

East Van Dan's



East Van Dan's Project 2019

A therapeutic drop-in workshop program for at-risk youth in the
Downtown East Side & East Vancouver.

East Van Dan's



Executive Summary

East Van Dan's (EVD's) is a therapeutic program designed to meet the needs of youth in the Downtown Eastside and East Vancouver who have cognitive disorders, spectrum disorders, mental health challenges, and living with the impacts of trauma. This series of workshops will be trauma-informed, facilitated by two specially-trained therapists, and include art, music, cultural, and land-based therapies. Youth will also be involved in group life-skills and one-to-one counselling sessions.

The Need

East Vancouver, in the area between the Ray-Cam Cooperative Centre and Commercial Drive, is a hot spot for violent crime, drugs, alcohol abuse, prostitution, street gangs and families experiencing chronic poverty. There is a large Indigenous population that is experiencing dislocation and is separated from their home communities and culture. Youth in this setting have a very high proportion of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), mental health issues, anxiety, depression, sleep and eating disorders, and gang involvement.

People living within the spectrum have unique needs, and these are not always understood or met. Furthermore, due to these unique needs, some of these youth are more likely to be involved in violence, gangs, situations that increase their vulnerability and victimization, and incarceration. This is due to experiencing higher rates of trauma in childhood and carrying forward inter-generational trauma, as well as having lower rates of emotional regulation, lower impulse control, and vulnerability due to gullibility.

Dan's Legacy's counselling programs are designed to meet the specific needs of this highly vulnerable group, with holistic therapy based on Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), Dialectic Behaviour Therapy (DBT) and Mindfulness principles, balanced with proper diet and exercise. When these youth cannot access counselling and life-skills support, they are at risk of developing serious and life-long mental health issues, chronic unemployment, homelessness, addiction, and death by suicide.



Details of East Van Dan's Program

Target Market

East Van Dan's will target at-risk youth residing in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) and surrounding Vancouver neighbourhoods including Strathcona, Mount Pleasant, and Grandview Woodland.

The program will support 75 youth and their families and address the challenges that these youth face by strengthening the resiliency already imbedded in the community, such as: belonging, connection, healing, and culture.

Approximately 50% of the youth who will participate in the program are Indigenous, and the entire series of workshops will operate under the clinical supervision of Dan's Legacy's specially trained therapists.

The participants are all young people who are at high risk for life-long mental health challenges, homelessness, justice involvement, entrenched addiction and suicide.

Program Background

"East Van Dan's" is the evolution of Dan's Legacy's successful "Supported Program for Youth with FASD" pilot program, delivered in partnership with The Asante Centre in Surrey from November 2017 to April 2018.

The pilot group demonstrated a great need for youth living with FASD and other spectrum disorders to have consistent, community-based, therapeutic guidance. The youth felt a sense of ownership and protectiveness over the group, demonstrating their sense of security and belonging.

These youth expressed to staff that they were using fewer street drugs, had less police involvement and less self-harm resulting in emergency visits.

Program Partners

The East Van Dan's Project has been developed by Dan's Legacy's Program Director Tom Littlewood (a psychologist with 40+ years' working with at-risk youth) in collaboration with project partners from the Ray-Cam Cooperative Centre and RICHER (Responsive Intersectoral Children's Health, Education and Research Initiative) group of healthcare providers, REACH Community Health Centre, the Broadway Youth Resource Centre, Cwenengitel Aboriginal Society and the East Vancouver Hip Hop Drop.



Evidence-based Programming

East Vancouver is a community with some of the lowest income and marginalized citizens in Metro Vancouver, with a high concentration of Indigenous families.

[The City of Vancouver's 3 Year Progress Report on the Downtown Eastside](#) (RTS11853) indicates the significant challenges faced by the community, including a high rate of homelessness, persistent acute and urgent health inequities, high concentration of income poverty, high levels of early childhood vulnerability, and a higher concentration of reported crime incidents.

A further [2016 study by SFU researcher Dr. Julian Somers](#) which tracked 300 offenders who regularly received support from healthcare providers and social services in the DTES indicated that 99% of users had been diagnosed with a mental health disorder and 80% had problems with substance abuse.

The majority of Dan's Legacy's clients are youth with little to no family support systems and who have grown up primarily in foster-care and group homes, or who are homeless. These youth are extremely "at risk".

["Without a Home"](#) (2016), the first pan-Canadian study of young people who experience homelessness, found that 57.8% of youth indicated they had involvement with child protection services: 51.1% reported experiencing physical abuse, 24% sexual abuse, and 47.5% other forms of violence and abuse.

Simon Fraser University's report ["Opportunities in Transition"](#) (Shaffer/Anderson, 2016) found youth from care "clearly are more likely to experience mental health disorders than the general population."

Youth in Care, many of whom have been placed in multiple foster and group homes throughout their childhood, have been set up, by definition, to experience *attachment disorders*. These disorders are characterized by an inability to: trust others; engage in positive social interactions; and experience healthy psychological development. The stressed out or even violent environments in which they were born into or raised have also been identified as the precursors for Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Desired Program Outcomes

Activity	Proposed Outcome	Key Indicator	Collection Method
To offer trauma-informed, culturally appropriate tools and therapy to strengthen emotional regulation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Youth participants express improved relationships with others and engage in group and one-to-one counselling sessions 2. Youth express feeling fewer suicidal ideations, less self-harm, and more control over rage, depression, and anxiety 	The number of youth who indicate they have acquired the desired outcome.	Interviews with youth clients conducted by therapists during counselling sessions Feedback from families
To build a community where youth feel a deeper sense of belonging and connection	Maintain or increase in numbers of youth and families who return week to week to participate in the program, develop friendships and express a sense of belonging	The number of youth and family members who indicate they have acquired the desired outcome	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Data collection of weekly participation 2. Interviews with youth clients conducted by therapists during counselling sessions 3. Feedback from families
To support youth in transitioning to more independence by teaching essential life-skills	The youth: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. engage with the tools and methods and use them in their lives outside of the group 2. express and demonstrate a greater understanding of essential life-skills (such as budgeting) 	The number of youth who indicate they have acquired the desired outcome	Interviews with youth clients conducted by therapists during counselling sessions

About Dan's Legacy

Dan's Legacy is a non-profit organization that provides therapeutic counselling and life-skills intervention programs to youth affected by mental health challenges, including depression, anxiety, sleeping and eating disorders and self-medicating issues, resulting from childhood trauma and abuse. We work one-on-one with our clients who are referred to us through a variety of channels.

The majority of our clients are youth with little to no family support systems and who have grown up primarily in foster-care and group homes, or who are homeless. They are at risk of "falling through the cracks" and have significant barriers in terms of accessing Health Authority mental health programs or private counsellors. Since they cannot go for help, we go to them.

We provide our services to those who find us by referral from friends and family or through our partnerships with other community-based organizations that offer training, housing, education, recovery or assessment. Our counselling and life-skills programming is holistic, based on Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) and Mindfulness principles.

We balance psychological principals with proper diet and exercise and focus on the role that past trauma and abuse now plays in their dysfunctional lives. When these youth cannot access counselling and life-skills support, they are at risk of developing serious and life-long mental health issues, chronic unemployment, homelessness, addiction and even suicide.

With support from our donors and partners, the youth have a greater chance of succeeding in their educational, housing and recovery goals, avoiding life-long mental health issues, homelessness and the prospect of entrenched addiction.

Contact us

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