

SISTERING IN ACTION




Sistering
A Woman's Place

CHANGING
LIVES
ONE WOMAN
AT A TIME

**ANNUAL
REPORT
2015/16**

FORWARD

A message from the Executive Director & Co-chair

September 22, 2013. It was a chilly night in Toronto, typical fall weather. A homeless woman was sleeping on the steps of a building at Sherbourne and Dundas Streets.

Between 4:00 and 5:00 a.m. she was sexually assaulted. Twice. By two different men.

The attack galvanized the community: how, in a city that prides itself as livable, could she – and too many other vulnerable women – not find a welcoming, low-barrier space to stay safe and warm?

On Monday, November 25, a group of female activists and supporters, including Sistering’s senior team, held a rally just meters from where the woman was assaulted, accusing all three levels of government of failing to protect women and girls.

According to a story in the Toronto Star, Norma Jean Neal, a Regent Park community



Executive Director Patricia O'Connell (left) and Board Co-chair Anne Chappelle.



health worker, asked, “Why was she out there sleeping on the stairs at four in the morning? It’s because there’s no shelters. We need something down here immediately – a 24-hour,

low threshold safe place – no matter what condition you’re in, you can get into ... that’s what we need to demand of our politicians.”

Through a grass roots collaborative process, Sistering peers and staff advocated on the streets and inside the system day and night for improved access to safe spaces for homeless women and trans people.

The City stepped up with funding and in November 2015 we opened our Drop In 24/7, 365 days a year.

This is Sistering in Action: identifying and understanding the needs of marginalized women, advocating for change and seeing the impact our effective model has on the women we serve.

Sistering operates on a trauma-informed and relationship-based model and our harm reduction philosophy is a core element of all the work we do: we are here to respond to participants’ needs, where they are at, in the moment, to support them in learning how to reduce harm and/or increase safety, and recognize that their lives have meaning and value.

We know our model works – and so do our partners.

Hostel to Homes Pilot: Follow Up Support Services

In a unique collaboration with Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre (PARC) and funded by City of Toronto Shelter, Support & Housing Administration, Sistering and PARC’s Follow-Up Support Program will assist 40 chronically homeless women to stabilize their housing through a Coordinated Care Planning framework (PARC supported female and/or male clients). Using our client-centred, harm reduction and trauma-informed approach, this pilot project will support the development of life skills; offer income support; reduce social isolation; address mental health and addictions issues; address impacts of past trauma; provide landlord mediation; and strengthen community connections. Sistering and PARC’s barrier-free models of community access will ensure continued support beyond the pilot project.

Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) for Syrian Refugees

Working with a wide range of agencies serving the newcomer Syrian population to reach this specific target group, we offered an information session and four WRAP workshops to 11 female refugees. Similar to the Sistering model, WRAP is based on a recovery-oriented mental health

framework that explores lived experience, insights and the significance of community connection for participants with mental health issues. WRAP is an innovative approach to providing mental health and recovery service and this pilot, funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada and delivered in partnership with the Gerstein Crisis Centre, was an opportunity to use this new service delivery model with a new target population.

Inspirations Vital Ideas Grant

Inspirations and Spun studios contribute to the reduction of poverty and homelessness through an innovative social enterprise that employs marginalized women in a creative, collaborative and healing environment. Creating and selling their work through Inspirations and Spun studios builds self-esteem, self-confidence and a sense of independence and self-worth.

Sistering was awarded a Toronto Foundation Vital Ideas Grant of \$29,250. We were one of 92 applicants – only 11 were funded. Our goal: a retail outlet to sell the one-of-a-kind pottery, knitted and woven products created by the artisans at Inspirations Studio and Spun Studio. The Vital Ideas Grant allows us to conduct a feasibility study and develop a critical business plan for a storefront.

Collective Impact

Poverty and homelessness are complex issues. It is well documented that solutions best evolve from customized “Collective Impact” (CI) models. In Canada, CI is a best practice used by United Way, The Metcalf Foundation (Regent Park revival), Tamarack, Peel County (welcoming new immigrants) and other organizations addressing social problems.

Using CI values and practices, Sistering partners with a number of agencies to offer participants enhanced services:

- Inner City Health Associates provides participants with access to two physicians and two psychiatrists on site in total three days a week.

- The Jean Tweed Centre provides a trauma-informed psychotherapist on site two days a week.
- West Neighbourhood House provides an immigration counsellor on site once a week.
- Sistering’s Parkdale Drop In and Outreach Program, located in the Masaryk-Cowan Community Centre at 220 Cowan Avenue, offers hot meals, seasonal clothing, support with and referral to housing and housing workers, education classes, health care, therapists, legal services and social and recreational activities including arts and crafts, videos, speakers, day trips and workshops.

