

COUNTERfit Harm Reduction Program

A Program By & For People Who Use Illegal Drugs



WORKING WITH 55 DIVISION

Why work with police?



Every person who uses drugs is by default considered a criminal



Therefore it is a must for Harm Reduction Programs to work with police from a mutually beneficial framework




Any harm reduction/needle exchange program that does not try to work with police is short-changing its service users

HOW TO work with Local police?

 With a lot of patience

 It took five years to find a 55 Division officer willing to attend COUNTERfit's Community Advisory Committee meetings

 It took another five years to include COUNTERfit in the regular training of 55 Division platoons

HOW TO work with Local police?



We knew that it was going to be tough to 'sell' harm reduction to police rank & file



Instead of focusing on the moral aspects of harm reduction, we focused on the practical aspects of our work



We had to convince the local division that cooperation was a win-win situation for the community, the program, and the police

HOW TO work with Local police?



We focused on SAFETY as the main reason for this cooperation to exist:

1. Safety of the community
2. Safety of police officers
3. Safety of our service users
4. Safety of our workers

Safety of the community



We emphasized on communicable diseases and how Harm Reduction Programs reduce the seroconversion rates of these viri

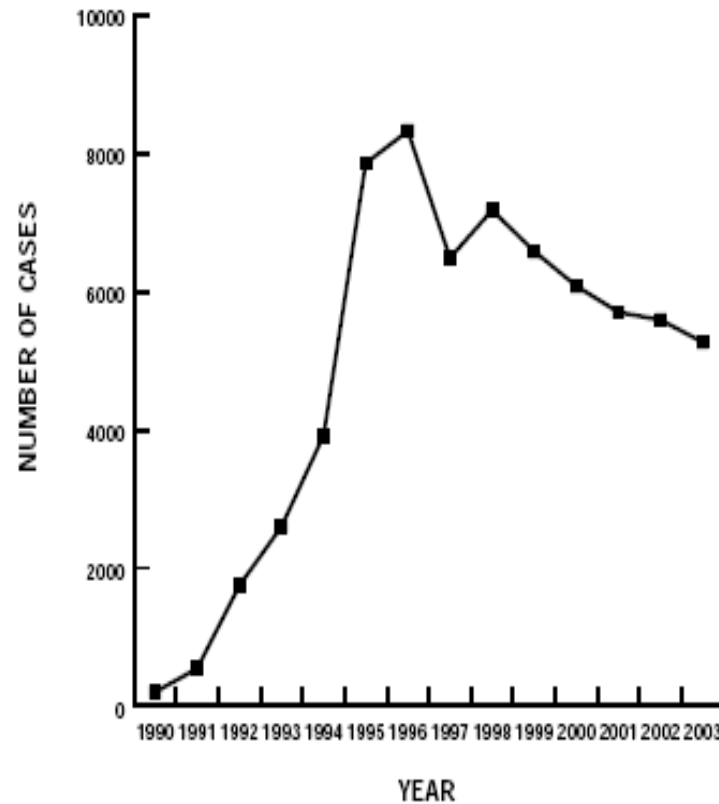
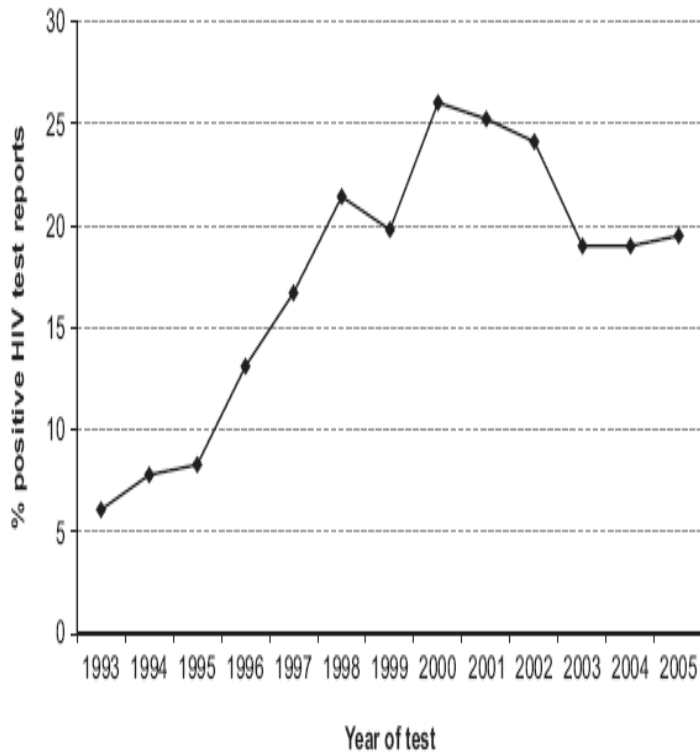
HIV & HCV RATES Among IDU_s IN CANADA SINCE 1993



