



# VANCOUVER WOMEN'S HEALTH COLLECTIVE

## ANNUAL REPORT 2019-2020

We acknowledge that we work on the ancestral land of Coast Salish peoples. We also believe that it is important to situate our work in the rich history of the women's movement in the Downtown Eastside.

## Message from the board chair

This year, the Collective decided to reexamine our approach to board governance. During our annual governance retreat, the board agreed to alternate the form of our monthly meetings between business meetings and working meetings. The working sessions intended to create more space to discuss larger and more complex topics that cannot be addressed in the typical board meeting structure. In addition to the change in meeting format, the board aimed to establish an overarching theme to frame future decision-making. After a lengthy discussion about what frame was most appropriate, which included discussion around decolonization, anti-oppression, cultural safety, and gender affirmation, the board decided to focus on ‘reducing harm and helping womxn feel safer in the space’ to recognize the many intersecting identities of womxn who use the Collective. To achieve this aim, the VWHC will visually present a more welcoming space, a space that reflects more the communities who come in; as well as to providing more opportunities for training on decolonization, cultural safety and gender affirmation to the Collective staff, volunteers and board members.

VWHC Committees’ work continued throughout the year.

- The membership committee established a membership fee of up to \$5, with the option of ‘pay what you can’. The committee also identified members’ incentives such as professional development workshops and guest speakers. The committee laid out a plan to renew existing memberships and acquire new members between April (beginning of the fiscal year) and June (prior to AGM).
- The Environmental scan committee developed an external scan survey, including a review of existing services. It created a job description to acquire a practicum student’s support to execute the external environmental scan in year 2020-2021.
- The gender-affirming committee amended the position statement of the Collective by removing the word “people” in the first sentence - “The programs, services and activities at VWHC are open to all who self-identify as womxn (cis and trans), gender non-conforming, or non-binary.” The committee arranged a workshop for the Collective with PRISM, and continues to work to implement recommendations stemming from the discussion.
- In addition, the board was more intentional and moving toward better representation as a priority for the Succession planning committee to ensure the board was more representative of

the womxn who uses the space. As a result, the succession planning committee focused on board recruitment of womxn with lived experience who could contribute to the governance of the Collective by prioritizing BIPOC womxn and those with prior involvement with the Collective.

The Collective participated in our second Kairos Blanket exercise and took steps towards implementation of the recommendations. We invited artist Haisla Collins to develop a mural for our front window, and in the meantime, another piece of artwork has been painted by community members Erica George and friend Nadine on our boarded-up window. The artwork will be installed inside the Collective permanently once the window is replaced. VWHC continues to build more meaningful/authentic relationships with Indigenous People through projects like AWI/ROS (Aboriginal Women’s Intervention/Reclaiming our Spirit) in partnership with Kilala Lelum.

The board explored the Collective’s long-term financial stability and has undertaken preliminary discussion on ways to leverage a bequest and reviewed a comprehensive policies and procedures manual created thanks to one of our practicum students, Sheralei Taylor.

At the end of this fiscal year, the COVID pandemic hit and forever changed the world. Much of the changes and ongoing work the collective to took to support womxn through the pandemic falls into the next fiscal year. Still, the board is immensely proud of our staff and volunteers who worked tirelessly to pivot the organization’s operations to continue to support women. As always, the VWHC would not provide such a high level of service without our volunteers. Thank you for your ongoing support!

The VWHC can deliver such a wide array of high-quality programming and events due to the power of the collective itself and all the womxn who volunteer in the centre. Thank you to all the volunteers who keep the space welcoming and running, dedicate time to committees, or contribute as my co-board members: Alaina Chun, Bina Salimath, Dianne Henshaw, Essya Nabbali, Lena McFarlane, Sanzida Habib.

– Amanda Pollicino

## Message from the executive director

Reflecting back on a fiscal year is hard with the day-to-day activities taking front seat. Looking back at our monthly calendars reminds me that we added weekly Healing Touch/gentle massage, donations from Choices, from Aunt Leah's, 'signed up' new yoga instructors and counsellors, welcomed back weekly Pilates, lined up a series of workshops, hosted a holiday high tea as well as a second annual pancake breakfast, welcomed the Kairos blanket exercise for a second year, started exploring the feasibility of hosting a naturopathic clinic, and built and supported an incredible team of resource centre/drop-in volunteers - to whom I express my deepest gratitude.

