



Bringing The Light

RAVEN

Issue #1 • February 2019



A new newsletter for DTES community members & organizers, frontline & peer workers

Welcome to the very first issue of the RAVEN!

This newsletter is created and distributed in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) by and for the community. It has evolved from the Tenant Overdose Response Organizers (TORO) program and, like TORO, it is in response to the continuing overdose crisis.

TORO is an organization of tenants living in Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotels who have lived experience. There are currently 18 TOROS in 12 SROs, saving lives and taking care of each other. These tenants came together in 2016 as a result of the changing drug supply, the addition of fentanyl, and the devastation it has caused to families and to the community.

The RAVEN is designed to help connect the community together by sharing stories of resilience and survival. We hope to connect

WELCOME!



Photo by Dani Aiello

Raven Story

There are many versions of the Creation Story. Nisga'a oral legend tells us of a time when the world (the spirit world) was in darkness. There was no light and all living matter residing in the darkness had no form or shape. Communication was through thought.

The Chief of Heavens, K'am Ligiihahlhaal, saw disorder and fear, so he sent his grandson Txeemsin (Raven, The Trickster) to bring sunlight into the dark world.

Forms were shaped with the light into trees, mountains, rivers and animals. When the Chief of Heavens saw the shapes he sent humans to the ends of the earth to care for the shapes and forms.

This creation story shows us that we are all connected through the spirit world. Plants, animals and humans all care for each other - that is the will of the chief of heavens, K'am Ligiihahlhaal.

This newsletter, RAVEN Bringing The Light, also seeks to make connections with each of you and with TORO, united by The Trickster's gift.

- Rhonda

our readers with harm reduction events and resources. Our goal is to build solidarity among frontline peer workers. People with lived experience are often the first responders and are finally being recognized as experts in the opioid crisis. The RAVEN is co-created by two peer workers who are passionate about strengthening peer solidarity, through

knowledge sharing and compassion.

The RAVEN will be published and issued free once a month for the duration of 2019. A very special shout out to our fellow TOROS and support staff in the office. The RAVEN's flight into production would not be possible without you. Thank you.

Understanding harm reduction

by Tawnya Lee

To me, harm reduction is not just handing someone clean supplies and sending them on their way. It is sitting in cramped bathrooms, stairways and outside with people to make sure they are safe. It is people knowing I got their backs. It is taking control and letting go at the same time.

To me, harm reduction is not just lecturing people to make changes in their life. It is listening to them and actually hearing. Not trying to change their actions but accepting people, where they're at.

To me, harm reduction is being there for someone when no one else is and saying "It's ok, I'm here."

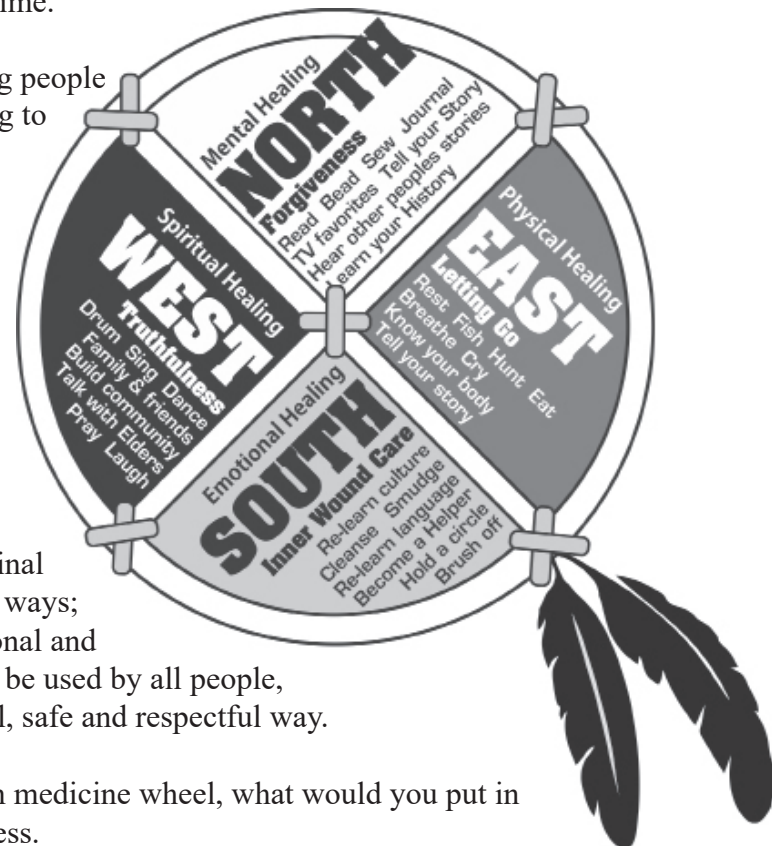
To me, harm reduction is not just a textbook mandate, but a way of thinking. A way of living. A way of reaching out to people in vulnerable situations to support them. Because everyone is someone's child and is valuable - even if they don't see it at the time. I'm still here.