Peer Outreach

A joint program with Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre and West Neighbourhood House and funded by Toronto Central LHIN, our Peer Outreach Workers engage homeless or under-housed women who often end up in emergency departments due to precarious health, poor primary health care, lack of access to mental health and addiction services, inadequate housing and insufficient income. They provide advocacy and empathy, helping to reduce barriers and increase access to essential social services and community support.

“Honestly, I don’t know what we would do without the Peer Community Outreach Program. I sing their highest praise. Trustworthy, reliable and personable, the Peer team gets our vulnerable clients to their appointments on time and brings them back safely. The Sherbourne Infirmary Program highly recommends the Peer Community Outreach Program for their professionalism and high standards. Many thanks to all who make this vital program possible.”

– Gillian Mais, Case Manager, Sherbourne Health Centre Infirmary

Peer Harm Reduction

Our Peer Harm Reduction program, funded by Toronto Urban Health Fund, employs seven Peer Harm Reduction Workers who educate substance users on safer drug use and teach safer sex practices to fight the spread of HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C.

We work in partnership with agencies such as Queen West Community Health Centre, All Saints Church, Regent Park Community Health Centre, Parkdale Community Health Centre, Weston King Neighbourhood Centre, Sherbourne Health Centre, Davenport Perth Neighbourhood and Community Health Centre, and Maggie’s. Outreach initiatives focus on marginalized areas in the city, especially where women have little or no access to services. We also partner with KAPOW (Knowledge and Power of Women), a support group for women-identified sex workers in Parkdale, sharing resources, knowledge and providing peer support.

We know Sistering’s model works because the women who access our services contribute enormously to what we are doing and how we are doing it. We’re a team, and together we are making a difference.

Here is what the women at Sistering have to say:

“They have an excellent array of services. I have been placed in housing, got a job, and have been in therapy. Without Sistering, without these services, I would be dead.”

“Sistering is a great support system for society, especially mental health. We are treated with respect, and we are let to know that we can turn for help with their various services.”

“Sistering has done what it’s supposed to do, like holding your hand, like a Sister should.”

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

With thanks to our tireless Board of Directors for their wisdom, guidance and commitment to the women we serve.

- Alicia Leyva Arcos
- Angela Nolan (Treasurer)
- Anne Chappelle (Co-chair)
- Cynthia Daley
- Debra Neil
- Heather Smyth
- Ida Hersi
- Jessica Smith Cross
- Judy Gabriel-Virgo (Co-chair)
- Lynne Woolcott
- Margaret Cioffi
- Mhetts (Myrtel) Saltat
- Pat Craig (Secretary)
- Shabnum Durrani
- Sue Kelleher



OUR YEAR IN NUMBERS

Number of women who
visited the 24/7Drop In

2365

Total number of visits
24/7 & Parkda Drop Ins)

