

# VAN CCAPO PEER WAGE COMMUNITY CONSULTATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Revision 1.1

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*This report was developed on the stolen land of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the territories of the xʷməθkwəy̕əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səl̓ílwətaḥ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.*

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## Executive Summary

In Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES), many peer support workers are paid under the minimum wage and are considered "honoraria based volunteers". As consequence, large disparities exist across peer support wages in the community, especially for those who work intense frontline roles, often frontline overdose prevention.

In order to sketch out an equitable, and community based standard for peer wages, the Vancouver Community Coalition Against Prohibition and Overdose (VAN CCAPO) held a community consultation at the Japanese Hall, with 39 knowledgeable community members and Downtown Eastside residents, in the hopes of developing a clear vision of what should be done to standardize employment conditions for those who work some of the most challenging jobs in our community. During this event, community members and residents of the DTES gave their unbiased input during an open mic, and filled out a short survey. Our efforts reveal that, when conversations about wages arise, and if allowed to speak without the fear of punishment, many honoraria paid peers express feelings of disempowerment and under recognition. Further, and by extension of the nature of its marginalization, this peer labor force remains one of the last exploitable workforces, and remains undercompensated and undervalued.

Our research further reveals that peers remain precariously placed in easily exploitable roles, and peer workers encounter a unique set of difficulties when navigating the patchwork system of employment and supports that they are faced with. This report discloses that, rather than being set with human dignity in mind, payment rates have been set in order to save money, with a specific focus on any given institution's bottom-line. In the face of this economic violence, the VAN CCAPO believes it is time for mass systemic change, and to this end, and in addition to the below wage standards, that peers should be offered benefits, sick time, vacation time, and other social and mental health supports. Ultimately, we propose the following wage standardization:

<b>Labor Type</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Wage Rate</b>
<b>Unskilled</b>	Jobs that don't require a specific background and that most people can perform.	Tied to a living wage.
<b>Relational</b>	Frontline jobs where a person's lived experience and developed skills are used to support others.	\$30/hour; tied to inflation.
<b>Advisory</b>	Jobs where one is required to give specific strategic input based on their lived experience at a meeting, document review, or in any other capacity.	\$35/hour; tied to inflation.

## I - Background (Why Are We Doing This?)

Many institutions in Vancouver have been using “peer” support workers (peer workers) to bolster their service reach and to fill systemic holes for quite some time. Generally speaking, peer labor can be classified as work done between folks who experience barriers to accessing health and social services and who work in a relationship of experimental sympathy in regards to overcoming said barriers. The work often takes the form of counselling, systems navigation, advocacy, and frequently, direct health crisis intervention. Due to the nature of sympathetic symbiosis generated by peer relationships, peer labor is generally employed as specialized type labor that aims to bolster support for those dealing with marginalization in the face of systematic violence; most frequently in the forms of helping those dealing with mental health diagnoses, issues with chaotic substance use, etc. find support in an under-resourced world.

In Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside (DTES), many of these peer workers are paid under the minimum wage and are considered “honoraria based volunteers”. As consequence, large disparities exist across peer wages in the community, especially for those who work very intense frontline roles. These roles are often frontline overdose prevention, which expose peer workers to tremendous trauma. If allowed to speak without fear of reprisal, when conversations about wages arise, many of peer workers express feelings of disempowerment and under recognition. Further, and by extension of the nature of its marginalization, this peer labor force remains one of the last exploitable workforces, and remains undercompensated and undervalued.

After a lengthy community discussion and planning, the Vancouver Community Coalition Against Prohibition and Overdose (VAN CCAPO) put together a community consultation by-and-for People With Lived and Living Experience (PWLE) in the DTES around peer wage standards. Our hope is that this document can serve as best practice guidance, as it takes direct feedback from folks working in the neighborhood, and that organizations can use it as a guideline to direct immediate increases to peer wages. This document is further intended to supplant the use of the *BCCDC Payment Standards for Short Term Engagements*,<sup>1</sup> which seems to be a go-to frame of reference despite its non-applicability to most peer employment situations, primarily as it is designed as a standard “short term engagements”, and isn’t designed to set wage standards for regular employment.

At the end of the day and ultimately, the purpose of this by-and-for community consultation, was to empower peers to help them understand the value of their labor, and to take action against institutions undercompensating some of their most valuable workers.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Educational%20Materials/Epid/Other/peer\\_payment-guide\\_2018.pdf](http://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Educational%20Materials/Epid/Other/peer_payment-guide_2018.pdf)

## II - Process (This is What We Did)

In order to sketch out a clear vision for Peer Wage standards, the Vancouver Community Coalition Against Prohibition and Overdose (VAN CCAPO) held a community consultation at the Japanese Hall, with 39 knowledgeable community members and Downtown Eastside residents, in the hopes of developing a clear vision of what should be done with peer wage standards. Community members and residents of the DTES gave their unbiased input during an open mic, and filled out a short survey. Quotes from this event have been used in this report to bolster our themes, and the full transcribed text is available in *Appendix B*, which contains verbatim notes taken during the speakers testimonials. The survey results, pre-analysis, are also available in *Appendix A*.

## III - Report Evaluation Methodology

This report was initiated by concerned community members to determine to what extent wage gaps exist, to identify solutions to wage disparity, and to inform stakeholders about how to set their wage standards and ethics towards peer workers. This report involved a mixed method design. Quantitative data was collected by VAN CCAPO community organizers via a short survey, which was analyzed to demonstrate trends. Qualitative data was collected from peer testimony, more specifically, via statement given at the community town hall.

## IV – Key Findings

The following are key findings of our quantitative and qualitative investigation. In reviewing these findings, it should be noted that they reflect data gathered from a relatively small cohort. Despite its small size, the wealth of knowledge that was brought to bear at the meeting and the themes that emerged in conversation warrant noting. These themes are:

- Demands for higher wages
- Demands for at least \$25 per hour across the board for all peer work
- Demands that no one should be getting paid under minimum wage
- Demands that highlight the need for pensions, sick time, vacation pay, extra pay for evenings and weekends, and “danger pay” / “(bio)hazard pay”
- The importance of peer labor as unique and skilled labor
- Issues with exploitation, and equity
- Contentions around and support for unionization
- The need for support and community building, and the consequences of other intersectional problems (i.e. trauma)

## A - Quantitative Results

For more information on survey responses please reference Appendix A.

From survey results, at a macro level:

- Housing
  - o The majority of folks lived in private SROs (54%)
  - o Another substantial majority (23%) lived in social housing or BC Housing
- Employment
  - o 69% of folks in attendance were employed
  - o The vast majority of folks in attendance were employed by the SRO-Collaborative (13), with representation from the Coalition of Peers Dismantling the Drug War (1), Lookout Society (1), the PHS (2), Raincity (2), the Salvation Army (1), VANDU (1), VCH (1), WAHRS (1), and private industry (2)
- Current wages
  - o 3 people were employed at \$10/hour
  - o 1 person was employed at \$11/hour
  - o 2 people were employed at \$12/hour
  - o 15 people were employed at \$20/hour<sup>2</sup>
  - o 1 person was employed at \$21/hour
  - o 1 person was employed at \$27/hour
  - o One outlier was paid \$500/week
- When asked how peer work in the DTES could be improved:
  - o 20 people mentioned that higher wages were important
  - o 17 people placed importance on employment security and opportunity for training and advancement
  - o 12 people stressed the need for peer employers to be more accountable to peers and peer needs
  - o 8 people highlighted the fact that peers should be paid a living wage
  - o 4 people wrote that peers should be paid at least minimum wage
  - o 3 people mentioned the need for unionizing
  - o 3 people thought peer wages should be taxed
  - o 2 people thought that peers themselves needed to be more accountable
  - o 2 people thought that benefits were important
- When asked about what the wage standard should be:
  - o 3 people said it should be at least minimum wage
  - o 4 people said it should be \$15-20/hour
  - o 4 people said it should be \$20/hour
  - o 4 people said it should be \$20-25/hour

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<sup>2</sup> A large contingency of these folks were employed by the SRO-C

- 10 people said it should be \$25/hour
- 5 people said it should be a living wage
- 3 people said it should be \$25-35/hour

## B - Qualitative Results

*For the full transcript of the town hall, please see appendix B.*

From analysis of the transcripts at a macro level:

### I - Current Wages

Many folks who spoke about their current wages noted that they receive below minimum wage, and stressed the unacceptability of this standard. Moreover, folks also spoke to the fact that they thought they were not being compensated adequately for their work, and that wage disparities exist, even for folks working the same job at the same institution. In the words of the peers:

“If you work at MOPS you get 15 dollars an hour [...] and if you work at the window out on the street collecting needles you get paid 10 dollars per hour.”

“I work for Lookout Society. And I work as one of the peer washing workers. 4 months out of the year we get paid five dollars an hour, our wages get cut back from 10 dollars per hour because we have to pay for our Christmas presents.”

“I’ve been paid as low as five to twenty three bucks an hour.”

“I’m kind of getting sick of getting paid eleven dollars an hour myself, but it’s a volunteer position, so I figure it was never written in.”

### II - Desired Wages

When speaking to their desired wages, peers highlighted the precarious nature of their situations in regards to job security and barriers to achieving higher wages in the face of institutional pressures. Nevertheless, the vast majority of community members believed they should be paid a living wage, or at bare minimum, a minimum wage. In the words of the peers:

“First of all it’s the law in BC to get fifteen an hour, that’s minimum wage, that’s what it’s supposed to be. Anyone starting at any job, the minimum wage is \$15.45 or whatever it is right now. So that’s where you start, that’s the law. We live in BC don’t we?”

