



A Place for Youth

to tell us anything and everything

»When you ask why she wouldn't want to go to another mainstream medical clinic, with raised eyebrows she asks, "Are you kidding? These ladies right here (Dr. Elizabeth Watt, Dr. Cindy Shaw, Dr. Consuelo Kinahan and Krista) are looking out for me. They take the time to follow up and actually get to know us. They are working for the public; they're working for us - young people. This place is great! This place is needed!«

The door opens and another young woman walks confidently through the door at the temporary location of the Abbotsford Youth Health Centre (AYHC).

She is greeted with big smiles and a friendly echo from Intake and Reception Coordinator Krista Kenessey and Intake Volunteer Tim Walters who are organizing an ever growing number of patient files. "Hey, it's so good to see you!"

Laura has been here before and in her words, "Every town in the world needs a place like this (for youth)! Right from the very first time I came here I felt totally at home."

Laura was in a car accident over a year ago and has been plagued with back pain ever since. "Here they

actually look at you, listen and talk to you. They even talk about your past and medical history to figure out what's actually going on. The doctors here always take the time to make sure I understand exactly what they're telling me. I come here because I know I will be treated with respect; I feel safe to be myself and to tell all the embarrassing details here."

Youth Friendly Environment

The atmosphere is casual, welcoming and most definitely 'youth friendly'. Everyone is offered water, juice and whatever snacks happen to be on hand. A group of teenage boys come in with their Abbotsford Community Services (ACS) youth worker and before they leave, help themselves to condoms at the front



»With the results that we've had – reaching youth who have never seen a doctor in their lives, fast-tracking youth to urgent, life saving treatment for conditions that were caught during our in-depth intake process – we know the service we're providing is not only meeting a need in the community, but it's also resulting in significant cost-savings to the medical system by identifying developing conditions before they become crises.«

desk. There is no judgment here and everyone is comfortable to talk about anything that's on their minds.

The door opens again and two sisters come in with another ACS staffer who works with the Immigrant Youth and Young Adults program. The 20-year old says she feels more comfortable here than at her family physician's office. "The way they talk to you and treat you here, it makes you feel like they have known you a long time. That's nice."

She needed to have some paperwork completed to submit with an application to Vancouver Career College for admittance into the LPN program. Her 19-year old sister had some medical concerns to discuss with a physician, so they came to the Tuesday afternoon drop-in and left about 45 minutes later with everything looked after.

No appointments are necessary which makes it more convenient for young people. What's not so convenient is that the AYHC operates only one afternoon a week at this time. "Hopefully, one day, we will be open every afternoon so that these young people will have a welcoming place to go when they need help," says Dr. Watt.

Educating Youth about Their Health

Something Krista hears from youth almost every week is that they do not feel like they are welcome at mainstream medical offices. "Many of the young people that drop in to the AYHC are marginalized in one way or another and it's simply more comfortable for them to be in an environment, a waiting room, which is full of their peers instead of adults who might be judgmental or critical of who they are. Many of these kids feel like adults just don't want them

around," she says. "But here at the AYHC, they are being empowered and educated about their health. That's important."

"When we began none of us knew for sure how much demand there would be," says Dr. Watt. "But that question was quickly answered. There have been days where, even with myself and a UBC Family Practice Resident both seeing patients, we haven't been able to see all the youth who have come for services."

Since the opening of the AYHC preliminary data has been collected from youth and young adults (aged 12-24) many of whom are aging out of the youth care system. Nearly 150 individuals have been served in over 200 appointments operating only four hours per week.

Need for Permanent Location

The AYHC has been operating at temporary locations since operations began in November 2010. Dr. Jacques West generously arranged space for the centre at his McCallum Clinic location and when that space was no longer available, the centre moved to a space normally occupied by ACS's English Language Services for Adults. That space was made available during the summer of 2011.

"But we need a permanent home," says Kenessey. "Stability is something that is in short supply for some of the youth we serve."

Starting in September 2011 the Abbotsford Regional Hospital and Cancer Centre is slated to become the new temporary home of the AYHC as part of a six month pilot project arranged in collaboration with the Fraser Health Authority.

"The centre is operated through a huge, wide-ranging collaboration of community partners and >>>

In the first six months of operation some alarming statistics came to light.

- 39% reported having traded sex for money/valuables
- 71% report depression
- 89% report high or moderate stress
- 29% report self-harm
- Only 43% report feeling in control of their thoughts and actions
- 56% have high or moderate risky substance abuse patterns
- Many youth fear stigmatization if seen seeking a service specifically for mental health, sexual health or substance abuse counselling.



>>> services which is so uplifting and encouraging," says Dr. Watt. "This community is full of people who care. So, where appropriate we want to help youth identify community supports that might be able to help them. At the AYHC, we do all we can to build, strengthen and restore supportive relationships – whether with family, peers, spiritual/religious advisors, school staff, social workers, or whoever else might be important to the youth who come in these doors."

About the AYHC:

- Provides health services in a youth-friendly, safe, confidential and non-judgmental environment for individuals aged 12-24
- Increases young people's knowledge about issues affecting their health
- Provides young people with tools to protect and maintain their health
- Helps youth recognize high risk behaviours, and manage the risks associated with day-to-day living
- Empowers youth to be active participants in their health care
- For more information, visit AYHC.ca

How You Can Help:

- **#1 Wish:** The gift of a house on a bus route in central Abbotsford as a permanent location
- Financial Donations to sustain and increase hours of operation