67,383

Number of
weekly
program
volunteers

20

Total number of meals served 24/7 & Parkdale Drop Ins

101,022

Total number of overnight visits
since November 2015

2500+

Number of condoms distributed

15,000+

Number of harm reduction kits distributed

11,000+

Number of
harm reduction
workshops
presented

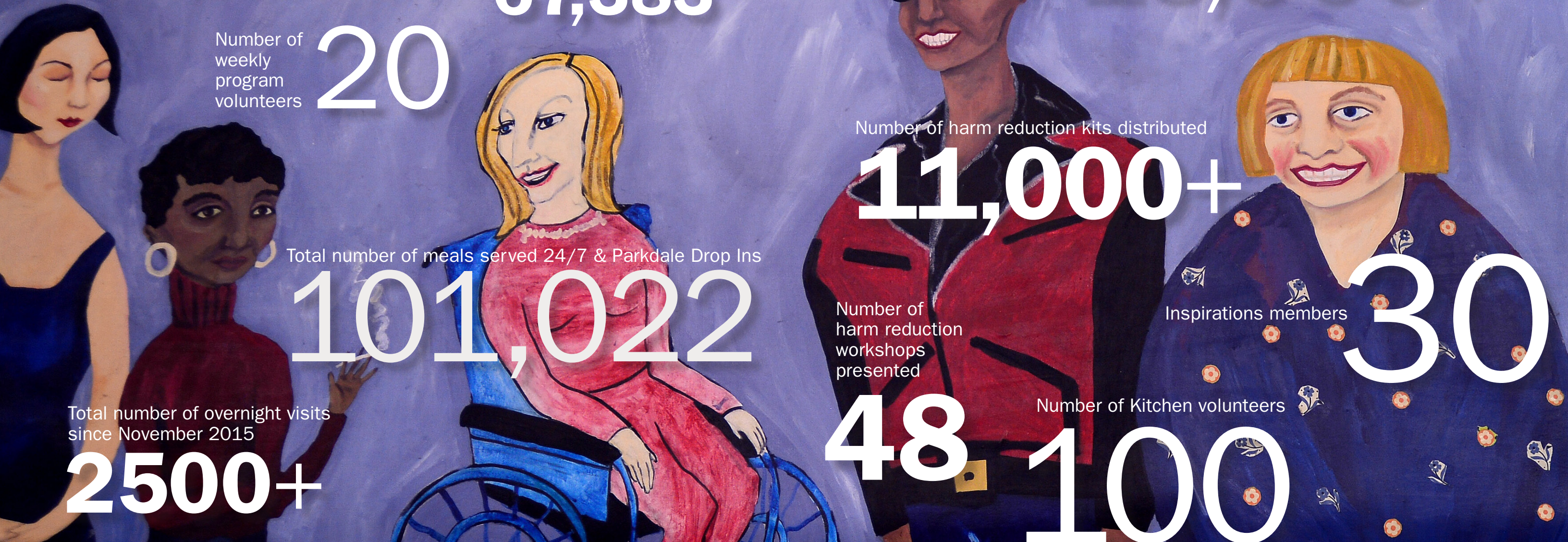
48

Inspirations members

30

Number of Kitchen volunteers

100



WHO WE ARE

Sistering is a multi-service agency for at-risk, socially isolated women in Toronto who are homeless or precariously housed. We have been serving this community for over 30 years, validating women’s experiences regardless of outcomes. These marginalized women come from diverse backgrounds and include: women with substance use and mental health issues; women who have experienced, or are experiencing, trauma and violence; immigrant and refugee women; women with disabilities; and women without legal status.

Our Vision

Sistering envisions a world where all women, in all our diversity, are valued; a world where we are safe and supported, treated with dignity, and given the respect we deserve. When opportunities are just and equitable, we can live life on our own terms.

Our Mission

Our goal is to create a safe, non-judgmental space for women who are socially isolated, poor, homeless or precariously housed. Guided by principles of Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression, Sistering works to change the social conditions that endanger women’s welfare. We offer practical and emotional support to marginalized women through programs and services that enable them to take greater control over their lives.

What We Do

Sistering’s programs include a low-barrier 24/7 Drop In, Housing and Case Support, Harm Reduction, Peer Outreach, On the Path to Employment, Inspirations Studio and Spun Studio social enterprises, and individual and systemic advocacy.

How We Do It

Sistering operates on a trauma-informed and relationship-based model and our harm reduction philosophy is a core element of all the work we do: we are here to respond to participants’ needs, where they are at, in the moment, to support participants to learn how to reduce harm and/or increase safety. And we recognize that their lives have meaning and value.

IMPACT: Participant

“I try to live Ahimsa, the Buddhist concept of non-violence to self and non-violence to others, promoting peace and compassion.”

– Donna

Donna has been weaving at Spun Studio for two years, and as she perfects her skills, has made quality products such as rugs and bags, and has sold much of her work. She also does pottery at Inspirations Studio, and beading at Sistering. Donna was in a precarious housing situation and spent time in a shelter, and through our Community Support Team, has just accessed her own subsidized bachelor apartment, which she says will be so much better for her mental health.

Nicolette from the kitchen at Sistering serves up soup at a community event.



IMPACT: Volunteer

“I’ve volunteered all my life, starting when I was about 15 years old. I can’t say where the practice came from, except to say that it’s something I have always done. I started out volunteering with kids who went to the community centre I had belonged to when I was their age. As a working adult, I volunteered on various non-profit boards. Four different ones, if my memory serves me right. During the last few years of my career, I hadn’t volunteered consistently, so once I retired, I knew that I wanted to volunteer again.

“I knew about Sistering and had donated to the organization for a few years. Now, I wanted to really get involved. I wanted to know firsthand what makes Sistering such a unique and necessary place. I had an appointment with the volunteer coordinator, who suggested that the ESL class could use another teacher. I was quite okay with the assignment.

“Working with marginalized women has had an enormous impact on me. I am much less judgmental of differences, more compassionate and more understanding of the difficulties many women experience. I am incredibly grateful for the privileges I have had - higher education and gainful employment, for example - none of which should be taken for granted.”

– Dorothy Rusoff

IMPACT: Participant

“I pay for my clay. I own what I do. I earned it. It wasn’t given to me for free. I’m in a happy place in my life. I love being a potter. It has kept me alive and given me purpose.”

– Judith

Seven years ago, Judith was homeless, jobless, with addiction issues, living on the street in Toronto. She found her way to Inspirations Studio and learned how to make pottery. She gained business skills. She became an entrepreneur.

Today, she makes beautiful one-of-a-kind pieces, platters, mugs, teapots and more.

Today, she earns income from the sale of her pottery.

Today, she lives in a market-rent apartment. She hasn’t been homeless since she started the program.



