

**THE DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE YOUTH ACTIVITIES
SOCIETY (DEYAS): A PRACTICUM REVIEW ANALYSIS
OF THE CHALLENGES FACING A COMMUNITY
OUTREACH ORGANIZATION**

by

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ABSTRACT

The Downtown Eastside Youth Activities Society (DEYAS) is a non-profit organization dedicated to homeless and drug-addicted youth in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. The purpose of this report is to describe and assess the role of DEYAS as a community agency. The introductory section provides a descriptive overview of the Downtown Eastside, and DEYAS as an organization; outlining its history, structure and programs. The body of the thesis consists of five sections; 'Resources and Funding', 'Engaging Youth', 'Dispelling the Myths of Homelessness', 'Understanding addictions and Dealing with them Effectively, and 'The Criminalization of Homelessness'. These sections represent what have been identified as the five key challenges facing DEYAS in fulfilling their major policy objectives. DEYAS programs are discussed, along with guiding principles, policy issues and other important factors influencing DEYAS's approach. The work of DEYAS is also evaluated with regard to theory, the need for research and recommendations for improvement.

Keywords: DEYAS, Youth, Homelessness, substance abuse

Subject Terms: Youth Homelessness, Community Organizations

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INTRODUCTION

The Downtown Eastside Youth Activities Society (DEYAS) is a non-profit organization dedicated to homeless and drug-addicted youth. DEYAS provides certain essential services to some of Canada's most vulnerable young persons living in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, Canada's most intensive neighbourhood concentration of intravenous drug use, homelessness, poverty, mental illness and crime. These services are designed to support opportunities for vulnerable youth in transforming their lives. The purpose of this report is to describe and assess the role of DEYAS as a community agency. It will explore the nature of the problems that DEYAS seeks to address and the predominant methods employed. Key programs will be discussed, as well as the policy, rationales and other important factors influencing DEYAS's approach.

The introductory section of this thesis will provide a descriptive overview of the Downtown Eastside, and DEYAS as an organization; outlining its history, structure and programs. The body of the thesis consists of five sections each focused on the five key challenges facing DEYAS in fulfilling their major policy objectives. The first barrier is funding. As a non-profit organization, reliable funding sources are imperative; it is necessary therefore to describe how funding is obtained and the difficulties that result from deficiencies in funding. The second section will deal with the crucial challenge of engaging youth and the difficulties that result in a vulnerable and potentially inaccessible client base. The focus therefore will be on an analysis of DEYAS's youth outreach program and the need for inter-agency collaboration in the Downtown Eastside.

The next three sections of this paper will address different myths that DEYAS deals with on a daily basis. Addressing public negative misconceptions about DEYAS's clientele is imperative in first, gaining public and political support, and, second, encouraging the appropriate policy and program responses to help the highly vulnerable youth clientele. The first section focuses mainly upon DEYAS's innovative Change the Future Campaign and the associated efforts that DEYAS are making to educate the public regarding youth homelessness. The next section will address the need to promote an accurate understanding of drug-use on the streets, and how to deal with it most effectively. In addition, this section will explore DEYAS's youth detoxification facility and needle exchange program. The policy objective of harm reduction has been debated and needle exchanges, important to that policy, generate controversy. The final section will address the policy perspective that criminal justice based interventions are the most effective way to deal with both drug-use and related crimes, such as theft or the use of illicit drugs. A major contention will be that law enforcement is over-emphasised, which causes further negative or punitive effects on already alienated and multi-problem youth. It is argued that DEYAS should focus more effort on discouraging the criminalization of homelessness and promoting their work in the realm of crime prevention.

THE DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE OF VANCOUVER

The Downtown Eastside of Vancouver (DTES) consists of a complex combination of neighbourhoods, streets, back allies, parks and subsidized hotel room living units. While there are stable neighbourhoods within the DTES, there is also the greatest concentration of poverty, homelessness, mental illness and crime in Canada. According to Hughes, many cities “*hide in their underbelly perverse and pervasive processes of physical decay and suffocation, social exclusion and marginalisation*” (p167). The DTES is a clear example of this with widespread homelessness, intravenous drug-use, ‘dumpster diving’, panhandling, psychotic acting out and a constant police presence.

According to Sassen (2005), it is widely acknowledged by social scientists that inequalities between the affluent and the poor are expressed spatially. According to Urban sociology and human ecology theories of urban dynamics are highly relevant in understanding the DTES (Bursik 1998 p527). Shaw and McKay (1942) and Sampson (1987), for example, identify similar areas in most large US cities with stable working neighbourhoods adjacent or inter-mixed with highly socially disorganized neighbourhoods. They found that poverty, single parent families, high concentrations of discriminated ethnic/racial group members, under-sourced community resources, few unskilled job opportunities, low home ownership, and high levels of transient residents were seen as leading to extensive property crimes, unsupervised youth groups, gangs, drug dealing and a visible sex trade presence.

According to Croall (1998), "*Functionalists deem that every society needs social order based on cooperation and social solidarity, or else there will be anarchy and chaos*". For example, Durkheim highlights the importance of a 'collective consciousness' (Durkheim 1893). However, in socially disorganized areas such as the DTES, communities are more fragmented and lacking in what Sampson et al (1997) terms as 'collective efficacy'. Collective efficacy describes the cooperation of residents to ensure that police and other resources are mobilized to maintain public safety. Sampson found that in areas of low collective efficacy, social order, the economic viability of neighbourhood business and the value of the housing stock was strongly related with high levels of major crimes (Sampson et al 1997). According to control theories, high levels of deviance and delinquency in the DTES could also be explained by a lack of "*local community social control*" (Bursik 1988 p527). Without a stake in community, The Joseph Rowntree Foundation argues that people view their localities as places to be "*Ignored, vilified and vandalized*". This is supported by Wilson and Kelling's (1982) 'broken windows' theory, where a lack of care and investment in an area can lead directly to its further deterioration.

It could be argued that the DTES does host a sense of the word 'community', just in a different way to more wealthy areas of Vancouver. The unique concentration of people with the same problems in the DTES offers the people living there a unique sense of connection. Many of the people living in the DTES feel safer and more accepted there than they would in anywhere else in the city (McCreary 2002). Unfortunately, this sense of 'community' both

harbours, and perpetuates, destructive cycles. According to a landlord of an SRO housing unit on the DTES, the area provides a sense of anonymity and acceptance of undesirable behaviours that simply do not exist in other parts of Vancouver (personal communication). Clifford and Shaw et al. (1929) argue "*if community standards are positive but not according to accepted codes of conventional society, behaviour will accordingly be contrary to the standards of larger society*" (p6). As a result, what Charles Murray terms as an 'underclass' has proliferated in stark contrast to the rest of Vancouver's prosperous downtown (Murray 1996).

The underclass phenomenon was originally termed by Oscar Lewis as a "*culture of poverty*" (Waxman 1977 p45). Waxman (1977) also supports the idea that there is a cultural perspective for conceptualizing and explaining poverty. As Cloward and Ohlin (1960) explain, subcultures appear in opposition to the conventions of dominant cultures and "*every culture provides its members with appropriate beliefs, values and norms to carry out required activities*" (Cloward and Ohlin 1960 p13). In opposition to mainstream society, the DTES subculture is characterised by family instability, crime, drug abuse and dropping out of education or the labour market. According to Sutherland's theory of differential association, these characteristics are reproduced through the process of cultural transmission, creating what Rutter and Madge describe as a "*cycles of deprivation*" (Bursik 1988). As Allen and Thomas highlight (2000), a "*learned helplessness is transmitted from generation to generation*" (Allen and Thomas 2000).

