



## Case Study 4

**Organization: Daniel McIntyre/St. Matthews Community Association  
(DMSMCA)**

**Program: Our Place–Safe Space (OPSS)**

*Classroom: 125 St. John's College*

*Agency key informant: Laurel Cassels*

*Facilitator: Samantha Neufeld/Marianne Krawchuk*

### 1. Program description

*Provide background information about your organization and program.*

Our Place–Safe Space (OPSS) was conceived to address a perceived lack of resources in Winnipeg's West End for people engaging in sex work and/or for those who are victims of sexual exploitation and trafficking. Spence Neighbourhood Association (SNA) and Daniel McIntyre St. Matthews Community Association (DMSMCA) were approached by Sage House in the winter of 2015 to discuss the need for more resources for folks in those positions. Since 2016, the two organizations have been running OPSS in a partnership.

It is important to begin with a distinction – one between those voluntarily engaging in sex work and those who are being exploited for profit. At OPSS, we make no assumptions about the reasons anyone is engaging in sex work. We welcome all who identify as currently or formerly engaged in sex work or with lived experience of sexual exploitation.

We endeavour to offer services in a relatively barrier-free environment. What does it look like? OPSS takes place on Thursday and Friday nights, weekly. On Thursdays, between 9:30 pm and midnight, two OPSS facilitators perform outreach to the West End and surrounding neighbourhoods (downtown and North End), offering resource referrals, harm reduction (safer sex and safer drug use) supplies, feminine hygiene supplies, bottled water and snacks. Outreach is conducted in a vehicle, which is marked with our logo on large door magnets. On Friday evenings, OPSS operates a drop-in "safe space" for program participants. From 4:00 to 10:00 pm, folks are invited to enjoy a hot, home-cooked meal, access donated clothing (socks and cold weather gear, especially), access harm reduction supplies and all manner of hygiene (feminine and everyday items like soap, shampoo, toothbrushes, etc.), use the on-site telephone, computers and washrooms, do their nails, play cards, and otherwise enjoy some community social time. Periodically, skills-building and informational workshops are offered. Some examples of workshops offered over the last two years are opportunities for adult-learning, collage and card-making, understanding the laws surrounding sex work, self defense strategies and techniques, and others.

OPSS operates on an extremely lean budget. In the 2017/2018 fiscal year, funding through the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA) and Neighbourhoods Alive!





were used to subsidize the wages of the two drop-in facilitators (roughly two days/week total), provide food for Friday night meals, purchase hygiene and cold-weather gear when donations did not meet the needs and honoraria for volunteers who cooked and facilitated workshops. In all, our total expenses for the year were in the neighbourhood of \$26,000, some of which was raised through three community fundraising events planned and executed by participants of the program (a car wash, a calendar featuring art by OPSS participants and a launch party for the calendar).

## **2. Reason/s for the evaluation**

*Briefly explain why you want/need to evaluate this program (including who the intended users of the information are and how the information may end up being used).*

Attendance at the Friday night OPSS drop-in is inconsistent. While there are a core group of 4 or 5 participants who attend regularly, numbers can vary from only 1 or 2 on a quiet night all the way to 17 or 18. It has become difficult and not always cost efficient to gauge the need for food, support (volunteers) and other resources each week. Participants have stated that factors affecting attendance can be: Weather; Cheque issue dates (EIA, Child Tax Benefit, etc.); Police activity in the neighbourhood; Relationships between participants, many of whom have contact outside of OPSS.

In other words, program staff cannot control the factors affecting participation. In a very "value for dollar" climate, this is difficult. OPSS staff are seeking a program evaluation in order to find ways to keep the program relevant to participants (boosting attendance sustainably). Other goals would include ways to frame the work in a way that encourages renewal of funding from a Conservative Provincial government.

## **3. Evaluation questions**

*What would you like to know (find out) from the evaluation?*

- Is there value in the workshop element of the program, beyond pleasing funders?
- Is it possible to plan such workshops effectively for a "drop-in" participant base that varies wildly?
- Are there ways we could be more inclusively serving our highly mixed participant base?
- Are there services we could be offering that would improve attendance?
- Can outreach be more effectively used in addressing some of these challenges and how?

