



apss

*aids programs
south saskatchewan*

2020 - 2021 Annual Report

AIDS Programs South Saskatchewan

Mission

Provide relevant and accessible services and programs, and foster connections for individuals families and communities affected by, living with or at risk of HIV/AIDS/HCV

Vision

To be a trusted leader in HIV/AIDS, education, prevention, support and care

Values

We are **respectful** — recognizing the worth and dignity of each person

We are **confidential** —respecting each individual's right to anonymity

We are **accountable** – transparent in all interactions

We treat people with **integrity** — acting in an honest and ethical manner, doing what we say we will do and following through on commitments

We respond to people with **compassion** — we treat everyone with empathy, gentleness, acceptance and kindness

We strive for **excellence** — we provide reliable, quality service as informed by the people we interact with and through self-reflection

AIDS Programs South Saskatchewan

Board of Directors

Our versatile board of directors bring dedication and specialized knowledge to their support of this agency.

Board Chair

Pam Reimer

Vice Chair

Ronnie Nordal

Treasurer

Kirk Nordick

Secretary

Debbie Rodger

Director

Tom Janisch

Director

Pauline Streete

Director

Mary-Ellen Scott

Staff

Our passionate and team oriented staff are the key to providing optimum care and support

Executive Director

Shiny Mary Varghese

Client Care Coordinator

Morag Hurn

Needle Exchange Coordinator

Lynette Flamont

Program Coordinator

Sophie Pitman

Education & Information Specialist

Vidya Dhar Reddy

Education Outreach Coordinator

Amanda Sauer

At Risk Support Group

Facilitator Danita Wahpoosewyan

Elder Janet Dufour

Message from the Board Chair

The 2020-2021 fiscal year was impacted by the constantly changing restrictions and prolonged experience of the current global pandemic on AIDS Programs South Saskatchewan (APSS). However, as reflected in this year's report, APSS met these challenges head on and continued to provide exceptional service in our community.

As outlined in last year's report, APSS experienced an increase in the reserves in the 2019-2020 fiscal year. With support of the board, the APSS staff continued to increase their efforts on obtaining additional grants and unique fundraising opportunities to meet the realities of COVID-19 with a focus to continuing a balanced budget this year. We are very pleased to report that these efforts have paid off, resulting in a surplus for the 2020-2021 fiscal year.

As our province was faced with constant changes in restrictions because of COVID-19, APSS had to continuously adapt to changes in how the organization operates in this new environment. Our staff, with assistance from our partners, have successfully adapted and continued to operate to provide services during these unprecedented times. Due to the amazing leadership and caring staff, APSS was able to expand its service to include programming focused on the opioid crisis currently affecting our communities by providing OPS specific education, client care services, and peer support services.

I would like to give a huge thank you to our wonderful staff, students, and all of our exceptional funders, partners, and donors. Without your support and perseverance, APSS would not continue to exist, and with your continued efforts, we will continue to persevere through these times together. In particular, I would like to thank our Executive Director, Shiny for keeping us running and expanding in this situation. All your time and efforts do not go unnoticed.

I really appreciate all the time and effort all of our board members have given throughout this past year in these uncertain times and appreciate you all. I would also like to thank our current board members who are continuing for the upcoming year, including those who have indicated their willingness to serve for another term. For those board members that will be leaving us this year, APSS thanks you for your dedication to our organization and we hope that wherever your journey takes you that you know that you will always hold a special place in APSS' heart.

I have enjoyed my time as the chair over the past year and will be continuing the chair position for this coming year. I look forward to continuing to work with the board and staff of APSS.

—*Pam Reimer*

Message from the Executive Director

FY 2020-2021 was a year with unprecedented challenges for the vulnerable population we serve. Throughout the pandemic, our harm reduction programs and services continued to uphold the APSS vision and mission. From PPE supplies to frequent cleaning protocols, to providing food security, APSS ramped up programming and service delivery, recognized the need for a changing workplace and remained open throughout the provincial lockdown and the pandemic. At a time of uncertainty, we wanted to ensure our client's routines were not disrupted and harm reduction practices remained consistent. The opioid and HIV crisis was overshadowed by the COVID-19 pandemic which magnified the gaps and exacerbated vulnerabilities.