Homelessness is so embedded in the normality of life in the Downtown Eastside that it is often taken for granted as an inevitable part of society. In other ways, it is regarded as too much of a problem; nothing can be done to solve it, so why bother trying? (Macarov 2003). The lack of transitional and affordable housing on the Downtown Eastside make it difficult for people secure a place to live. The level of social exclusion evident in the DTES points to a clear *“failure of government to develop ‘inclusive’ policies that relieve deprivation and create opportunity for people to climb out of poverty”* (Blakemore 2003 p83). In order to alter the situation in the DTES, large scale and long term structural changes are a necessity. For example, the regeneration of urban areas and the provision of programs to break destructive cycles and promote positive community involvement. In the meantime, residents rely on the provision of social supports from a number of organizations that deal with the effects of poverty on an individual basis.

DEYAS: THE DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE YOUTH ACTIVITIES

SOCIETY

Undoubtedly, one of the most disturbing aspects of the DTES is the number of youths who call it their home. The levels of victimization, mental illness and untreated trauma within the street population mean that youth on the DTES are some of the most vulnerable, unprotected and at-risk members of Canadian society (IPC 2008). As Suave highlights, *“with youth being a large segment of total populations, ignoring any members of this generation, including youth involved in the street, risks future economic and societal development”* (Suave 2003 p3). It is also a matter of social responsibility to help sections of society who are illequipped to help themselves. In 1984, the Downtown Eastside Youth Activities Society (DEYAS) was founded; a non-profit organization with the aim of offering opportunity to new generations living on, or at risk of living on the DTES. To this day, DEYAS remains a trusted fixture in the body of community services concentrated on Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside (DEYAS 2008).

DEYAS founder, John Turvey, was a well respected activist for Vancouver’s disadvantaged. Turvey’s personal battles with heroin addiction made him dedicated to advocating for youth, reducing harm in the community, and aiding young people in transforming their lives. His pioneering efforts in this area earned him the honour of both the Order of Canada and the Order of British Columbia (Hamilton 2006). DEYAS workers hold a unique connection with street entrenched youth, with high levels of compassion, commitment and often personal experience of the problems they deal with on a daily basis. As

highlighted on the DEYAS website; *“operating the same programs successfully for almost twenty years with many of the same staff DEYAS originally had at the launch of the organization, positions the Downtown Eastside Youth Activities Society in a position of experience, leadership and credibility”* (DEYAS 2008).

This is not to say, however, that DEYAS has not experienced considerable criticism. In fact, due to the nature of its work and clientele, DEYAS is subject to constant controversy and debate. Under intermediate supervision, internal difficulties caused a relative decline in DEYAS’s dominance, community status and success. However, over the last two years, DEYAS has experienced the injection of new insight and innovation from Executive Director, Cannon Singh; and Director of Development, Anna Jones. The current administration is making clear efforts to raise awareness, repair fractured relationships in the community, and ensure that DEYAS proves consistently pivotal in the lives of Vancouver’s street youth. DEYAS seems to now be back on track with regard to the innovative, active and pioneering character that established it as a primary community agency.

According to Cannon Singh, *“beyond the four basic needs required for living (food and water, shelter, oxygen) the common denominator, particularly with the street entrenched youth, is a lack of belonging”* (DEYAS 2008). One of Turvey’s key goals was to empower and support youth; instilling enough dignity and self-worth for them to take control of their own life circumstances. A key strength of DEYAS’s new management team is its commitment to Turvey’s vision. DEYAS seeks to provide non-judgemental support to people from

condemned lifestyles, in an environment designed specifically to reduce feelings of social alienation. DEYAS's approach is primarily one of basic humanitarianism, social justice and human rights. At this time of writing; DEYAS's programs include a youth detoxification facility, youth outreach program, community education and awareness campaign, community pick-up van and a needle exchange.

DEYAS's youth detoxification facility offers 16-24 year olds a short-term, safe place to stay, for safe withdrawal and dealing with the physical side of addiction. Their youth outreach program has workers that drive around the streets of the DTES; handing out food, bad date sheets for sex workers and a range of other harm reduction paraphernalia. The outreach team spends a considerable amount of time out in the community, speaking to residents and looking for youth in need of aid. DEYAS's community education program operates in schools, businesses and visits other agencies. Community educators are used to teach first aid, the realities of life in the eastside, safe disposal techniques and the benefits of DEYAS's work. Finally, DEYAS's needle exchange and community pick up seek to reduce the levels of used syringes in the community. The needle exchange van drive around the DTES giving out safe, clean needles and the community pick-up removes used ones from a large number of collection points in the community.

With a significant proportion of their work connected to drug-use, a guiding principle of DEYAS's work is the Four Pillar Drug Strategy endorsed by the provincial government in B.C (City of Vancouver 2008). The four pillars assert

that enforcement alone cannot be effective in dealing with drug-use. Prevention, harm reduction and treatment are also needed. DEYAS's youth mandate is important for prevention. For those who cannot be helped preventatively, DEYAS offers detox and directs clients to treatment as a fundamental prerequisite for a stable life. DEYAS's adherence to harm reduction can be seen in their educational campaigns, distribution of harm reduction materials and in the guiding principles of their needle exchange program.

CHALLENGE #1: RESOURCES AND FUNDING

The most important barrier that DEYAS faces in the realization of its goals is securing sufficient resources. This issue is integral to the running of a non-profit organization and is inextricably intertwined with all the other issues to be discussed in this paper. It has been afforded its own section here to emphasise the overriding nature of its importance. DEYAS cannot put any of their plans or ideas into action, run any programs or employ any regular staff, without financial backing. Resources are limited, with any decision to provide resources to charity being constrained by other competing demands upon public and private funding. Throwing money at the problem of homelessness is not an effective solution alone (Hughes 2007). However, it is undeniable that adequate resources are fundamental to the implementation of effective solutions and programs.

The funding arrangements for each of DEYAS's programs are dealt with independently. The detox and needle exchange are each funded by separate contracts with Vancouver Coastal Health. The youth outreach program receives the majority of its funding from the City of Vancouver and B.C Gaming (DEYAS 2008). Government funding bodies are one of the prominent sources of funding for non-profit organizations, and are available at community, provincial and national levels. However, funding is finite, applications are complicated and competition is fierce. DEYAS therefore has to rely on a changeable supply of different funding sources; including contributions, grants, sponsorships and charitable donations. The effective delivery of programs also depends heavily upon donations-in-kind and un-paid volunteer work

Competition and barriers to funding

To receive a sustainable flow of resources, DEYAS has to prove their merit amongst a plethora of deserving causes. This is no small feat in an area such as the Downtown Eastside, where non-profit organizations exist in concentrated abundance. According to McKnight, many local governments and funding bodies find themselves completely caught up in the politics of deciding between services (McKnight 1995). Eurchuck (2004) argues that DEYAS was once part of a group of larger agencies who worked together to limit the competition for funding in the DTES. However, fractured community relationships mean that DEYAS now has to work hard in order to compete for resources.

Potential funders will want to know where their money is going before deciding to contribute. To be effective, proposals for funding need to be persuasive, attention catching, comprehensively put together, well prepared and on-time. DEYAS's youth mandate generally stands in their favour. As Macarov (2003) highlights, children are part of the 'deserving poor'. From personal research into funding availability, it is clear that a sizeable proportion of social responsibility and charitable giving is geared towards youth. However, there is a stigma attached to homelessness and drug-use that can hinder DEYAS in gaining the support they require (Waxman 1977).

