

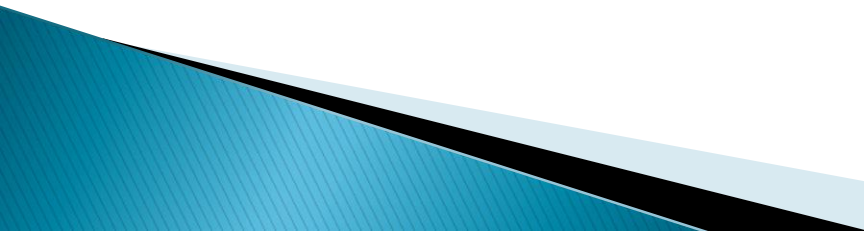
- ▶ To not make people feel on display, outed or disrespected
  - ▶ To ensure people's experience and knowledge is rewarded at an equitable level
  - ▶ To ensure all staff respect and care about each other – “live” Harm Reduction
  - ▶ To manage triggers well and understand that triggers are not what we always think they are
- 

# Community involvement at Streetworks

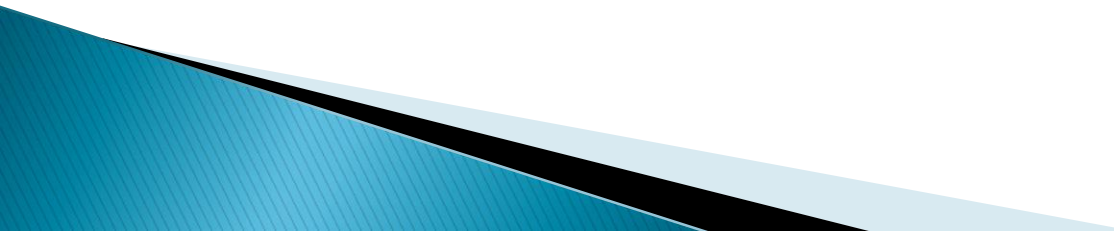
Many ways that community is involved through Streetworks:

- \*Full time staff
  - Volunteer at needle exchange sites, events, community clean-up, moving/organizing supplies, data entry
  - Research assistants
  - Presentations, media and committees
  - Tours, general input, spreading the word
  - Resource development
- 

# AAWEAR – As It Is

- ▶ Alberta Addicts Who Educate and Advocate Responsibly
  - ▶ Alberta's provincial group of people who use or used to use substances – “As It Is” is the local chapter.
  - ▶ Wide variety of activities
  - ▶ Operate as a separate entity from Streetworks, but one Streetworks staff is the provincial President, and one is the local facilitator.
- 

# What is experience/expertise?

- ▶ Not just typically what we think
  - ▶ Professional staff also have experience but have been taught to not talk about it.
- 

# What is expertise?

	2012
Aboriginal decent	60%
Discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation	97.5%
Remand, prison, charges, convictions	32.5%
Police hassle	77.5%
Abusive Relationship	75%
Sexual/physical assault	70%
Mental health system involvement	40%

Someone close to you that had a chronic/persistent MH illness	75%
Homelessness	37.5%
Lived in poverty	70%
Addiction	65%
Someone close/ family member that has an addiction	95%
Detox/treatment/12 step	32.5%
Gang involvement	30%
Family/someone close involved in a gang	45%

Prostitution	32.5%
Unplanned pregnancy	52.5%
Abortion	27.5%
Child welfare	7.5%
Social assistance	45%
Criticized for working in this field	80%
Employer abuse (not getting paid, threatened, publically humiliated, fired without notice, yelled at etc.)	60%

	2012
OD	15.6%
Withdrawal	43.8%
Cotton fever	15.6%
STD	50%
TB	6.3%
Hep B	12.5%
Hep C	15.6%
HIV	0%
Traumatic death of someone close	68.8%