Programming:

- Our clients had coined the term 'Re-use Sundays' as no harm reduction services were open on Sundays. On May 10, 2021, APSS opened the needle exchange on Sundays for four hours with support from the Saskatchewan Health Authority to meet the increasing demand for services. 1,498 people accessed the needle exchange on Sundays, and we distributed 68,470 needles, 972 meth pipes, 583 crack pipes and associated harm reduction supplies.
- The delivery of our services pivoted to remote working, decreased group sessions, increased one-on-one sessions and virtual education programs. APSS provided 5,213 harm reduction conversations through the needle exchange and 9,315 in person/virtual education and outreach.
- Through the generous grants from the Community Foundations of Canada and the South Saskatchewan Community Foundation, APSS provided 17,678 healthy meals to address food insecurity faced by our clients with clients relying on APSS to provide food security.
- The opioid overdose crisis exacerbated during the pandemic. Regina reported record numbers of opioid-related deaths and hospitalizations. We distributed 2,382 naloxone kits of which 1,158 were used to reverse an overdose and trained 583 people.
- Consistency in our harm reduction programming and services, partnering with the Community Engagement Unit of The Regina Police Service to promote positive interactions and reducing barriers that prevent calling 9-1-1 (In a recent survey 66% of people did not call 9-1-1 during an overdose.) are key harm reduction strategies to help people with substance use disorders.

Amazing Race Against HIV: The Jerome Nagel/Rick Ranger Wellness Fund is wholly dependent on funds raised through fundraising and donations to provide support for people with HIV which was severely affected with the pandemic. Thank you to Gilead Sciences Inc. for the support in helping fund the deficit in the Wellness program and operations which enabled APSS to provide vital support programs and services for people living with HIV.

Financial sustainability: The unprecedented times of 2020 meant ensuring financial stability was a significant focus for APSS. Grants from funders helped cover all expenses. For the second year in a row, the fiscal year ended with a surplus and our unrestricted net assets rose to \$87,779.00. This surplus will help APSS in its financial sustainability and our ability to support clients in the longer term.

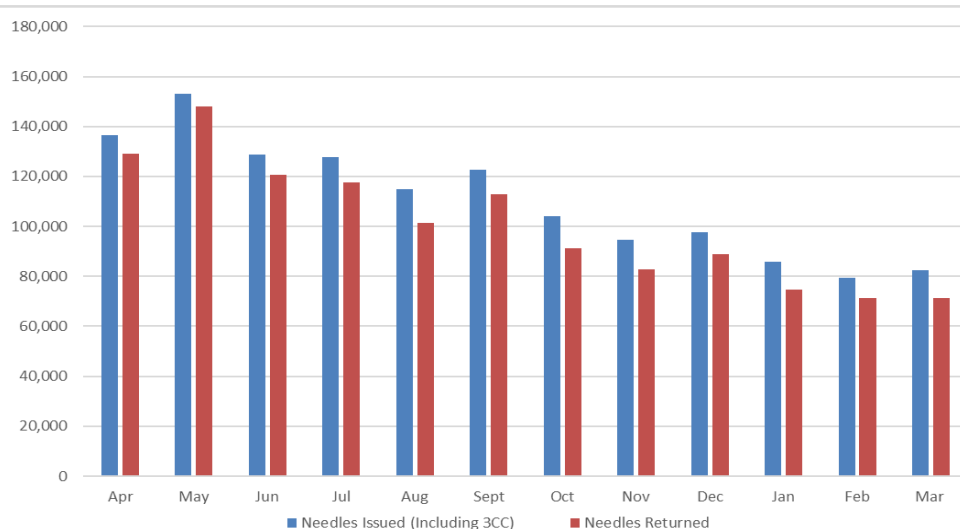
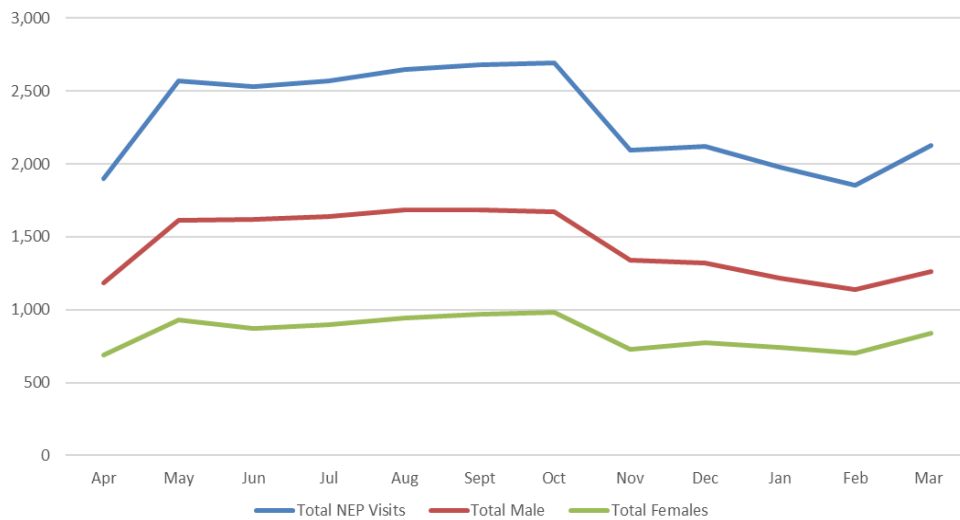
In Memoriam: The sudden passing of Jenny Talia, a long-term supporter of APSS and the AIDS Benefit was deeply felt by the community and all those who knew Jenny. Memories and legacy remain at heart.