VOLUNTEERS

Without our dedicated team of volunteers, we wouldn't be able to offer the programs and activities participants have come to count on. From facilitating craft activities such as beading and quilting to teaching ESL to prepping and serving meals, our tireless volunteers help ensure that every woman who comes to Sistering feels welcome and valued.

Some highlights from the past year:

- Congratulations to four volunteers who were recognized with Ontario Service Awards: Dorothy Rusoff, who has taught ESL classes and offered support at special events, 10 years; Christine Malec, 5 years (although she has been volunteering as a massage therapist for 6 years); Darcie Clark, 5 years (although she has been volunteering as a yoga teacher for 6 years); Joey Nobel, who teaches weekly ESL classes, 10 years.
- We created an English Conversation Circle at the request of a number of participants who had attended our regular ESL classes – they wanted to put their new language skills into practice in a safe environment. Conversations ranged from grocery shopping to going to the bank.
- Days of Caring Volunteers: United Way has brokered with corporate donors to offer their teams the opportunity to volunteer at agencies supported by United Way. We have hosted 18 Days of Caring and 90 volunteers donated 360 hours helping prepare daily meals for participants.
- We partner with the University of Toronto to offer students in diverse programs the opportunity to contribute Service Learning hours to Sistering. This year students taking the Global Hidden Hunger course created a food and nutrition blog in concert with our kitchen team that can be used as a reference for the next cohorts. It also provided prospective food prep volunteers with the chance to explore A Day in the Life of a Sistering Kitchen Volunteer before signing up.

We count on volunteers to prep and serve delicious meals created in Sistering's kitchen. Dooreeana Manickarajah (left) and Priya Thiranand (right), volunteers with Scarborough Sai Youth.



- A team from creative agency Traffik volunteered in a number of ways: they worked for a day in the kitchen, wrapped holiday gifts and created more than 70 generously-filled shoe box gifts for participants.
- Dooreeana Manickarajah, a youth leader from Scarborough Sai Youth group, organized over 20 young people ages 14 to 17 to volunteer in groups of five in our kitchen once a month. The group also came together to create 90 care packages filled with treats and necessities including lip balm, candles or incense sticks, hand cream, mittens or gloves, socks, hats or beanies, a mug and a hot chocolate pack.
- Hopeworld's Toronto Chapter Director, Dr. Phil Osagie, a member of the Central Region Toronto Church of Christ, brought together a team of volunteers from his congregation who held a sock drive over the holidays – and collected six huge plastic bags stuffed full of clothing, mostly new socks. Twenty volunteers also organized a Valentine's Celebration at the Drop In, complete with afternoon tea, entertainment and 200 gifts of a fresh flower and chocolates or cookies.



Volunteers contribute in so many ways to the work we do: teaching classes, organizing toiletry drives, bringing holiday gifts and more. Below: Deanna Lentini (left), Awo Dirie

(right, seated) and Anoke Dunston (standing) from Fix the 6ix. Bottom left: Laura Chang; top right, Lorna Seyed; bottom right, Zarina Decambra.



IMPACT: Volunteer

Karen Reich, *Senior Manager, TDS Control Services*
Sarah Grant, *Senior Manager, Internal Audit*
TD Bank Group

Karen and Sarah are both members of TD's Corporate Women in Leadership (WIL) Chapter and Events Sub-committee. A key objective of the sub-committee is to inspire current and emerging women leaders to give back to their communities.

They were drawn to Sistering, they say, because of the work we do with homeless, marginalized and socially-isolated women. Initially, they coordinated small groups of volunteers to help in the kitchen once a month. But they quickly recognized Sistering's need for toiletries – simple day-to-day items like shampoo, conditioner, brushes etc. They reached out to over 2000 Bank employees and ran a one-month Toiletry Drive. To their amazement, donations filled more 70 boxes! The drive also raised awareness of Sistering, and as a result the group doubled its volunteer time commitment.

“Volunteering in the Sistering kitchen has given us the opportunity to see and feel the challenges and life struggles these women are going through,” says Sarah. “And by giving just a few hours of our time we hope we're making a small difference in their lives.”

“We have also been inspired by the hardworking staff at Sistering,” says Karen. “Their dedication has had a remarkable impact on the community. Seeing the tangible impact on the organization and hearing the incredible stories of the women we encounter has made for a meaningful work experience we have become passionate about.”



DONORS & SUPPORTERS

Rotary Club of Toronto/Rotary Club of Toronto Charitable Foundation

The number of homeless women in Toronto has doubled, and there has been a phenomenal increase in seniors living in poverty. Thanks to the generous support of our friends at the Rotary Club of Toronto, Sistering's Parkdale Drop In has had the opportunity to run workshops to support the special needs of senior women including mental health and emotional wellbeing, seniors' rights, landlord and tenant issues, elder abuse, and healthy eating on a budget. Sistering's seniors also enjoyed a number of day trips and special events as well as a Community Walk to explore the neighbourhood and all the resources available.