	2012
Cocaine	54.1%
Mushrooms	62.2%
Heroin	13.5%
Dilaudid	10.8%
Morphine	29.7%
Ts & Rs	13.5%
Speed	32.4%
Crystal Meth	24.3%
Acid	43.2%

Crack	29.7%
Codeine	45.9%
Benzos	21.6%
Barbiturates	21.6%
Methadone	16.2%
Alcohol	94.6%
Nicotine	81.1%
Pot/Hash	91.9%
Ecstasy	43.2%

- ▶ There is a depth of experience on the team from all personnel

# Focus groups

- ▶ About 3 years ago, held focus groups of staff to hear about their experience
  - people who were from the community
  - people with diplomas / degrees
- Wanted to understand how work was experienced. Team members were open, thoughtful and honest. They rock!

# Outreach – Past histories

- ▶ Have had to tell their story over and over
  - “I was in a college class and the teacher asked a question. I put my hand up and basically told my whole life story. The other students looked at me like a was from another planet.”
- ▶ Used to fighting for everything

“Your ready to fight because that’s how it is on the street, with welfare, with nurses, it’s always a fight. When a supervisor approaches you, you are ready to fight. You already have shit in your head as to what is going to happen, and you have your peeps to back you up.”

# Outreach – Past Histories

- ▶ Lots of employment abuse
  - “Anyone in the position of authority has power over you. Not knowing the boss personally is scary and causes me to not talk and to cower”
  - “I didn’t realize there was such a thing as sick time. In my old jobs, I would just not get paid if I was sick. I feel guilty if I’m off”
  - “I’ve been let go and not paid”
- ▶ Used to living in the context of welfare
  - “ I got a pay check in the middle of the month. I was thinking *what is this free money?*”
  - “ Getting paid every 2 weeks fucked me up. I didn’t have to shoplift anymore.”

# Outreach– Past histories

- ▶ The past is always a breath away
  - “There’s a tape in my head that won’t stop. It tells me you’re going to fuck up”
  - “Its teaching a bird to swim when it wants to fly. The street never leaves you, you are always going to be that bird who wants to fly and it’s not easy.”
  - “ I can go from lady to ghetto in 2.5 seconds.”
  - “PTSD is my reality”

# Outreach Pressures

- ▶ Feels like you're always sitting on the fence
  - “Its hard to enforce the rules, because you *get* it”
  - “I can identify with the clients, but that means I can be either more compassionate or harder on them.”
  - “You don't want to be holier than thou – you need to stay true.”
- ▶ Stress can come from co-workers
  - “Sometimes people try to knock down other outreach workers on the team. Its lateral violence and a lack of confidence. Its like if she looks bad and I look good, then I won't get fired. You love the job so much, you don't want to lose it”



# Outreach Pressures

- ▶ Its easy to beat yourself up

- “I’m my own biggest critic. If I screw a small thing up, I immediately am afraid I’ll get fired. Its happened before. Even though they keep telling me not to be so stressed”

- “It’s been 6 years I’ve been employed here and I’m still afraid if I’m off sick for more than a day. My head says you don’t deserve it (sick time). You’ll be fired”.

- ▶ Street rules remain

- “On the street you don’t rat. So if someone at work is doing something wrong, its hard to report it”

# Outreach Pressures

- ▶ Getting a good job can be very difficult
  - “You have to change everything – you lived a certain way (street) and then all of the sudden its different.”
  - “Have to choose your environments, and it is a *lonely* day when you decide to choose one over the other. You lose a hard part of your life. You have to let go of your family and friends.”
- ▶ From family, friends, and community
  - “It’s like crabs in a bucket. People don’t want you to get ahead.”
  - “The other people look for flaws”
  - “My family is both happy for me and angry at me for getting ahead”

# Outreach – Triggers

- ▶ Triggers are prevalent and an almost daily occurrence
  - “Triggers are more than just seeing drugs, it can be the way other professionals talk, violence, the way a man talks to a women, past lived experiences, bad bosses, not being able to fight, gangs, suspicion.”
  - “I had a bad experience with a child welfare worker. It triggered me, I wanted to knock the fuck out of him. I got in my car after and all I could do is cry. I felt hopeless, helpless and didn’t know what to do.”

