

## Get Plugged In! event packs a powerful message

Before she launched into her powerful musical performance during the Get Plugged In event opening, Theresa Point told the audience of 150 attendees about her own awakening. Hospitalized because of drug abuse and struggling with alcoholism, the young woman made a decision to quit drugs and alcohol and to start singing her story. "Where I got today is because I've made some healthy choices in my life."

Get Plugged In, an event for youth and adult allies focused on making healthy choices about substance use, took place Saturday, November 18 at Tupper Secondary in Vancouver. Co-organized by the City of Vancouver's Drug Policy Program and Youth Outreach Team, a diverse group of 10 youth, the Centre for Addictions Research of BC, Vancouver Coastal Health, the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Vancouver and Watari, the event featured musical performances, some short addresses, the screening of four claymation videos and films created by youth, some improv theatre and an afternoon of workshops all focused on the theme of preventing harm from substance use. This was the first of what will be an annual prevention event hosted by the City of Vancouver. The event was one of the recommendations in the Drug Policy Program's report, "Preventing Harm from Psychoactive Substance Use," which was unanimously adopted by Vancouver City Council one year ago.

In opening the event, Mayor Sam Sullivan recalled the long history of problems with drug addiction in Vancouver. He noted that, during the 1880s, the city's mayor asked the chief of police to deal with the terrible problem of the city's 15 drug addicts. Referring to the City's Four Pillars Drug Strategy - including Prevention, Treatment, Harm Reduction and Enforcement - Sullivan said any action in the Prevention pillar is valuable. "If we only succeed in that pillar, we wouldn't need the other pillars."

Speaker Sana Arif Siddiqui, an 18-year-old Simon Fraser University Criminology student, urged those present to share their stories with others. She noted that youth have several transition times in their lives where they're particularly vulnerable to falling into harmful substance use. She urged them to find passions - in sports, the arts or volunteer work - that motivate them and to also share their stories, as a way of reaching out to others and sharing strength. "Passion is prevention and when we don't have enough of it on our own we can borrow it from others."

The new School Aged Children and Youth (SACY) program is now being piloted in two Vancouver schools. Art Steinman described how SACY brings together youth, parents and teachers to help prevent harmful substance youth by teens.

The afternoon sessions included 10 diverse workshops on everything from grant writing, using new technology to empower youth, making images for a digital quilt and training assistance dogs to reflecting on drug-seeking and drug-using behaviours and taking part in a harm-reduction trivia activity.

Participants also viewed four videos ([Acid Candies](#), [Making It Through](#), ['Just Say No' Blows](#) and [Street Addicts](#)) on the prevention theme, created by youth for this event under the mentorship of Mark Vonesch with Reel Youth. Vonesch spent the day shooting video and then screened the resulting video at the event's closing.