To illustrate, imagine a hungry mother and child with no sustainable income or regular shelter. Add a forced career of prostitution, a substance

dependency to numb the pain, and a criminal record of theft in order to survive, however; and the public response can become quite different. According to Lynn Hancock, crime and its effects are a significant barrier towards funding “*because of their impact on the willingness of residents and businesses to stay and/or get involved in the problems of the area and their adverse impact on the views of potential investors*” (Hancock 2003 p132). The nature of the social problems prevalent on the DTES means that perceptions of deservingness can often become displaced by negative stereotypes and blame (Katz 1989).

According to the ‘contact hypothesis’, one way of altering this perception of deservingness is to bring members of different groups together to promote more positive attitudes (Allport 1954 p92). The more involved with the community DEYAS and their clients are therefore, the more likely they are to gain necessary support (Jones and Perkins 1996). Community support is pivotal to funding. Community and political support depend upon each other in almost a cyclical nature. If you can get the public behind DEYAS therefore, government money is likely to be more attainable. Similarly, if the government supports DEYAS, morally and financially, there is likely to be more money available to spread the DEYAS message and gain public support.

DEYAS relies on the public for monetary donations, moral support and the donation of their time in the form of volunteering. Unpaid work is vital for the effective delivery of services. Internal difficulties arise with regard to the staffing of non-profit organizations because job positions are insecure, the work is hard and the pay is low. Volunteers relieve the workload of paid staff and ensure the

continuation of services when resources are scarce. The use of volunteers also adds the benefit to the clientele that the majority of people working for DEYAS have a genuine desire to help, and often a personal understanding of their clients situation. This stems from Webber (1991) for example, who describes the idea of 'redemption'. It is thought that many former clients of services want to help others, the way they were helped themselves. More resources need to be made available for the staffing of NGO's. Otherwise, people with a willingness to help may be deterred by their own financial pressures.

Accountability and Representation

Another way the public is involved with DEYAS is through membership. In the past, Turvey's leadership structure has been called into question with the criticism that "*the top-down anti-democratic structure of DEYAS was the source of its weakness, and ultimately handicapped its work*" (Eurchuck 2004). Memberships seek to give the community a voice and an individual stake in the functioning of the agency. All members are given the opportunity to take ideas to the Board who, in turn, can take their recommendations to the Executive Director.

In theory, memberships are a way of making DEYAS more representative. The term 'representation' describes a "*meaningful voice in decisions on policy or leadership*" (Bob 2007 p3). Unfortunately, the level of '*meaningful*' contribution for members, and their level of influence are both subject to debate. According

to Clifford Bob, the problem is that representation is difficult within the context of a NGO, and “*at best, “representation” occurs because members or donors ratify past NGO’s by giving money—or reject them by withdrawing support*” (Bob 2007 p3). If agencies such as DEYAS are unable to be truly representative, they must at least ensure that they remain accountable to their stakeholders.

Financial stability is not the luxury of a non-profit organization; contracts are short-term and fragile. The previous management of DEYAS fell short in reporting back to their funders; losing valuable support previous administrations had sought hard to gain. DEYAS has recently lost the contract for its youth detoxification facility. Their youth outreach program is also under extreme threat of permanent discontinuation. One of the principle challenges facing DEYAS is to rebuild these funding relationships and explore new avenues where connections are deemed irreparable. A key recommendation in this area is for DEYAS to record their successes through the production of evaluation research. Not only could effective research help funding, it could also serve as a platform to influence public policy.

It should be noted that research is problematic with homeless youth. For example, it is difficult to operationalize success measures, due to the ambiguities that surround definitions of success. Incremental improvements in life circumstances (such as the consideration of treatment by youth) may be monumental for the client or outreach worker. However, it may translate more negatively in the research context (ie. by being recorded as the client not achieving full recovery). DEYAS could certainly benefit from a record of their

success. However, this would perhaps be best achieved in the form of qualitative case study analyses, operationalized on DEYAS's own terms. DEYAS is a potentially rich site for research due to increased access to a largely inaccessible research population. More resources also need to be made available for research in this area, in order to highlight best practice issues and gaps in service.

Clifford Bob asks; "*who do NGO's represent and to whom should they be held accountable?*" (Bob 2007 p1). The key danger concerning accountability is that; "*due to funding necessities, incentives for accountability surround distant donors, not clients*" (Bob 2007 p4). According to Eurchuck, concerns over funding can also "*foster a culture of political timidity. Ultimately many organizations contribute more to the status quo than to change*" (Eurchuck 2007). This is relevant to DEYAS as dealing effectively with youth homelessness will inevitably require political and social change. DEYAS must ensure that efforts are made to increase accountability to their clients and to their own principles. A recommendation for ensuring this is to encourage what Bob (2007) describes as an "*open market place of ideas*" (p6). If efforts are genuine, this would add an increased democracy to DEYAS. It would make their decision-making more transparent and involve the diverse voices of funders, clients *and* the general public.

CHALLENGE #2: ENGAGING YOUTH

According to Webber (1991) *“kids tend to experience professional intervention as oppression more than assistance. Their stories are laced with incidents of indifference and outright negligence”* (p10). Many youth are therefore untrusting of ‘social work’ and this may deter them from actively seeking help. Many of DEYAS’s potential clients are also missing persons or runaways who by definition, may not be easy to find. After financial backing; one of the key challenges facing DEYAS is gaining access to a hidden and often reluctant client base.

According to DEYAS, *“the mandate is to find youth under the age of 24 who are homeless, at risk of being homeless or simply in need of assistance”* (DEYAS 2008). In this way, DEYAS is similar to the McCreary Centre Society in their less restrictive definition of ‘street youth’. In other words, it includes those who are involved in street life, but may not be considered homeless in ‘absolute’ terms (McCreary 2001, IPC 2008). The distinctive feature of DEYAS’s youth outreach program is that it proactively seeks out potential clients who do not know where to turn, or who may not readily ask for help. This is an important feature of DEYAS’s work because everyday spent in the destructive cycles of the DTES makes a person more disenchanting, further removed from society and that little bit harder to help (Waxman 1977). DEYAS’s proactive, on the street approach is unique and separates DEYAS from other single location or drop-in services for youth.

DEYAS's brief intervention approach is much better suited to street youth's unpredictable lifestyles and habits. Travelling to meet youth workers, at pre-appointed times, may actually put youth off from taking advantage of the services that organizations have to offer (McCreary 2002). The McCreary Centre Society (2002) highlights that despite initial reluctance, the majority of street youth "*reveal an underlying loneliness and search for connection*" (p13). Webber also highlights that "*these kids are survivors... their posturing, however, often melts away if you are able to reach something inside them*" (Webber 1991p8). DEYAS makes a point of reaching out to youth, where they are, armed with information required to take the required steps in transforming their lives. As Yates et al (1991) highlight, youth outreach is a vital first step on an often extensive continuum of care.

Trust in the Community

To gain access to street youth, DEYAS has had to work hard to develop a relationship with the community at large. A primary obstacle to this is trust, a characteristic that is almost non-existent on the Downtown Eastside (Webber 1991). Dependability and consistency is also something that is lacking in the lives of many in the DTES. However, constant interaction with members of the community has meant that people have become more willing to help when clients go missing and report on how known youth in the community are doing. DEYAS is now accepted in areas of the DTES that most people would not even feel safe

to venture. To newcomers, word of mouth serves as a key form of “*informal publicity*” for DEYAS’s position in the community (Bowers and Johnson 2005 p330).

The DEYAS website highlights that “*as the life and death struggle on the streets continues, these relationships [remain vitally] important in the DTES so the youth know that there are people and an organization they can trust*” (DEYAS 2008). DEYAS has a clearly marked van that has driven around the alley ways of the DTES every day since the late 1980’s. In the process of checking the status of youth and seeking out new clients; the outreach van also gives out food packs provided by the Greater Vancouver Food Bank, providing sustenance to approximately three hundred and fifty people a week. The outreach van also performs the vital service of distributing harm reduction materials; such as bad date sheets for sex workers, condoms, urban mouthpieces and clean water for syringes. This provides a vital service to the community and an important point of initial contact for clients.