The highlights for me have been embarking on the coalition 'Feminists Deliver' with over 20 other organisations, and further planning the implementation of our WAGE-funded project 'Expanding on AWI - Aboriginal Women's Intervention' (that has now officially taken the name Reclaiming Our Spirit Part II) in partnership with Kilala Lelum (formerly Urban Indigenous Health and Healing Cooperative). Attending an Elders' Circle and receiving permission to roll out the program was an incredible insight into shared wisdom and how all things are connected in Indigenous culture.

Another reminder of the power of listening happened during the 4-day local conference that Feminists Deliver organized as an accessible local event in parallel to the international conference Women Deliver, which few grassroots organizations or local individuals could afford to attend. It was striking to listen to speakers exposing the multiple effects of colonization while witnessing white privilege in action from institutional representatives. Reminder to self: don't be that person. I grew up with the freedom to voice my thoughts and the nerve to push back when I wasn't offered the opportunity. As an interrupter, I need to constantly remind myself to make space for others and actively listen.

Working for a consecutive year with Casey and the same board members as last year has been a pleasure. I will miss Amanda, Lena and Sanzida; and look forward to the new dynamic that incoming board members will create.

– France-Emmanuelle Joly

## Summary

The focus of services offered by the Vancouver Women's Health Collective is our Drop-in resource centre, a safer, secure, women-only space located in the heart of the Downtown Eastside (DTES) of Vancouver. Services are free of charge, or by donation. We welcome all self-identified women and our clients reflect the diverse nature of Vancouver. We do not keep records of age, ethnicity, primary language, occupation or socioeconomic status, to avoid profiling women who use the space, and informal feedback tells us that women appreciate not having to disclose their history in order to access the space and services.

### DROP-IN RESOURCE CENTRE

Our Drop-in Resource Centre is open 28 hours per week (weekdays, daytime) and offers:

- Free access to 7 updated/refurbished computers with Internet connectivity, printing, faxing and phone service
- Yoga classes increased from three to four times per week, and Pilates class once a week, provided free of charge by qualified instructors from various institutes
- Wellness Counselling 3 times a week
- New this year: Healing touch/gentle massage, once a week
- Health and wellness workshops open to community members and to other community agencies regarding women's health issues
- Free baked goods, sandwiches, breads, donated by community business partners (average of 5,800+ baked goods): Bean around the World, Pure Bread, Prado Café, Nelson the Seagull, Lost + Found café, and Balila
- New donations of non-perishables and produce from Choices Market Cambie (\$6,400 value)
- Free hygiene products (body/hair/feminine/dental) and distribution of make-up, costume jewellery, clothing, and linen & blankets, donated by Sylvia Hotel, Jean Queen clothing store and (new) Aunt Leah's

For 2019-2020, the number of women who used the space averaged 37 per day. An average of 11 women attended Health and Wellness workshops.

## VOLUNTEER-RUN ORGANISATION

Volunteers maintain all services. Resource Centre volunteer hours averaged 263 per month i.e. over 3150 hours per year, an extraordinary commitment and one essential to the delivery of all the Collective services. In addition, there were 7 Board members, 14 yoga and Pilates instructors, acupuncturist, massage, counsellors, as well as workshop facilitators who also generously volunteered their time. In all, volunteers donated close to 3800 hours of service. Our core group of volunteers consists of an average of 13 volunteers, with 6 long-term volunteers. Committee work and practicum also provided additional opportunities to volunteer to another 8 women.

## NURSE PRACTITIONER CLINIC

The Vancouver Women's Health Collective hosts a Nurse Practitioner community clinic thanks to a partnership with BC Women's Hospital (BCWH). This partnership also allows clients to access interpretation services through the Provincial Language Services. 3 clinical rooms are at the disposal of a team of 4 Nurse Practitioners (NP) who provide half-hour visits by booked appointment or on a walk-in basis. The team of NP continued investing time in reassessing their caseload to provide better continuum of care, and to decrease wait times – hence the drop in number of visits (-41%), reduced number of drop-in visits (only 14% as opposed to 25% of all visits in 2018-19) and decreased '3rd next available appointment' (standard measure of access to care) to an average of 6 days (versus 12 in 2018-19). Though still high, the turn-aways also decreased to 35 (from 53 in 2018-19).

