

Mayor's Four Pillars Coalition Meeting March 26, 2008



Mayor Sam Sullivan kicked off the meeting by recalling that at the last Mayor's Four Pillars Coalition Meeting, former Vancouver Mayor Philip Owen spoke passionately about a need for a meeting around the theme of prevention. The March meeting delivered a full menu of prevention activities. The City of Vancouver Drug Policy Program's Coordinator Donald MacPherson talked about the program's 2005 prevention report, which was passed unanimously by Vancouver City Council. Gerald Thomas of the Centre for Addictions Research of BC spoke of his organization's work in the prevention field. Nancy Poole, Co-leader, ActNow BC, Healthy Choices in Pregnancy described how the program teaches healthcare professionals across the province how to engage with pregnant women about alcohol use. Julie Norton of the BC Council for families talked about the Council's new program for 7-12 year olds. Finally, Art Steinman, coordinator of the Vancouver School District's School Aged Children and Youth (SACY) program led a group of SACY leaders and participants in a description of how SACY is structured and the outcomes it has achieved.



Mayor Sam Sullivan

In welcoming participants to the meeting, Mayor Sam Sullivan credited former mayor Philip Owen with inspiring its theme by remarking at the last Four Pillars Coalition meeting, that "Prevention is the pillar that gets the least attention."

He then gave some quick updates on recent developments in areas related to the Four Pillars. He noted that Vancouver should receive \$10 million of the \$64 million the federal government has committed to its new Anti-Drug Strategy. Further, of the \$100 million the federal government has committed to mental health, Sullivan understood through a meeting with Senator Michael Kirby that Vancouver should receive about \$20 million. Sullivan mentioned the opening of 120 beds in Burnaby and at Riverview for those with severe mental illness. Many of the people who will benefit will be from Vancouver, he said.

Sullivan also discussed how city council voted unanimously to dedicate 12 City sites to social housing, free of property taxes. He mentioned discussions with the provincial and federal ministers of health, regarding the Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams for Vancouver. Finally, he said he's fully supportive of the planned centre for concurrent disorders.



Donald MacPherson, Coordinator, City of Vancouver Drug Policy Program

Donald MacPherson, the City's Drug Policy Program Coordinator, also spoke about how gratifying it was to focus on the prevention pillar. He said that there have been "murmurs from the prevention community" about the focus on the crisis and the lack of attention for prevention.

In creating the Drug Policy Program's (DPP) November 2005 prevention report, Preventing Harm from Psychoactive Substance Use, MacPherson said the DPP had to re-think prevention issues and realized it includes treatment, enforcement, support of families and reaches all ages and stages of life. While it's often linked to the school system, MacPherson said prevention is more of a community engagement process, for all ages. It does not necessarily call for abstinence but focuses as well on harm prevention.

MacPherson called for attention to the real problems, not just the drugs used. He noted that when media splashed images of young Aboriginals huffing gas, there was not an outcry against gas. He said there was an understanding that the problem was the youths' sense of dislocation from community and within their community. MacPherson also noted that the prevention report called for regulatory approaches to substance use.

MacPherson said that, in Vancouver, there is a growing consciousness that we can reach out to vulnerable populations and provide better supports:

better housing, improved drug treatment services, and a more rich and diverse approach to prevention.



Gerald Thomas, Senior Policy Analyst, Centre for Addictions Research of BC (CARBC)

In introducing the first speaker, Gerald Thomas said that his organization has documented well what does and does not work in the treatment and addictions field. He pointed to CARBC's March 2006 prevention report, *Following the Evidence*, which included five major themes: influencing developmental pathways; preventing, delaying and reducing the use of alcohol, cannabis and tobacco; reducing risky patterns of use; creating safer contexts; and influencing economic availability. He said Nancy Poole's project fits the first theme because it concerns a strategy of developing and deploying a comprehensive program on the use of alcohol and tobacco during pregnancy.