# Outreach– Triggers

- ▶ Prevention and support are key

- “I was holding everything in and I lost it the first year. I went on a bender. It was the support of my supervisor that pulled me through and brought me back.”

- “ I have to take care of my emotional well being. I have to be together *a//* the time. Emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually. And I’m judged to higher standards than mainstream workers”

# Outreach – Boundaries

- ▶ There are no boundaries on the street
  - “I had zero boundaries, I had to watch listen and learn how to establish boundaries from the people I work with.”
  - “I had to make it clear with the community I had two roles. 1– Worker, 2– Relative. Sometimes I knew too much, but I also can’t un-know.”
  - “I once had a boss that “outed me”. He talked about my past to other people, people in other agencies. They treated me differently then – kind of with suspicion. They knew too much. I want to make it on my own merit and I want to tell who I want to about my past. He shouldn’t have done that, even if I do work for him.”

# Outreach – Boundaries

– “I had to learn to say *no*, I was burning out. When you are on the street you’re there to survive, your animal instinct takes over. Now I can see when a client no longer has that, and have fully given up, so you need to help them.”

– “You have survivors guilt, so you overcompensate. You feel that if you don’t do this for this person they may not survive. I have been there.”

# Outreach – Language/Communication

- ▶ Communication skills aren't the same
  - “Confrontation means “confrontation””
  - “I can know what someone else (from the street) is thinking just by a look. Its our secret code. We know.”
  - “On the street you can't look weak.”
  - “We have a sixth sense and can feel the street energy.”
  - “You need to have a trusting relationship with the people you work with”

# Outreach – Work Issues

- ▶ A lack of confidence can make work harder
  - “We overanalyze and over–think everything.”
  - “Making decisions is hard. You second guess yourself. Sometimes the street and the work don’t jive. Who do you represent?”
  - “Sometimes I’m not sure what to do. I just cross my fingers and hope I’m doing it right.”



# Outreach – Work Issues

- ▶ Mainstream service providers have never worked with workers with a street history
  - “Other professionals outside of the team use our past history against us”
  - “You feel that people assume that you are only from the street and that’s all you know”
  - “I can say something and they don’t believe me. One of our professionals can say the exact same thing, and everyone believes them”

# Outreach – In General

- ▶ “I thought that professionals must live in a wonderful world. But really it was not what I expected and I realized that they are just as messed up as I am. It was very disheartening that they aren’t what I expected.”
- ▶ “I had to reinvent what my dreams were, and what I expected about being “normal”. Normal isn’t what I expected normal to be.”
- ▶ “I put people above myself. One-on-one time with the professionals has helped me get over it and see the professionals as people, and that they come from fucked up places as well.”

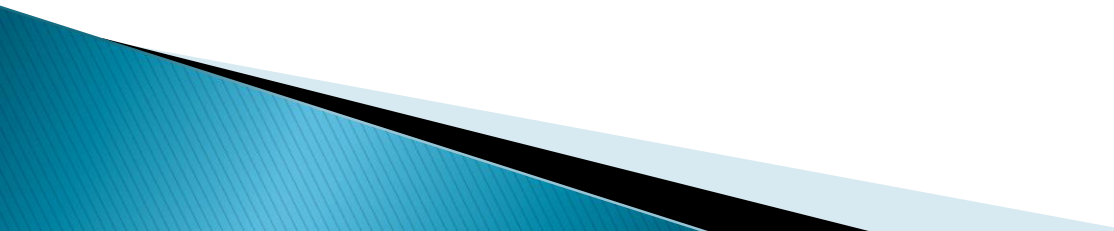
# Outreach – In General

- ▶ “When the nurses talk about their weekend and how they went to the mountains, that’s really cool and I think that’s awesome. When I say I hung out with my kids and did laundry, they are not impressed. Normal life stuff, (taking your kids to school, cooking supper for your kids) is really important and valued. I **never** thought I would be here. This is ground breaking for me, I am the first one in my family to be “normal”. Professionals don’t understand that stuff.”
- ▶ “One slight from a professional can destroy everything that you have worked for.”

