

## CAHN Awards & Recognition Committee 2018

### **Award of Innovation and Inspiration: Toronto Community Hep C Program (TCHCP)**

The CAHN Award of Innovation and Inspiration recognizes the importance of multidisciplinary teams and collaborative partnerships that support excellence in Hepatology nursing. This award is a new and unique one for CAHN, created to honour creative responses to evolving challenges in health care and to recognize that our best work as nurses is not done in isolation. It takes a village to bring transformational change to the health systems level. Nurses, especially those working in community, need to rely on different ways of knowing to inform best practices and to shed light on evolving needs and gaps.

It is fitting that the Toronto Community Hep C Program (TCHCP) should be the recipient of CAHN's inaugural Award of Innovation and Inspiration.

In 2017, the number of overdoses and deaths due to opioid misuse rose to unprecedented levels in Canada. Front line workers struggled to cope as clients, peers and community members were dying. In Ontario, part of the government's response was to ask that provincially funded Hep C teams distribute naloxone in addition to their existing mandate to provide coordinated, comprehensive care and support for people living with/ at risk of acquiring Hepatitis C.

The Toronto Overdose Prevention Society (TOPS) was formed last summer because front line workers – including members of the TCHCP – understood that naloxone distribution and training was not sufficient to match the urgency of need for harm reduction services in the communities they serve. Even as applications for supervised injection facilities were being expedited in the city, people were dying and the need to step up harm reduction services was obvious.

In August TOPS opened a pop-up injection facility in a park in downtown Toronto. The unsanctioned, unfunded site was staffed by teams of volunteers: outreach workers, health professionals, and peer users. Members of the TCHCP, including notably CAHN member Bernadette Lettner, were instrumental in getting the site open and in maintaining the energy and organization to keep it going day after day.

The TOPS site (initially a series of tents, now expanded into a donated trailer) has remained open from 4-10 pm every single day since despite receiving no funding from government. Well over 100 overdoses have now been reversed there, and many important links to the people at highest risk for drug related harms. Volunteer nurses and other responders at TOPS have built up a body of specialized knowledge and expertise that now informs the work of other harm reduction groups and agencies across Canada and internationally.

Excellence in community nursing sometimes requires that we sniff the wind, step out of our comfort zone and take risks rather than wait for permission to act. Acknowledging the expertise of drug users and and truly collaborating with them can feel risky and sometimes uncomfortable for clinicians.

The TCHCP has not only embraced the challenge of incorporating naloxone distribution into their already overflowing mandate from funders, but through its involvement in TOPS has become an example of how to lead community response in a crisis.

Bernadette Lettner – one of three Hep C treatment nurses within the TCHCP and a consistent volunteer at the TOPS site since it opened – embodies the foresight, courage and compassion that is the spirit of this award. Her nursing practice demonstrates professionalism, teamwork, and innovation... truly inspiring.

Bravo Bernadette, and thank you for the work you and your team do!