“You need twenty bucks an hour to basically be considered minimum wage”

“Wages should be brought up to about twenty five an hour, and regardless whether or not they do get bumped up, all wages should be at least minimum [fifteen dollars per hour].”

“It’s BC law to get fifteen dollars an hour [... we should get] 15, 20, 25, 30, 40. What do doctors get? They save lives, we save lives.”

“The lowest paid for short term workers should at least be five dollars more than minimum wage for entry level people. [...] They obviously deserve more than just five dollars above minimum wage, they should probably be getting maybe like 15-20 more than minimum wage.”

“I think twenty five [dollars per hour] would be a much better thing for people”

“[Wages] should be at least twenty dollars per hour.”

“I think a fair wage looks like at least minimum wage”

“You deserve at least minimum wage with holiday pay. [...] And I think really, you deserve twenty five or thirty for this kind of work.”

“Wages should have to be at least 20 dollars, because 21-22 dollars an hour is a livable wage in Vancouver, so they claim.”

“If you’re getting \$11 an hour from Rain City, if they’re treating you like an employee and you’re getting an honorarium, I’d say press for at least minimum wage. I really think you deserve 25-30 dollars per hour, especially if you’re taking care of people that are overdosing. You are the backbone of all of this, so go for it.”

“The people are being paid eleven dollars an hour, that is just ridiculous. No matter what you are doing, you should get minimum wage at the very least. Any other job, picking up needles, dealing with stuff like that, you get hazard pay, you get paid extra working late hours, being on call. That should all go into any type of program whether it’s government funded or not.”

“As far as that stat goes, minimum wage is 8 years behind. So right now we’re 8 years behind, so 20 dollars an hour right? It’s gonna’ take us another 8 years to catch up, we’re gonna’ be another 5 dollars behind again and again and again, 8 years behind.”

Currently we should be at 20 dollars an hour, that stat was taken 2 years ago, so it's already changed so it should be 22 an hour right now. . That's the current standard of living that we need in order to just live in Vancouver."

"I'm on the board of the SRO-C. Nicole was quite forthright about what we do there. In our last meeting at the SROC we were talking about wages. And we had a vote on — \$20 in this most expensive city in North America, \$20 is eh... not good enough. So we voted and decided that we're going to pay our peers \$25 an hour coming up fairly soon. [...] I think we should have parity amongst all our peer workers. When I hear 11 per hour i go what the fuck is this? Really? 11\$ an hour, that was 10 or 12 years ago, ok more than that, ok 40 years ago. I remember when the wage was 3.65, but that could buy you stuff."

"The thing about \$20 an hour now, what does that buy you? [...We definitely need parity. Everybody should be getting a minimum of 20\$ per hour. I mean we say, \$50 an hour."

"I think everyone should be paid a living wage of not a penny less than what the city of Vancouver pays its employees, which I believe is about 20-21 an hour, with all the benefits that come with it."

"Look at the nursing staff and how much they make. 35 per hour for us is not unheard of, it's not too much. Shit, they make the same amount of money. Not everyone lives in subsidized housing, they have to pay increased rent, buy groceries, pay your cable bill, pay your phone. 25 per hour is shit, it's nothing, it's absolutely nothing, you can't make it on that. [...] We should fight really hard for at the very least 35 dollars hour and a pension, god-damn-it."

### *III - Importance of Peer Labor*

Although often peer labor is seen as unskilled or even so-called "work of last resort", peers at the community consultation highlight the fact that peer work is *indeed* skilled labor, which requires a specific skillset and temperament. To this end, the irreplaceable nature of peers as community supports has been largely exploited and undercompensated, especially given the unique skillset required to be a peer support. In the words of the peers:

"How many of the higher ups in these organizations could do our jobs? Like I've worked in 3 different overdose rooms. You can't tell me one of those fuckers could come in there and do the same job that we did and do it as well as well. There's no fucking way. Excuse my language but it's true, it's true, it's absolutely true. They are scared of us, they do not know how to handle someone that's dropped, they don't know how to

handle somebody that's having a seizure, they don't know how to handle somebody that's freaking out. But that's our jobs. And yet they're getting paid 50 bucks an hour and we're getting paid peanuts. I don't think that's right."

"There's no way that management should be paid \$43 dollars per hour to just watch Ray pour coffee and tea and juice to everybody and work his ass off. I've seen it, that guy works his ass off and everybody else does too at all of the injection sites, at all of the SROs, whatever you're working for peer support everybody works their asses off."

#### *IV - Exploitation and Inequity*

Just as peers stressed their fundamental irreplaceability in the face of exploitation, peers also spoke to workplace inequity and the ramifications of the exploitation itself, largely in relationship to their time and labor being undervalued. Peers expressed feeling burnt out and that their skillset was not seen for what it was. Peers also expressed the need for justice in the face of this inequity. In the words of the peers:

"We always seem to be the last people to get parity when it comes to wages. You can't have people in the same organization[, working the same job,] getting one wage and people on the other side getting less, there has to be equality."

"There's this really cool peer education role that got posted, but then why is it posted for 22 dollars an hour? That didn't seem like it was high enough for that work."

"The guy that does the most work is usually the guy that makes ten dollars an hour. Now the supervisor is making twenty three or twenty six dollars an hour."

"Somehow we are just a very easily manipulated means to an end. If there's somebody somewhere that could do something about it, that's what in my opinion I think we need."

"Who's going to do our job if we all quit? Nobody. Because they can't fucking do it. Why can't we all get together as one, everyone wants to unite then let's unite and do what we have to do."

#### *V - Support*

Further, and in the face of their exploitation and unjust pay standards, peers also drew specific concerns around lack supports that should be given credence. Specifically, citing the total lack of mental health and social supports, folks at the consultation elaborated on the impacts of

working traumatic jobs without accessible low barrier support resources. In the words of the peers:

“I was also told directly and definitely that we were covered by the workers compensation board. About a month ago at the building, I work in a hops (housing and overdose prevention site), we suffered 3 deaths in the course of 2 days. People overdosed in the rooms and 2 of the victims had become very close friends of mine in the last 6 years because I worked exclusively at this one building. I became unglued and I was having worrisome thoughts of checking out. I just couldn’t take it anymore. I, for the first time in my life, was willing to admit myself to a psychiatric hospital for evaluation or treatment. I approached my supervisor and inquired about workers compensation and I was laughed at and told that we were not covered by workers compensation and she left it at that. She offered no sympathy, no empathy, no encouragement, and no alternative resources. I felt as if my supervisor could care less if I hung myself. There’s some nasty things going on at least in the organization I work in.”

“There’s nobody here that’s adequate enough to listen to me. It’s even more fucked up than you know the beginning of.”

“We should also have something available to us to go to when we’re stressed out to prevent burnout.”

“It’s not adequate. Most people don’t get any support at all which is completely unacceptable for this type of work, and those people that do get support it’s not adequate.”

“When they do send us to folks to talk about stuff the people are not adequately equipped to fucking deal with what we handle.”

#### *VI - Unions*

The topic of unionization also came up as a solution to current issues of equity and wage disparity. However, and especially after the understanding the ramifications of PHS’ peer unionization, the topic of unionization remained contentious, and the idea that folks would scab and cross strikes for money remained a sticking point. In the words of the peers:

“We gotta work on that all together. Forming a union would be a great idea, if people have any ideas of how to go about doing that, that would be great.”

“I’d say it’s about time to unionize, not just as one separate company but as a whole group of peers.”

“The unions — why can’t we get that happening? We talked about it in Victoria. Let’s do it here. Let’s get the meetings together, let’s form a union and tell these people what they need to hear.”

“We went union now all the senior peers [at PHS] are gone.[...] Unions are not the be all end all.”

“If you want to go on strike, you have to make sure everyone goes out including all the employees from other buildings belonging to the firm you work for.”

## V - Analysis and Omissions

Upon analyzing the aforementioned themes, data, and key findings, the Van CCAPO strongly advises that the current payment rates for people with lived and living experience (PWLLE) **must** be boosted across the board. Moreover, given peers cries for support and stability, more must be done in order to support folks working some of the most specialized and difficult jobs in our community. This includes offering folks sick time, vacation time, benefits, and additional mental health and social supports (i.e. counselling, cultural supports, etc.).

In addition, peers will continue to encounter barriers to conventional forms of payment, such as not having bank accounts, a fixed address, or because they are receiving income assistance. However, we would like to challenge the conventional narrative that it is a peer’s responsibility to ensure specific conditions are met for a fair wage, especially given the nature of their specialization. To this end, institutions should invest more resources into supporting and stabilizing their peer labor force, for example, by helping folks set up bank accounts and helping them to deal with the Canada Revenue Agency and the Ministry of Social Development. Moreover, it is of utmost importance that institutions *should continue to pay cash until such time that folks barriers to accessing services have been removed.*

Although not discussed at length, issues relating to income assistance clawback still remain a large sticking point for peers receiving “income” from any given institution. Noting the significance and routine that many peers have in regards receiving income assistance, the VAN CCAPO believes that it is imperative to not disrupt this relationship until the peer in question reaches a point of stability where they no longer need government assistance. To this end, we believe that more must be done to clarify the Ministry of Health’s income assistance clawback exemption – specifically *MOH4C*.<sup>3</sup> Until this exemption is clarified, it is our firm belief that peers should be allowed to continue to receive income assistance in addition to being paid

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/policies-for-government/bcea-policy-and-procedure-manual/eligibility/income-treatment-and-exemptions>

their wage. In this vein, a new standard of how peer payments are counted against income assistance should be negotiated between peer groups, the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Social Development, and Revenue Services Canada. Further, and perhaps most importantly, just because a peer is receiving income assistance, does not mean that the same peer should be underpaid for their labor. In this regard, and even under our current taxation and income assistance framework, a peer could work half the amount of time at a higher wage, and not encounter clawback. It should be noted that it is perhaps in the interest of the mental health of all peers to be able to work less, and thus, more investment must be put into designing a system that supports rather than exploits.