HIV/AIDS Among Injecting Drug Users in Canada

NUMBER OF NEWLY REPORTED HEPATITIS C CASES BY YEAR, ONTARIO, 1990 TO 2003

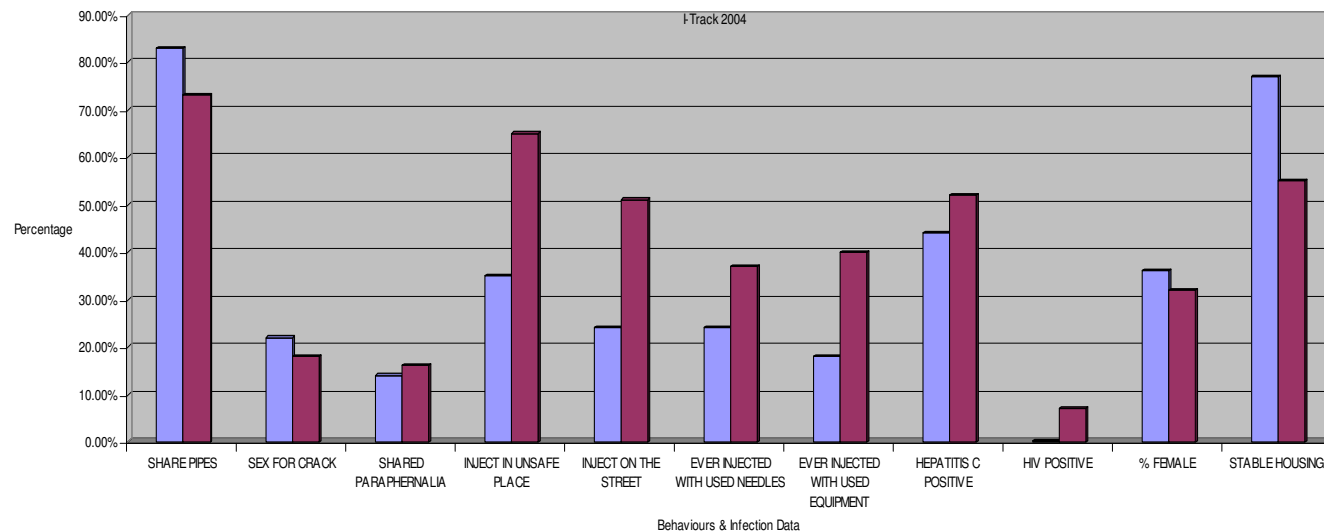
Figure 2. Proportion of adult positive HIV test reports attributed to IDU, by year of test 1985-2005



Safety of the community



We also emphasized on how COUNTERfit has maintained a low HIV & HCV prevalence in its catchment area (Less than 2% for HIV)



Safety of the community



Familiarized the platoon with our services



The SRCHC has Physicians, Nurse Practitioners, Case Coordinator, Case Manger, COUNTERfit, Respiratory Therapist, Outreach Workers

