

& WINE STORE

DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE SPEAKS UP!





The DTES Neighbourhood House is located on the traditional territory of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Peoples.

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The background of the page is a grayscale photograph of the exterior of the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House. The building has a sign above the entrance that reads "DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSE".

DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSE

Let's Speak Up! is a participant-led initiative that involves learning together about issues that affect our community, and working alongside others to advocate for change.

INTRODUCTION

In 2020, Let's Speak Up! (LSU!) embarked on a challenge to conduct a community survey in the Downtown Eastside to assess and learn more about the challenges the DTES community and neighbours were facing. LSU! is a project focused on accessible civic engagement, guided by the interests and focus of community members. The intention of the survey was to connect and

engage with our neighbours and to take our findings to municipal and provincial governments. We created a survey that covered 8 different topics (**recreation, healthcare, food, housing, hygiene, education/training, harm reduction/substance use, and social services/community resources**) and allowed us to do a broad investigation into social issues that impact the DTES community. Through the process of conducting the survey, it was clear that while we were able to see what challenges our neighbours were going through, we did not have the means to address the many concerns that were brought forward by our neighbours, we found this to be a good place to start to question and think through grassroots social change.

Responding to community consultations held by the City of Vancouver and other government bodies, LSU! wanted to produce

a survey that was *written by community members, facilitated by community members, and for the community*. We hope that this document will show that community members have a strong understanding of the challenges and barriers in the neighbourhood, and inspire others to organize within the community around the issues that matter most to them.

PROCESS

Over the course of a few months in late 2019, the LSU! group wrote the survey questions, determining which topics would be most important to include in the survey, starting from over 50 topics to just 8 after editing down. After receiving training around participatory action research, the LSU! group finalized the content of the survey together. The survey facilitation process took place in February 2020, where the DTES Neighbourhood House and Embers (formerly

Eastside Works) were the two hubs where the surveys were conducted. Each survey had a total of 38 questions with room for additional comments on each topic, with between 3–7 questions per topic and had a mix of ranking, yes/no, and short answer questions. The questions were guided by an understanding of the social determinants of health.

155 surveys were conducted in total ($n=155$), and at the beginning of March 2020 LSU! took a 6-month hiatus due to COVID-19. LSU! hired an external researcher, Soroush Moallef, from the BCCSU to support us in the data analysis and data entry process as well as offering feedback for our research and survey process. This report includes reflections and direction from those who facilitated and wrote the initial surveys regarding the process and how to move forward with this form of community-led research.

TECHNOLOGY

19.5%

of respondents report not having access to a computer.

24.5%

report not being comfortable using a computer.

SOCIAL SERVICES

41.9%

of respondents report not having a government form of identification.

56.1%

say that they have advocates in the community

Those that do not access social services or seek advocacy services say **long wait times** are the biggest deterrent and barrier to access.

RECREATION

WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR ACCESSIBLE RECREATIONAL SPACES/ ACTIVITIES?

59%

of respondents use “recreational services”

This includes community centres, gyms, public pools, and other accessible gathering spaces.

Some respondents said that they would like the **FINANCIAL & PHYSICAL BARRIERS** to access to be reduced.

HOUSING

55.5%

of survey respondents said they were either homeless or underhoused.

34.8%

said they had no access to pest control services in their building.

59.4%

said that they found housing services inadequate.

“I don't want to live in an SRO with vermin or rats again, in all my years of being homeless not one person has attempted to speak with me or my options about housing”

“Housing services are too full, seems impossible to get in. Underhoused in my SRO, feels like I am still homeless because of infestations. Infestations can be toxic, people or toxic insects, bed bugs”

Pests are a clearly a large problem in many SROs. Housing management is not adequately maintaining the conditions of the buildings. This is a safety and health issue for tenants.

HOW CAN WE CHANGE THE HOUSING SYSTEM TO MEET OUR NEEDS? WHAT ARE YOUR DEMANDS?

FOOD

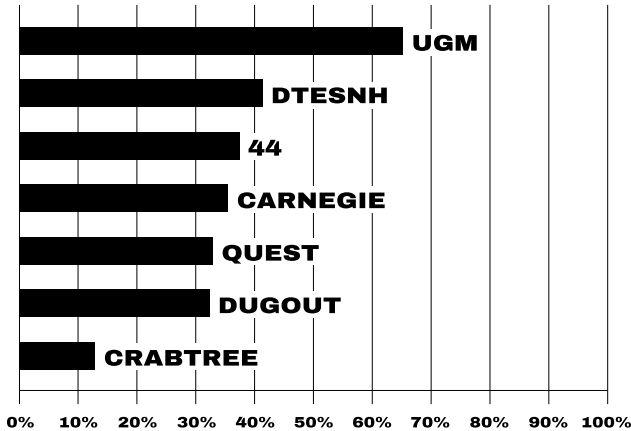
91%

of survey respondents said that they use low-cost food services

31.6%

of respondents stated that they had no access to cooking facilities

Where respondents access low-cost food:



% of survey respondents that use these low-cost food services

IN ADDITION TO ADEQUATE HOUSING, WHAT OTHER WAYS COULD FOOD SECURITY IMPROVE IN THE DTES FOR THOSE WITH NO ACCESS TO COOKING FACILITIES?

