

Deputation to Budget Committee

Item BU41.1 – Public Presentations on the 2022 Capital and Operating Budgets

(Funding for Drop ins for people who are homeless, precariously housed and who are street involved and Creating Health +)

January 25th, 2022

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I am pleased to be giving this deputation during the City's **Emergency Shelter and Homelessness Service Worker Appreciation Week**. This is a week that the City, including the Mayor, especially recognizes and appreciates the continuing commitment, remarkable skills and creativity, and the incredible hard work of people who have worked, as the SSHA communications states: "tirelessly to ensure critical services were delivered, while facing increasing demand and ever-evolving challenges. We [SSHA] have met these difficulties head-on, together, and we recognize and respect that this would not have been possible without your immeasurable efforts and the countless contributions of our frontline workers." (January 24, 2022)

Drop ins have always been the invisible glue in the community health and homelessness sector - working to support people who are homeless, precariously housed and who are street involved - by doing critical work in small and medium sized spaces in neighbourhoods across Toronto, on shoestring budgets and without much acknowledgment of their role in supporting people to survive and to thrive, including finding and maintaining housing and community.

The pandemic has changed this – at least the profile of drop ins. City emergency response planning, the pivoting and refocusing of health and mental health services, ramped up food security efforts, all have turned to drop ins and TDIN for guidance and ideas – and often relied on TDIN and drop ins for implementation and success. (e.g. Restaurant Voucher Program, Access to Health Services for People who are Homeless Framework, etc)

TDIN is a network primarily of drop ins – 50+, as well as program and service providers that do not offer drop in space per se but who do work with people who are homeless or street involved. All of our members did more than can be described in order to continue to provide at least essential services for drop in participants during the pandemic. And to be able to provide these services to ever increasing numbers of people who could no longer afford food, housing, or TTC and have turned to their local (and not so local) drop in for help. Here is a snapshot of what drop ins have accomplished during these challenging times:

- ✓ 17 members continued to keep space open, despite the huge IPAC, staff training and support and staff retention issues; the escalation of drop in participant needs; and even while requirements and best practices were continually shifting over the 2 years. Some members opened and closed more than once. Others set up hospitality tents so that they could continue to provide some kind of community space for drop in participants.
- ✓ Almost all our member drop ins provided take away meals - some 7 days/week; some one evening a week. Some delivered groceries and meals to people who could not come to them.

The 519, which before COVID ran weekly drop ins, served approximately 130,000 fresh and frozen meals to their 2SLGBTQ community members experiencing homelessness, food insecurity, job loss, and social isolation between March, 2020 and December 2021. They also worked with Second Harvest to cook and distribute over 100,000 meals to partners throughout the Downtown East and the rest of Toronto. (see 519 deputation for more details)

Syme Woolner Neighbourhood and Family Centre in the York/Weston/Pelham area kept their food bank open daily for emergencies and once/week scheduled. They have about 40 people a day come. They are also a member of the food security team for York Weston Pelham which now supports a mobile food delivery program for seniors. Syme Woolner provides the food hampers and also offers a hot meal program 7 days per week which serves an average of 60 meals per day to a high of 90 meals per day.

Mustard Seed in Leslieville, saw the demand for their meals increase in March 2020 from 70 per week to 300. This has remained consistent 18 months later.

- ✓ Many drop ins tried to fill the gap in what hygiene facilities were available to people during the waves of the pandemic that closed restaurants, city facilities and other places where people could wash hands, use toilets and shower or do laundry.

Agincourt Community Services in Scarborough put up portable toilets and handwashing stations.

Mustard Seed saw 2352 visitors accessing 3336 seasonal personal supplies in 2021. They are seeing the same amount of need in 2022 and are planning for this 44% increase in participants requiring support with these basic essentials and a 209% increase in provision of hygiene supplies, which includes a variety of incontinence products, as best they can. Syme Woolner Neighbourhood and Family Centre has a daily clothing bank for anyone in need.