Building Relationships

As well as developing trust, DEYAS seeks to instil a sense of belonging in their clients. This is incredibly important due to prevalence of neglect and abuse in their histories (Burt and Cohen 1989, Janus et al 1995, McCreary 2002). Homelessness hinders the personal networking that can prove instrumental in getting youth off the street (D’Ercole and Struening 1990). Outreach workers can

therefore also be seen to play an important supportive role. This involves being a constant fixture in youth's transition from the streets and being available to respond to youths in crisis. DEYAS seeks to assure youth that *"regardless of their situation... they truly are people worthy of health, happiness and a life beyond the streets"* (DEYAS 2008).

According to Perkins and Borden (2003) *"positive youth-adult interaction is an important protective factor in a young person's life"*. Relationships with an adult outreach worker can also prepare youth for future interactions with conventional adults. Social control theories suggest that bonds to conventional persons can play an important role in the behaviour of youth (Hirschi 1969). As Sampson and Laub (1993) explain, *"emotional ties create a social bond [that] should lead to a reduction in deviant behaviour"* (p140). A positive relationship with an outreach worker could be pivotal in influencing youth to consider more conventional life paths.

Due to dysfunctional backgrounds, many street youth have an issue with authority, something they associate almost exclusively with oppressive adult figures (Hagan and McCarthy 1997). It is important therefore to avoid traditional adult-led models of social work in favour of more youth-oriented approaches (Jones and Perkins 1996). As Suave (2003) indicates, service providers need to *'support and increase their opportunities while respecting them as independent actors'* (p1). Need is too often translated into some form of deficiency in the individual or client. This is dangerous because it encourages the perception that solutions lie with professional service providers, and not with youth themselves

(McKnight 1995). Youth need to understand that they play the principal role in altering their own life circumstances. A recommendation for DEYAS is to also focus more attention on reconnection work with the people that *should* be providing support. As Newburn and Souhami (2005) suggest, this might include expanding reach beyond the child in isolation, to work alongside guardians, families, peers and the community (Newburn and Souhami 2005).

Once a relationship is established with youth, another challenge is to maintain it. Retaining youth on the continuum of care is as important as initially engaging them. There are high incidences of relapse to street life, especially when drug-use is involved (Webber 1991). There are also considerable pressures that exist with regard to the workings of the social care system (Vancouver Foundation 2008). At the age of 22 for example, clients 'age out' of eligibility for a number of 'youth' services, and are considered outside of the states responsibility (Hutson and Liddiard 1994 p58). Unfortunately, as highlighted by a series of interviews with street youth; *"for these disinherited youngsters, individuals, not systems fail. Kids do not protest the existence of underfunded, understaffed, sprawling and anonymous human service bureaucracies which workers...are saddled with impossibly large caseloads and impossibly restricted mandates....Hungry, homeless, hurting kids do not stop to think that they are up against agencies that can't even begin to meet their material, let alone their spiritual, needs...all they see are adults who deny them help"* (Webber 1991p10). A high client-to-worker ratio can place considerable pressures on workers time. However, Youth Outreach workers have to be

familiar with the flaws in the system and be able to compensate for them as effectively as possible.

Transitional Outreach

Due to time and funding constraints, a key element of DEYAS' outreach program is sign-posting to other essential services (Blakemore 2003). In this sense, the outreach program acts as a form of '*crisis intervention*', used to direct youth towards "*longer term and more comprehensive rehabilitation*" (Gilvarry 1998 p290). The different services that could potentially be required by homeless youth are multiple, diverse and independently run (Yates et al 1991). A complex combination of emergency and long- term supports could be needed, including housing, food, clothing, income assistance, jobs, education and training. Many clients are also likely to need some form of counseling or treatment. Without direction to the services that really change the life circumstances of youth, destructive lifestyles are likely to continue, despite the supporting role of a youth outreach worker (Hagan and McCarthy 1997).

Outreach workers seek to offer an individualized assessment based on the client's personal needs. DEYAS's vision for their outreach program is to develop a more comprehensive case worker approach and add a drop-in facility to their services. A case management approach would mean the ability to guide youth through the transition process on an ongoing one-to-one basis. This approach would provide a much better premise from which to develop effective

rapport and facilitate developmentally appropriate client growth (Gilvarry 1998 p286). However, the funding for DEYAS's 1.5 outreach worker positions has already been called largely in to question. A brief intervention method is therefore the most effective way to reach out to a larger number of homeless youth under the current funding circumstances.

Inter-Agency Collaboration

For DEYAS's directional role to be effective, DEYAS must have thorough knowledge of all of the services available on the DTES and the resources available to youth (McCreary 2002). Youth workers need to know what services are available and be able to aid their clients successfully in admission or uptake. For this reason, collaboration and effective communication between agencies is imperative (Chand and Thompson 1997). To provide an example of effective inter-agency collaboration, DEYAS outreach workers currently work collaboratively with ministry offices, Emergency Services, the Downtown Eastside Neighborhood Safety Office and the Adolescent Services Unit. The most troublesome youths are also afforded extra attention through Hard Target meetings; a number of weekly, case-based, confidential, meetings between outreach workers and direct service providers.

Unfortunately, however, DEYAS has experienced a number of difficult relationships with other agencies in the DTES. Disputes between agencies can surround admission procedures, individual differences and battles for funding.

For example, limited funding forces DEYAS into direct competition with other agencies, which can place an understandable strain on relationships. Inter-agency relationships can also be strained by external power relations, conflicts of interest and differing perspectives on how problems should be addressed. To provide an illustration, DEYAS's emphasis on harm reduction means they disagree with church-based organizations that refuse to provide youth with condoms. Differences in opinion between agencies do not only reduce the effectiveness of DEYAS's directional role for youth, it can also endanger funding relationships. For example, DEYAS's former Executive Director, who did not leave due to a difference of opinion, now works for the organization responsible for the discontinuation of funding for their youth outreach program. DEYAS needs to develop new strategies for when it encounters such conflicts with other agencies. This could include joint strategy meetings to find shared policy interests for approaching funding. It could also involve working together to discuss the adjustment of in-take procedures and criteria.

CHALLENGE #3: DISPELLING THE MYTHS OF HOMELESSNESS

According to the Institute of Crime Prevention, "*the nature of homelessness is not well understood by certain segments of the public, which can lead to a lack of tolerance*" (IPC 2008 p26). In fact, many understandings of homelessness are based largely upon false assumptions and stereotypes. This is important because as Kluckholm warns, "*things perceived as real are real in their consequences*" (Maracov 2003 p80). Negative perceptions can translate directly into opposition to DEYAS and barriers for youth. A primary obstacle facing DEYAS is therefore the need to educate the public and promote a more accurate awareness of youth homelessness.

The Individual Culpability Model of poverty views homelessness an issue of personal responsibility and blame (Brandon et al. 1980, Hutson and Liddiard 1994). As Macarov (2003) explains, homelessness is often conceptualized as the result of 'deviance' or individual pathology (p58). This has important implications for homeless youth because there exists a "*moral distinction between the worthy and the unworthy, or the deserving and undeserving poor*" (Katz 1989 p5). The individual view of homelessness is condemnatory, over simplistic and can diminish people's willingness to help. It is also detrimental in the way it decreases the perceived need for broader social change.