In Gratitude: Thank you to our funders, donors, APSS board and our versatile staff in helping with the delivery of programs and services during the pandemic.

—*Shiny Mary Varghese*

The Queen City Needle Exchange

AIDS Programs South Saskatchewan (APSS), in partnership with Saskatchewan Health Authority, operates one of the busiest Needle Exchange Programs (NEP) in the province. APSS is open Tuesday through Friday from 9am – 4:30pm and Saturday from 10am – 4:30pm, and Sundays, 11am-3pm. On May 10th, 2020, APSS opened on Sundays to meet the increasing demand for services. The NEP distributes clean needles, tourniquets, cookers, sterile water, alcohol swabs, cotton filters, crack/meth pipes, and condoms. The NEP also provides updated harm-reduction messaging, personal harm reduction counselling, and referrals to other agencies. We also collect used or discarded needles from the community and return them to the office for a safe disposal. Our Needle Exchange Coordinator, who is also an addictions counsellor, is available daily. Even with COVID-19 and the closure of many organizations, APSS remained open by limiting clients to one at a time in the building, wearing PPE, and installing a plexi-glass barrier. At a time of uncertainty, we wanted to ensure that essential harm reduction programs and services continued so that our client's routines were not disrupted by our closure. In 2020-2021, we conducted **5,213** information/intervention conversation sessions on topics such as harm reduction, overdose prevention, HIV/HCV/STIs, testing, and treatment in the NEP. These sessions lead to increased knowledge and referrals to testing and treatment.



Number of Visits

Female: 10,063

Male: 17,374

Total Visits: 27,765

Needles Distributed

Needles In: 1,327,796

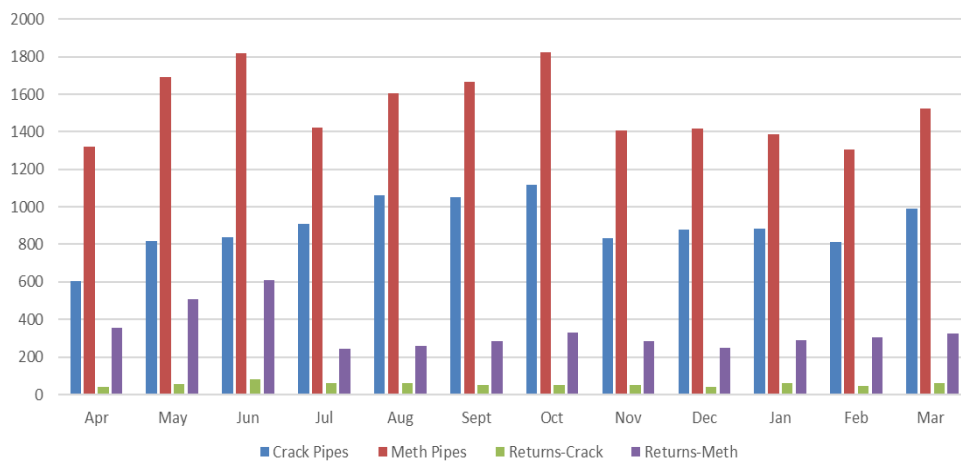
Needles Out: 1,210,129

Return Rate: 91.1%

Condoms: 27,540

In March 2019, APSS started distributing safe inhalation kits in our NEP. Clients could receive one crack and meth pipe per day and were encouraged to bring back the pipes to reduce the number of pipes in the community. Pipes can be hard to return as they break after a few uses but clients can receive up to 5 pipes if they return their broken pipes. In 2020/2021, our pipe distribution went up 38%, compared to our pipe stats of last year. Our monthly survey in April 2020, saw some extreme changes compared to previous years in the substance usage profile among NEP clients. In the past, we had about 50% Morphine users, 32% Crystal Meth users, and 3% Fentanyl users and Cocaine, Heroin, and ADHD medication making up the other 15%. This year, we had 27% Morphine users, 34% Crystal Meth users, and 27% Fentanyl users (Cocaine and Heroin making up the other 12%).

