

About the Opioid Awareness Project

Cycles and Circles explores the opioid epidemic through art and considers its effect on people.

Bissell Centre community members, and a local poet, author and visual artist held a series of workshops throughout the summer of 2018. Numerous participants shared their deeply personal stories and artwork about addiction. A selection of these moving works is included here.

On average, more than two people are dying every day in Alberta from opioid overdoses.

The **resources section** offers up-to-date information about the opioid crisis and the resources available to inner city Edmontonians.

355 people in the province died from apparent accidental opioid overdoses from January to June 2018. In the same period last year, 332 people died. The number rose to 687 overdose deaths by the end of 2017.



CYCLES & CIRCLES

Stories, poetry and art about addiction created at Edmonton's Bissell Centre

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*Patricia Brockmeyer
hard at work on
creating her energetic,
gestural painting about
transformation during
one of the visual art
workshops held over
the summer of 2018.*



*Craig Wolfe created
this mixed media
artwork patiently
and thoughtfully over
many sessions. His
painting powerfully
relates a story about
how he once sheltered
and ultimately
saved a baby bird.*



About the Opioid Awareness Project

The opioid awareness project *Cycles and Circles* explores the opioid epidemic through art and considers its effect on people struggling with addiction, their family members, and the inner city community at large. This project is a collaboration between the Bissell Centre community members and three local artists: poet Leif Gregersen, author Lea Storry, and visual artist Agnieszka Matejko. A series of workshops was held throughout the summer of 2018 with numerous participants who shared their deeply personal stories and artwork about addiction. A selection of these moving works is included in this publication.

The aim of this project is to raise awareness about the opioid crisis both among participants of the Bissell Centre and other Edmontonians impacted by this growing problem. Using non-stigmatizing, plain language, this publication provides current statistics, and shares harm minimization tactics. Most importantly, this book offers up-to-date information about current resources available to an inner city community that has limited access to social and traditional forms of media.

The Bissell Centre is located in the heart of Edmonton's inner city and provides services to people who are experiencing poverty and/or homelessness. We see upwards to 400 clients a day that face various forms of oppression, including intergenerational trauma, racism, poverty and poor health. We have seen many clients lose their lives to the opioid epidemic over the past few years. We hope this publication empowers our community and provides much needed information on where to seek help.

Rocky Hill was a regular participant in the workshops and submitted dozens of sincere and inspiring poems, stories, and artworks about overcoming addiction.



Johnny McDonald is a talented young artist whose works appeared during the workshops in a flash of inspiration.





Mary-Jo Dion is a prolific artist who experimented with a variety of media and styles during the workshops and plans to continue to develop a series of large paintings inspired by the project.



Daniel, one of the visual art workshop participants, is creating a symbolic work about life on the streets.

Opioid Statistics

Alberta saw **228** fentanyl deaths during the first 18 weeks of 2018.**

The most up-to-date data shows that **733** people died from apparent accidental opioid overdose in Alberta in 2017.

On average **2** people die every day in Alberta as a result of an apparent accidental opioid overdose.***

The first 18 weeks of 2018 saw "significantly more" deaths than the same period of 2017. But there were fewer deaths in the first quarter of 2018 than in the final quarter of 2017.

– Dr. Karen Grimrud, co-chair of the Minister's Opioid Emergency Response Commission

Number of apparent accidental fentanyl poisoning deaths in Edmonton: **2016 = 114**
2017 = 171*

3,537

Emergency Department visits related to opioids and other substances at the Royal Alexandra Hospital since the start of 2014 to 2017, the highest number in Alberta.

Average number of Naloxone kits dispensed each month by community pharmacies in the Edmonton zone on 2017.

322

*<https://edmontonjournal.com/news/local-news/by-the-numbers-albertas-opioid-crisis-hit-edmonton-hard-in-2017>