A key myth DEYAS needs to dispel is that street youth *choose* homelessness (Hagan and McCarthy 1997). It is a common misconception that youth live on the streets because they want to have fun, escape the constraints

of household rules, or because they do not wish to work or follow other societal norms (Webber 1991). In reality, homelessness is often more of an unintended consequence than choice. Although choice may play a role in the activities that can inadvertently lead to homelessness, it is unlikely that youth actually choose homelessness itself. In contrast to popular belief, most cases of youth homelessness are better described as the result of *no* choice (Killeen 1988). As Gesling (1990) highlights, "*The problem is not that people leave home, but that when they do, there is often nowhere for them to go*". Limited support, opportunity or guidance can mean that instead of choosing homelessness, they simply do not perceive themselves to have any other options available.

It would be patronising to overlook the role of self-determination entirely (Hutson and Liddiard 1994). However, even most 'runaways' are more aptly termed "*throwaways*"; forced out of their violently abusive homes with little room to consider the consequences (Hagan and McCarthy 1997, Webber 1991 p5). In the large number of cases where abuse or family conflict is present, the response is more like an instinctive flight or flight response to a threatening situation (Thornton 1990). As Hagan and McCarthy (1997) highlight, "*explosive parenting, (involving violence and abuse) and extreme forms of parental rejection*" can have an incredibly adverse effect upon youth (p57). A young person saying their homelessness is a personal choice is often a good way to "*maintain dignity or avoid talking about personal issues. When trust is really built with someone who is really able to provide help, the stories of abuse, abandonment, and other trauma invariably come out*" (New Avenues for Youth 2008).

It should also be noted that choice itself is a very tenuous concept. For example, many young people, especially those with mental disorders, are rendered with the diminished ability to appreciate the nature, quality or consequences of their so called 'choice' (Brandon et al 1980). It is also widely acknowledged that substance abuse impairs decision-making, ability to reason and capacities for choice. As one street youth describes; "*my drugs make my choices for me*" (McCreary 2002 p25). Overall, the concept of rational choice provides an inadequate and incomplete explanation for youth homelessness (Hagan and McCarthy 1997). From the literature, poverty is far more convincingly attributable to broader social issues (Suave 2003).

From a functionalist perspective, poverty is a necessary aspect of capitalist society (Croall 1998). As Maracov (2003) indicates, capitalism "*paradoxically creates poverty and further deepens existing poverty*" (p65). One of the primary causes of homelessness is the failure of infrastructure to support those most vulnerable to poverty. The solution is therefore more likely to lie in larger scale structural changes and increased social supports for at-risk youth. A particularly damaging misconception is that it would cost too much to provide affordable housing. With limited public resources available, the issue becomes "*not only who needs aid, but whose behaviour and character entitle them to the resources of others*" (Katz 1989 p9). Taxpayers may be reluctant to fund housing for those they deem responsible for their own circumstances. However, numerous research studies have shown that the costs of emergency supports, over a lifetime, far exceed those of assisting homeless people with more

permanent solutions (Federation of Canadian Municipalities 2006). In fact, providing stable housing for homeless people in Vancouver has been estimated to generate savings as high as thirty per cent (Eberle et al 2001).

There are many reasons why myths about homelessness exist, and why they are able to perpetuate. The majority of misunderstandings are born out of ignorance or a lack of exposure to the problem. Societal divides ensure that vastly differing lifestyles need not often meet and instead, perceptions are based on media-induced stereotypes. Another potential explanation is the “*exclusivist ‘othering’ of seemingly non-productive populations*” (Hughes 2007 p166). As Croall (1998) highlights, the vilification of out-groups has the important function of strengthening in-group solidarity. According to Macarov (2003), “*the poor represent our own worst fears of downward mobility and we hate them for showing it to us*” (p62). On the other hand, the reality of homelessness may simply be too hard to accept; “*facts about male battery of women and children; about incest and other forms of sexual abuse; about poverty among women and children; about illiteracy; about homelessness*” (Webber 1991 p7). In some cases, negative prejudices might also be explained techniques of neutralization, created to justify people’s failure to help the situation (Matza 1964).

Community Education and Awareness

Psychological Research illustrates how *“people’s perceptions influence their behaviour or decisions made, and how this can be influenced by information provided”* (Bowers and Johnson 2005). Goffman (1963) also highlights that people’s perceptions are unlikely to be reconsidered until they are given a reason to question them. It is for this reason that some of DEYAS’s most fervent efforts are currently going into informing the public of the realities of homelessness. DEYAS’s educational role has three discernible functions. The first is to challenge public perceptions and increase community support. The second is to teach first aid, encourage disease prevention and promote harm reduction techniques. The third and crucial role is to educate as a form of prevention.

DEYAS’s community education program has received awards for exceptional service to the community (Toskan Casale Foundation 2006, 2007). DEYAS uses community educators to work with businesses, schools and at-risk youth. They also provide firsthand experience of the DTES with DEYAS staff on ride-a-longs. This service can have an important preventative function for at-risk youth. According to Intergroup Contact Theory, it could also play an important role in changing public perceptions (Jones and Perkins 1996). Another platform for DEYAS’s preventative work is their Art in the Streets program, where youth visit the DTES and communicate their perspectives through the medium of art. As well as increasing exposure of the DTES to at-risk youth, it engages them with art as an activity. According to Eberle et al. (2001) engagement with

conventional activities has the potential to be an incredibly useful diversion for youth from other less socially desirable activities (Eberle et al 2001).

DEYAS also seeks to use their clients as a vital part of their education and awareness program, based upon the assumption that *“youth’s voices can influence action and influence change”* (DEYAS 2008b). It is beneficial for youth to be involved in youth advocacy work as it increases their involvement, and makes the instillation of healthy choices more likely. Advocacy also provides a voice to a voiceless minority that are used to being ignored, or having their interests dictated for them (McCreary 2002). DEYAS’s youth advocacy programs combat the *“paradigm of absence”* so common in social work, that can prevent the individual empowerment of street youth (Suave 2003).

According to Webber (1991), it is important for clients to have a voice *“undiluted by others’ qualifiers”* (p9). However, Bob (2007) highlights, NGOs such as DEYAS are actually *“well positioned to affect policy debates on youths behalf”* (Bob 2007). According to Freedman (1969) *“generally speaking, the poor have not been political activists”* (p96). A key aim for DEYAS should be to use community educators and youth advocates to influence social policy at higher levels. A recommendation in this area is also for more funding to be made available to involve other key stakeholders, including ex-clients, reformed addicts and people who have had experience of working in the DTES. The McCreary Centre Society also supports the idea of using older residents to discourage newcomers to the DTES; discouraging drug-use and encouraging youth to stay in school (McCreary 2002).

The umbrella term for DEYAS's education and awareness campaigns is 'Change the Future'. It includes community education programs and a number of large-scale awareness-raising events, such as the Downtown Eastside Youth Music Festival and participation in the Vancouver Pride Parade. Recent research recommends that "*publicity works best in a specific local context and, in particular, if it tackles specific local issue*" (Bowers and Johnson 2005 p342). Change the future is a long-term campaign, focused on issues in the Downtown Eastside; that seeks to educate, inspire healthy choices and encourage volunteerism in the community. It is the culmination of all the efforts DEYAS are making to deliver their message, increase exposure and promote an accurate understanding of their cause. According to Bowers and Johnson (2005) however, "*constant publicity has the potential to result in overexposure and people tiring of the messages you are conveying*" (Bowers and Johnson 2005 p343). It is good therefore that DEYAS publicizes each element of Change the Future separately, each focusing on a different key issue. However, they keep the unifying and recognisable theme of the Change the Future campaign consistent throughout.