Another issue that exists in the background is the Request for Proposal (RFP) process, which remains a sticking point in regards to institutional actors not following any peer wage standards. This process, where institutions try to undercut each other in order to gain contracts, needs to end. It remains a race to the bottom, and causes cost cutting where folks should be supported the most, and places a burden that typically impacts the peer labor force the most.

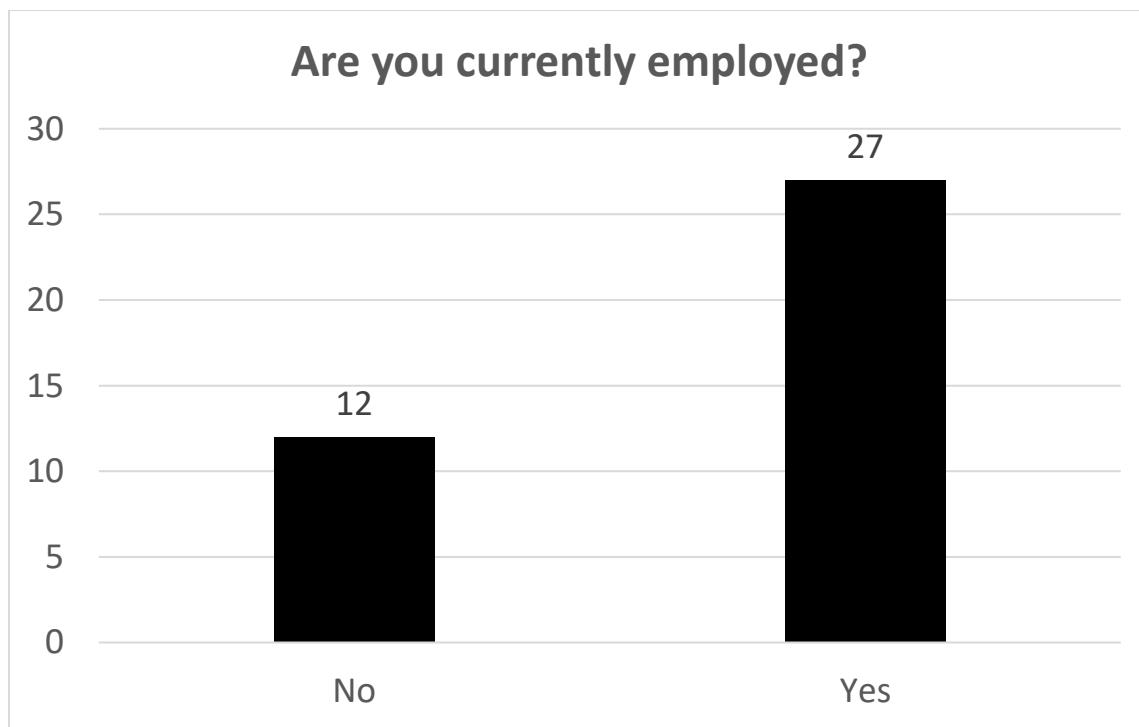
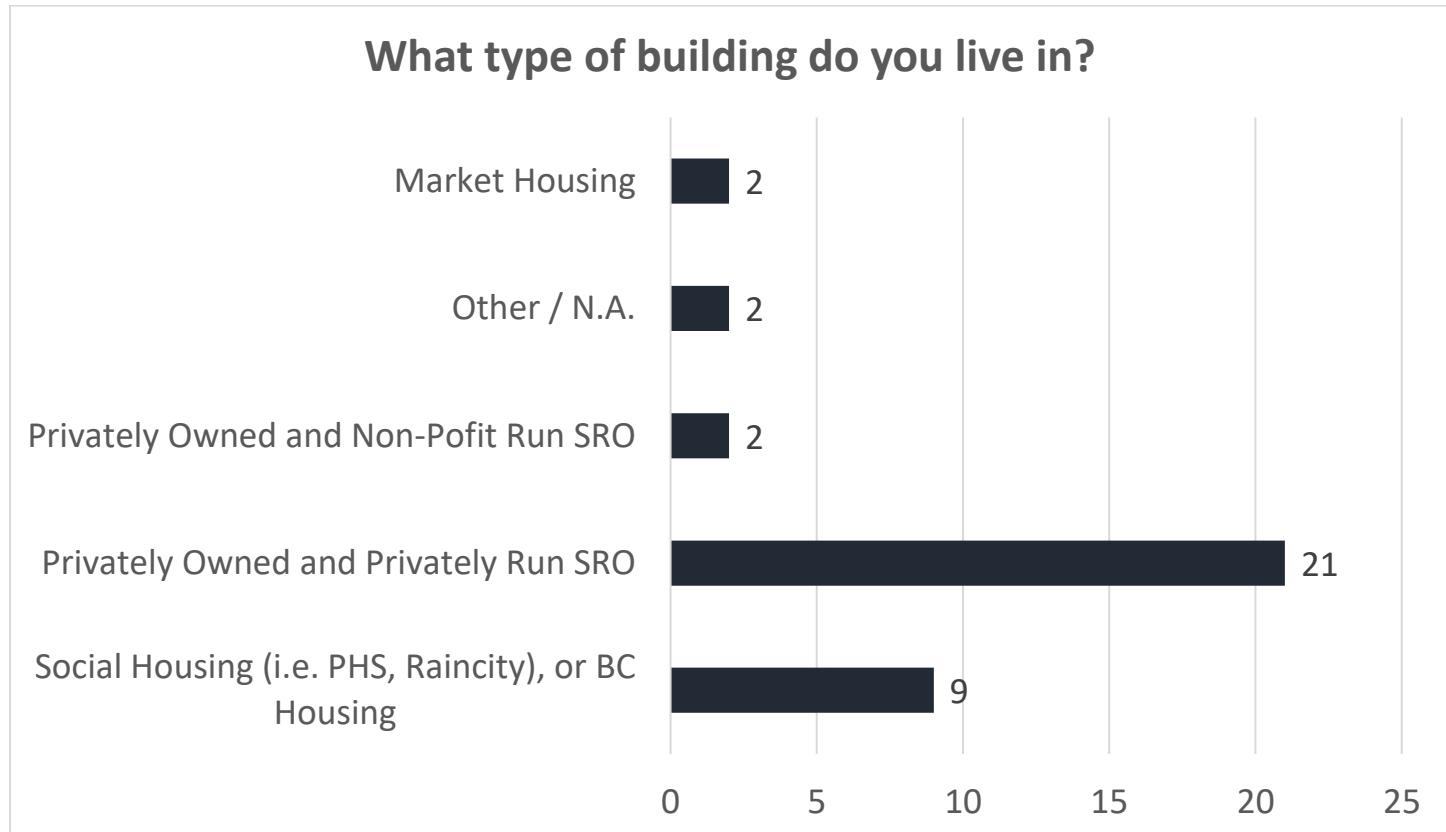
In sum, peers remain precariously placed in easily exploitable roles, and peer workers encounter a unique set of difficulties when navigating the patchwork system of employment they are faced with. Rather than being set with human dignity in mind, payment rates have been set in order to save money with a specific focus on any given institution's bottom-line. In the face of this economic violence, the VAN CCAPO believes it is time for mass systemic change. In addition to the below wage standards, peers should be offered benefits, sick time, vacation time, and other social and mental health supports. Ultimately, the VAN CCAPO would like to propose the following wage grade for anyone paying peers:

<b>Labor Type</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Wage Rate</b>
<b>Unskilled</b>	Jobs that don't require a specific background and that most people can perform.	Tied to a living wage.
<b>Relational</b>	Frontline jobs where a person's lived experience and developed skills are used to support others.	\$30/hour; tied to inflation.
<b>Advisory</b>	Jobs where one is required to give specific strategic input based on their lived experience at a meeting, document review, or in any other capacity.	\$35/hour; tied to inflation.

