

Calgary Youth, Health & the Street Study

Results of two-year study to be discussed at community roundtables

CALGARY – AIDS Calgary Awareness Association announces the results of the Calgary Youth, Health and the Street Study, a two-year study focusing on street-involved youth and their health issues and HIV risk. Launched in the fall of 2004 with the goal of improving safety, stabilization and HIV prevention services to street-involved youth at all stages of street life, the study has produced some interesting findings that Calgary service providers can use to effectively plan services for street-involved youth.

The Calgary Youth, Health and the Street study, a community-driven research project, reached 355 street-involved youth through outreach on the streets, at youth events and at locations where youth frequent throughout Calgary. The study investigated street-involved youths' patterns of service use, family background, experiences of physical, sexual and emotional abuse, involvement in the child welfare system, use of medical services, and how they feel Calgary agencies can support them to pursue their goals. Further information was gathered about street-involved youths' perspectives by conducting over 40 one-on-one interviews.

"Including street-involved youth in the research process and outcomes was extremely important to us," said Dawn Dittmann, Research Coordinator, AIDS Calgary. "Making this a community-owned study means researchers, service providers and youth have a vested interest in addressing the underlying issues of street-involvement and its associated HIV/STI risk. The results of the study were launched to the youth in late August, so they could participate in the process from beginning to end."

Calgary Youth, Health and the Street Study Community Roundtables

Results and Media Interview Opportunity

DATE: Wednesday September 13, 2006
LOCATION: The Kahanoff Centre, Suite 200 1202 Centre Street SE
TIME: Results released at 9:15am – 10:00am
Questions and answer period from 10:00am -10:15am

HIV risks for street-involved youth are influenced by social, cultural and environmental factors. In 2000, AIDS Calgary conducted a needs assessment to better understand the needs of youth living on the street but realized that further research in this area was critical, leading to the development of community partnerships and collaboration with the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Calgary to conduct the research for the Calgary Youth, Health and the Street Study. The study was funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR).

"We began a process to learn about and understand the need in the community and worked with many community partners to move forward and address the needs of street-involved youth," said Susan Cress, Executive Director, AIDS Calgary. "Collectively, the study and community partnership means we will be able to strengthen our ability to coordinate and improve our network of service offerings."

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The Calgary Youth, Health and the Street Study relied on 15 community partners including social service, health (including mental health), harm reduction, education, justice, housing, addiction, and child welfare agencies. Study results being released this week include some findings of direct relevance for service planning. For example, 48% of youth surveyed had been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant, 27% had been involved in sex work, 26% had been involved in survival sex, 16% had shared needles or injection equipment and only 26% indicated they “always” used a condom. The prevalence of risk activities is of concern to the community partners involved in the study and the roundtable will be used to address any needed changes to services for street-involved youth.

“High numbers of street-involved youth reported being tested for HIV/STIs and were aware of testing locations,” said Catherine Worthington, Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary. “Although youth with higher levels of street risk experiences had more contact with the medical system and outreach services, screening does not address the underlying causes of HIV/STI risk, something service providers need to consider.”

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AIDS Calgary is a local not-for-profit AIDS service organization that offers support services to individuals who are at-risk for, living with or affected by HIV/AIDS and provides prevention and education throughout the Calgary region. For more information, please contact AIDS Calgary at (403) 508-2500 or visit www.aidscalgary.org.

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