Crack & Meth Pipes



Pipes Distributed

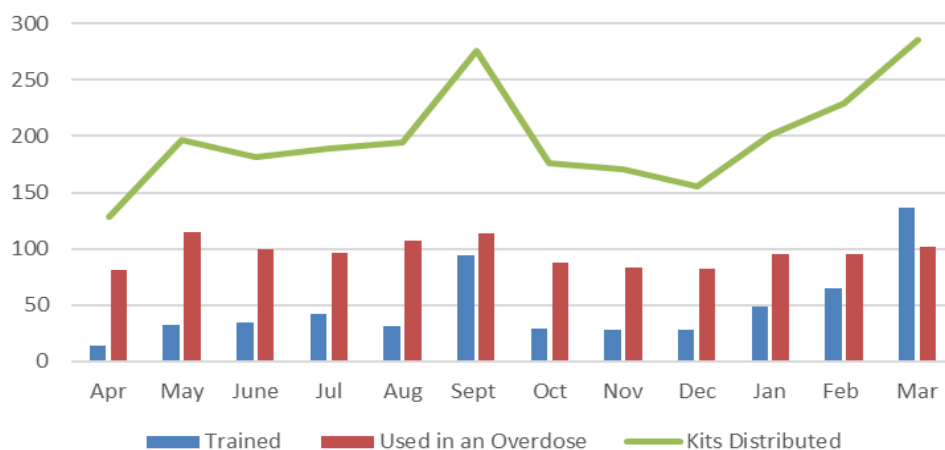
Crack Pipes: 10,795

Meth Pipes: 18,388

Returns: 4,696

With the high levels of interest in Naloxone kits and training, APSS became a distribution site in November 2018. All APSS staff have been trained and will be able to train anyone interested in Naloxone. The training, depending on those being trained, takes 15 minutes and trains individuals on how to administer the drug, how to identify an overdose, and overdose prevention. 2020/2021 recorded the highest number of overdoses in Regina which resulted in increased requests for naloxone training and replacement (in September, we gave out 276 kits!)

Naloxone



Naloxone Kits

Trained: 583

Used: 1,158

Kits Distributed: 2,382

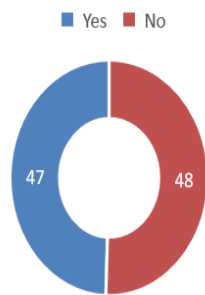
Monthly IDU Survey

In 2020-2021, we surveyed Needle Exchange clients for 3 weeks every month. We asked an anonymous question to different people and then took down their answer and their Needle Exchange ID. This was done to ensure accuracy of results and avoid duplicated data. At the end of the three weeks, all data was collected and separated by gender, age, ethnicity, and location. (Graphs were made depending on relevance).

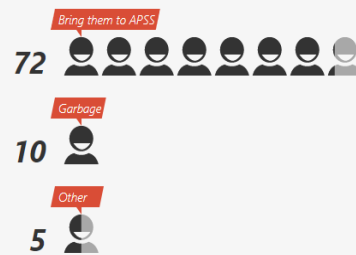
People were very open with their answers, even to the point of going into detail and telling our staff their story. By providing a safe space, being anonymous and having consistent staff, needle exchange clients are more likely to trust us.

The responses from our Needle Exchange clients have been informative which have helped in relationship building as well as enhance our programs to meet the needs of our clients. We will take this data as a needs assessment and turn what we have learned into where we need to focus. This could include: increased youth education on injection drug use, working with our NEP clients in a way they will understand, and creating awareness events for the public.

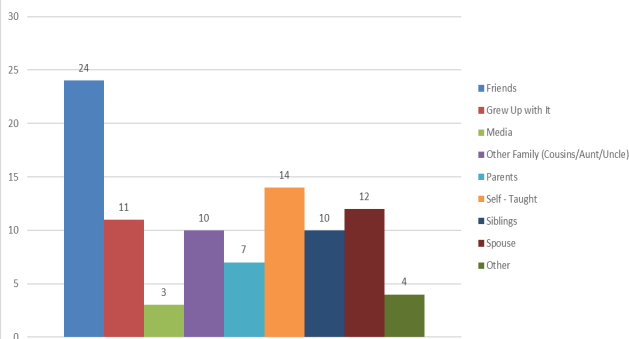
Have you ever used Naloxone on someone?