** <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/alberta-opioid-response-commission-update-1.4735428>

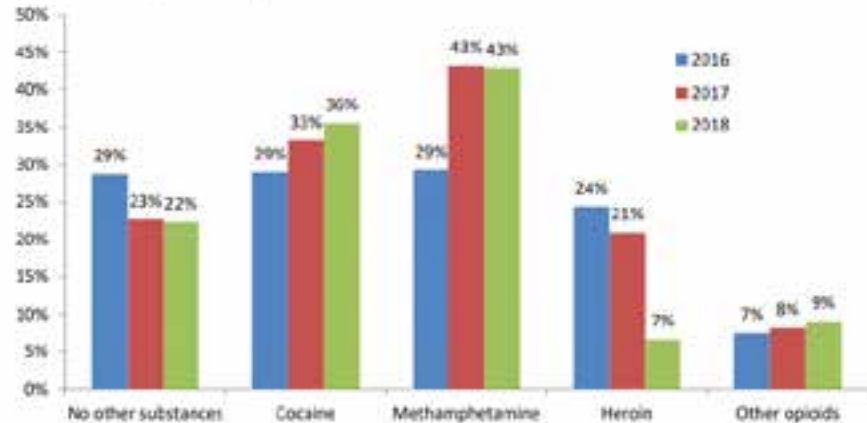
*** <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/1cfed7da-2690-42e7-97e9-da175d36f3d5/resource/dcb5da36-7511-4cb9-ba11-1a0f065b4d8c/download/opioids-substances-misuse-report-2018-q1.pdf>

Fentanyl related deaths

Figure 2: Number of apparent accidental fentanyl poisoning deaths, by Zone (based on place of death) and quarter. January 1, 2016 to June 30, 2018.



Figure 12: Confirmed fentanyl poisoning deaths (accidental) in Alberta, by most common additional substances causing death and year, 2016 to 2018



Lifesaving Naloxone Kits

Naloxone is a drug that can temporarily reverse an opioid (such as fentanyl) overdose, so long as it is given right away and followed up by emergency medical care.

In other words: if you're having an OD from an opioid (such as fentanyl), Naloxone can save your life.

You can get a Naloxone Kit to carry with you, when using drugs.

Naloxone kits are available free of charge to anyone at risk of opioid overdose.

If you get a kit at a community walk-in clinic or pharmacy you do not need ID or a prescription.

Family and friends can also get a kit.

To get your FREE Naloxone Kit, visit one of the following organizations or a walk-in clinic.

Boyle McCauley Health Centre | 10628 96 St NW
780-422-7333
Mon-Thurs: 8 am - 8 pm | Fri: 8 am - 4pm | Sat: 9 am - 12 pm

Downtown Prescription Centre Ltd. | 10419 102 Ave
780-429-2988
Mon-Fri: 9 am - 5 pm | Weekend/Stats: 9 am - 1 pm

Street Works (Boyle Street Community Services) | #10116, 105 Ave NW
780-278-8431
Mon: 9 am - 12 pm | Tues-Fri: 9 am - 12pm, 1pm - 4 pm

Panorama Medical Clinic | #221 10106 111 Ave
780-471-4434
Mon/Wed/Fri: 9 am - 4:30 pm

Naloxone Kits:

Summerside Medical Clinic | #6 1109 Summerside Dr Sw.

