

Sistering Community Advisory Council

September 20, 2018

Sistering 962 Bloor St West

6:00 - 7:30 pm

Attending:

Alida Morris, Community Support Worker at Sistering

Angela Burns, resident and BIA member

Christine McGlade, resident

Debra Neil, Peer Worker at Sistering

Jessica Smith, Paradise Theatre

Kalli Anderson, resident

Roona Maloney, resident and business owner

Sally McLean, resident and volunteer at Sistering

Shelley Walters, Chair of Committee

Sonya Williams, resident, Paradise Theatre

Patricia O'Connell, Executive Director of Sistering

Karen Harding-Brown

Marian Lupu, Fundraising department of Sistering

Sari Stitt, Volunteer at Sistering

General Introductions

- All participants introduced themselves
- Review of agenda, check in about any additions

Patricia O'Connell updated on the community complaint email forwarded by Angela Surdi. The complaint was sent to all Sistering staff. Peer presence has been increased in front of the building, Sistering is trying to organize having full time or relief staff out there. This is difficult given that Sistering has never had budget to monitor an additional space.

Discussion within the group about comments in the email re having people committed to CAMH showing a lack of awareness about the systems of mental health care and shelters. There are multiple barriers that stop people from accessing shelters and hospitals, and Sistering has limited space inside, with no designated outside space.

One impression of the email is that this is an issue that has been building up with the resident. Sounds like an incident made their feelings more urgent and triggered an email. The mention of public urination, open drug consumption, and dealing, which some council members have never seen during the day – is it more of an evening incident?

Pat – not aware of dealing, staff have witnessed urination in Sistering's porch area but it may be happening due to the washroom reduction during renovations, which has created a temporary barrier to using a bathroom inside.

Women have been seen urinating outside. It's hard to get everyone up to the bathroom when they have to go because you can fit only 3 women in the elevator at a time. Witnessed in the late evening, probably the same participant. This is a new phenomenon for Sistering probably due to renovations, Women have been seen urinating in the back alley if they don't feel safe in the bathroom.

Some of these issues may be covered in the communique "Sistering in the Neighbourhood" from this committee.

Review of "Sistering in the Neighbourhood" communique:

- Possibly adding into communique answers to a question posed in the email – why participants cannot just access CAMH or other systems that the writer of the email thinks they should. Framing it as a 'Toronto' problem not a 'Sistering' problem.
- Communique to be distributed as a brochure size flyer, and as a digital flyer.
- The group conferred to edit the draft 'Neighbourhood Update' flyer.
- Is this testimonial what the neighbourhood is looking for? They are looking for answers on why people are sleeping out front or peeing on the sidewalk. Do we need the testimonial? It's a powerful connection. Discussion over what we are trying to communicate by using a testimonial

Is there still staff on outside shifts? Pat confirms we do not have a budget to have designated staff outside. Managers, staff and peers go outside when they can. The renovations have also added to the staff needed. Sistering is short staffed by at least two people per shift when outside shifts and elevator shifts are necessitated.

Discussion on whether this coverage is a budgeting or funding issue. Budgeting is done at the beginning of the fiscal year. Some money is put aside for peer work, some for other programs. The budget set aside at the beginning of the year was based on last year's needs – could not predict this year's needs re: extra designated staff for outside. Clarification that it is not a budgeting issue, but that there are not sufficient funds coming in from outside sources for this program. Honoraria and other money from peer programs should not be reallocated for policing the space, instead of alleviating poverty by empowering women.

Discussion around overcrowding at Sistering – the agency is being pressured by the city to get our numbers down, while Sistering is pressured from other avenues including hospitals to accept women. Sistering refuses to close their doors unless women have another safe place to stay. This is a systemic issue.

Decision to identify peers or staff working outside with lanyards or t-shirts to ensure they are recognizable by the public. Sistering to supply all peer workers with apparel. D confirms that having some form of identification for when you are on shift is helpful for participants as well in terms of self-monitoring behaviour.

Suggestion to put a sand bucket for cigarette butts outside the building so that there is a visual that we are doing something about the cigarettes. The obstacles to this – it is considered a hazard by public health to have one on Sistering property. Anything tied down will be illegal due to by-laws, but anything not tied down can be dangerous.

Discussion about enforcing non-smoking rules. Sistering does their best. It's hard to enforce as soon as your back is turned. People do walk down the street to go smoke at other public benches. We have received complaints from people living by the park with accusations against our participants, that women are doing drugs in the park. However there isn't anywhere else safe inside to use, and they aren't allowed to use in Sistering. Possibly we could add something around this to the flyer, in the description of low barrier. State that Sistering is not a safe-injection site.

Part of Sistering's renovation is adjusting the bathrooms to be safer for people who may choose to use in the bathroom despite the rule against open use. Sistering can't know or control what people are doing in the privacy of the bathroom but can try to provide safety.

Clarify that we are not a shelter, because many people think we are a shelter and have many beds for people

Pat – when Sistering first opened 24 hour service, they envisioned an awake space for sex workers and other people up all night. This is not what it has become. The service became a makeshift shelter possibly within 1.5 months of opening

Is there a minister of housing in the provincial government? Pat to find out. Decision on shelter RFP to come October 1 as quoted by the City.

Commitment to send e-version of communique to BIA and Mike Layton's office ASAP. And to remove the testimonial and just say, "There is nowhere else to go". This text version sent by email will include the deadline for RFP decision to encourage community advocacy.

Commitment from C and S to review final version before it goes out. Pat commits Sistering through Marian to produce the physical version of the flyers. Decision to make it clear that the flyer comes from the Community Advisory Council.

Re: website: C only needs the content for the website and then it is ready to go.

Content: FAQs sent by Pat, the communique edited today. Once website is up, Sistering will add a link to the Community Advisory Council page.

Distribution on physical flyers still needs coordination. R to contact Ana Bailao's office, and Mike Layton and Angela Surdi, asking if our e-copy can be distributed on their list. K will help with physical distribution, make a map and assign people to areas.

Pat brings back answer from BIA re: request for funding for training, the answer was a no from Meg. Pat will offer an answer to the email from Angela Surdi, and reference communique and website to state that it's been addressed and we're taking it seriously.

Last call for business.

Switch to new dates – second Tuesday of every month. Next meeting will be October 9th.

To do for next time:

- Pat to find provincial minister of housing
- A to look into options for clothes peers can wear to identify themselves
- Edits to be made on communique
- R to contact Ana Bailao, Mike Layton, and Angela Surdi re: distribution of communique
- K to draw up map to organize distribution of communique
- J, K and S to send C and S content of communique for copy editing, and C will get the website live