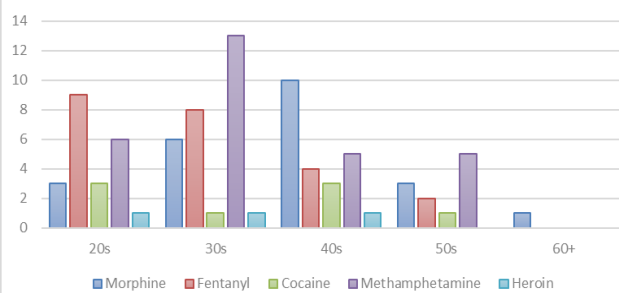
WHAT DO YOU DO WITH YOUR USED NEEDLES/BROKEN PIPES?



Who Introduced You to Drugs?



What's Your Drug of Choice? Sorted by Age



The questions we asked were as followed:

April- Have you ever used Naloxone on someone?

May- Have you ever gotten an abscess?

June- Who introduced you to drugs?

July- Do you use alone?

August- What's your drug of choice?

September- Could you get through the day without using?

October- Do you mix drugs?

November- What do you do with your discarded needles or broken pipes?

December- Have you been tested for HIV this year?

January- 7-part survey on drug use, overdoses and Naloxone, and homelessness

February- What's your drug of choice?

March- What do you do for needles/supplies when we're closed (on Monday)?

(All survey results can be found on our website)

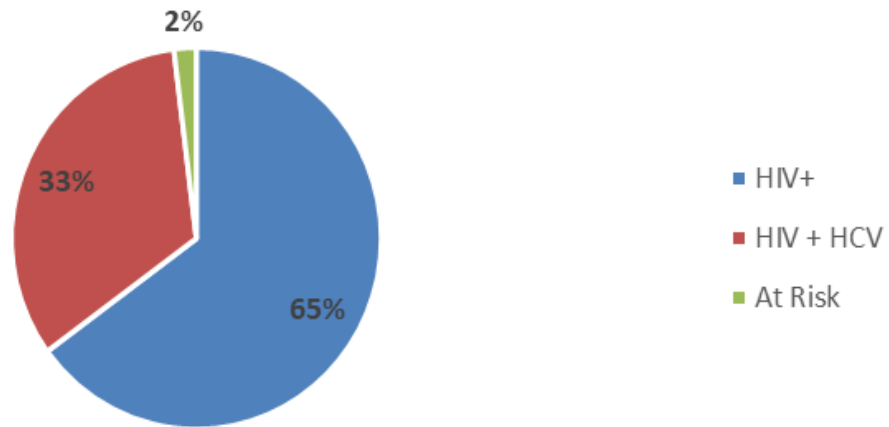
Support Services

The goal of the Client Care Program is to assist people living with HIV in self-care so that they experience optimum health. Services provided include transportation to appointments, nutritional support, counseling with a psychologist or social worker, financial assistance with prescription costs, food bank deliveries for those needing assistance, one-on-one HIV and HCV education and support, and referrals to other agencies that provide care to people living with HIV. The Support Services' client base continues to grow, as such our Client Care Coordinator works closely with the Saskatchewan Health Authority case management team to provide integrated care.

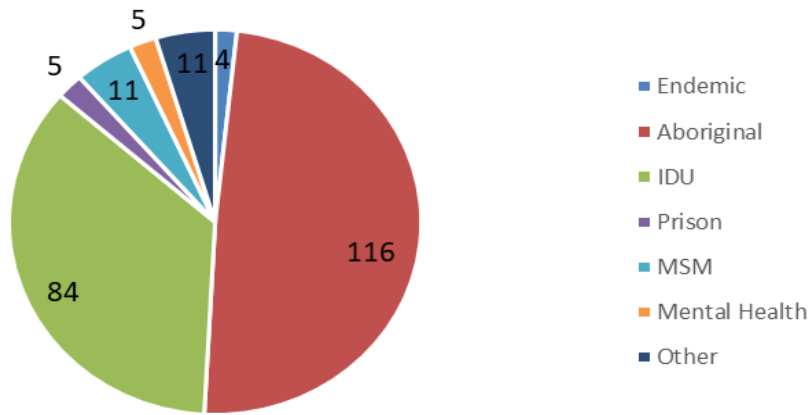
Sadly, we lost **nine** of our clients this year and they were all overdose related due to the ongoing opioid epidemic. They will be missed but we are grateful to have been able to provide them with support and care throughout the years.

