



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

School of Community and Regional Planning
433 - 6333 Memorial Road
Vancouver, BC Canada V6T 1Z2
www.scarp.ubc.ca

Tel: (604) 822-3276
Fax: (604) 822-3787

July 17, 2006

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, PC, MP
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, K1A 0A2
Fax: 1-613-941-6900
Tel: 1-613-992-4211
Email: Harper.S@parl.pc.ca

Dear Prime Minister Harper;

I am writing to strongly urge your government to renew the operation of the Supervised Injection Facility (SIF) in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) of Vancouver. As an academic who has done research with organizations in the DTES investigating the needs of that population, it has become abundantly clear to me that what are needed to address the problems in this neighbourhood are innovative, compassionate approaches that respect the dignity of its residents while ensuring the safety and security of the general Vancouver population. The Supervised Injection Facility is one such approach.

I am convinced by the rigorous academic research that has been published on the SIF that it is reaching its target group of the underserved and unconnected drug addicts and because of this it is providing a basic connection with the addict population that before has not been reached. The evidence demonstrates that there have been no fatal overdoses at the facility, a decrease in public injection for this population, and a reduction in dangerous behaviour such as syringe sharing that is a prime cause of HIV infection for this population. Because this population (that before the SIF were hard to reach) has the benefit of counseling there has been an increase in the uptake of addiction services and referral to community services and detox facilities. They are also healthier because there is a reduction in bacterial infections such as cellulitis and endocarditis.

For those who were apprehensive about such a facility because of its potential negative impact in the immediate area, the research has demonstrated that there has been no increase in crime, public disorder, littering and drug dealing near or in the facility resulting in no negative impact on the community. In fact, all measures of public

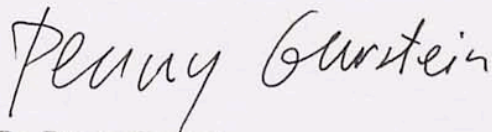
disorder have declined with the SIF opening. The Vancouver Police Department, among many other organizations, is supporting its continuation because of this.

The strength of the Supervised Injection Facility is that it isn't a stand-alone project either in terms of the Vancouver Agreement's Four Pillars Approach (treatment, prevention, enforcement and harm reduction) to addiction or the work of the organization that operates it; the Portland Hotel Services Society in partnership with the Province of BC. The PHS also operate an art gallery, a dental clinic, a low income credit union in partnership with Vancity Credit Union, employment programs, a grocery store, an antibiotic program and five hundred units of social housing that serve the absolutely most marginalized in the DTES. This network of services and housing are there to support the users of the SIF.

The residents of the DTES have many challenges that they have to face due to their addictions, health status, poverty and lack of secure, affordable housing. The Supervised Injection Facility, clearly a success in many measures of assessment, is needed in this community to provide a safe, clean facility for these people. Rather than the facility perpetuating an unhealthy, dangerous habit, it provides an opportunity for drug addicts to be connected to needed services.

Again, I strongly ask you to support this critically important facility.

Sincerely,



Dr. Penny Gurstein
Professor, School of Community and Regional Planning and Centre for Human Settlements, UBC
gurstein@interchange.ubc.ca