

REDUN Program Coordinator 2024-2025 Year End Report

Reviewing the events of this past year, a major focus of REDUN's programming and my role specifically has centred around building capacity - in a few ways.

Partly an essential and organic response to a period of intense backlash, and partly driven by internal demand for growth, capacity-building, while always worthwhile, is especially appropriate given the current circumstances. Similarly, we have been continuing to deepen and extend our working relationships and stakeholder connections. Many social movement theories of change identify resistance or backlash as a normative stage any systemic transformation. Rather than defensively struggling against this predictable response, or admitting defeat and abandoning the project altogether, some suggest this is a time for internal reflection and coalition building - in essence, a time to evaluate, fortify, and prepare.

General Updates:

Having closed our Nelson office in the spring of 2024, our meetings moved initially to ANKORS, then, given the size and season, we moved outside for the summer, eventually landing at the Salvation Army in Nelson. This opportunity was made possible thanks to long-standing relationship with the staff and leadership at the weekly drop-in which had recently moved into that space, and whom advocated on our behalf and worked closely with our team to ensure that these programs could remain complementary and supportive without threatening the continuation of either. This working relationship evolved over time, developing better communication strategies, clear boundaries and expectations, and processes for addressing concerns in timely and constructive ways.

Our Trail group continues to meet in the same location. We have attempted to advance 4 peers for coordination/support in the past year, and regrettably, will again be looking for a way to grow this leadership. While Alex's outreach work has vastly improved connection with this community, still it remains difficult to grow the necessary capacity to meet the significant need of this area.

Castlegar's chapter has been meeting with support from the shelter/connection centre. This relationship continues to hold the group well, but has added challenges during periods of more extreme cold weather due to space constraints. As the shelter will be relocating (probably in the fall), we are uncertain whether the connection centre will remain open in it's current location, meaning we do not know if this location will continue to be available for our meetings. In spite of these small challenges, this group continues to grow, welcoming new attendees and acquiring new members who bring diverse perspectives and talents to the mix.

In order to ensure our programming is best meeting the needs of membership, we conducted an internal survey evaluation. Sharing the findings with membership, we continue to remain responsive to the evolving needs of our communities.

Capacity Building Activities

In the past year, we have formalized small roles for existing peer volunteers, on-boarded multiple people to support the Trail chapter (though, as of the writing of this report, we very recently find ourselves again looking at ways to empower leadership in this group), supported multiple members and leaders to engage in Non-Violent Communication training, continued to provide opportunities for members to participate in outreach activities and have offered training in PWLLE Harm Reduction Outreach (including Advanced Peer Overdose Response) and have also offered this to HOPE members in Grand Forks. Opportunities to connect the regional drug user groups always prove productive, uplift our members, strengthen relationships, and empower further growth for this work locally and regionally.

Having submitted a joint application (REDUN, HOPE, and EKNPUD) to Community Action Initiative to support a Kootenay-Boundary regional coalition, including a convergence and mentorship opportunities, we were disappointed to eventually have this denied, however hopeful when encouraged to collaborate with Penticton Overdose Prevention Society to resubmit. Working with POPS to write a proposal that replicated much of what we had originally visioned (with more convergence, no mentorship, and a wider regional lens), this was submitted in early 2025 and (while still awaiting final confirmation) have recently been informed that we can expect to have our proposal approved. These funds will support a regional convergence, anticipated to take place in October 2025 at Ainsworth Hot Springs, which will focus on building capacity and enhancing our ability to adapt to evolving circumstances. Uncertain if Community Action Initiative (having no current commitment of continued funds from the Ministry of Health) will be able to continue supporting the Provincial Peer Network after April 2026, we should be actively exploring ways to sustain this network, which may involve looking for new sources of funding, including potentially reframing or refocusing the work we do to attract new funders.

After last-minute cancellation of CAI's regional capacity building convergence in March, REDUN was able to send some key representatives (including leadership from EKNPUD) to attend in May. This opportunity to connect with other interior region groups from the Provincial Peer Network was invigorating and inspiring, and has encouraged ongoing collaboration with other groups - including an upcoming mentorship visit from an Indigenous peer leader. We are excited for this support as we seek to further decolonize and indigenize our programming, and are confident that these connections will strengthen the work we do locally and improve our collective provincial advocacy in the future.