Our support would not be possible if it weren't for the tremendous ongoing support given to the Jerome Nagel/Ric Ranger Wellness fund by the Regal Social Association of Regina (RSAR), Gay & Lesbian Community of Regina (GLCR), the Amazing Race Against HIV, World AIDS Day, and a host of other donors. (See charts below for clients in care, client demographics and gender)

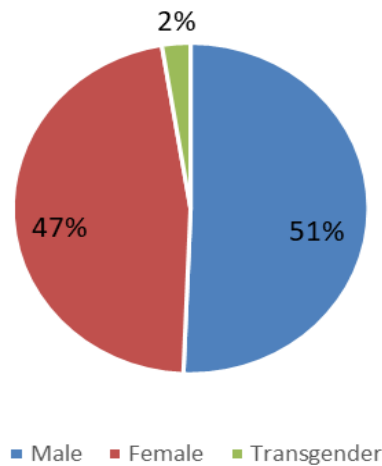
HIV/HCV Status 154 Individuals in Support Services Program



Client Demographics



Client Gender



Wellness Fund

The Jerome Nagel/Ric Ranger Wellness Fund was started to provide financial assistance for health care related expenses to people living with HIV and AIDS. The Jerome Nagel/Ric Ranger Wellness Fund is supported by many fundraisers hosted by community agencies and businesses. APSS is very pleased that the fund continues to provide financial assistance to pay for medications, massage therapy, medical/occupational therapy, transportation to doctor visits, baby formula, psychologist services and other needs directly related to HIV positive status. We are very delighted and so very grateful for the tremendous support received from supporters of the Amazing Race Against HIV, the Regal Social Association of Regina, and the Gay and Lesbian Community of Regina's annual AIDS Benefit. Their support allows us to continue to assist our clients.

Drop-In Centre

The Drop-In Centre continues to be a resource to the North Central community that offers programs and helpful answers to questions surrounding HIV and HCV. Our Needle Exchange Coordinator, who is also an addictions counsellor, is available to consult with clients daily. The Public Health Nurse from Saskatchewan Health Authority is also available on Thursday afternoons and provides testing and consultations as needed, however, due to COVID-19, our Thursday testing was halted. Thursday testing will resume once safe to do so.

APSS conducted 10 HCV testing events with local community health professionals and community partner organizations. For events held at our office, a fibro scan was done, and a phlebotomist took blood samples for the lab from mainly an IDU population. A nurse tested through point of care 17 individuals and over 50% were positive for HIV/HCV. We were able to get everyone on treatment and connected to care.

APSS began working with Four Directions Community Health Centre in October for in-office flu clinics and Coronavirus swab testing every Wednesday.

These events are vital for stopping the spread of HIV//HCV/COVID-19 in our communities and linking clients to care.

Food Security Program

This initiative was created last year at the start of the pandemic when we saw an increase in people coming to our services looking for food as other services had closed. APSS, through a NEP survey, identified many of our clients were struggling with food security and responded by providing them with breakfasts and lunches.

Since April 21st, **17,678** meals were given out.

Proper nutrition is an important aspect of harm reduction. Food insecurity aggravates the harms experienced by people who use drugs (PWUD) and therefore food security plays an important role in helping PWUD reduce drug-related harms.

With the funding received, APSS gave back to the community businesses who supported us previously. We worked with COBS Bread for breakfasts and CO-OP for meals. Thank you to our board member, Ronni, who made lunch bags every Friday!