The Medicine Wheel

By Rhonda Stephens

The medicine wheel was given to Aboriginal people by the Creator to be used in many ways; to connect to the mental, spiritual, emotional and physical parts of our lives. The circle can be used by all people, from all walks of life in a non-judgmental, safe and respectful way.

Imagine if you wanted to create your own medicine wheel, what would you put in each direction? The possibilities are endless.



A Poem

I'm immune to
All these drugs...
And these gangsters...
And these thugs.
I'm invincible
To their threats,
To their fuckery,
To their bets.
I'm untouched,
By all their play.
To what they do,
To what they say.
I'm just out here,
Keeping it real.
Not afraid,
Of what I feel.
I got soul,
And I got heart.
Everyday I'm
Tearing it apart.
I got guts
And I'm not dumb.
Fact is....
I'm solid as they come.
I won't change and
I won't sway...
Wanna test me?
Make my day!
I won't become
What I hate.
Live my life and
Find my fate.
I will stay the
Muther-fuckin' path,
I will love and
I will laugh.
I will scream and
I will cry.
I will ask
The reasons why?
You can't kill me
With your dope.
'Cause I have faith
And i got hope.
I will centre,
I will pray.
I know I'll find
Another better way.

- Tawnya Lee

Rewriting my story & honouring my spirit

By Rhonda Stephens

My name is Rhonda. My Nisga'a name is Haagunta'a (sitting beside the spirit wolf). I grew up in a traditional environment of culture and family. Perhaps this is how I should have continued to grow, but sh*t happens, and sh*t did happen.



Walking from a place of goodness to addiction, despair, disappointment, etc, etc, well - you get the idea. Cross culture created confusion and resentment.

The songs, dances and orality I learned as a child disappeared into the shadows. These losses created a new me, basically "f**ked up." My wounds were deep; suffering was my middle name.

Rewriting my story began when Ma passed away. Her death shook me to the core. She was the one person who loved me unconditionally and sacrificed so much of herself to help me. I thought pain and I understood each other, until she was laid to rest.

My journey to recovery began to honour my broken spirit. With the help of my father, I re-learned my traditional ways. By the time my father was called to continue his walk in the Spirit World, I was given the tools to understand the true meaning of connectedness.

Thank you for allowing me to share a bit of myself. It is an incredible honour to be a part of a team, in reaching each of you through The RAVEN to bring light to your stories, your truth - to share and learn from each other.

- All My Relations -

Excited about this project?

Want to contribute?
Got a story, poem, art, photo,
resource or community event
to share? Contact us at:
newsletter.raven@gmail.com



Maintaining a vision of my future self

By Tawnya Lee

I attended the Indigenous health fair during my first week with TORO. About halfway through the fair, I was taking part in a group art project, when a boy about 10 years old turned to me and asked, "Did you ever think of something really strange that didn't really make sense and then it came true?"



I smiled at him and replied, "Actually, I have."

My name is Tawnya Lee and I am a lightworker in the DTES and co-creator of the RAVEN. I was raised in East Vancouver by a single father of Asian and European ancestry and my grandmother, who was Chinese and fluent in Mandarin.

When I was 13, my mother moved me to Coquitlam - away from the only home I had ever known. These early beginnings shaped my life path. I became a teen parent, but continued with my education and graduated. I went to college and spent several years working in nursing.

When I got divorced and lost my special needs child, I fought my own battles with depression, addiction and homelessness. Throughout it all, I maintained a vision of a future self who had an office, worked in Chinatown and wrote for a community newspaper in the heart of the DTES.

While I was working as a peer worker at RainCity, I applied for and was given this wonderful opportunity to work with TORO. The path here was long and strange, but I have made it to where I am supposed to be.

I am living out my life's purpose and there is no better feeling than that. Except maybe the feeling of coming home.



The RAVEN is a collaboration between peer frontline workers from Tenant Overdose Response Organizers (TORO), RainCity Housing, Lookout Emergency Aid Society and PHS Community Services Society.

You can contact us at: newsletter.raven@gmail.com
or ravenbringingthelight.wordpress.com

The RAVEN acknowledges that it is produced and distributed monthly on the unceded territory of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the territories of the x̱m̱əθkw̱əy̱əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and Seḻilw̱ətaʔ/Selilwiltulh (Tsleil-Waututh).

Special thanks to Angela Krugar & Murray Bush for their help getting this project off the ground.