"We have supported the work of Sistering for a number of years," says Don Brooks, a member of the Rotary Club's Senior Citizen's Committee. "When

we award grants, we look at the impact a program has on the end user. And there is no question that Sistering positively impacts isolated and vulnerable women – and for this program, seniors."

Toronto Dish Soup Sisters

Soup Sisters has been supporting Sistering for two years, providing us with 200 servings of vegetarian soup, originally every other month and as of January 2016, every month.

"We chose to develop a relationship with Sistering because we saw a need," says Wendy Bunston, coordinator of events for Toronto Dish. It's a volunteer position – everyone involved volunteers, except for the event chef and dishwasher.

"It's a simple model," Wendy explains. "We partner with Dish Cooking Studio, which provides the space free of charge, and we invite 20 or 25 people to come together and make soup to celebrate a birthday, a family event, or as a corporate teambuilding opportunity. Groups need to book months in advance – in fact, we're booked into January 2017!

"We come together to nourish and nurture women in their time of need. We want to show them that we care, and that we stand with them."



Thanks to generous support from Rotary Club of Toronto, we offered programs supporting the special needs of senior women.



Toronto Dish Soup Sisters invite people to come together and make 200 servings of soup for Sistering to nourish and nurture women in their time of need.



IMPACT: Volunteer

"I started coming every Saturday to do acupressure on women who signed up. I got to know the women who come to Sistering and the staff.

"I got married and we asked our guests for a donation to Sistering instead of giving us a gift.

"I stepped back for a while – lots going on in my life! – And almost three years ago came back to lead a simple stretching class every Saturday morning. It's not structured; I show up, start stretching, and anyone who wants to join in is welcome. Sometimes everyone in the room takes part – and that's so great.

"Sistering is an amazing place – it's an accepting and non-judgmental environment. I have so much fun there. I have built a trusting relationship with the women and they often ask me questions after class. I feel like part of a community; there is no separation between me and the women and I hope they get as much from me being there as I do."

– Kirsten Bedard

Personal Trainer and Nutritionist, Kirsten, who owns Ladylean, has been volunteering at Sistering on and off for 12 years.



IMPACT: Participant

"If I hadn't heard about Sistering I feel I would have been dead, overdosed, especially after losing my Mom."

– Crystal

Crystal is an active participant with mental health and addiction issues, who has been accessing Employment and Income Support for three years. Initially, she identified facial tattoos as a barrier to traditional employment. She receives on-going employment and supportive counselling, and this year started volunteering in Sistering's kitchen, washing dishes and prepping food. She is exploring working as a Peer, and has completed the Wellness Recovery and Action Plan (WRAP), to become a Peer Facilitator. Crystal had a housing crisis, and received new housing, thanks to our Community Support Team.

ADVOCACY INITIATIVES

Advocating on behalf of homeless, marginalized and socially-isolated women is in our DNA. The women we serve direct our efforts, and we focus on initiatives they identify as critical: poverty reduction and an increase in safe, affordable, low-barrier housing.

Poverty Reduction

- Five years ago, participants and community members identified the rising cost of transit as a huge issue, and as a result Sistering was instrumental in forming the Fair Fare Coalition, advocating for economically accessible TTC. We still play a very active role in supporting FFC and several participants are part of the coalition.
- Last year, we launched our research report, and are asking for free transit for those on Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and Ontario Works (OW), a \$50 Metropass and \$2 tokens for low-income wage earners, a discount to agencies like Sistering who buy tokens in bulk, and free transit on heat alert, cold alert and smog alert days.
- We currently sit on the City of Toronto Advisory Committee for Transit Fare Equity.
- We are active with Commitment 2 Community (C2C) and the Alliance for a Poverty Free Toronto (APT) that organizes around the Poverty Reduction Strategy.
- We participated in Up for Debate, which worked to put women’s issues on the federal election platform, including a campaign that centred on wage equity for women and eliminating violence against women. Sistering hosted an interactive art display for Up for Debate.
- We are active with the Toronto Drop In Network (TDIN) Advocacy Committee, which coordinates advocacy and advocacy tools for Toronto’s drop ins.

Safe, Affordable, Low-barrier Housing

- Sistering participants and staff were key in mobilizing the City to establish two 24/7 drop ins for women in Toronto. We identified an immediate need for evening and overnight low-barrier services for low-income women not accessing shelters, particularly sex workers, substance users and consumer/survivors. Our Peer Harm Reduction team acted as tireless advocates on the streets and inside the system. Sistering’s Drop In opened 24/7 on November 1, 2015. Harm Reduction Peers and staff are sitting on an advisory committee for the 24/7 drop ins.
- Sistering was involved in the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO) Housing Now Community Forum and March, and the campaign for a federal housing strategy.
- Sistering helped form the Allies Group calling for low-barrier, harm reduction shelters in the City. We signed a Joint Statement and participated in a press conference with many other agencies and groups, asking the City to take action to provide low-barrier shelters. We continue to actively advocate around the need for harm reduction focused, low-barrier, emergency shelter.



