

# PEERS OUTREACHING MITIGATING RISKS

## EVALUATION REPORT

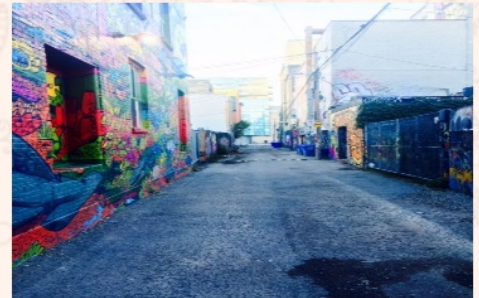
### Healthy Initiatives, Promoting Safety (HIPS) Project

## Background:

Regent Park Community Health Centre and Street Health received funding from the OHTN (Ontario Treatment HIV Network) in 2013 to develop an evaluation of the The Healthy Initiatives Promoting Safety (HIPS) project. The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the effectiveness of the project and to analyze the lessons learned in helping to inform ongoing programming efforts to mitigate HIV risks among a marginalized and hard to reach population

## Study Sample:

- The study sample comprised a total of 45 respondents:
- 30 were clients who have used the services offered by the peers participated in the survey
    - 8 clients were interviewed
    - 4 project peers were interviewed
  - 4 staff members from different agencies were interviewed



## What is the HIPS Program:

The Healthy Initiatives Promoting Safety (HIPS) project is a peer based project which aims to mitigate risk and prevent HIV in a population of high-risk marginalized women (as defined by involvement in sex work and/or substance use) and women living with HIV in downtown East Toronto, Ontario, Canada.



## Methodology:

The 4 peers were trained in collecting data and the methodologies that were employed for the research.

## Findings:

Service users identified the following key outcomes as a result of accessing the HIPS program.

- Enhanced access to Point Of Care testing
- Enhanced knowledge of HIV, safer sex practices, and window period for testing
- Enhanced knowledge of harm reduction strategies
- Enhanced awareness of high risk behaviours

Peer workers identified the following key outcomes as a result of participating in the HIPS program.

- Increase in HIV knowledge
- Increase in safer sex knowledge
- Increase in safer drug use information

Additional findings:

- 70% interviewed indicated that they were more comfortable being taught about safe sex and HIV prevention from a peer versus a health care professional
- 90% indicated that the information and support provided by the peer workers directly influenced their decision to access POC testing

## Recomendations:

- 1 • Violence against sex workers is a risk factor for HIV and must be prevented and addressed in partnership with sex workers and sex worker led organizations.
- 2 • Promote an enabling environment for HIV prevention, for example a space that offers condoms and education
  - Targeted outreach and support services for transwomen and racialized sex workers should be planned and implemented
- 3 • Peer programs should be promoted as an effective method of reaching and engaging street based sex workers and for providing effective HIV prevention services to this often isolated and marginalized group.
- 4 • Peer programming must be inclusive and recognize that factors such as poverty, gender and race intersect and increase vulnerabilities.
- 5 • Peer programs should have established links and networks within the community
- 6 • Foster a climate of cooperation and mutual respect between peer workers and agency structure and staff.
- 7 • Recognize that peer workers are intimately acquainted with current issues and trends that affect their communities.
- 8