Nancy Poole, Co-leader, ActNow BC, Healthy Choices in Pregnancy

For the past two years, Poole's group has been working to improve knowledge transfer and prevention around the use of alcohol in pregnancy with the ActNow Healthy Choices in Pregnancy initiative, funded by the province.

Showing a photograph of a girl who may have fetal alcohol syndrome, Poole outlined some of the health concerns a child exposed to alcohol in utero might have: impairment to the central nervous system, poor coordination, visual problems, mental and learning disabilities, poor memory, and attention, reasoning and judgment problems.

The 2001 Canadian Community Health Survey found that 14 percent of mothers indicated they used alcohol during their last pregnancy. The 2004 Canadian Addiction Survey said 15 percent of young women reported heavy frequent drinking. Yet a study from Vancouver and Prince George with pregnant women who use alcohol found that they were slow to ask for help because they were ashamed and also feared they would lose their children. In the study, physicians reported that they didn't know what to say if women reported using alcohol during a pregnancy. This has led to situations where, often, healthcare providers simply tell the women to stop using alcohol, rather than engage with them and see how they could offer assistance.

Poole's group set a target: they would work with the healthcare system to ensure that 50 percent of women counselled during pregnancy would receive information regarding alcohol use. They believed that the system could be caring and effective and take a mother-centred, harm reduction, guiding approach that considers the health of both the mother and the child.

Poole said her group has made presentations to almost 3,000 healthcare providers, including midwives and physicians and others. They have also offered them resources such as posters, pamphlets and question-and-answer sheets, to help them in engaging with clients.

The main message, Poole said, is that it's safest not to use substances when pregnant but that there are places where women can engage with the healthcare system, such as the nurse line, which is confidential. She said the program reminds healthcare workers that in thinking about how to engage women in the process, they have to remember that women with a higher education in higher-income positions are more likely to drink during pregnancy than lower-income women.



Questions

In response to a question about the sustainability of the program, Poole said that ActNow was established by the provincial government as a way to make BC the healthiest jurisdiction to host an Olympics, so it is embedded in the 2010 timeframe. Poole said the group is trying to post materials on a website and use webcasting so that it can continue to have the dialogue online, even if it cannot travel to meet with healthcare providers.

Responding to a question about success measures, Poole said that the group looked at prenatal records to see how many times healthcare workers

record the women mentioning alcohol use. Prior to this program, about 1 percent of women mentioned it, despite the fact that other studies show about 14 percent of expectant mothers drink. After the first year of the program, about 3.5 women were mentioning alcohol use.



Julie Norton, BC Council for Families

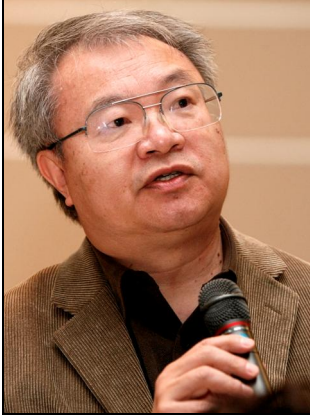
Julie Norton started her presentation by noting how few new parenting programs have been produced recently; most are about 20 years old. Further, few programs target the 7-12 age group, dubbed the “Tweens”. Yet, she said, there has been a lot of new research in the middle years and parenting issues today are very different from those parents faced 20 years ago. Now, most tweens are exposed to substance use earlier in life, usually within their family.

In order to research its new guide for parents of tweens, *My Tween and Me*, the Council examined various studies, such as the Human Early Learning Program at UBC. It showed that the majority of children who are vulnerable in one or more area live in middle class families so the Council decided it would take a universal approach, in order to reach as many parents as possible. The Council also worked with CARBC and did research on parent groups through a McMaster University study.

What emerged from the Council’s literature review and its own research was that parenting --which could be carried out by parents, grandparents, foster parents etc-- was one of the strongest factors protecting tweens. The research also showed that the influence of siblings, particularly around drug and alcohol and substance use, is often overlooked.