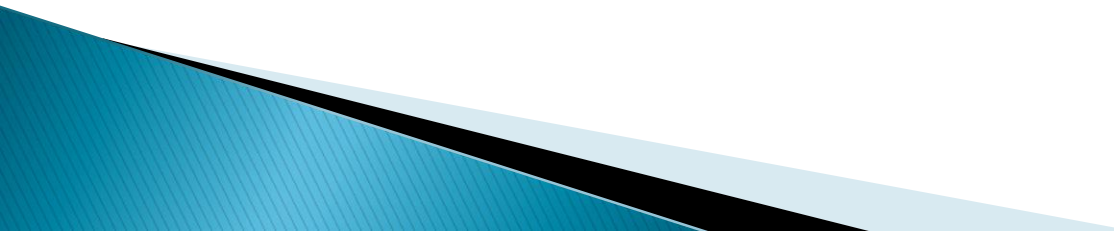
# Outreach – What helps when working with the professionals?

- “That the professionals are truly empathetic”
- “When I am trying so hard, it feels better when it is noticed and appreciated.”
- “They don’t act like they are better than the community”
- “Having supervision that is supportive but not afraid to be straight and setting clear boundaries for me.”
- “Having patience with my learning curve.”
- “Patience while I learn more than the job – I have to learn about how to work in this culture”

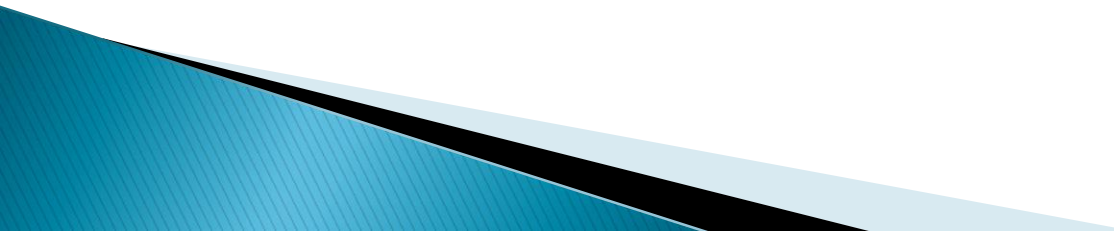
# Comments from professionals

- “There was no, to next to no, education on Harm Reduction.”
  - “They didn’t teach us that sometimes its ok to just shoot the shit.”
  - “School and other workplaces focused on boundaries. How are you supposed to develop a relationship with someone when you can’t even talk to them about yourself? It’s a little unfair to ask someone to bare their soul when you can’t even tell them your last name.”
- 

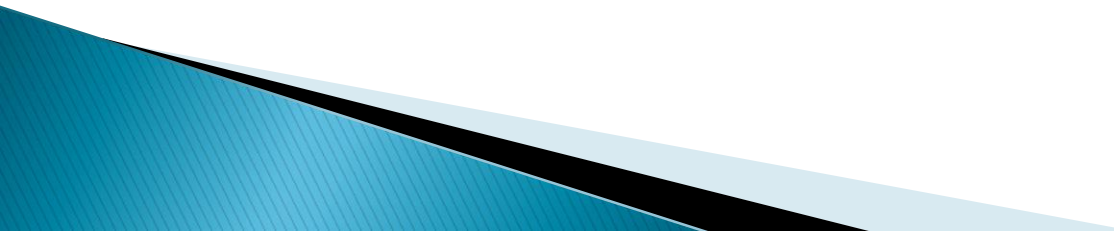
# Comments from professionals

- “You hear from other people that you are not a real nurse because you work in the inner city.”
  - “In this program we have blurred lines. But sometimes we have our professional bodies that require some very strict rules. The outreach staff don’t always understand that”
  - “When other professionals treat our community with disrespect or are derogatory, it’s very upsetting and we take it hard.”
- 