ARE YOUR FOOD NEEDS BEING MET? IF NOT, WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE?

“I only occasionally use free food services. But for brief periods twice per day. I feel like this can effectively eat up a whole day leaving little time for employment seeking.”

HEALTH

30.3%

of respondents reported not having a family doctor

Some people also mentioned the lack of Indigenous approaches to healing taken at hospitals, and would like to see traditional healing practices.

82.6%

stated they were covered under a healthcare plan

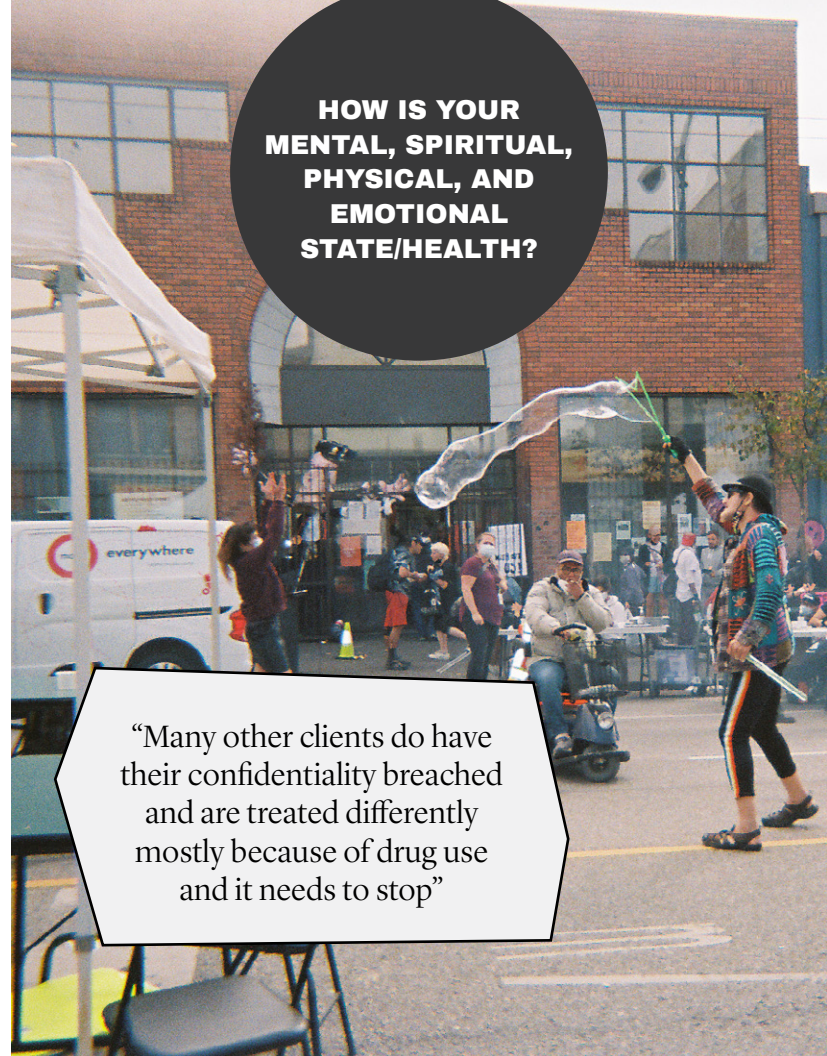
23%

felt that their confidentiality was not respected while accessing medical help

WHAT CHANGES TO HEALTHCARE DO YOU WANT TO SEE IN THE FUTURE?

HOW IS YOUR MENTAL, SPIRITUAL, PHYSICAL, AND EMOTIONAL STATE/HEALTH?

“Many other clients do have their confidentiality breached and are treated differently mostly because of drug use and it needs to stop”







HARM REDUCTION & SUBSTANCE USE

63.9%

of survey respondents are aware of where to find and access harm reduction supplies in the DTES.

24.5%

stated that they use safe injection site services.

47.7%

have completed Naloxone training.

51%

of respondents (that is, 79 people) stated that they have been to some form of treatment for substance use.

61 out of 79

respondents found that their treatment was helpful.

EDUCATION & TRAINING

27%

of respondents state that education or upgrading is important or necessary to achieving their goals.