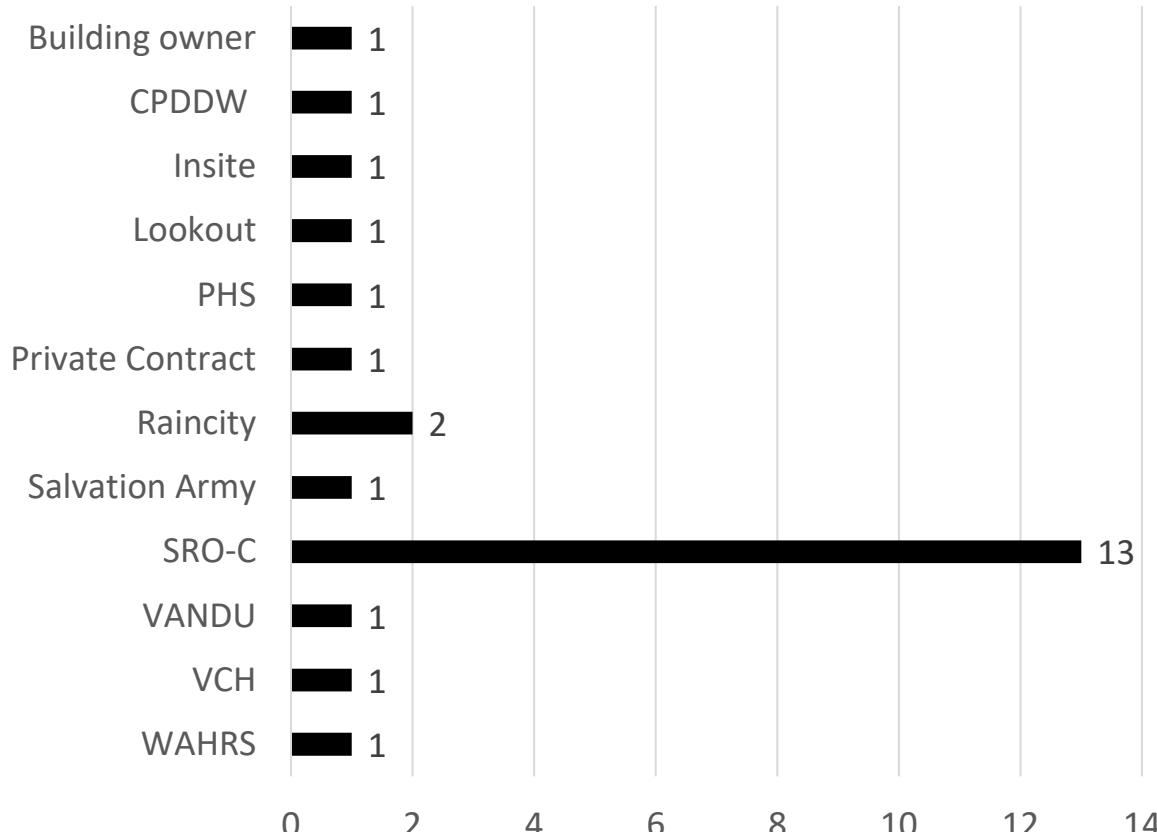
## VI - Conclusion

Peer labor, due to its specialization, remains an integral type of work in many varieties of frontline work and policy advisory. Despite its tremendous benefit, peers are often exploited, undervalued, and undercompensated for their time. The honoraria based peer labor system allows for wage exploitation, and prevents many folks from gaining access to the supports they need to remain well in their positions. Through analysis of both a survey given to PWLLE and their testimony at a community town hall, it has become clear that peers believe they should ***at least be compensated a minimum wage***, and that the vast majority of folks believed that peers should be ***compensated at a living wage***. Focus was also placed importance on employment security, benefits, the opportunity for training and advancement, and the need for peer employers to be more accountable to peers and peer needs. The topics of unionization, taxation, and peer accountability were also raised. In many regards, the overarching theme of this report is that employers are neglecting their duties to their employees, and that our rights as peers may need to be taken back – a do-it-ourselves philosophy – an advocate for ourselves philosophy. To this end, and to conclude, it is now the time for the peer labor force to push to liberate themselves from the hand that dominates them, and to seek the wages that their labor so clearly deserves.

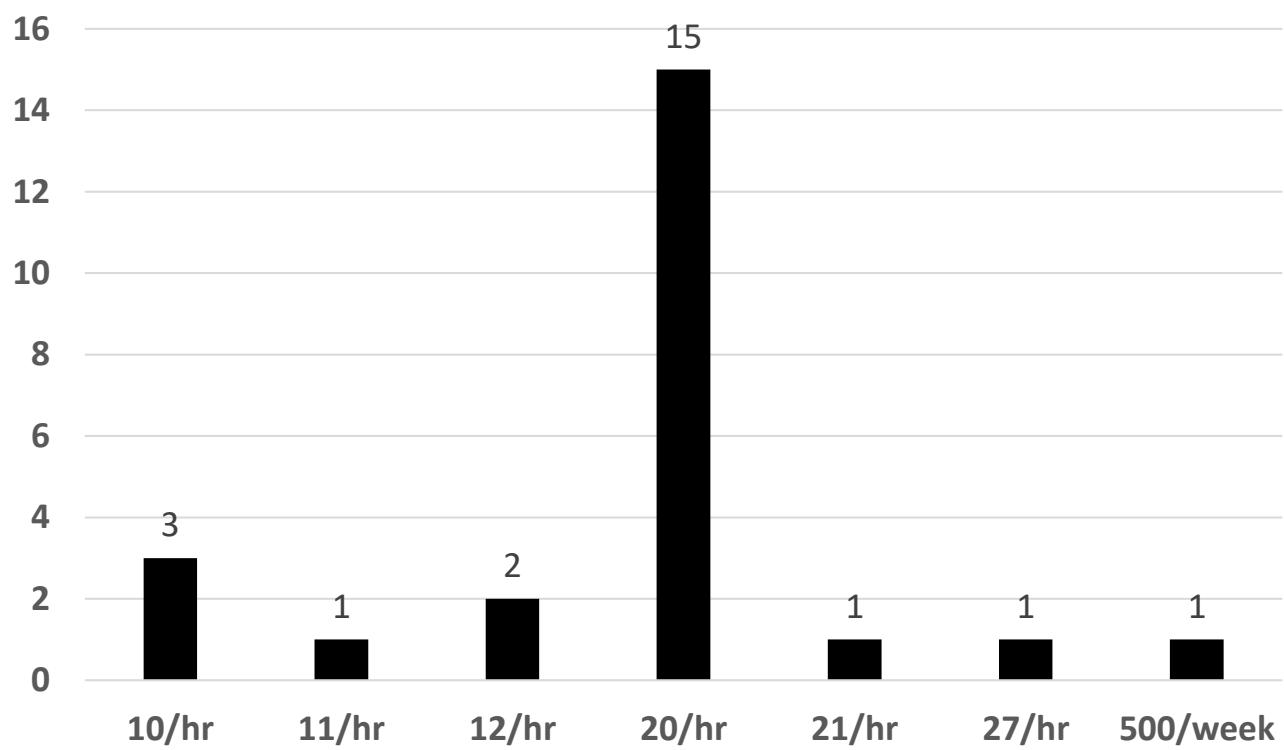
## Appendix A – Survey Results



## Current Employer



## Current Wage



## How do you think peer employment can be improved in the DTES?

1. Higher wages, employee security
2. Union-led, peer pay taxes, living wage
3. Improved by treating it like any other employment, minimum wage, opportunity for other types of training, chance to move up the ladder or expand program. No one should be paid less than minimum wage.
4. More pay
5. I think it would be an improvement if peer workers be held accountable for their behaviours at work ie: falling asleep, going on the nod, or slurring in their speech , because they are far too high at work. No other job would tolerate this.
6. People needed to have commitment, that really have passion for the DTES. Who actually do the work. It is about the community.
7. Even coverage across all jobs, taking into account seniority.
8. Yes, the work people do should be compensated for their efforts the help is necessary, but slavery was abolished for a reason
9. More full time positions rather than 2 or 3 shifts per week.
10. People need to be paid according to the cost of living as we do not all live in subsidized housing. Some are homeless but still care enough about the DTES community. People need to be valued for what they do.
11. First off paying everyone a living wage of minimum \$20/hr. Also the formation of some sort of peer advisory/advocacy board with something like an special ombudsman who can rule on disputes and make binding decisions.
12. Better communication between the employers and employees
13. Pay people closely to what jobs are being done. If the jobs are similar but run by different companies they most obviously should be paid basically the same.
14. Better wages, more hours
15. Making this document so peer wages have a minimum and fair wage, health benefits. Union-Seniority, pay relates to length and value of work done. A tax document for people like me who are not on social assistance so I get a return and W.I.T.B. again.
16. Regulated wages, nice hats
17. We all should make a flat rate of pay which should be at least \$30-35 per hour not per shift. I work 6 hour shifts so figure that out.
18. Peers should have higher wages, raises, access to therapy, benefits, holiday pay, vacation days, extra pay for evenings and weekends like in other employment.
19. Pay a living wage, Vancouver being one of the most expensive cities in North America. It helps everybody and keeps it clean.
20. Wages evened out, bottom tier scale increased \$15-\$20 and top tier cap at \$35 tops. Easier access to positions/opportunities/programs.
21. Increasing access to programs for people of other languages (especially french as it is the other official language of Canada)

22. Free training or employment programs.
23. Give them the full time jobs so they can pull themselves out of poverty.
24. Fair pay for work. Maybe union, some form of dignity.
25. At least \$20/hr
26. Bring the wages up to equal private or government paid wages. eg: overdose rooms, etc.
27. Increase in wages would be the best.
28. Extra curricular activity for peer social stress relief. Sports, book club, darts, bowling, pool, etc.
29. Minimum wage is what they deserve. Don't kid yourself, honorariums of \$11 is really cheap labour.
30. Opportunities for everyone. Information, good wages.
31. It needs to come under one set of rules or guidelines, etc.