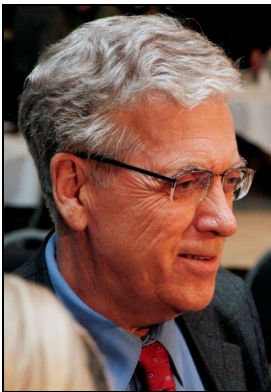
One of the issues with prevention work, Norton said, is that when it’s done well, nothing happens, there is no visible crisis.

The outcomes of the program the Council designed increased the confidence and ability of parents to positively influence the lives of their tweens. It increased their knowledge of the risk and the protective factors that parents can recognize and use with their tweens, to prevent drug and alcohol use and other high risk behaviours.



Questions:

In response to a question about the low number of parents who attend parenting workshops and how to overcome that stigma, Norton pointed out that, 25 years ago prenatal education was not common. Now about 70 percent of parents attend prenatal classes, a change brought about through broad public education and a tracking of the improved outcomes for parents who took the course.



Clarence Hansen, Chair, Vancouver Board of Education

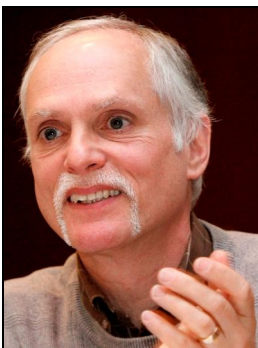
Clarence Hansen started his presentation by referring to the drug culture in Vancouver and the fact that the Vancouver Board of Education (VBE) is trying to create a culture of no drug use. He said the Four Pillars approach is certainly an answer to the problem but noted that while three of the pillars attack the crisis, only the prevention pillar looks to the future. With its program School Aged Children and Youth (SACY) program, the VBE is engaged in prevention and working individually with students who use substances. Hansen said the VBE needs more funding for the program, totaling over \$1 million, in order to expand it to every school in Vancouver. He said it has the potential to become a model for the rest of Canada.



Cameron Duff, Research Lead, Youth Addiction Services, Vancouver Coastal Health

Cameron Duff said that, from the health authority's perspective, prevention work is critical. Looking specifically at SACY, he noted that the five years of work creating the program pulled together elements from the most effective community-based prevention work that exists. It reflects the need to integrate prevention work more into our communities.

SACY, he said, like the best prevention programs for youth, is trying to find the most effective ways to support youth and provide them with skills to build their resiliency. It also includes strategies that reflect the developmental stages of children and youth and embrace Vancouver's diversity.

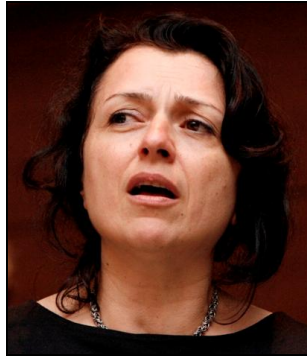


Art Steinman, SACY Coordinator

Prior to SACY's arrival, Art Steinman explained, there were prevention programs in place in the district that were ad hoc and taking place in isolated pockets. The district talked to parents, students and teachers and did a literature review for best practices. It then crafted a pilot program to enhance students' core competencies and connect them with their schools and families so that they would be less likely to use substances. SACY's mission became the enhancement of the prevention and early intervention measures for children and youth, to prevent, delay or reduce substance use.

There are four streams in SACY. The classroom component engages students in dialogue and critical thinking. The parent stream focuses on helping parents become more aware of their children's context and building a better relationship with them. The SACY Teen Engagement Program (STEP) provides

an alternative to the typical three-day suspension imposed on children caught with or using substances at school. Finally, the youth engagement stream engages SACY workers with students. There is a SACY club at each school where kids gather to hear speakers, chat with one another, hold “Capacity Cafés” (where students educate parents and teachers about drug use and their own context) or go on field trips to tour addiction facilities or cook food to hand out to street people. They’re also provided with links to treatment services. SACY is also working with CARBC, to create a new substance-use related curriculum for schools.