Programs:



Outreach Clinic



COUNTERfit Harm Reduction Program including a Woman Specific project



Shelter Outreach



Primary Care Asthma Program



Hepatitis C Support and Treatment Program

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICE & THE COMMUNITY



when an officer breaks a stem, service user will have to share with someone else = ↑ risks



Many drug users are afraid or reluctant to access a NEP because they believe we're fronts for cops. When police officers park in front of the centre, or if arrests are consistently being made in front of the centre, some of these folks will never access the program or the health centre

Safety of police officers



When arresting an IDU, or conducting a search for drugs and paraphernalia, it's safer when used needles are in sharps containers rather than hidden under sofas, or on window sills



When illicit drug users or STWs are hassled, they throw their needles wherever they can. More used needles on the streets = more unhappy citizens



Cooperation between COUNTERfit and the police is a win-win situation: a minority of drug users commit the majority of crimes – when these individuals are referred to COUNTERfit, they have the opportunity to volunteer or even work for us. **A busy drug user is less likely to commit crimes than a bored drug user!**

Safety of police officers



Both the Police and COUNTERfit want the same thing: A Healthy & Safe Community!



Honouring our client cards will make the program more popular among illicit drug users in South Riverdale.






The more illicit drug users access the program, the more we are aware of the extent of drug use in South Riverdale, the drugs available currently in South Riverdale, their price, the trend of drug use, overdoses, the number of drug users and all kinds of other important information

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICE



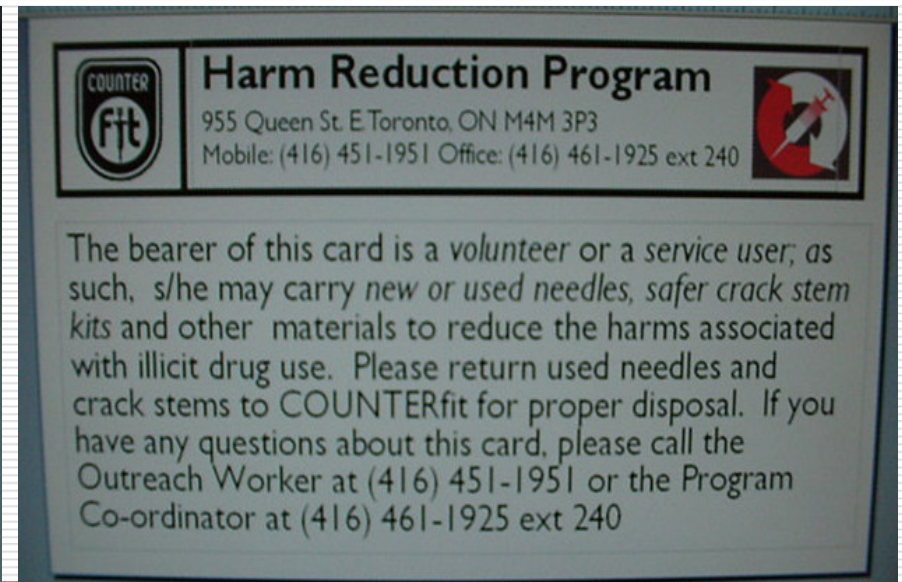
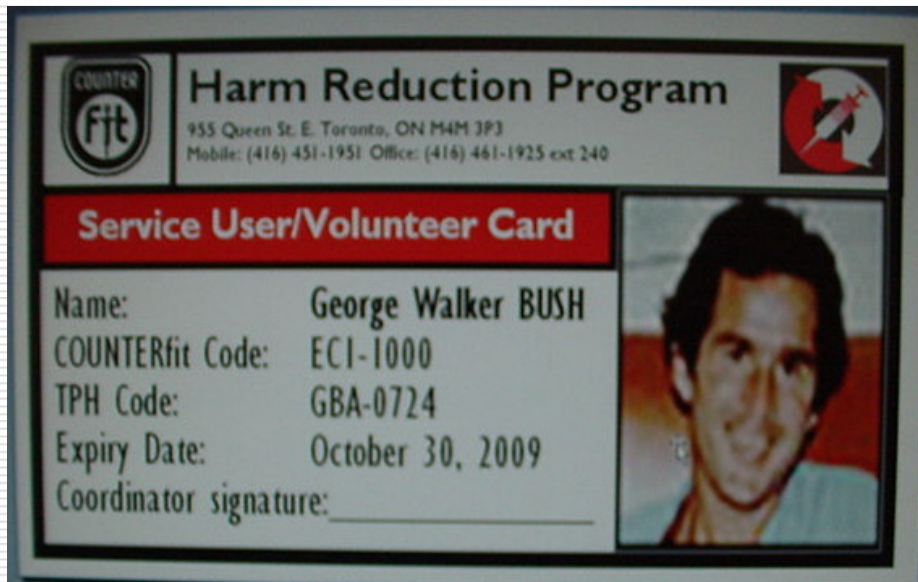
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-  Some of these information we can share