The promotion of DEYAS events includes media coverage, viral messaging through social networking sites, poster, e-mail and pin-card campaigns. Although DEYAS appreciates the attention grabbing qualities of controversy, they remain media-conscious and acknowledge that "*not all publicity is good publicity*" (Bowers and Johnson 2005 p330). With regard to the media therefore, DEYAS tries to maintain a degree of control over public perceptions by

monitoring and combating any negative reporting. They also seek to foster positive relationships with media outlets, making it more likely for them to be presented in a favourable light. As a fundamental element of their awareness campaign DEYAS has even started to produce its own publication, 'Voice of the Streets'. DEYAS's educational magazine has a distribution of 30,000, a figure that will soon be increased through the sales by youth street vendors. 'Voice of the Streets' reports on community and organizational news, client success stories and contains educational articles on a number of relevant topics (DEYAS 2008). It has previously been recommended that DEYAS should produce research to formalize their success. Voice of the Streets is recommended as an excellent medium to publicize research findings and circulate positive outcome data.

According to Lee et al. (2004), all types of exposure to homelessness have been found to have a positive effect on the attitude of the public. However, research into the effectiveness of publicity campaigns has indicated that people recall television-based campaigns (with an 82% recall), better than newspaper articles (27%) or posters (9%) (Van Dijk and Steinmetz 1981). For this reason, DEYAS is currently in the planning stages of producing a documentary on street youth in the DTES. Television coverage and written articles are useful for communicating with the public at large. However, it should be noted that they may not be an appropriate medium to reach out to all of DEYAS's potential supporters or clients. This is because television ownership and the ability to read are not luxuries that all key stakeholders possess. A well designed poster,

attendance of DEYAS events and word of mouth are therefore likely to be equally as important to DEYAS in terms of raising awareness.

CHALLENGE #4: UNDERSTANDING ADDICTIONS AND DEALING WITH THEM EFFECTIVELY

The DTES is characterized by “*the public consumption of alcohol, a sizeable heroin trade [and] noticeable levels of crack use*” (Hagan and McCarthy 1997 p17). The McCreary Centre Society highlights that “*substance use often contributes to a youth’s initial attraction to the street and also keeps young people involved in street life*” (McCreary 2002 p16). However, the relationship between drug-use and homelessness is often oversimplified and is another area of DEYAS’s work where negative misconceptions prevail. According to the Canadian Centre for Substance Abuse; even “*policy decisions are often tied to political and ideological circumstances rather than to evidence*” (Canadian Centre for Substance Abuse 2007 p41). DEYAS deals extensively with drug-involved individuals through their youth detoxification facility, outreach program and needle exchange program. One of their key challenges is to use their expert knowledge to challenge misconceptions and alert people to the realities of dealing with substance-use effectively.

According to Hagan and McCarthy (1997), the DTES has a “*continuing history as a haven for street alcoholics and drug addicts*” (p17). On the surface, this can generate the perception that only those with dependency problems are in situations bad enough to become homeless, and that the relationship is directly causal. This results in the stereotype that all homeless youth are that way as a result of their involvement with drugs. It cannot be denied that substance abuse and homelessness are inextricably related. However, a large

degree of substance dependency problems exist amongst people who are *not* homeless. It should also be noted that a number of people become homeless with no involvement in drugs at all (Webber 1991, Hagan and McCarthy 1997). If the risks of homelessness are reserved for society's substance abusers, non-users may falsely assume themselves to be exempt from the possibility of life on the streets. In reality however, homelessness often surrounds a complex combination of issues that can affect a large proportion of society. Included in this is anyone affected by poverty, unemployment, unfair distribution of wealth, ineffective government policies, histories of incarceration or institutionalisation, mental and physical disability, family breakdown and abuse (Suave 2003, McCreary 2002).

Perhaps the most convincing explanation of the relationship between homelessness and substance abuse is Shannon's (1998) "*common-cause position*", where the same factors are seen to lead to involvement in both (p132). As Gilvarry (1998) highlights, youth homelessness and substance abuse are both the result of the same "*backgrounds of risk and lack of protective factors*" (p281). As stated in a report by the Canadian Centre for Substance Abuse, "*we need to recognise the potent influences of trauma, violence, stigma, and neurophysiological vulnerability on the risk for chronic substance abuse*" (Canadian Centre for Substance Abuse 2007 p18). These are factors that have already been explained to be associated with youth homelessness. Many people may also turn to substance abuse as a coping strategy, *because* they are homeless. As Hutson and Liddiard (1994) argue, "*alcohol and drug abuse can*

be as much a consequence of homelessness as a cause" (p66). Drug abuse can serve as a form of self-medication to people on the streets (McSweeney and Hough 2005, Novac et al 2006). For many, it provides what Webber describes as the "*psychological wall of a necessary amnesia*" (Webber 1991p11).

Treatment

According to the McCreary Centre Society, 65% of street youth consider themselves to have a problem with addiction. However, less than a third had ever received treatment and 23% of those who sought help were actually refused it (McCreary 2001 p27, p46). The availability of treatment is a key barrier that exists for DEYAS in helping their clients transition from the street. DEYAS understands addiction as a disease and believes treatment is necessary to deal with the physical symptoms and underlying causes of substance abuse. It is for this reason that, up until recently, DEYAS has run its own youth detoxification facility. Without effective withdrawal management, away from destructive environments, other aspects of a stable life are almost impossible. According to Gilvarry, detoxification falls under the 'pharmacotherapy' model of treatment (Gilvarry 1998 p289). It is what Kipke et al. (1996) describe as a "*pre-treatment phase*", used to attend to crises before the development of a more comprehensive treatment program (p290). It is a vital service. However, funding difficulties and internal conflicts have recently led to the closure of this facility.

The treatment aspect of DEYAS's work was a vital element of the 'Four Pillar' approach to drug-use in the community (Canadian Centre of Substance Abuse 2007 p3). The loss of a youth specific facility is especially unfortunate for DEYAS clients. Waiting lists are long and beds in treatment facilities are in constant short supply in areas such as the DTES (Chand and Thompson 1997). This is further compounded by the fact that many youth intervention services are "*underfunded and fragmented and too often based on adult treatment models*" (Canadian Centre for Substance Abuse 2007 p41). It is hoped that the Vancouver Detox will take the primary role in compensating for any losses to the community that the closure of the Detox will incur. Some hope might also be found in the \$6 million dollars recently being put towards the first long-term youth treatment facility in B.C; 'The Crossing at Keremos' (Vancouver Foundation 2008). With the closure of the detoxification facility, DEYAS's key efforts in the realm of substance abuse now lie in aiding client's admission to treatment and reducing harm in the community.

Harm Reduction

DEYAS acknowledges that people are going to engage in drug use. As highlighted by the Drug Policy Alliance Network; "*there has never been, is not now, and never will be a drug free society*" (Drug Policy Alliance Network 2008). Harm reduction presents itself as an alternative to the 'war on drugs' mentality that has prevailed in both social policy and public consciousness. However,

harm reduction is a controversial topic in contemporary public, political and criminological debates. Unfortunately for DEYAS, a considerable amount of opposition stems from an under-informed or misinformed public, and a popular misconception of what it is that harm reduction measures really seek to accomplish. Barriers to an accurate understanding of harm reduction reduce people's acceptance and encourages policy that could even be argued to perpetuate the problems of drug-use in the community.

There are a number of risks of drug-abuse that are not specifically related to the substance itself, but to the activities surrounding its use. For example, the blood-borne transmission of disease and infection through the sharing of contaminated drug-use paraphernalia (Miller et al. 2007). DEYAS boasts the “*crowning achievement*” of the first, and one of the most successful needle exchange programs in North America (Eurchuck 2004, Hamilton 2006). As an archetypal harm reduction program, the needle exchange has experienced substantial criticism. Harm reduction approaches are often misconstrued as condoning, promoting or enabling drug use. Needle exchange programs in particular, have been accused of increasing drug-use in communities and facilitating rather than mitigating undesirable behaviours (The Canadian Harm Reduction Network 2008). However, according to Wood (2008) “*these beliefs are inconsistent with the scientific evidence... the reasons people start and continue to use drugs are much more complex than the availability of harm reduction programs*”.