Alexandra Wilson, Mali Khaksar and Joe Goodwill

Alexandra Wilson, a SACY parent support worker, explained that the parent stream works to help improve parents’ connectedness with teens, as a better relationship between parents and teens will help kids make better decisions. She said the main point is that they work on prevention through relationship building among parents and kids. They also connect parents with resources in the community. They work with parents from different linguistic and cultural groups; she noted the children of immigrants and refugees can be particularly vulnerable.

Mali Khaksar, a parent of two teens praised SACY for helping to establish peace in her family. She now helps with SACY, so she can share her knowledge and experience with other parents.

Joe Goodwill who has three daughters was encountering difficulties with her 16-year-old daughter. She spoke about how, within one week of interacting with the SACY counselor, she learned new ways of speaking with her daughter and the relationship improved immediately. She noted that the girl who used to stay out late and then sleep in until noon had, that morning, been by the door at 7 am ready to join her mom at the gym for a workout. She said SACY gave her hope.



Kristina Spring, STEP

Kristina Spring spoke about the STEP program. When students' drug and alcohol use is impacting them at school, they're referred to the three-day program, rather than given a suspension. The youth are invited to do a self assessment of their alcohol and drug use, which they then shred. One of the goals of the session is to examine students' networks, to see who could serve as an adult ally: a parent, coach, teacher, minister or other adult. They draw up an action plan for getting academic help, doing homework, cutting back on drug use or whatever they choose. SACY then contacts the school, to share the students' plan. Spring said there are a lot of referrals to tutoring and other groups; they'll also help students who ask for it get information about detox programs. There have been 32 students through the program since January and all stayed for the full three days.



Heather Charlton, SACY Youth Stream Leader

Heather Charlton spoke about SACY's youth engagement stream, where the program creates a safe and healthy place for the students to think and talk about substance use and its impact. She said the program encourages students to think about choices and their reasons for their behaviour. She then introduced three students who are part of SACY.



Katie, Riley and Conrad

Katie joined SACY in Grade 9 and said the experience has given her the confidence to speak publicly about the group. As part of SACY, she attended a three-day camp which gave her three days to be sober and get to know herself and some friends better. She said it was a great opportunity for low-income teens. With SACY she has also gone into a recovery centre to speak with drug users in treatment. That scared her into believing she could be in their place one day and said now she thinks before making a decision such as getting into a car with somebody who is drunk.

Riley is a Grade 9 student. She said she joined the SACY club at her school last year because she wanted to know more about drugs, alcohol and addiction. She said that while society may think teens don't have a job in fact, school is their job and it is stressful. She said she appreciated the weekly lunchtime meetings where students can relax and open up about issues that matter to them. She said the openness and trust that's been built up among group members means that students don't have to put a lot of energy into explaining themselves. In going on field trips and talking about drugs, she learned drugs are not all bad by themselves but seeing what others have done with drug use has taught her to think before taking such risks.

Conrad, who came to Canada from Germany, said he became involved with SACY after about five or six friends were suspended from school for using and selling drugs. He was impressed that there was a program reaching out to them. He said he used to smoke marijuana and use other drugs, partly because he was a hip-hop producer and using drugs was part of the image. Once he learned he didn't have to use drugs to do what he loves, he stopped.



Chris Kelly, Superintendent of Schools, Vancouver School District

Chris Kelly said he was pleased that the meeting focused on prevention, bringing people together to start focusing on ways to create a common culture of prevention, rather than remediation. That means acknowledging that every human life has its own course and development and if we respect the wholeness of every person at every age and stage, in terms of their capacity and choices, then we will reach a common philosophy of ensuring the best quality of life for each person.

He noted that from infancy to age 18, students spend about 13 percent of their time in school and while that must be the best possible use of that time and provide them with the competence to engage in self-determination, the remaining 87 percent of their life must also give youth the same qualities. Kelly added that while the district seeks funding for the program, considering its success it is highly affordable and very financially viable.