- ✓ Drop ins are often the one trusted site for health services. In addition to harm reduction supplies, nursing and foot care and mental health case workers can connect to people who are homeless and street involved at drop ins. In the pandemic, drop ins managed to keep some of these services going. On top of that, many drop ins became sites for outreach, support and the physical location of both COVID testing and vaccine clinics, in partnership with health organizations.

Anishnawbe Health and The Neighbourhood Group Corner Drop in offered regular mobile testing and vaccine clinics outside the drop in to make testing and vaccines as accessible as possible for people who face barriers to health services and face greater risk of serious health impacts if they contract COVID.

Syme Woolner hosted bi-weekly vaccine clinics that have provided doses to 600 people since June 2021. Syme Woolner is also the vaccine lead for York Weston Pelham

Partnering with Toronto Public Health and Inner-City Health Associates since May 2021, to date, Mustard Seed has offered 7 pop up vaccine clinics, for all three doses. One of Mustard Seed's participants told them after he got his 2nd vaccine dose, "I'm getting my shot because I know you. I'm not waiting in line at Jimmy Simpson, I don't trust them, but I trust you". As many

of their participants are living rough and do not have a fixed home address, Mustard Seed's phone number and address were given as 'safe places' where their vaccination proof could be sent and they could have it printed. (Read Mustard Seed deputation for more information.)

Mustard Seed does not currently get any City funding for their drop in. I'd like to see that change - for all TDIN drop ins that do not currently receive funding from SSHA or other City funding for their drop ins, even though they are critical for safety, wellbeing, equity and social inclusion across the City.

Only 28 Toronto Drop In Network's members receive City funding. All of our members have to fundraise, seek donations, organize creative staffing strategies and mostly make inadequate budgets stretch – to a breaking point. Close to 10 of our drop ins have budgets of less than \$50,000. Ten more have budgets of under \$135,000. Yet what they provide in neighbourhoods is worth so much more.

Besides a below cost of living increase in their 2020 City funding, drop ins saw their last increase in 2015. That year some drop ins did not get an increase at all, and some were actually cut. One TDIN member has not had an increase in funding since 2010 and their SSHA funding covers less than 50%, and in some cases only 25% of staff salaries. This is not sustainable, for drop ins or for the back bone of drop ins, which is their staff. Meanwhile, inflation in Ontario has increased almost 5.5% between 2015 and 2018 and is now at its highest point since 2003, at 4.7%.

This City budget is an opportunity to start matching dollars to the amount and quality of drop in work that seeks to meet the deepening need we have across the city.

1. **Creating Health Plus** is an important support to drop ins that leverages partnerships to provide good food for people who are homeless and street involved. As members shared with TDIN in a survey:

"As our food budget is relatively limited and we rely heavily on donations, having a reliable supply of healthy food we can depend on has enabled us to provide our drop-in participants with more consistently nutritious meal programming. In particular, we appreciate the milk, eggs and yogurt."

"CH+ helps us sustain food provision tied to increase in client numbers, budget support, helps provide greater nourishing options, helps expose high barriered clients to nourishing food, stabilizes essential basic food sources."

TDIN supports increased and stable funding for this important service.

2. Councillor Matlow has put forward a motion for **an increase of \$500,000 for City funded drop ins**. Adding this funding to city funded drop ins would enable these drop ins to make up for lost ground and continue to be a place of dignity, of access to basic needs and a place where community and connections are built.

This increase would give us all hope that drop ins that are not currently receiving City funding and drop ins that do not yet, but should, exist in neighbourhoods where this kind of space and support is needed will also be recognized as part of an essential response to the impacts of a two-year pandemic, an on-going poisoned drug supply crisis, as a critical pathway to finding and

keeping housing and as a key to building and sustaining healthy communities. The drop in sector as a whole needs to receive an even greater funding commitment to continue to do this.

In past discussions with Budget and Executive Committee members and others at the City, I have described what drop ins have had to cut and the impact of lack of staffing on what drop ins can achieve. Now I want to speak to how, once again, because of this most recent crisis, drop ins have gone above and beyond to care for people who are homeless, street involved, at risk and isolated.

If the pandemic had never happened I would still be hear urging you all to increase funding now for drop ins. The pandemic has only demonstrated why this ask is even more urgent and a necessary use of City Funding.