Harm reduction measures are not intended to replace or stand alone from other approaches to drug use. Instead they are conceptualized as a necessary component of a holistic four pillar approach. When used in conjunction with the other required elements (treatment, prevention and enforcement), harm reduction offers an unprecedented opportunity to mitigate the potential health risks and dangers of drug-use (Canadian Harm Reduction Network 2008). Arguably one of harm reduction's most important successes is the way that it can essentially save lives. Harm reduction measures such as needle exchanges, methadone maintenance programs and safe injection sites; can prolong the premature mortality associated with injection drug-use (Miller et al 2007). They have also been shown to reduce the spread of blood-borne disease, prevent overdose deaths and reduce the number of used syringes circulating around communities (Wood 2008, Canadian Harm Reduction Network 2008, Drugs Policy Alliance Network 2008). Harm reduction does not rely upon the punishment of offenders or a reduction in drug use as the only measures of success. Instead, success is more compassionately expanded to include a reduction in disease, suffering, premature mortality and crime (Drug Policy Alliance Network 2008)

According to Gilvarry (1998), "*insistence on abstinence may discourage engagement and retention of the young person in services*" (p284). Harm reduction alleviates the negative effects of an over-emphasis on prohibition; by focussing instead upon prevention, education, more hygienic drug consumption, and pathways to treatment (The Canadian Harm Reduction Network 2008). Harm reduction provides a supportive and non-judgemental approach to drug

use; which is known to be much more effective in aiding recovery. DEYAS believes that people deserve understanding, support and care, regardless of their lifestyle choices. They advocate harm reduction as a more pragmatic solution to the problem of drug-use, and a way of minimising the harm that it can cause to both user and society (The Canadian Harm Reduction Network 2008). The educational component of DEYAS's work in harm reduction also helps to increase the potential uptake of treatment and services, thus aiding a reduction in long term drug use and a reduction in drug-related crime. It also plays the vital role of educating the public and informing them of the benefits of harm reduction.

CHALLENGE #5: THE CRIMINALIZATION OF HOMELESSNESS

Criminal activity is rife in the DTES with a high prevalence of violence, theft, prostitution and illicit drug-use. Without access to services that positively alter the life circumstances of youth; drug-use and involvement with crime is a common and frighteningly likely eventuality (Einstadter and Henry 2006). As Hagan and McCarthy (1997) highlight, *“although street youth constitute a relatively small proportion of all adolescents, they are involved in a disproportionate amount of crime”* (p10). A likely alternative to life on the streets, therefore, is a life behind bars. This is important to DEYAS because criminal justice interventions can be seen to have a detrimental effect upon youth and can exacerbate their struggle in transitioning from street life (Newburn and Souhami 2005).

‘Crime’ is a social construct used to describe the behaviours which break the laws of a given society (Croall 1998). Many homeless youth are so far removed from the conventions of society that it is not surprising that much of their behaviour is considered deviant. However, much of what we define ‘criminal’ is little more than a means of survival to those on the streets (Hutson and Liddiard 1994). It could be argued that homelessness has been criminalized, through the criminalization of its associated behaviours. The final section of this paper therefore recommends three key areas where DEYAS could improve their mandate. The first is to advocate against the criminalization of homelessness. The second is to educate the public with regard to the pains of punishment and discourage an over-emphasis on criminal enforcement. The final

recommendation is for DEYAS to promote the clear benefits of their work in the realm of crime prevention.

Homelessness and Crime

According to Hutson and Liddiard (1994) *“there is debate about the exact nature of the relationship between crime and homelessness”* (p65). As Hagan and McCarthy (1997) indicate, *“there is more to these young lives than crime”* and *“some street youth report no involvement in crime at all”* (p3). However, the connection cannot be doubted. From a common-cause perspective, youth involvement in crime can often be explained by many of the same factors that lead to homelessness or involvement in drug-use (Shannon 1998). As McSweeney and Hough (2005) illustrate, *“lifestyle and sub-cultural factors are important in explaining why these who try illicit drugs are also more likely than others to get involved in other forms of law-breaking”* (p571). Social control theories also highlight the importance of a lack of conventional bonding with parents, schools and positive peers. According to Hirshi (1969) attachment to ‘unconventional’, homeless, drug or crime involved parents could be equally as important. Sutherland’s (1947) notion of ‘differential association’ asserts that *“criminal behaviour is learned through associations with people who break the law”* (Hagan and McCarthy 1997 p136). Homelessness greatly increases the frequency of these associations for youth. According to Matza (1964), there is

also a considerable pressure for youths to conform to the delinquent dictates of their world (p39).

Shannon (1998) found “*convincing evidence that juvenile delinquency and adult crime are products of life experiences in different types of neighbourhoods*”. As Merton (1938) highlights, “*social structures exert a definite pressure upon certain persons in society to engage in non-conformist rather than conformist conduct.*”(p671). The best illustration of the criminalization of homelessness can be seen in crimes that are the direct result of being homeless. Social deprivation can be linked to almost all areas of crime (Macarov 2003). For example, Hagan and McCarthy (1997) alert us to the “*privations and dangers [of the street] and how it pushes young people toward crime as a means of securing basic necessity*”. Sampson and Laub (1993) also highlight that that homelessness in youth can drastically alter life trajectories and that criminogenic factors are considerably higher for street youth (Sampson and Laub 1993). The strain associated with street life makes crime a perceived necessity to many on the DTES. This is exacerbated by the pressures of society’s goals and the lack of legitimate means to achieve them (Merton 1938). Crime is often viewed as the problem in need of address with troubled youth. However, it is clear that poverty or drug related crimes are actually largely symptomatic of far broader social issues. The problem with the use of criminal justice interventions is that they do not provide a solution to the conditions that so commonly lead to crime. Current solutions to youth crime will often leave many ‘offenders’ with the same problems that led to their involvement with crime in the first place.

An Over-Emphasis on Enforcement

“Many homeless persons are trapped in a revolving door between the prison and the street” (Kushel et al 2005). Prison is a prominent tool of law enforcement. However, it can be argued to further exacerbate the housing problems of youth through largely ineffective short-term sentences (IPC 2008). In reality, incarceration offers little more than a band-aid solution. Any solutions it does provide are grossly outweighed by their long term negative effects. As one street youth warns, *“don’t put [youth] in jail. It’s the way I learned my stuff...It’s the worst thing to do to help someone”* (McCreary 2002 p7). Lemert’s (1951) Labelling theory also asserts that criminal law should intrude into people’s lives as little as possible. This is to avoid adding further labels to street youth’s already stigmatized existence (Waxman 1997). McKnight highlights, we put so many resources into criminal justice systems, yet society seems less just and less secure (McKnight 1995). It could be argued that all that really seems to be achieved by prison is the satisfaction of misguided appetites for harsh punishment, and the further entrenchment of its use in the public psyche.

The ethos of modern criminal justice is almost wholly based on retribution and punishment, with little room left for rehabilitation or reform. A problem with an over-reliance on punishment is that it is reactive and actually does very little to address the underlying causes of crime. It could be argued that a prison sentence can offer a coercive power for engagement with treatment services. However, the success of mandated treatment is largely questionable (McSweeney and Hough 2005). Prisons provide little room for people to truly

transform lives due to a culture of deindividualization, degradation, violence and fear. DEYAS has a unique understanding of the problems that lead to crime and the detrimental effects of the justice system on youth. This places them in a prime position to advocate on behalf of their clients as to the inappropriateness of criminal justice interventions. A recommendation for DEYAS in this area is to use their knowledge as a platform to encourage more effective solutions, and raise awareness of the negative effects of punishment on already marginalized youth.