- Met on a quarterly basis with BC Women's Hospital: this joint meeting provides an opportunity for VWHC staff to meet with the team of Nurse Practitioners, their program assistant and program manager at BC to discuss access to care, policy changes, operational challenges and improvements to the NP community clinic hosted at VWHC.

- Year 1 of a 4-year project funded by Women and Gender Equality – WAGE (formerly Status of Women Canada) The project is based on Reclaiming Our Spirit (Aboriginal Women's Intervention), a wrap-around model of care and healing developed by UBC School of Nursing Colleen Varcoe & team. The model combines Western healthcare and Indigenous teachings and/or circles with Elders.

Meetings between VWHC, Kilala Lelum and other partners took place to consolidate budgeting and clarify roles of each organisation.

2 consultations with peers from other Community Advisory Committees were organised, and feedback collected highlighted the need to consider throughout the next three years of implementation of the project, such as:

- \* the urban Indigenous environment vs. rural Indigenous communities, or women coming from small rural villages who need to understand services they can access in their new urban setting.

- \* women may not all want a "safe space" to be women only.

- \* participation should be open to including women who have experienced violence, but not domestic violence

- \* participating in cultural activities for those who are disconnected from their culture can be intimidating - there is an appropriate way to introduce cultural activities and there needs to be meaning behind these activities. One-to-one interactions would be important for bringing members in who might not be ready to sit in a group.

## Skills Development - Clients

## Advocacy

Organized 17 Monthly workshops attended by an average of 11 women

### APRIL

Music therapy

### MAY

Embody your power w/Bettina Rothe

Coping with Stress series: Crystals w/Rev. Victoria Marie, PhD

Dinner and documentary: For the next 7 generations

Coping with Stress series: Essential Oils w/doTERRA Wellness

### JUNE

Coping with Stress: Mindfulness w/Neda and Sara

### AUGUST

Coping with Stress: Art as Therapy w/Clayre Sessions

### SEPTEMBER

Dinner and documentary: For the next 7 generations

### OCTOBER

Dinner and documentary: Aging and the human spirit

### NOVEMBER

Nutrition day

### DECEMBER

Ukulele class

High Tea presented by Secret Garden tea salon

Holiday Pancake Breakfast

### JANUARY

Footcare with Julia

Trans beauty event w/ Beauty Night

### FEBRUARY

Bone broth making w/Mithalee

The Art of Meditation

Kairos Blanket exercise w/Healing at the Wounding Place

- Participated in the following work groups or advisory committees:
  - Bridging the Gap between Health and Settlement, immigrant & refugee services
  - Patients in Education (co-chairing)
  - Women's Intensive Care Management Team (WICMT)
  - DTES Women's Coalition
  - Feminists Deliver
  - Community of Practice (CoP) organised by Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) and DCHC DTES Women's Night Clinics Coordinator
  - Care Provider Workshop/consultation (April 2019) for BCWH's mature women's health program to discuss results from a survey among women (volunteer basis, online). We voiced that the survey lacked representation from vulnerable/under-represented women.
  - Feminist approach to health - July 2019 w/Belkin house staff
- Facilitated workshops
  - Women's Rights in healthcare system (100 participants from YWCA, ISSBC, Douglas College, UBC HOPE)
  - 'With not for: advocacy and allyship', for Equal Voice's 'Daughters of the Vote Legacy' Western-region event
  - Presentation to SFU students on the topic of Diversity and Equity in Cities (9 students)
- Facilitated Q&A on abortion in Canada (September 2019) following the reading of What a Young Wife Ought to Know performed by Alley Theatre (30 people in attendance)
- Participated as panel speaker on Harm Reduction - Feminists Deliver event (June 2019) (13 attendees and 4 panelists)
- Participated in the following consultations:
  - Rise Women's Centre Community, on community needs in terms of legal training and support (June 2019)
  - CCF's Hope Dialogue (October 2019)
  - BC Centre on Substance Use (BCCSU) re: importance of applying an intersectional/feminist lens to substance use (July 2019)