43.2%

say that there are no upgrading opportunities that are appropriate for them in the DTES.

44.5%

face **FINANCIAL BARRIERS** to education or training. Other barriers that respondents face include **MENTAL (34.8%)** and **PHYSICAL (32.9%)**.

ARE THERE ANY NEW
SKILLS/KNOWLEDGE
YOU'D LIKE TO GAIN?

“I would like to see more holistic education, not just book learning—learning through dialogue”

WHAT JOB OR ROLE IN
THE COMMUNITY WOULD
YOU LIKE TO HAVE?

HYGIENE

14.8%

of survey respondents reported not having regular access to drinking water

12.3%

reported not having access to hot water.

WHAT DOES YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD NEED IN ORDER TO BE CLEANER AND MORE HYGIENIC?

CONCLUSION

The process—conducting the surveys and connecting with fellow community members and neighbours—was very impactful and meaningful to LSU! members. Some were surprised by just how much people had to say and were pleased to have an opportunity to simply connect with strangers or acquaintances.

Through the process, we found that we were able to conduct surveys and research through grassroots methods, where community members are writing the questions and conducting the interviews. Many of the questions in the LSU! survey were similar to questions asked in other surveys conducted by academics and “experts.” This process was very different in that community members were not only guiding the questions asked but also direct how the results will be distributed and used. Community-led

research is important as it puts power into the hands of those who are vital to the research process. **Research that is done by the community allows for the power to be situated locally and to build connections and capacity within the neighbourhood.**

In the future, LSU! hopes to continue doing research and surveys on more specific topics (for example: affordability, housing, etc.) in greater depth to offer recommendations to municipal and provincial governments.

We found that all of the issues covered in the survey were interwoven with each other. There are parallel challenges that deeply influence one another. Challenges associated with housing are related to barriers to employment, which are related to barriers related to health, and so on. While it is daunting to see so many issues build on each other, ways to address these challenges lie in taking seriously

the concerns and ideas from community. For example, it is those who have experience navigating the challenges of displacement who will know what gaps exist in the current housing system. Implementing solutions and returning power to the people requires political courage and an engaged community.

Although the city has offered solutions to address the gaps in housing, mental health, and affordability, many of their approaches come from a top-down process. **There is little meaningful community input, and there are high barriers to participation in city-initiated consultation processes.**

Even some of the services and supports that were offered in the community by city services were unknown to many residents. There is clearly a large gap that exists between city government and residents. Many said they were let down by



**“ALL THE [CITY]
PANELS I’VE EVER
BEEN ON HAVE BEEN
DEFEATED”
- LSU! MEMBER**

outreach services and attempts the city has made towards inclusion. Let us ask how residents can have a real voice in what happens in our city?

How can decision-makers build a stronger relationship and foster trust with community members? Where are the opportunities to collaborate across organizations and groups to amplify our voices? Is the city or provincial government willing to engage in a deep, relational way with residents?

To address this attitude held by community members while engaging with the City, how can the people shape the narrative, dialogue, and action to implement change? LSU! calls upon you, whoever is reading this, to think about how you can build your community and advocate for what you think is right. Pushing back from the bottom-up is the best way to see the change that we all need.

LSU! MEMBER BIOS

My name is **Marvin Joseph Delorme**. My spirit name is **Grizzly Child**. I'm from Muskeg River, Alberta. My language is Mountain Cree. I live by three words: ...Always Help Others. I love my people in the downtown Eastside. They are my family. I've been walking the Red Road for 19 years. Welcome to the Red Road. I love, honor, and respect all my people in the Downtown Eastside. All my relations!!



I'm **Paul Henry** I live in the Downtown Eastside, I like to volunteer in the Hood on occasions, alone time is sacred to me. I'm a part of the leadership program at NH to learn about the community were I live to improve the quality of living life in the Eastside.



My name's **Dianne**. I look outside of myself, that's why I stay in this neighbourhood. I didn't know that I cared, but I really do. I'm bouncing back and forth as I go in spirit and I'm pulling through. I love you all. I love the effect everyone has on me.

I have a way to make others feel like they can talk to me. My focus is to stay with what I have right now, the Neighbourhood House and the Tech Cafe for example. I don't want to hover around my house. I'm very happy to share my skills with people. Nothing pays in the same way as being part of your community.

My name is **Bill** and I volunteer at CCAP and LSU! and have been involed with CAN and PRC. I'm on the DTES NH Board and enjoy meeting the people at the Neighbourhood House, serving food, and getting to know people by name.





Dan has been here since 2007. He came for the Olympics and never left! He's enjoyed being in Let's Speak Up!—getting out there and being part of the community.



Will I Am

We want to thank all former LSU members who helped do the research for this survey, and everyone who participated in the survey!



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Downtown Eastside
Neighbourhood House