## What do you think a fair wage for peer labor looks like?

1. Minimum \$25 an hour
2. \$25/hour to start, Time and a half for overtime and weekends.
3. Living wage for living and the cost of full time work, proper training on the job like we used to have. For our company we used to call people in get tickets like First Responder First Aid.
4. At very least minimum wage. Considering what people do in the DTES for these programs if it were a normal/government company you would be entitled to hazard pay, late hour shift wage benefits, being on call 24 hours a day people should be compensated for that as well. Just because it isn't a government program doesn't mean we (peer workers) don't treat it as any other job and work hard, as much as possible to the best of our ability and care.
5. At today's cost of living a realistically livable wage would be somewhere in the ballpark of \$27.5 - \$37.5 / hr. Rent (1200-2000), groceries - 750, clothes 100-300, ICBC (illegible), vehicle - 5000 not financed, life entertainment - 200-500. All numbers on a month by month add that all up and divide by 12 and a welfare single person \$935. The gap between is greater than the Grand Canyon.
6. 25/hour
7. 15/hr to start plus a raise to 20/hr for employees that put all efforts to doing a great job and behave appropriately at work.
8. 25/hr is a start.
9. 15-18/hr for unskilled, 18-25 for supervisors
10. 25/hr should be the going rate
11. Somewhere around minimum wage, as we are front line workers, risking our lives, with fellow employees suffering from COVID-19, we've had fellow peers suffer stress, resulting in heart attacks. One is a supervisor recently, however the other is not part of the union. Yet she continues to work as a peer.
12. \$35 hourly is at least comparable to what nursing and the health care receive. Also, as the cost of living increases so should the wage automatically. A committee could also be available to front line workers for self care and to prevent burnout.
13. Not a penny less than what the C.O.V. pays. A living wage of 20/hr with benefits
14. I think \$20 - \$25 /hr is a fair wage for peers
15. At least 20/hr
16. A fair wage for peer labour would be a minimum of 25 per hour.
17. \$20-25
18. Lowest paid at least \$5 above minimum wage for entry level workers to union because of the nature of work (stressful, possibly dangerous if poked by needles) even short term employees should be protected by workers compensation and health benefits in case of accidental poking or attacks by tenants, both of which I have experienced. I think that people should get paid a raise, determined upon employee review every 6 months

to a year. And if a contract says each individual gets paid \$\_\_\_\_ they shouldn't have to share with their roommate or partner if the roommate or partner also has signed a second contract.

19. Around 20/hr would be fair

20. \$30-35 for the amount of work we do we save lives same as a doctor or nurse so why can't we get what is a fair wage so \$30-35 is a good wage.

21. Probably at least \$25/hr. Definitely not less than minimum wage but even that is not enough. People are saving lives and risking their health should be at least \$25-\$30

22. \$20-35 an hour depending on being merit based

23. \$25-\$30 /hr

24. \$20/hr minimum for entry level positions, \$25-30 for supervisor positions. (illegible)... bi annual review with potential wage increases with benefits medical, dental, optical.

25. Base wage based on inflation (\$25ish now) plus bonuses based on amount of responsibility - should be agreed upon unanimously.

26. Starting wage \$18

27. \$20/hr is a good start with inflation

28. At least \$20 an hour, merit based.

29. \$25/hr

30. At least \$25 / hour

31. \$25ish

32. Someone should be paid minimum wage and holidays. Employees of raintree - minimum wage and holiday in cash

33. \$15 - \$25 /hr

34. That depends on how much physical labour is involved.

## Anything else you'd like us to know?

1. Buildings should be provided with water as the majority.
2. Lookout Society paying our workers are only paid 10 per hour, then 3 or 6 months out of the year we get cut in half to five bucks an hour
3. I think me myself (TORO worker) finding out all the other programs out there, who where and what they are called and what type of programs they use or have access to or option to so as a representative of TORO for Astoria and my neighbours what else is out there that we could get going that would benefit them and everyone in the end just knowing what's available is a big step especially with bigger buildings and people that come and go quickly.
4. When our new peers start they should be on a probationary period of 30 days and if they are not suited to the job they should be let go or moved to a different area of work possibly picking up needles.
5. The safety of the people is most important. Harm Reduction saves lives.
6. More accountability from peers. Still too much being paid for jobs not done.
7. People should be given the minimum wages no matter what
8. Wow, I would like to remind people that there is a picture of a lady in the chill that created "peers" and that was 19 years ago. She has since passed but her legacy has grown and thanks to peers I've not committed crime in 12 years.
9. I would be willing to fight very hard for increased wages and pension fund. We have to remember we have families too that we will leave behind. We want to be valued
10. For the last 6 years I have been in direct violation of federal tax law as a result of lies told to me, as in special deals were made that made us exempt from reporting our income to anyone CRA, Ministry of Social Development etc. last but not least I was told directly and definitely we were covered by WCB. About a month ago we suffered 3 deaths in 2 days. Two of the victims had become very close friends of mine. I came unglued and was having worse thoughts of checking out. I for the very first time in my life was willing to admit myself to a psychiatric hospital for evaluation and or treatment. My current supervisor simply laughed and said absolutely not we weren't covered. It was left at that. I was offered no encouragement or alternative resources. I felt as if my supervisor could care less if I hung myself.
11. All employees should have mobile communication devices only for those who are in the program. Also can employees have a choice to have a payment option to receive cash or by cheque for their work payment. All employers should do a monthly inventory with the employees (example: work supplies, equipment, etc.)
12. 20/hr isn't liveable in a city like Vancouver and a living wage is more like \$30 just to house and feed themselves and that's just one person not a family.
13. I am a person living with more than one disability. One of them is a cognitive disability diagnosed at age 4 and the other is a complex PTSD caused by a traumatic event in 2019. I won't name the cognitive disability because I believe that I will be called a liar

and forced to provide a medical document as proof my cognitive disability requires that I have one full time staff to have daily communication with.

14. Give peers more credit

15. As for workers who coordinate full days (for example to plan meetings, plan how the programming works, send data of what is used, give us a job, they should be paid at least \$20 above minimum wage at entry level and be eligible for wages to be raised upon employee reviews every 6 months or annually that depend on their length of employment, value and enthusiasm of work done.

16. In my building I was paid \$5 (illegible) clean all ....

17. I work at Triage and get \$80 per 6 hour shift so I make 320 for a week of work that was 4 shifts a week now I lost one shift because of funding so they say but yet I had to train someone new so what the fuck that is bullshit and they won't let me have a set of keys so I can do real health checks. I also get yelled at, told to fuck off. I need more cash per hour not per shift.

18. Never pay in gift cards, always cash or cheque. It is stigmatizing. The government needs to re-evaluate income assistance rates, how much folks are allowed to make, not to lose money because you want to live with a partner.

19. We need to have equity amongst all peer workers and parity.

20. TORO does a great job.

21. Petition for disability and income assistance supplement. Wage increases to be increased and for fulltime work or (illegible) to be capable with no penalty or deductions. Support groups or meetings bring it to (illegible) peer advocate program.

22. We need subsidized housing where people can have full time work in supportive housing you get evicted for full time jobs and school. You are not allowed to live in a quiet (illegible) staff housing is supportive. In SROs have black mold, bugs, and rats unsafe and unhealthy for people to live in.

23. People have expressed an issue with low wages for the most dangerous work. Equity needs to be addressed.

24. Counselling is imperative for front line workers.

25. People are getting screwed! If you being treated as an employee (raintree) you should be paid minimum wage in cash. Start a peer support group or the folks who been traumatized by their experiences working their work.

26. More money helps buy more foods and more personal items.

## Appendix B – Town Hall Transcript

### **REDACTED**

Ok about the only thing I want to say is that in the PHS organization, if you work at MOPS you get 15 dollars an hour. And if you work at the window and out on the street collecting needles you get paid 10 dollars an hour. And, our organization, the window as we'll call it, is the longest running part of the PHS platform. We were the first to start handing out harm reduction.

We've been at two or three different locations, but we always seem to be the last people to get parity when it comes to wages. I've brought this up and I've offered some solutions to management but it has to be addressed. You can't have people in the same organisation getting one wage and people on the other side getting less, there has to be equality. I mean that's what we're all about, isn't it, equality in the workplace and equality in how we're treated and the fairness. That's all I've got to say.

### **REDACTED**

You guys are going to love this one, I work for lookout society. And I work as one of the peer washing workers. 4 months out of the year we get paid 5 dollars an hour, our wages get cut back from 10 dollars per hour because we have to pay for our Christmas presents. So the peer workers are paying for the Christmas presents for everybody in the society, which is kind of unfair to us.

Also on top of that they're taking off of everybody's cheques so much per month across the board — I think it's 20 bucks a month across the board — an extra 20 bucks a month for their own Christmas presents. So they're taking extra on top of our cheques plus everybody across the month, so we're just taking a look at that. So you think you guys got issues? You've got issues.

### **REDACTED**

I work over at DCHC now. I have a lot of lived experience.

I can't believe that people are getting paid \$11. The guy that just talked before me, I'm so fucking mad for you, that's unbelievable.

There's two things that I'm annoyed by. There's this really cool peer education role that got posted, but then why is it posted for 22 dollars an hour? That didn't seem like it was high enough for that work. In that report that's the recommendations for how to work with peers, number 3 is pay cash. I just got an email from some survey that's still trying to pay people with fucking gift cards. It's something that's connected to UBC. How are we in this day and age still

paying people in gift cards? Are the people running the fucking surveys being paid in fucking gift cards? Don't offer someone a gift card, it's bullshit.