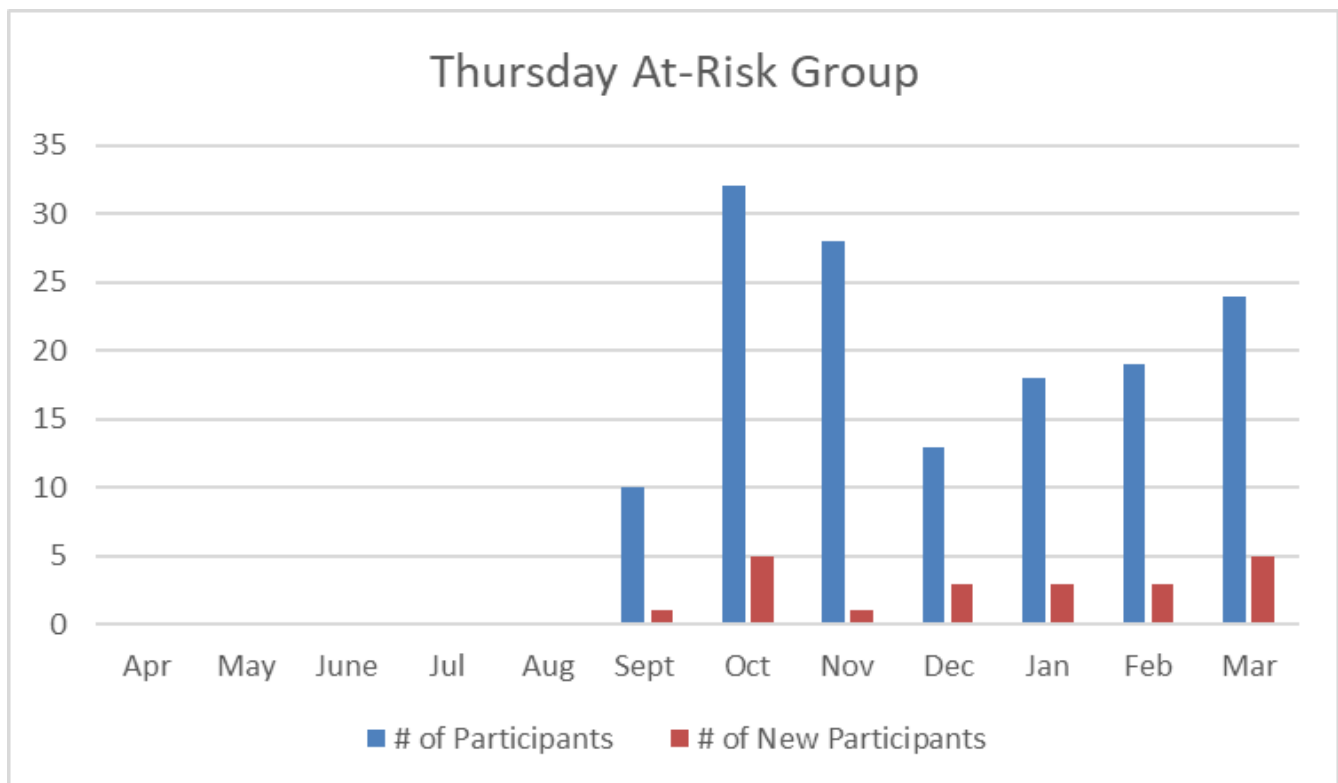
Anyone-at-Risk Support Group

Funded by the Saskatchewan Health Authority HIV Strategy, the “Anyone-at-Risk” support group meets at All Nations Hope each Thursday evening starting at 5pm. Participants are provided with a nutritious meal. Elder Janet Dufour and Danita Wahpoosewyan facilitate the group.

The group functions in a talking circle that allows participants to share their experiences in a non-judgmental environment as well as cover topics on living with HIV, shared life experience, CD4 counts, needle use, HIV/HCV, the importance of getting tested, high risk behavior, self-care, triggers and “slips” and how these lead to high risk behaviors, and coping with grief. As seen in the chart below, the group continues to draw both regular attendees and newcomers. The group is open to anyone from the community who wants to participate.

Over the past year, the group averaged an attendance of 7 individuals.

Due to COVID-19, the “At Risk” Peer Support Group was halted from March to mid September. The “At Risk” Peer Support Group resumed September 17th, 2020.



Education & Outreach

The Education Program had to navigate new approaches this year in the COVID-19 pandemic. As in-person sessions were halted and schools/community services were closed, the Education team turned to Zoom presentations, educational videos, online education, and education for IDU's in the NEP. The Education Program has continued to improve relationships and collaboration with partner agencies, target populations and especially reduce stigma and discrimination among the general public. Over the last year, APSS has a stronger LGBTQ+ presence participating in both motor pride parades and a reoccurring segment on Prairie Pride (a local community access show).

APSS was able to distribute education through our NEP to Substance Users through our new meal program. Education included information on Harm Reduction, HIV, HIV and COVID-19. We feel HIV/HCV and Harm Reduction education is vital among these groups.

Education resources are accessed through our website (4,915 unique visits) and our social media channels (Facebook (Likes 788 – 878 and Followers 782 – 881) and Twitter (Followers 1104—1169). We post relevant and current information on HIV/HCV/STIs/Overdose Prevention and services available. Knowledge check questions were posted on our Facebook Fridays and reviewed on Tuesdays.

The Education Team created APSS educational pamphlets for HIV (HIV 101, Prevention, and Testing and Treatment), Safer Sex (An HIV sexual health guide for men who have sex with men and women who have sex with women), and Substance Use (Overdose Prevention/Naloxone Training, Overdose Prevention for “Uppers” and Crystal Meth (as Naloxone is not effective), Safer Cocaine Use, Safer Crack Cocaine Use, and Safer Injecting). Whiteboard educational videos for HIV, Naloxone Training, and Needle Pick Up were created as well.