Sistering’s grassroots advocacy initiatives on the streets and inside the system put the issues facing homeless and marginalized women on the social agenda.



- Harm Reduction Peers and staff have taken part in eight rallies on homeless issues.
- Thirty participants attended the Reclaim the Streets rally. Twenty participants took part in Take Back the Night. We took part in the International Day to Eliminate Violence Against Sex Workers, International Sex Workers Day, and a fundraiser for safe sex work. We participated in the Strawberry Ceremony for Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women.
- We are on the committee for safe injection sites. We had activities and outreach for Overdose Awareness Day and World Hep C Day.
- We participate in the Bad Date Coalition.



IMPACT: Participant

“Harm reduction means safety – and safety is sexy. Get a harm reduction job – and you start to build a life.”
– D.

D. is 36 years old, the mother of two girls aged 18 and 19. They live with their dad. She Facebooks them.

D. left home at 14, bouncing from her 16-year-old boyfriend’s place to a shelter to family and back again.

She worked furiously to create a safe home for her young family – her girls were always her priority – but despite her strength and courage the girls’ father eventually gained custody.

D. spent a decade using crack. She worked as an exotic dancer. She came into conflict with the law.

A chance encounter with a woman who came to Sistering led her to the Drop In.

Fast forward: today D. is a Peer Harm Reduction Worker. She is a vocal advocate for homeless and marginalized women, fighting for their right to be safe and warm and treated with the dignity.

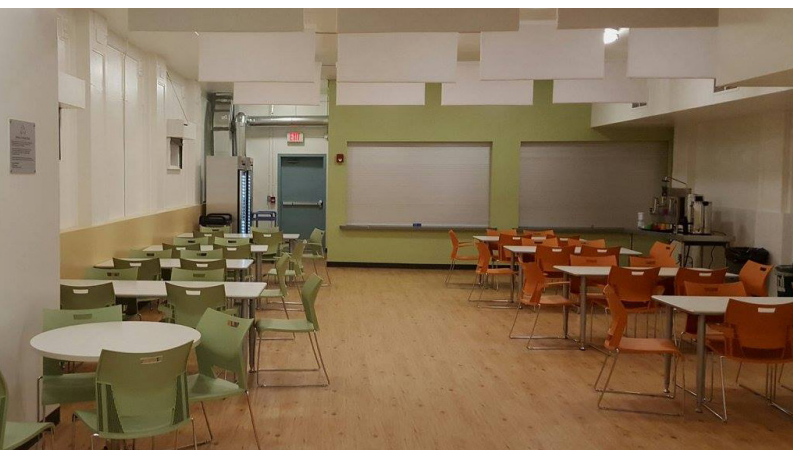
Sistering gave D. strength, she says. She learned that she deserved to be treated with respect.

24/7 DROP IN

In November 2015, Sistering’s Drop In opened 24/7, 365 days a year, thanks to City of Toronto funding. Extended Drop In hours were approved by the City to address the growing concern of isolated women who could not access shelter due to a variety of complex issues, and/or who experience crisis and need a safe haven devoted to the ongoing care of women.

A core belief is that women with lived experience are key to enriching the foundations of our drop in services. Sistering has hired Peer Drop In Workers to interact with and provide support to fellow participants in the evening hours. Peer Outreach Workers engage women in the Toronto West Central area in the evening/night hours, and provide valuable resources and information about Sistering’s programming.

The Drop In Community Support team is in the process of implementing evening programs that will meet a variety of needs as identified by participants. These proposed activities include: games, movies, art therapy, and social group for women, stretching, pet care, and esthetic services.



Renovations have created a safe, comfortable and welcoming space for the increased number of

women coming to Sistering. Right: Five members of our Harm Reduction Peer Worker team.

RENOVATION

Our 24/7 Drop In renovation - thanks to generous funding and support from the City of Toronto - did more than simply refresh our space: it allowed us to offer support and safety to the increased number of women we serve as a 24/7 community. On average, 20 to 25 women stay overnight with us, which is close to capacity.

- New floors and fresh paint create a warm and welcoming place
- Upgraded ventilation and air quality systems
- Energy-efficient lighting for both the awake and asleep spaces
- Noise buffers to create quiet areas
- Increased storage space for our donations
- 2 more counselling rooms
- Space to deliver new evening programs
- Expanded physician facilities to enable our doctors to deliver a full scope of practice
- A dedicated space for participants’ pets
- Expanded laundry facilities
- New furniture designed for women’s comfort day and night

PEER HARM REDUCTION

Harm reduction focuses on reducing social, economic and health-related issues, helping women involved in substance use and/or sex work to build resiliency and improve overall health and wellbeing.