### **REDACTED**

I work at Insite and I don't know if anyone's ever been there, but there's usually the role of the supervisor to sit there and do nothing, and the guy that does most of the work is usually the guy that makes 10\$ an hour. Now the supervisor is making 23-26\$ an hour, but usually I have to say that they don't do a heck of a lot, they don't do a lot of the stuff. I get yelled at if I don't keep up, I get yelled at while I'm doing two things. And I worked at MOPS where I made \$15 an hour and I work way harder at Insite than I did at MOBS. I love MOPS, the way they treat people there is beautiful.

I just have to say, I just wish I could get a little bit more money.

### **REDACTED**

Hey everyone it's awesome to see you all here.

When I first moved here — this was several years ago somewhere around 7 or so — they did a study and they found in the DTES, you needed 20 bucks an hour to be basically considered minimum wage. And that was from the city I believe, or some organization that had actually done the work to find out what you needed to actually survive. That was just what you needed to survive in this town.

I went to Victoria, I went to work for an organization named Solid, worked at a couple overdose rooms there. I was making between 21-23 bucks an hour while I was there. Here we don't see it. Over there, their city and their government seems to be a little bit more aligned with reality. I really don't see that here.

I worked for VANDU, I worked for BCAPO, I worked for BCCSU, I worked for lookout society. I've been paid as low as 5 to 23 bucks an hour. That's a huge disparity. It doesn't make much sense but that's the truth. Maybe we can make that happen where the city and the organizations that we do work for go 'hey let's give our people what they deserve.'

### **REDACTED**

First off I'm one of those people that runs surveys and yes I do get paid for it, but not always. I do 3 hours I get 60 bucks but I end up putting in about 15 hours on top of that that I don't get paid for. And those survey are very important, we get a lot more programs. The building I live in didn't have any food, it didn't have any harm reduction, it didn't have any maintenance programs. It had nothing. In 15, 20 years, the tenants that lived there had nothing. Now I've got produce coming in thanks to Jill and her team, harm reduction thanks to Eris and her team, and a HUB program with maintenance thanks to Wendy and her team. Those are programs we

wouldn't have without those surveys and those people are grateful for those gift cards, so I gotta say they do help, and it's always motivating when you get something for even five minutes of your time, and that's all those surveys take.

I think our wages should be brought up to about 25 an hour, and regardless weather or not they do get bumped up, all wages should be at least at minimum, which is legal standing at 15. Those programs running under that, they should be at least brought up to that standard.

### **REDACTED**

First of all it's the law in BC to get 15 an hour, that's minimum wage, that's what it's supposed to be. Anyone starting at any job, the minimum wage is 15.45 or whatever it is right now. So that's where you start, that's the law. We live in BC don't we?

After that, any raises, or depending on the category of job or the length of time that you've been there, I believe that's the best way to increment raises - 15, 20, 25, 30, 40. What do doctors get? They save lives, we save lives.

### **REDACTED**

Me and my wife just moved back to the lower mainland from Alberta 4 years ago. We were in Alberta, I was there for almost 20 years. When I left BC, I left here a bad guy. I had gone to jail blah blah blah cleaned up my act, did my programs and promised my family i would go straight and that's what i did.

I knew in my heart that if I went back to Surrey where I started, it would just not be a good thing for very long.

I went to Alberta, and there was no way in hell to find anything that I wanted, if I wanted crack or opiates or whatever, it was so difficult to find it, and work was so easy to find, that I spent that much time looking for a job and zero time enough to go looking for trouble.

In those 20 years out there, I became a red seal mechanic, with papers put through school by my employer. I got in a car accident, crushed my feet, re-healed, I got another job as a laborer at a construction site and learned how to build houses, restaurants, what have you buildings from the ground up. Learned very fast, was lucky in that. Moved to the top of that, and became a superintendent there. The jobs fell when the economy fell. When the oil business out there went for shit. Everybody got laid off because it all stemmed from there. The guys making money it trickled down hill. I was the lowest man on the totem pole.

My wife had never seen the lower mainland, the most beautiful place in BC per square mileage so I said lets go home. I'll show you all the stories I've been telling you about.

We came back here and within literally the first 2 weeks I was back, I had no chance. There was people smoking a drag in my face every time I turned around. I got back on it and I tried to get off. The doctors here are paid to keep you on and keep you addicted to something at any point. I asked my doctors to drop me down mils, he boosted me up mils. They are being paid the more we stay on their programs. It there is a miracle cure of sorts or some sort of help for those that really truly want it, and that person takes it, uses it, fucks it up, well he's had his one shot. There are umpteen thousands of us who would just like that one shot to just get back to our feet. I'm finding it near impossible with the people and societies and everybody that I've been sent to try and help me with this or put me in this direction.

I don't know what I'm trying to say except that it doesn't seem that the society is geared for curing the problem, it seems to sustain it and everyone else will be happy about it that's above us in society.

Somehow we are just a very easily manipulated means to an end. If there's somebody somewhere that could do something about it that's what in my opinion I think we would need.

#### **REDACTED**

Ok I was just actually looking at this survey.

The lowest paid for short term workers should at least be 5 dollars more than minimum wage for entry level people, and it probably should be unionized as well because then you can do employee reviews. For people like me not on social assistance I can have a tax return at the end of the year and be eligible for a worker income tax benefit possibly

Just because the work is so stressful, dangerous, I've had to have tenants be violent towards me and basically the longer they work there, they should get a raise depending on the value of the work they put in and how long they've been there.

As for workers who actually coordinate the full days — like in our workhouse there's Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:30-5:30 or probably more — they actually give us a job and they plan all the meetings, they plan how the programming works, send data that was used to actually give us a job and get us more grants and more money to get paid, they obviously deserve more than just 5 dollars above minimum wage, they should probably be getting maybe like 15-20 more than minimum wage, and still on a unionized plan. Like the longer you've been there and the more work you put in or the better work you put in upon employee review should be given a raise.

#### **REDACTED**

Hello everybody. I'm kind of getting sick of getting paid 11 dollars an hour myself too but it's a volunteer position so I figure it was never written in — the OPS at VANDU it was never actually

written in for wages, we're just working on that right now. I think 25 would be a much better thing for people, you need at least that. We gotta work on that all together. Forming a union would be a great idea, if people have any ideas of how to go about doing that, that would be great.

I've been with the IBEW for years but I'm pseudo-retired because I'm waiting for my pension, and when I'm 55 and then I'll take it. Things will be a bit better then, I'm 51 right now.

Hopefully things get better, let's make them better.

### **REDACTED**

I've been in this neighborhood for about 35 years and I've worked with a lot of different groups and organizations and I help out with people in the communities. Considering that I've been trying to get normal jobs, because of me living down here., I can get away with it because I live in subsidized housing.

The only problem is if you live in supportive housing if you get a full time job that can give you means of you being evicted. Same thing if you're a full time student, trying to educate yourself in order to make yourself a little bit better so you can get out of the situation you're in or progress or move forward.

When I went and applied for work in this community I got the credits and everything else. When they find out my address is V6A — I live right on Hastings 400 block — then they say that job somehow mysteriously disappeared but I can be a volunteer at 10\$ per hour. Which is absolutely ridiculous. I've got vehicles I have to pay insurance for. I've got 3 motorcycles and 2 cars. If I live in supportive housing, all that gets taken away.

I'm right now working for the salvation army and I'm only getting paid 21\$ an hour and now they said there's some sort of complications with me working there because of my address, because the V6A postal code, and that's the biggest problem.

I've worked at the dudes' club, we do a lot of outreach there, smoke signals, did outreach there too. Basically I'm just trying to get it so that people who at least try to get themselves a full 8 hour shift where they can start banking and benefiting from their income. It should be at least 20\$ per hour.

### **REDACTED**

I just wanted to mention it says here 'what do you think a fair wage for peer labour looks like', well I think it looks somewhere around minimum wage. We are frontline workers risking our lives with fellow employees suffering from COVID-19, we've had fellow peers suffer stress resulting in heart attacks. One of the supervisors recently, he's in the union now, he should

have benefits. However the other is not part of the union, she continues to work as a peer, which is ridiculous at \$10 an hour she's continuing to risk her life

I think a fair wage looks like at least minimum wage.

### **REDACTED**

I first moved down here in the 90s and I moved out for a bit and I came back and all I can say is I got hardwired through heroin and cocaine and I think I got into the last program that wasn't government subsidized, which means I didn't go on methadone. We had to go through some kind of stuff and I think about that all the time, because I know a lot of people that really want to quit but they have to go through these programs where they have to do meth or the new stuff. All I can offer is that it takes a lot of work for that.

As for the Rain tree workers and other stuff, don't let the employers pull the wool over your eyes with an honorarium of 10\$ and \$11 an hour. You honestly deserve at least minimum wage with holiday pay. Just fight it out and get started on that.

I know there's a lot of stuff going on, I got offered a job from Rain tree a couple years back and they offered 11\$ and I had to decline. At the very least you deserve minimum wage and I think really you deserve 25 or 30 for this kind of work. I think unionizing is a good idea, people don't agree with that, not everyone agrees with it but, you know, I'm union and they take care of me, and it's that simple.

### **REDACTED**

Anyone interested in unionising in any group you gotta get everyone together that you work with and I believe it's a majority of the vote and you can approach whoever, teamsters — or you can just form your own union, form your own. But you have to vote, a majority of the people in your workplace have to want to have the union. I'm not sure if it's a supervised work or how that works. If the majority of the people want a union you can form a union and then you'll have a shop steward that makes sure that the contract that you have to agree to that the employer comes up with that you all have to agree to is followed with everyone's rights and everyone's pay scale and stuff like that. There's a few more cross the ts and dot the i's involved, but I was a teamster for 10 years and they take some money off your cheque but they take care of you.

