



FIR SQUARE COMBINED CARE UNIT BC WOMEN'S HOSPITAL VANCOUVER BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Background

Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES), the poorest neighbourhood in Canada, hosts a significant drug and sex trade. A study of alcohol and drug use by pregnant women in the DTES indicated low birth weights and frequent removals of babies by child welfare officials. In response, Sheway, an outreach program offering supportive prenatal care, developed within the neighbourhood. In 1993, BC Women's Hospital partnered with Sheway to provide medical detoxification for pregnant women, and in 2003 opened a strengths-based harm reduction maternity unit.



Structure of the Program

- ▶ Withdrawal management
- ▶ Parenting classes
- ▶ Alcohol and Drug counselling
- ▶ Alcohol and Drug group
- ▶ Recreation therapy
- ▶ Talking circle
- ▶ Music therapy
- ▶ Acupuncture
- ▶ Access to on-site 12 step meetings

Philosophy and Practice Approach

- ▶ Reframing concepts in health management of substance-using pregnant women
- ▶ Providing a safe foundation for family health and family unity
- ▶ Supporting and educating substance using mothers to reduce harm and risks
- ▶ Supporting 'safe substance use' instead of 'no substance use', for patients unable to practice abstinence
- ▶ Revolving door strategy to promote access to medical care
- ▶ Strength-based practice, supporting and promoting women's self-determination



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Results: Letters from Patients

"When I first met you I thought of myself as worthless and was quite used to being treated that way by every person that I had come into contact with. Your easy kindness was felt immediately and I remember that you gave me that shred of hope that I so desperately needed. I think you should know that your belief in me and your kindness and non-judgment played a huge part in how my life is today"

"I just want you to know how much we do appreciate your kindness and dedication. I came in here all hurt and broken up with not a lot of purpose in life. You guys (and gals) have treated me with respect and tenderness. I once again felt human. After a while as I became healthier you made me feel worthy and whole again. Life started to have purpose and meaning."



"They gave me a warm and safe place to stay away from violence and drugs. I never would have gotten to keep my baby without coming here, and it saved me from a life of drugs and abuse. Thanks to the staff, I get to take my baby home today and get a fresh start".