Whether through training, hiring, or relationship-building this emphasis on capacity is gradually advancing REDUN's work throughout the region, and this can be seen in the stakeholder relationships and collaborative activities that present themselves. A shining example of this can be seen in the involvement of a new and unexpected addition to the Sunday EOPS team: Dr Grout, a new, young doctor in Nelson, approached REDUN and ANKORS to offer his support, and, having seen the value in our approach, actively pursued partnership with REDUN and now provides medical care on an outreach basis whenever he is able to join the night outreach team. Seeing professionals seeking partnership, honouring the approach and role of PWLLE workers,

confirms the importance of our programming. Other examples of worthwhile partnerships, to name a few from this past year, have included collaborating in various ways with: Interior Health(...), the local Community Action Teams, Legal Aid, Nelson Cares, Nelson Committee on Homelessness, Circle of Indigenous Nations Society, BC Housing, CATIE, BCCDC, Selkirk College, the Foundry, Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research, municipal governments, and others. Some of these engagements have been consultation, research, presentation, event coordination, service delivery, and all have reinforced the necessity of centring experiential perspectives and, I feel, serve to reduce stigma against people who use drugs by positioning us as viable and effective partners in the provincial overdose response.

Support, Education, Advocacy

The ongoing work of support, education, and advocacy remains steady. Support is provided in many ways, including the group peer support of meetings, the 1:1 peer support in our daily interactions, community outreach support (including community clean-up, harm reduction and other essential supply distribution, and episodic overdose prevention services), low barrier cash-paid peer work opportunities. Education offerings include informal lateral education at meetings, individual harm reduction information sharing, maintaining a social media presence to reach a broad and often distinct audience, and providing more structured training opportunities to members and other community partners. Our advocacy efforts this year have taken many forms, including media engagement, presentations to decision-makers, affidavit submission for legal challenges, participating in research, policy and program consultation, letter-writing, supporting initiatives spearheaded by members, raising awareness through social media, (finally) building a (mediocre) website (!), and engaging our communities in other ways. In the daily flow of this work, it can often feel difficult to keep an eye on the horizon, and seldom do we have time to look back at the path we have taken - but these reporting opportunities require a reflection that is valued. However overwhelming or inadequate or challenging this work may feel, the goal is worthwhile and we are making progress.

Concluding and Looking Ahead

One final example from the activities of this past year, I feel, exemplifies the success that we have collectively achieved, and I share this such that this report might conclude by opening to the expansive potential of what is to come in the upcoming months and years. In late November 2024, following a very big drug bust elsewhere in the province, the supply predictably worsened to a level of crisis that shook the region. During this time, we lost a number of people, including a community member who touched all of our hearts in deep and memorable ways. At a loss with how to respond to this grief, with so much impotent fear and such ineffective systemic solutions, a couple of eager peer leaders decided to try a new way of providing harm reduction support in Nelson. At their own expense, on a very short-timeline, with very few resources, these folks opened an after-hours cafe-style drop-in space out of a historic Nelson location, already known as a safe space by people who use drugs in the area.

With the aim of providing after-hours, low-barrier, peer-driven support over the winter months, the appropriately named *Brandi's Place* was met with both resistance and also so much support from the broader community, and, despite many challenges, was able to stay open for most of the winter, providing safe, indoor, inclusive space, free food, volunteer opportunities, purpose, belonging, safety, community, and evidence of the existence of alternative solutions. When we so often find ourselves stuck in the regulatory muck that inhibits our ability to do the community development or support work that we know to be needed, at times, everything feels immovable, impossible, and hopeless. As a refreshing reminder of the innovative, creative, and capable spirit that is at the centre of PWLLE harm reduction work, this project breathed hope back into this work for me this year. As we approach 2026 and begin to imagine how REDUN might adapt to respond to the current climate, how to survive funding gaps and backlash, I hold this lesson close to my heart, and know that we will endure and continue to grow, regardless of the obstacles or constraints imposed.

For further information about any of the activities or issues raised in this report, or for any other reason, please reach out to me directly at redun.bc@gmail.com.