## Organizational Capacity - Volunteer & Staff Capacity Building

### Volunteer management

- Interviewed 36 applicants, resulting in 18 new RC volunteers; 4 workshop facilitators
- Supervised and evaluated 6 practicum students
- Provided references for 6 volunteers applying to medical and arts studies; and for 2 former staff

### Volunteer engagement

- Designed workshops/training program (ongoing)
- Organized 3 Quarterly Volunteer appreciation nights (July, October, February) with average of 10 participants
- Provided 3 Volunteer trainings with average of 8 participants: Trans inclusion with Nikki and Kelendria; Non-profit 101; Kairos Blanket Exercise w/ Jodi and Melaney, from Healing at the Wounding Place

### Capacity building

Supported staff through training in Non-violent communication; Intersectional feminism (with CRIAW-ICREF) and Fund Development (at Vantage Point)

### Committee work

- 6 committees based on the VWHC's Strategic priorities: (see Message from the chair of the board)
  - o Succession planning
  - o Membership
  - o Environmental Scan and Outreach
  - o Operationalizing Gender Inclusivity
  - o Volunteer engagement
  - o Wellness programming

## Organizational Capacity - Outreach, Communication, Funding, & Membership

### Outreach

- Central City Foundation - Fair in the Square (May 2019)
- Secret Garden Women's brunch (November 2019)

### Communications

- Fear of Science podcast re: abortion (Aug. 8, 2019) w/ Jeff Porter, Joyce Arthur (Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada) and comedian Emma Cooper.
- Interviews w/Radio-Canada
  - o Unmet healthcare needs of women (Oct. 7, 2019)
  - o Cost of contraception as a barrier for young women (Nov. 8, 2019)
  - o Housing costs as a barrier for women to leave abusive situations (Nov. 12, 2019)
  - o 16 days of action to end WAV (Nov. 25, 2019)
- Monthly mailout: Calendar, Posters for workshops and other events
- Website updates (monthly calendar and workshops) Facebook and Instagram

## FINANCIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We acknowledge the financial assistance of

- the Province of British Columbia for our Resource Centre;
- BC Women's Hospital, an agency of PHSA, for the NP Clinic;
- Women and Gender Equality Canada

Fundraising activities raised close to \$4,000 and we were recipient of a FedEx Cares Community Employees Fund grant for \$1,000.00 USD (\$1290.50 CAD)

We are very grateful to community partners who donate items, including HCMA Architecture + Design for in-kind redesign services and to those who fundraised for us or made individual donations.

A special thank you goes to Central City Foundation for their support as landlord.

# Resource Centre Report

## ANNUAL CLIENT SERVICES

* closed due to COVID-19 on March 17, 2020 Statistics include only half a month for March.	April 2019- (mid) March* 2020	April 2018- March 2019	% Change 2019-2020 compared to 2018-2019
<b>CONTACTS</b>			
Drop-in	8029	7714	+4%
Appointments	1176	1699	-30%
Email	152	204	-25%
Phone	1656	1439	+15%
Total Contacts	11,013	11056	+0.4%
No. of women in space:	9205	9413	-2%
<b>SERVICES DELIVERED</b>			
NP visits	1367	2326	-41%
NP Related	1622	1739	-7%
Food/Drink	6551	6598	+0.7%
Hygiene & Clothing	4273	3255	+31%
Acupuncture	15	147	-90%
Yoga & Pilates	677	658	+3%
Computer/Phone/Fax	1317	1274	+3%
Workshops/Events	125	186	-33%
Counselling	348	268	+30%
VWHC/Other	636	280	+127%
Total Services	16,931	16,731	+1%
RC Services	13,942	12,666	+10%
NP Appts. & NP Related	2989	4,065	-26%

VWHC: tracks miscellaneous services such as women dropping in or phoning/emailing for information, having a tour, or sharing information about other services in the area

NP Visits: indicate the number of clients who saw a nurse practitioner, either by drop-in or appointment; the drop-in visits constitute approximately 1/4 of all nurse practitioner visits.

NP Related: indicates the number of women who come in/call/email to manage appointments. Decreased only by 7%, indicating the volunteers spent a great deal of their time supporting womxn with NP-related issues.

The total number of women in the space was down very slightly from 2018-19, but the number of Resource Centre services accessed was up by 10%.



acknowledges the financial assistance  
and donations from



An agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority



- NELSON *The SEAGULL* -



purebread.