We were honored to have been chosen again to come speak for the College of Medicine Saskatoon to future doctors on Harm Reduction. We were able to address the stigma our clients face as well as how to care for those who use drugs. We are confident that these future doctors will pave the way in Harm Reduction practices. They also reached out to us to train 80 first year medical students in Naloxone.

On August 31st, APSS was asked to facilitate the Naloxone trainings at the Legislative on Overdose Awareness Day. APSS trained 60 community members on overdose prevention and Naloxone; receiving a take home Naloxone kit.

This year **9,315 people** benefited from the in person/virtual Education and Outreach program as well as **19,078 people** saw the online social media education.

Special Events & Donations

APSS Events: The annual **Amazing Race Against HIV** had a hurdle to jump over this year. Planning for September 19th in Victoria Park with a city-wide race partnering with Regina Transit was foiled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We modified to a virtual event, set locations worldwide, and live streamed through Facebook.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 affected our fundraising and participation as we had 3 participants and raised \$1,200. All proceeds support the Jerome Nagel/Ric Ranger Wellness Fund.

Due to COVID-19, the **Annual AIDS Benefit** fundraiser hosted by **The Gay and Lesbian Community of Regina (GLCR)** for World AIDS Day was to be held virtually. After the sudden passing of long-term supporter Jenny Talia, the AIDS Benefit Committee postponed the event until next year.

Thank you to **Gilead Sciences Ltd.** for funding the Jerome Nagel/Ric Ranger Wellness Fund and operating costs during the pandemic.

Our sincerest gratitude to our supporters:

Heather Szeponski, Laurie Sampson, Martine Proux-Birchard, Tom McIntosh, Lindsay Goertz, Beverly Crossman, Ronni Nordal, Debbie Rodger, Pam Reimer, Kirk Nordick, Mary-Ellen Scott, Tom Janisch, Pauline Streete, Darrell Higgins, Lorraine Ulmer, Angels4Warmth Inc. and Little Elves Foundation.

APSS was the charity of choice for **COBS Bread Grasslands** hot cross bun fundraiser on April 4, 2020, and they raised a total of \$780. We really appreciate the continued support we receive from Ashley and her team every Tuesday/Thursday with their bread donations and thinking of us for their fundraiser.

For the months of October, November, and December, **RMX Digital and Flo Mingo** donated 10% of all Flo merchandise and presented APSS with a cheque for \$500.

In November, masks became mandatory in indoor places in Saskatchewan. We reached out to the community for donations of masks and got an overwhelming response! We received PPE donations from **United Way, Scotiabank, Saskatchewan Mutual Insurance (SMI), Bianca Amor's Liquidation Supercentre, Elaine Costescu,** and tons of anonymous donations including an Amazon package of 200 masks and a donation of **10,000** masks!

In January, **Coney Island Poutine** started donating weekly poutine for our clients.

Thank You!

Our Funders



Public Health
Agency of Canada

Agence de la santé
publique du Canada



Saskatchewan
Health Authority



Saskatchewan
Ministry of
Health



South
Saskatchewan
Community
Foundation

MAC
AIDS FUND



Community
Initiatives Fund



COMMUNITY
FOUNDATIONS
OF CANADA



GILEAD



REGINA

ViiV
Healthcare

Our Partners



Community Partners

All Nations Hope Network
Carmichael Outreach
COBS Bread
Cosmopolitan Learning Centre
First Nation's University
Four Directions Community Health Centre
Gay and Lesbian Centre of Regina
Infectious Disease Clinic
The Little Elves Foundation
Moose Jaw HIV Strategy
Moose Jaw Pride
Newo Yotina Friendship Centre
Outpost Health
Paul Dojack Youth Centre
The Peer to Peer Program
Prairie Harm Reduction
Prairie Pride
Prairie South School Division
Planned Parenthood Regina

Queen City Pride
Rainbow Cinemas
Regal Social Association of Regina
Regina Catholic Schools
Regina Public Schools
Regina & District Food Bank
Regina Provincial Correctional Centre
Regina Open Door Society
Regina Transit
SaskAbilities
Saskatchewan HIV Collaborative
Sask Polytechnic LPN Nursing Program
Street Workers' Advocacy Project
University of Regina/Saskatchewan Polytechnic
Collaborative Nursing Program
University of Regina Social Work Program
University of Saskatchewan College of Medicine
University of Saskatchewan Nursing Program
UR Pride Centre for Sexuality and Diversity



apss

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AIDS PROGRAMS SOUTH SASK

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EDUCATION • SUPPORT • FREE TESTING • NEEDLE EXCHANGE