### **REDACTED**

One other question is, has anyone ever had a problem of having their cheques being late? I have, so have all our peers at Lookout. We've had the problem of having the cheques being late. We're beginning to hate that. Just recently our cheques were becoming late again for, I don't know, the third year in a row around this time. Our cheques have been coming late, they

arrive either two weeks too late or one week late. The cheque that's supposed to arrive that same week doesn't arrive till a week and a half later.

I'd say it's about time to unionize, not just as one separate company but as a whole group of peers.

#### **REDACTED**

I know I'm up here again but I got thinking about this and I think you guys will probably agree with me. How many of the higher ups in these organizations could do our jobs? Like I've worked in 3 different overdose rooms. You can't tell me one of those fuckers could come in there and do the same job that we did and do it as well as well. There's no fucking way. Excuse my language but it's true, it's true, it's absolutely true.

They are scared of us, they do not know how to handle someone that's dropped, they don't know how to handle somebody that's having a seizure, they don't know how to handle somebody that's freaking out. But that's our jobs. And yet they're getting paid 50 bucks an hour and we're getting paid peanuts. I don't think that's right.

The unions — why can't we get that happening? We talked about it in Victoria. Let's do it here. Let's get the meetings together, let's form a union and tell these people what they need to hear.

#### **REDACTED**

When I was talking about how for work I was trying to save money and everything else, I've been in this neighborhood for 35 years and I still haven't been able to afford to go on vacation. That's the problem. I mean I'd like to see my own country that I came from when I was 3 years old, but I can't do that, because I can't afford the plane ticket, I can't afford to even do anything.

Wages should have to be at least 20 dollars, because 21-22 dollars an hour is a livable wage in Vancouver, so they claim.

For the unions, the reason why these organizations will give you 4 hour shifts or 6 hours shifts, because you don't qualify for a union due to the fact that you have to work 8 hours a day. That's the reason why they only give you those shifts. This way here, you have to create your 8-hour shift. But what happens is when you do work 8 hours you are no longer qualified to live in supportive housing, because you're not classified as mentally ill or incapable of housing yourself which means they have the right to evict you and throw you out on the street. We need to create more subsidized housing so people can work.

Just to tell everybody know, I'm going to run for city council again.

**Sue**

Everybody is yelling union. We went union now all the senior peers are gone. Unions not the be all and end all. If you're gonna unionize you have to really educate yourself, extremely educate yourself, because it's very hard to not get lost behind all the rules and all the things that come in acronyms instead of words. I no longer have a job. Unions are not the be all end all.

**REDACTED**

I would like to remind people that there is a picture of a lady in the ?? (chill??) that created peers and that was 19 years ago. She has since passed away but her legacy has grown and thanks to peers I have not committed crime in 12 years.

**REDACTED**

Sort of in response to the lady that was speaking of unions, she is right. There's a lot you have to educate yourself about. And most of these unions, if you did decide you wanted to be a union and you approach one of these guys, they just want your union dues really for themselves, and when they negotiate a contract with your managers, they are not really going to be there for you.

But if you did want to unionize, What if you formed your own union, then you would elect a president. Then, you would directly negotiate with your management for your contract and then they would have to understand the language you are laying down.

**REDACTED**

If unionizing is a bad idea especially if you live in these kinds of housing units, at the very least my opinion behind this is if you're getting \$11 an hour from Raintree, if they're treating you like an employee and you're getting an honorarium, I'd say press for at least minimum wage. I really think you deserve 25-30 dollars per hour, especially if you're taking care of people that are od'ing. You are the backbone of all of this, so go for it.

Eris has seen negative things happen with peer unions, like being late, gotta be careful how they negotiate your contract. Like missing shifts, etc. lost really good people for having a shitty strict contract. Vengeance thing on behalf of PHS, probably. You should be paid 25 an hour, who gives a fuck if you're not paying taxes. Elon Musk doesn't pay taxes.

**REDACTED**

Even if you are paying taxes you're also paying pension. Which means at the end of the day when the government decides they're going to cut you off and force you to take your pension you'll actually have some. That was the only benefit that I saw to the union, is that I was

paying into a pension, so that when I do retire, which is coming up really quick, I would have an actually livable pension.

## **REDACTED**

Reading through the BCCDC peer wage guideline

- Meeting document reviewer: 25/hour
- Peer meeting support worker: 30/hour during meeting, 100 flat rate per day for being on call in addition to hourly wage
- Presentation facilitation: 50/hour

The peer educator and facilitator role that VCH just advertised is \$22 an hour. The BCCDC recommendation for this kind of role is 50 dollars an hour, just saying.

I also work for VCH so I'm fine saying that, I don't give a fuck, I think it sucks.

Why is somebody making 5 dollars per hour and paying for their own fucking christmas presents.

People should definitely be doing surveys, all of that information is relevant and gets more funding and more services, but they should always be paid paid in cash, always. That shouldn't even be a question.

This is from CDC and all the organizations, nobody's fucking following it, what was all that work done for?

## **REDACTED**

I live at the Astoria with my husband, we are part of the TORO program.

As far as this whole set rates for the CDC and everything, like when you think about it, any of these programs, if you're in one of these units, every single one of us is technically on call 24 hours. We're there to make sure that nothing happens.

The people are being paid 11\$ that is just ridiculous. No matter what you are doing, you should get minimum wage at the very least.

Any other job, picking up needles, dealing with stuff like that, you get hazard pay, you get paid extra working late hours, being on call. That should all go into any type of program whether it's government funded or not.

## **REDACTED**

Reading from social assistance website: whether you're making cash or even a lottery ticket winning, you have to claim that money, but a social single or couple without children can make \$500/month earning exemption, with a child \$750, and a child with a disability \$900 month extra. That's still well within the rates that we're working right now. But if you're on disability, they work annually, so you can take your money and make it any month. A single person on disability can make 15k a year above their earnings throughout the year, doesn't matter what month or how much money in a month and 18000 per family with two adults and one person with a disability. 30k for a family where both adults have a persons with disabilities designation. You can use your exemption any time during the year. I'm reading this straight from the BC social assistance website procedure manual. It says you can work a lot in some months and less in others and it won't affect your monthly assistance amount until you earn more than your annual amount for that calendar year.

I think we should still be able to make a little bit more money even if you're on social assistance and be paid cash at the same time if you don't want to unionize.

### **REDACTED**

So you're talking about starting up your own union. Wouldn't it be cool if we could start up our own function, maybe through the grant process like maybe starting an athletic program, seasonal, that would change throughout the season. We could find captains per buildings we could find maybe a small honorarium for such a person for each person. We could keep the teams and baseball would be 7 on each side, soccer 7 on each side, hockey 7. I think exercise is key to your ability to focus on wanting to quit drugs and finding a way, it also is great way to – I can't think of the word. It is a good way to motivate – motivate is kind of the word I'm looking for. It is a fantastic way for people to form a support group, it's a great way for people to build a support group. If everyone needs a support group, a team, you've got one in your building of a bunch of people who are committing to a team yearly. It's a support group, that's the point I was trying to make. That's fantastic right there. You got 7-10 people, you could even have people throw in life coaches, there's so many possibility to a program like this.

### **REDACTED**

As far as that stat goes, minimum wage is 8 years behind. So right now we're 8 years behind, so 20 dollars an hour right? It's gonna' take us another 8 years to catch up, we're gonna' be another 5 dollars behind again and again and again, 8 years behind.

Currently we should be at 20 dollars an hour, that stat was taken 2 years ago, so it's already changed so it should be 22 an hour right now. That's the current standard of living that we need in order to just live in Vancouver. We're the poorest postal code in Canada. 22 per hour starting. They just need to level it off. We need to start there, maybe take a little bit from the top and cap it off. There's no way that management should be paid \$43 dollars per hour to just watch Ray pour coffee and tea and juice to everybody and work his ass off. I've seen it, that

guy works his ass off and everybody else does too at all of the injection sites, at all of the SROs, whatever you're working for peer support everybody works their assess off.

33 hours per week is where it caps off for full time work, and they try to keep it there. I don't know what you can make for disability, it's like \$1000 bucks extra. They should that too.

I think we should stand up and write it all down, write a petition and sign a million fricken people down here, over and over and over again.

**REDACTED**

On just regular welfare, you're allowed to make 200 dollars more as a single person.

**REDACTED**

I have not been with the establishment in Vancouver for very long. I've seen a lot of amazing resources and a lot of changes for the better here and at the same time there's been lots of disappointments. The disappointments aren't really a finger to be pointed at any particular group or anybody, sometimes it's just the wrong timing wrong location, and just not enough support. When we tried to do softball with Doug and I at Insite, we tried to have softball during the summer, hockey and floor hockey.

I'm a chef and bartender by trade and I was thinking about incorporating a community kitchen, volunteering for some sort of court or crash course with prepping a large quantity of food preparation. I'm sure there's plenty of SROs and whatnot and even just handouts that could very well use the lunches and meals and whatnot.

So that being said, there's gotta be a little bit of a events for everybody and I'm sure everyone has different interests and strengths. I will play any kind of sport, can coach it, and love to compete and I'll go and do it all by myself for all I care. It's a great way to keep yourself active and healthy, and keep your mind positive and entertained. It's my distraction and escape for the bad stuff and y'all know what I'm referring to. Everyone has different goods and bads and different strengths and weaknesses

What was the manner of fairness and such the previous gentlemen that was up here, I know is a little accurate and right to the point. Some sort of consistency, some sort of cap off. Not saying anything other than that or pinpointing.