# Comments from professionals

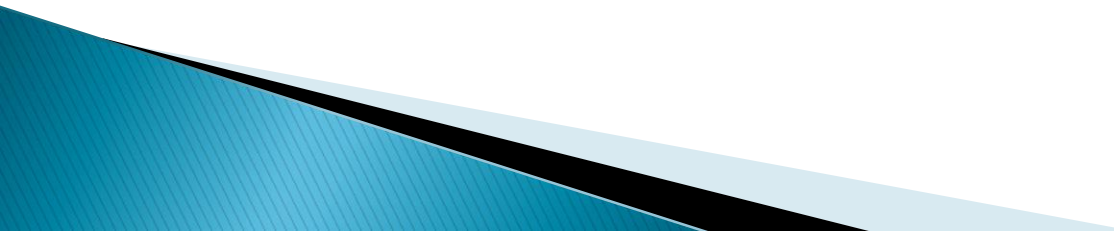
- “We love being a part of this community and obviously we want to be here. Hearing “you dumb white b-----” from community members that you truly care about is very hurtful. Its reverse racism even though I understand where it comes from”
  - “I don’t know how to express to someone in Outreach that I don’t see you any different then me.”
- 

# Comments from professionals

- “Sometimes they hear a request as an order.”
  - “I have avoided asking for help because I don’t want it to sound like I am bossing outreach around.”
  - “In the mainstream system things like clothes, time limits, rules, are real barriers to people. I *never* saw inner city community members when I worked in those systems.”
  - “Some things should be the same like being accountable, being on time etc.”
- 



# Comments from professionals

- “ We are very close. We are the same at the core, we believe in Harm Reduction, equality and basic human dignity.”
  - “We pull together because we are an island. The longer I am here the more I am away from the others, like professionals, friends and family”
- 

# What helps when working with outreach staff?

- ▶ One on one time
  - ▶ Getting together outside of work
  - ▶ Patience with our learning curve
  - ▶ Open communication and willingness to teach us
- 
- ▶ Pretty much the same things that outreach said.....

# Management Issues

- ▶ Managers need to decide if they will do “hard” management or “soft” management
- ▶ Each group thinks the other is “the favourite”. Sometimes, need to defend the “others”
- ▶ As a manager, one must be in tune with signs that the communication is breaking down and take action immediately. It can be as small as body language
- ▶ Sometimes, you need to *make* people sit down and talk. Outreach especially fears confrontation.
- ▶ Need to understand that reactions are often based on past work abuses or experiences, and know how to talk about it

# Management Issues

- ▶ Helps to clarify what people's triggers are – how will I know if things are going off the rails for you?
- ▶ You need to make it safe for open dialogue about issues like triggers, confidence, community relations, etc
- ▶ Be aware of what is ethical – are you putting your employee in harm's way? Are you engaging in tokenism? Are you putting them on display?

# In conclusion....

- ▶ Having a team of both people with street background and people with educational background is crucial to the work the program does, and truly creates holistic, ethical, responsive, appropriate Harm Reduction services

# Contact

Shanell Twan  
Marliss Taylor  
10116-105 Ave  
Edmonton, AB T5H 0K2  
780-423-3122 ext 210 or 211  
[stwan@boylestreet.org](mailto:stwan@boylestreet.org)  
[mtaylor@boylestreet.org](mailto:mtaylor@boylestreet.org)

Twitter: @StreetworksAB

Facebook: Streetworks Edmonton