Crime Prevention

Instead of relying on ineffective solutions, the only sure way to deal with crime effectively is to prevent it from occurring in the first place. Criminal enforcement is an undeniable necessity. However, it could be argued that a considerable proportion of public money would be better spent on more preventative measures (Tilley 2005). There is an old saying, "*an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure*" (Dershowitz 2007 p29). Organisations like DEYAS have a powerful contribution to make to crime prevention in the way that they address the issue of social, and not criminal, justice. DEYAS does not deal with crime reactively, punishing or stigmatising youth for their involvement. Instead, they seek to empower them and alleviate the conditions that make crime a perceived necessity.

The same themes repeatedly emerge as to the underlying causes of crime and the people who are most likely to become involved (Einstadter and Henry 2006). Poverty, disconnected youth and drug problems are all themes that DEYAS deals with on a daily basis. DEYAS may not fall under the umbrella of a 'criminal justice' agency per se. However, DEYAS's preventative capabilities with regard to crime are clear. According to Newburn and Souhami (2005), youth need to be diverted from the use of custody, diverted from formal criminal justice processing, and most effectively, diverted from involvement in crime in the first place. DEYAS does this by helping with drug problems, changing life circumstances and reducing a perceived lack of alternatives. Non-judgemental support is also pivotal in diverting youth away from crime. For crime prevention to be most effective, it is best approached at a point in people's lives where circumstances are most easily changed. This speaks loudly to a need to engage youth before criminal lifestyles have the chance to become too firmly entrenched. DEYAS's youth mandate is perfect for this, especially in their educational work with at-risk youth.

It should be noted that DEYAS does not include crime prevention in their stated mandate. This could be because of the negative connotations that any 'criminal justice' agency has for troubled youth. However, a crime prevention platform could be incredibly beneficial to DEYAS, especially in terms of increasing public support and funding. In turn this would greatly benefit their clients. A key and final recommendation for DEYAS is to actively promote their importance in the realm of crime prevention. Much work is needed to convince

the public of the benefits of prevention over quick-fix and punitive criminal justice solutions. However, alternative solutions do not just benefit youth; they reduce crime and give youth the opportunity to benefit the rest of society.

CONCLUSION

A recent publication by the Vancouver Foundation (2008), found that *“everyday in Vancouver 400-600 young people between the ages of 16 and 24 are homeless or at risk of being homeless”*. According to Gilvarry, the complexity and seriousness of youth homelessness makes the availability of services like DEYAS *‘particularly pertinent’* (Gilvarry 1998 p281). The Downtown Eastside Youth Activities Society plays a crucial role in the delivery of services for street youth on Vancouver’s notorious Downtown Eastside. Where services are not provided directly by DEYAS, they also have an equally important role to play in terms of support, guidance and direction.

The Republic of East Vancouver newspaper describes DEYAS as *“a model non-governmental organization in the downtown eastside. Its structure, goals, and politics typify many such organizations in the area”*. It also highlights that *“a critical assessment of DEYAS’s record would contribute to a useful assessment of these types of organizations throughout the area”* (Republic 2004). This paper identifies five key challenges that act as barriers to DEYAS in their functioning and the realization of their goals. In turn, it has implications for other non-profit organizations, organizations operating in disadvantaged communities, and also anyone dealing with the issues of youth homelessness in general.

The first key barrier identified by this paper is the difficulty of securing resources and funding. According to McKnight, *“public budgets are becoming*

strained under the service load" (p37). As a non-profit organization dealing with people on the DTES, the interests of DEYAS falls dishearteningly low down on society's agenda. This is important because DEYAS's insight into effective solutions mean little without the necessary backing and support to promote them. DEYAS's funding difficulties have recently led to the closure of their detoxification facility and are in danger of affecting their vital youth outreach program. DEYAS needs to work hard to seek out new long-term funding relationships and promote the 'deservingness' of their clientele amongst the plethora of society's deserving causes.

The second challenge for DEYAS is engaging youth and gaining access to a hidden and often reluctant client base. Once relationships are established they also need to work hard to maintain them and retain youth in services. DEYAS's youth outreach program plays a pivotal role for many youth in their transition from street life. As DEYAS (2008) highlights, it "*offers youths avenues of hope and opportunity that are otherwise unavailable...over time, this becomes a lifeline to many individuals sometimes even long after they have left the destructiveness of the streets*". However, more work needs to be done to develop effective working relationships with other agencies. This is essential so that youth can gain access to a full range of necessary and developmentally appropriate services. New funding avenues must also be sought out to ensure that this valuable service can continue to serve as DEYAS's key link to their clients and the surrounding community.

The third barrier that faces DEYAS surrounds the myths or stereotypes that cling so tenaciously to the issue of youth homelessness. Public perceptions of the causes of homelessness often result in a false and condemnatory understanding of the problem. This can greatly hinder DEYAS in their support, which in turn can affect the client. DEYAS are currently working relentlessly to educate the public of the realities of youth homelessness. DEYAS's community education and awareness efforts also serve as a vital preventative tool in discouraging at-risk youth from a life on the streets.

One of the key areas where negative misconceptions prevail is in youth's involvement with substance-abuse. DEYAS have extensive experience with the drug-using population and purport that a 'four pillar' approach is imperative to dealing with them effectively. DEYAS's penultimate challenge is to promote an accurate understanding of addiction and ensure that it is dealt with in the most effective manner. DEYAS acknowledges the overriding importance of treatment as a prerequisite for a stable life. Their understandings of drug-use also mean that they are great advocates for the benefits of harm reduction. Harm reduction is a vital and indispensable element of the approach required to deal with substance abuse effectively, especially in an environment as entrenched with drug use as Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. DEYAS's community pick-up and needle exchange therefore provide an essential service to both drug-user and community at large. Their educational work also has an important preventative function for potential drug-users. Unfortunately, however, more work need to be

done to educate the public to the benefits of harm reduction, as it is often misinterpreted as enabling or condoning drug-use.

Closely related to the issue of drug-use is the issue of crime. The fifth and final barrier facing DEYAS is a suggested criminalization of the behaviours associated with homelessness. Crime and Homelessness are inextricably related. However, the relationship is complex. Hutson and Liddiard (1994) describe how the explanation of a problem should determine the solution. However, there seems to be noticeable disparity between the researched causes of people's involvement in crime, and the solutions employed to deal with them. DEYAS needs to discourage the use of punitive and reactive criminal justice interventions because of the detrimental effects they can have on already stigmatized youth. They also need to make more use of their clear potential for preventing crime. DEYAS understands the underlying causes of crime, drug-use and life on the street in general. They need to continue to use their position as an advocacy NGO to promote the most realistic and effective solutions to the public and influence policy makers at the highest possible levels.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Production of evaluation and outcome data. At a minimum, DEYAS should try to publicize individual success stories in a formal research context. Due to funding constraints, research could be best approached through work with universities and university or practicum students.
- Develop new strategies for when it encounters conflicts with other agencies. Eg. Joint strategy meetings, finding shared policy interests for approaching funding, working together to adjust in-take procedures and criteria.
- Work with other agencies and use advocacy position in order to promote broader social and structural change
- Educate the public to the realities for homelessness and continue to bridge gap between clients and potential supporters or funders.
- Use position as an advocacy NGO to promote the most effective solutions to involvement with drug use and crime.
- Prioritize existing fundraising efforts and volunteer drives to ensure the continuation of DEYAS's vital youth outreach program.
- Promote value of work for preventing crime and seek support from a crime prevention angle.

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