Safety of our service users



We familiarized the platoons with our Registered service User cards, asking the officers to honour them



Safety of our service users



We shared some of our stats, specially pertaining to referrals to treatment, withdrawal management, social work, and other health related issues



We shared success stories about service users that we knew had a history of frequent police involvement

Safety of our service users



3/18/2011

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Safety of our Staff:



We shared information about our catchment area



We shared our schedules, and information on our fixed site, our mobile project, and our satellite sites.



We familiarized officers with the mobile staff's names, their vehicles and license numbers

“Example” of police cooperation



before



after

Safer Crack Kit Content



Impact on COUNTERfit and its service users

- ☒ Police officers were, for a while, friendlier to us and to our service users
- ☒ They referred drug users to the program
- ☒ They honored our client cards
- ☒ Some service users could not believe how kindly they were being treated
- ☒ However, over time, things started to revert to oppressive treatment
- ☒ While COUNTERfit maintained a good relationship with the upper echelon of police officers, the discontinuation of training meant that new officers are not familiar with our program
- ☒ Also, adversarial relationships between those who “persevere” the law and those who brake them creates a chasm between the two groups and unless continuous training takes place, this chasm will increase.

CHALLENGES:

“If you’re not with us, you’re with the terrorists”

❑ **The police world, and white**, especially at the ground level, is black

- ❑ Police and Harm Reduction Staff have competing ideologies: we want to advocate for our service users, they want to put them in jail
- ❑ When we start working with police, there often is expectation that we cooperate with them at other levels too – many have difficulty accepting boundaries
- ❑ Police are not too good at maintaining confidentiality and they expect you to violate service user confidentiality too
- ❑ Even when police are called for an unrelated matter, they hang around and make their presence felt

COUNTERfit STAFF

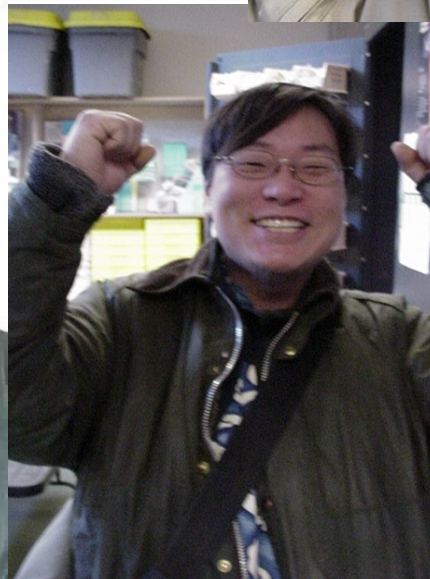


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THANKS FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS WORKSHOP

**ANY QUESTIONS??????
PLEASE ASK US TOUGH ONES**

**IF WE DON'T KNOW YOUR
CONCERNS, WE CAN'T DEAL
WITH THEM!**