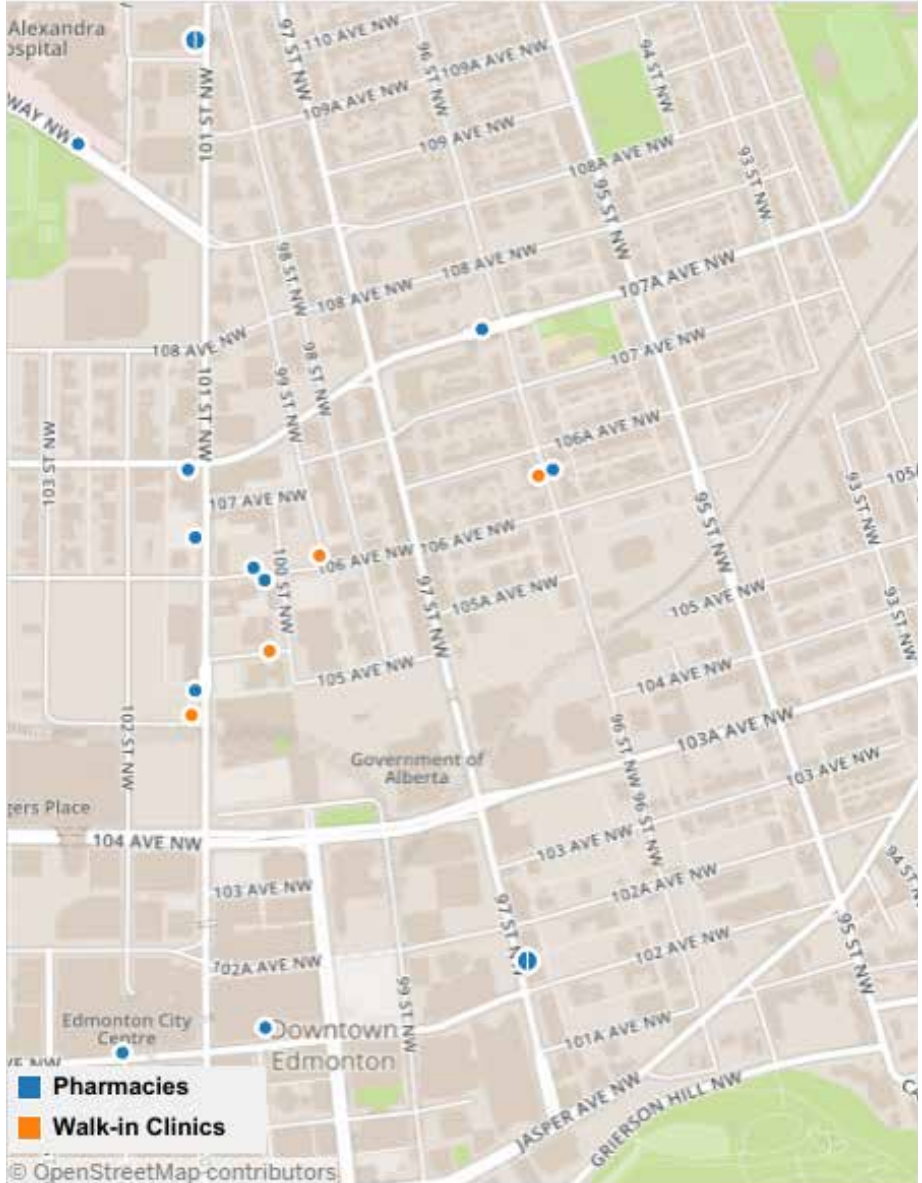
780-249-2727

Mon-Fri: 9 am - 4:30 pm

George Spady Society | #10015, 105A Ave NW

780-424-8335

24/7



Safe Consumption Sites

Street Works locations/times; (Winter Hours)

see map on page 12

Boyle Street Community Services

10116 – 105 Avenue NW Edmonton, Alberta T5H 0K2
(780) 424-4106 (ext. 210 or 211) • StreetWorks@boylestco-op.org
8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. 7 days/week

At Boyle Street Community Services Harm reduction is a practical approach to drug use. It recognizes that quitting drugs may not be realistic or desirable for everyone.

It is:

- community-based
- user-driven
- non-judgmental
- broad-based in that it addresses systems, which isolate, alienate and marginalize people.

The mission of Boyle Street Community Services is to build and provide community support for people with multiple barriers to inclusion. Our vision is to see that all people grow healthier through involvement in strong, accepting and respectful communities.

Bus service is available on the following routes:

3, 9, 12, 125, 134, and 151.

The southbound stop is #1050, northbound is #1587.

Boyle McCauley Health Centre

10628 96 Street NW Edmonton, AB T5H 2J2

8:30pm – 7:00pm Mon-Thurs

8:30am – 3:30pm Friday

9:00am – 12:00pm Saturday

Phone: 780-422-7333 • Fax: 780-422-7343

BMHC is the only non-profit community owned and operated health centre in the greater Edmonton area.

*Addictions and Mental Health services and supports are embedded in Primary Health Care. We provide a broad range of medical services. **We are equipped to deal with minor emergencies, including stitches burn treatment, and wound care.***