**REDACTED**

I work for the SRO-C. It is a non-profit funded organization. They also fund the TOROs, they fund a lot of different programs actually. The great thing about working for them is the peers that we answer to like Wendy and Bryan and Dani and a few other people, they all get the same as us, the ones that get stipends and stuff, like our students and Eris and everyone else.

We're all equally the same, nobody gets more above the other. It's great to work for that organization and I wish that all of us had organizations set up the same way.

### **REDACTED**

I'm on the board of the SROC. Nicole was quite forthright about what we do there. In our last meeting at the SROC we were talking about wages. And we had a vote on — \$20 in this most expensive city in North America, \$20 is eh... not good enough. So we voted and decided that we're going to pay our peers \$25 an hour coming up fairly soon.

I think we should have parity amongst all our peer workers. When I hear 11 per hour i go what the fuck is this? Really? 11\$ an hour, that was 10 or 12 years ago, ok more than that, ok 40 years ago. I remember when the wage was 3.65, but that could buy you stuff.

The thing about \$20 an hour now, what does that buy you? I went and saw the rolling stones and I paid \$12.50 for a ticket in 1981. I was making 8 dollars an hour. I worked 2 hours and I could go see the rolling stones and probably have a beer or two. Nowadays what does it cost for a concert? Over a hundred dollars. So how many hours does that take for your to work if you're getting \$20 and hour, 5 hours.

We definitely need parity. Everybody should be getting a minimum of 20\$ per hour. I mean we say, \$50 an hour.

In all seriousness, 25-35 dollars an hour is what we should be getting paid, and we should be yelling at whoever is employing you and we should be loud about it. I work for honorariums, I work for stipends and I'm proud of the SRO-C. That's all I have to say.

Eris: the overall thing we're hearing is that wages are too low; people are getting shafted by social assistance; shafted by housing; not adequately compensated to deal with trauma. Benefits system for folks. Remember the mobile response team at MOPS? There are not mental health resources for anyone in this neighborhood, all the resources are trash.

### **REDACTED**

When they do send us to folks to talk about stuff the people are not adequately equipped to fucking deal with what we handle. A lot of organizations have a phone number that you can call to somebody in the fucking Midwest that has no clue what we're dealing with and then they're like why are you in this work, that's not what I want to hear when I'm calling for support for something. I got sent to somebody else who then quit her job because it was too hard. So I'm like, so listening to me talk about the stuff that I've handled has made somebody leave their job is what it felt like to me.

It's not adequate. Most people don't get any support at all which is completely unacceptable for this type of work, and those people that do get support it's not adequate.

## REACTION

I've been doing this since the very beginning, since the emergency was declared here in BC. And I don't know, as far as what we should be paid, I think everyone should be paid a living wage of not a penny less than what the city of Vancouver pays its employees, which I believe is about 20-21 an hour, with all the benefits that come with it.

Something else, I'd also like to see the foundation of some sort of peer advisory or advocacy board with something like a special ombudsperson who can rule on disputes and make binding decisions on certain things because I've had problems with my supervisors at work and there's not outlet to get you any closure on anything.

For the last 6 years, I've been working 5 days a week, 6h a day. I've been making over 20,000 a year doing this work and I haven't reported a penny of it to the CRA, because I was told in the very beginning that I didn't have to, that special agreements were made between the ministry and Revenue Canada or whatever, that it didn't have to be reported and this could not be further from the truth. If I were to approach CRA and tell them what I just said, I wouldn't be prosecuted, but I would have to pay my back taxes and any fines. Where's that money going to come from? It doesn't sit well with me that – I believe in society, that there need to be some rules and to be put in positions where I've been breaking the law based on lies.

I was also told directly and definitely that we were covered by the workers compensation board. About a month ago at the building, I work in a hops (housing and overdose prevention site), we suffered 3 deaths in the course of 2 days. People overdosed in the rooms and 2 of the victims had become very close friends of mine in the last 6 years because I worked exclusively at this one building.

I became unglued and I was having worrisome thoughts of checking out. I just couldn't take it anymore. I, for the first time in my life, was willing to admit myself to a psychiatric hospital for evaluation or treatment. I approached my supervisor and inquired about workers compensation and I was laughed at and told that we were not covered by workers compensation and she left it at that. She offered no sympathy, no empathy, no encouragement, and no alternative resources. I felt as if my supervisor could care less if I hung myself. There's some nasty things going on at least in the organization I work in.

We need more money. We need an advisory board or something put in place to deal with disputes between employees and supervisors because I've been threatened to be fired so many times that I can't even count and I have to basically beg for them not to take my job

away because it's one of the few reasons I have for living. It's just not right, sorry to be a bummer.

**REDACTED**

Those stupid councilors, stupid mayor. Did you know the chief manager of the mayor's office makes \$400,000 per year? More than the President of the USA. I heard that on the radio this morning. The mayor makes \$300 and some odd thousand.

We just want a decent wage, we've had a hard life. We can do some positive things. We've lived a very hard life for a reason and we're still here. I think it would be great if we could actually get our raise and do something positive with it.

**REDACTED**

We've had no overdoses in our building since we started with the TORO program

**REDACTED**

So everybody says go union? Why go union when you can strike now and don't come back to work until we get a raise. We deserve it. Who's going to do our job if we all quit? Nobody. Because they can't fucking do it. Why can't we all get together as one, everyone wants to unite then let's unite and do what we have to do. I work at the same company that somebody does here. What I just heard is bullshit.

I have no one to decompress with. I go home to a cat, you can't decompress with that, I need someone to talk to. There's nobody here that's adequate enough to listen to me. It's even more fucked up than you know the beginning of.

**REDACTED**

I've worked with the SROC and I was working with WAHRS for a few years. We started working like that after I lost my son 4 years ago. This business of harm reduction and working in the community is very important. I saw that when I trailed my son along, we kind of shadowed him, he wanted to show us what he did. And I thought holy smokes you guys are absolutely amazing, they did absolutely everything for everybody. They cared about everybody.

Look at the nursing staff and how much they make. 35 per hour for us is not unheard of, it's not too much. Shit, they make the same amount of money.

Not everyone lives in subsidized housing, they have to pay increased rent, buy groceries, pay your cable bill, pay your phone. 25 per hour is shit, it's nothing, it's absolutely nothing, you can't make it on that.

We should also have a pension fund like the government does.

We should also have something available to us to go to when we're stressed out to prevent burnout. Because sometimes we don't want to say away from our job because we care about people so much out there that we want to be there for them, we want to do what we can for them. So we want stay there and we continue to go back and go back and go back.

Something should be available to all of us, just like the government has. They have committees for everything. They have pension funds, we should have the same thing. Why are we different? We do the same amount of work, we do more work than they do! We go to DTES alleys, middle of the night and during the day, doesn't matter. We find people where they are, we know where they are, just to make sure they are safe, they're fed, they're hydrated.

We should fight really hard for at the very least 35 dollars an hour and a pension, god damn it.

#### **REDACTED**

The last person mentioned that we should have someone to go to relieve stress. I'd say an extracurricular of some sort. Whether it's a sport, a hobby, sitting around the table coloring books or reading books or something. Just something social where we can all connect. Sports is my thing. Dancing is fantastic, karaoke, darts, pool, the sky's the limit. Community centers for us.

I lived at a building where before COVID we had community kitchen on Fridays where residents were able to volunteer to help cook lunch in the building and the residents that received meals were very appreciative. It was entertaining and I enjoyed it and it kept me busy as well. I liked looking sharp in the uniform as well.

There's an image that we can set to minimize the taboo. The more professional and organized we can be, the more on top of our game we can be, it's very important for the impression that we give to be seen for the media and for people walking by. They're going to tell someone else and if it's bad they'll talk about someone else.

There's been so much improvement of harm reduction being given and being discarded and whatnot. But there's still also a lot of users — not to point fingers to hate on them — but if they maybe got a friendly advice or reminder that there might be children walking by that needle that you just left. Cap that, put it in your pocket or put it somewhere where nobody who doesn't need to come across it won't come across it. There's so many awesome volunteers picking up rigs and that's fantastic too. I will pick up what I see.

#### **REDACTED**

I the other day wanted to go shopping and the further I got away from downtown, it was like, I haven't done crime in 12 years, what's your fucking problem. I wasn't even high. And just like,

they wanted to use me in the training videos. I just don't get it, it's like they have photos of every single person and they know you'll light up when you get on a train. I've had people following me and this was years ago and I asked are you going to stop following me. It's safe in the east side, as soon as you start heading south or west or north, they're going to be targeted. That's one of the highest forms of racism. Peers can show we don't deserve that kind of treatment.

I've been working 7 days a week except for maybe 7 days since July. But I've been using, I don't have a choice because they won't let me detox, I don't understand the science behind that. There's nothing to go back to so I don't get why they say I shouldn't relapse.

#### **REDACTED**

I just wanted to say something about the pension fund. I worked for the government before in Alberta and I know how much money they make and I know how much they get in their pension and even after they leave their job they continue collecting. They have families they leave behind, so do we. What about them? We leave them nothing, because we have nothing, we make nothing, we get nothing. \$20 an hour is nothing. I think we should really fight hard for that because we have to take care of our families. Not only do we have to take care of the community but we have families too. And when we get old they take care of us too and we'll all help each other out.