Sistering employs a team of Peer Workers who have lived experience to help deliver programs



at our 24/7Drop In. The Harm Reduction team makes and distributes harm reduction kits, leads workshops and produces and distributes educational materials.

In addition to supports such as outreach and providing relevant referrals, the program also fosters a sense of community, reduces isolation and meets women where they are at, focusing on their strengths. The Peer Team helps build a community where the women we serve are honoured, respected and supported.

- This past year, our Harm Reduction team:
- Conducted 10 in-house drug awareness workshops
 - Delivered 10 evening Drop In activities
 - Took part in 12-plus community events and rallies including World Hep C Day, Take Back the Night and Reclaim the Streets
 - Organized two six-week educational series with outside speakers on Hep C and HIV prevention
 - Delivered 48 workshops at partner agencies
 - Trained 25 women in Narcon delivery to prevent overdose and death
 - Invited the Toronto Police Sex Crimes Unit to deliver an information session on how to stay safe on the streets
 - Delivered outreach and support to 140 people on the Health Bus
 - Facilitated on-site, point-of-care AIDS testing for 20-plus women
 - Held a six-week clay art project

THE KITCHEN AT SISTERING

The kitchen at Sistering is the heart of our home – it’s often a participant’s or volunteer’s introduction to the Sistering spirit and this past year was full of special celebrations.

- More than 30 volunteers helped prep and serve our Festive Holiday Luncheon. Two hundred and forty women enjoyed turkey with all the trimmings – and stuffed squash with quinoa and beans for the non-turkey eaters – plus clementines and pumpkin and apple pie.



- During the winter holiday season, we served 10,471 meals at the Drop In and through our Outreach Program, and 246 sandwich and soup combos at the Drop In after the kitchen closed at 10:00 pm.
- The beginning of February saw the kitchen combining efforts with Mandarin and Cantonese women to make a bountiful Chinese New Year meal for all of Sistering. This special group has volunteered their time for five years. They made Vegetarian Dumplings - 500 in 2 1/2 hours, an amazing feat - then came back the next day to cook them..
- In February, Maureen Watson, Food Access Worker, and the kitchen crew invited Sistering to celebrate Black History Month with curried goat with rice and peas, red bean soup with spinners (dumplings), jerk tofu and fried plantain – and there weren’t any leftovers!
- The Spring Holiday meals were a culinary success with Lesa (our longest-standing relief chef) coordinating volunteers and staff to create and serve sumptuous seafood stew thanks to donations from two Red Lobster restaurants.

- In March, Second Harvest, a Sistering supporter, asked if Sistering would participate in a video for all Metro supermarkets, explaining how and why the company contributes to Second Harvest – and ultimately to Sistering.

IMPACT: Participant

G. is a skilled seamstress and has been sewing at Spun Studio (On the Path) and earning income for a couple of years. She was struggling with displacement and homelessness, and then discovered she had breast cancer. G. currently lives in a shelter with her two children while she undergoes chemotherapy. She attends On the Path as often as she can and remains connected to Sistering for practical, emotional and housing supports.

SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

Inspirations Studio and Spun Studio contribute to the reduction of poverty and homelessness through innovative social enterprises that employ marginalized women in a creative, collaborative and healing environment.

Inspirations Studio

“Inspirations Studio is my place to work and earn money. When I first came, I was living in a shelter. I now have my own apartment.”
– Inspirations Potter

This past year has been a busy one.

- We secured a Vital Ideas Grant of \$29,250 from the Toronto Foundation to complete a feasibility study and business plan investigating the viability of creating a storefront to sell the products produced by our social enterprises. We were one of 92 applicants – only 11 were funded.

- Inspirations was mentioned in an article by Dr. Mia Hunt – Social Enterprises Inspire Social Change – which was published online at healthscape.ca
- Susan Hay, Global Television Anchor/Producer and host of Making A Difference, shot a segment at Inspirations Studio, including a forthright interview with one of our participants.
- Peer Artistry: Social Inclusion through Peer Based Art Facilitation, received a Women’s Exchange Grant from Women’s College Hospital. Some of the peer instructors will come from Inspirations and Spun studios and the programming will take place during the evening drop in. Our expectation is that a number of participants from these sessions will join both studios.
- Inspirations custom orders included The United Way, Working for Change, CAMH, The Canadian Women’s Foundation and the University of Toronto. Inspirations provided speaker gifts for the Social Enterprise Toronto conference in February, and thank you gifts for the Mayor’s Committee on Homelessness.
- The studio has continued to accept new challenges to make unusual and beautiful pieces including a pottery sink and replacement tiles for the outside of a house.
- In fall 2015, Inspirations began offering pottery classes to the public as a new source of revenue and interest is growing.
- The studio members took part in an exhibition called The Spoon Project at Balzac’s in the Distillery District.

Spun Studio

“I consider weaving my therapy and it keeps me balanced.”

“It helps my mental state of mind when I am in the studio – helps me to forget the problems in my life.”

It’s been a busy year at Spun Studio, too. We continue to teach knitting, sewing and weaving to a large group of enthusiastic women. Classes are offered Tuesday to Friday.

- In partnership with the Textile Museum of Canada’s exhibition Home Economics: 150 Years of Canadian Hooked Rugs, Sistering held a Rug Hooking workshop which resulted in an exhibition at the Textile Museum. The Textile Museum sponsored both the training and the exhibition. The women enjoyed the project and will continue to pursue this craft.
- The studio has completed several orders for zippered pillows; massage bed covers and bags in a variety of sizes for numerous customers. The studio has worked for local designers such as Inner Goddess Tarot where we made small tarot card bags from recycled saris.
- This year, a new workshop taught participants how to make duvets, with the final project, a duvet the women took home for personal use.

Spun Studio and Inspiration Studio, our innovative social enterprises, offer marginalized women the opportunity to learn pottery and textile skills in a creative and collaborative environment.



SPECIAL EVENTS

Sistering was honoured to have the support of so many community organizations that fundraised on our behalf, or invited us to speak on the issue of homeless and marginalized women. Here are just a few examples.

Vagina Monologues A Celebration of Women, Their Bodies and Their Experiences

First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto Women’s Caucus mounted a two-night, sold-out benefit performance in support of Sistering and the movement to end violence against women. The audience laughed, wept, cheered, - and donated more than \$15,000 to support our programs.

Patricia Beard, Sistering’s Food Access Coordinator, took to the stage to explain what the monologues were about, and the responses of the 200 women whose stories created the play.

Reverend Shawn Newton closed the final performance with a powerful quote and a passionate plea for support.

“What would happen if a woman told the truth about her life?” the poet activist Muriel Rukeyser once wondered. “The world would split open.

“My task was to ask the audience to generously support Sistering, the wonderful organization that helps women in crisis and transition in Toronto. The amazing, courageous cast of our show made my job so easy by telling such world-splitting stories. I couldn’t possibly be prouder of this group of wonderful women!”

Women in Toronto Politics

2016 Municipal Budget Explainer Night Executive Director Patricia O’Connell was invited to speak to this group about how funding allotment affects marginalized, homeless and precariously-housed women – and why we need low-barrier shelters.

Rock & Brew 4 Sistering

Four fabulous bands, one incredible night! It was a cold and damp February evening at The Linsmore – but inside, the bar was jammed with 100 plus men and women who braved the weather to support our services. Our host for the night: Bronwyn Caudle. Kimberly Spice donated her time in organizing the free space and bands. In fact, everyone who contributed to the evening’s success did so at no charge. The bands: **Chris Birkett; Creep Echo; Jammers Waffle House; The Marvels.** The evening raised \$3400 – and just as important, the event built brand awareness and opened new avenues for volunteers.

Kitchen Sisters Soup for Our Sisters

More than 50 women celebrated International Women’s Day at Dish Studio, laughing and sharing stories while they helped prepare soup for our 24/7 Drop In. The event raised \$5781.

Below left: The Vagina Monologues team.

Right: Rock & Brew for Sistering rocked! Guests included auctioneer City Councillor Joe Cressy.



DONOR RECOGNITION

Sistering gratefully acknowledges the generosity of our many individual donors, and the following partners, supporters and funders.

City of Toronto
Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care Trillium Foundation
Ontario Women’s Directorate

Toronto Arts Council
Toronto Central LHIN
Toronto Enterprise Fund
United Way Toronto

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The Rainbow Foundation
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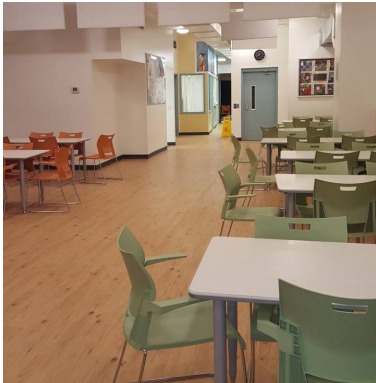


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Nova Era Bakery
Starbucks
Red Lobster, Dufferin St.
Red Lobster, The Queensway
Second Harvest
Daily Bread

Charitable Registration
Number: 10798-3009-RR0001

Sistering is a United Way
Member Agency



THIS IS THE EVERYDAY POWER OF SISTERING

“I came to Sistering messed up on crack cocaine and heroin, under-housed, unemployed and hungry. I am now working as a peer, and much healthier and feel positive about my future. If it weren’t for Sistering, I would not be alive today.”



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