www.bmhc.net/contact-us

George Spady Society

10015 105A Ave NW, Edmonton, AB T5H 0M5

7 days/week 4pm – Midnight

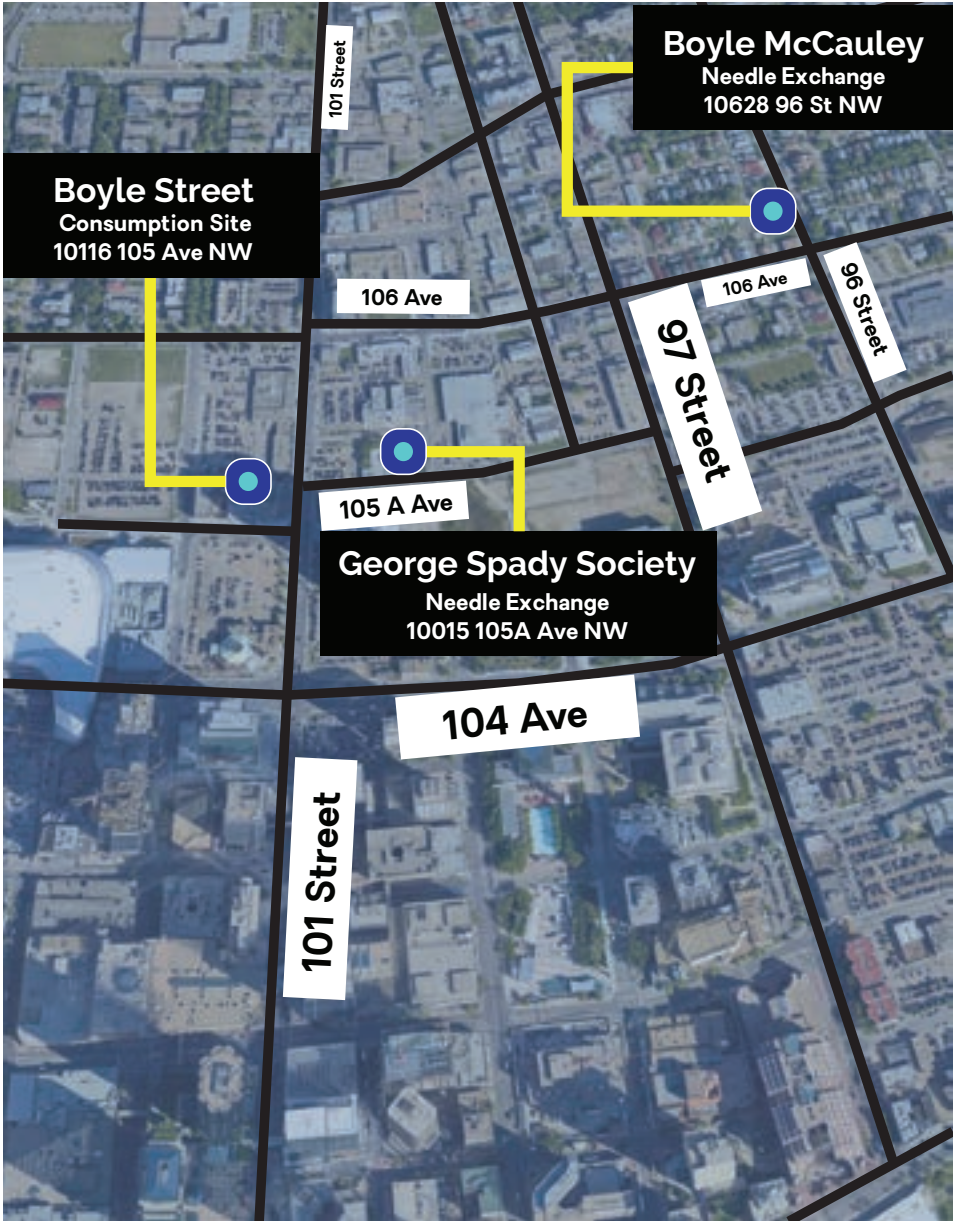
Other Services provided at George Spady Society

- 24 hour physical care and supervision
- Compassion and understanding from trained staff
- Opportunity and encouragement to look at new directions in life
- Information regarding treatment options and self-help groups

Detox

- Supervised withdrawal
- Assessment and referral to treatment programs
- Information sessions and self-help program introduction
- Referral as needed to other programs and services

Safe Consumption Sites



see details on page 10 and 11

Needle Exchange Services

Street Works Mobile Van

THE STREETWORKS VAN (mobile needle exchange)

Cruising the inner city:

Every day 8:30 p.m. - 12:30 a.m.

Cell phone: 780 990-6641 (during van operating hours)

STD Clinic, Alberta Health Services

11111 Jasper Ave Edmonton, AB 413-5156

9:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Mon. to Fri.

HIV Edmonton

9702 111 Ave. NW Edmonton, AB T5G 0B1

Toll Free Phone 1.877.388.5742

Phone 780.488.5742

9:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Mon. to Fri.

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7 days/week 4pm - Midnight

Don't be afraid to call 911!

The Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act provides some legal protection for people who experience or witness an overdose and call 9-1-1 for help.

The act can protect you from:

- Charges for possession of a controlled substance (i.e. drugs) under section 4 (1) of the Controlled Drugs And Substances Act
- Breach of conditions regarding simple possession of controlled substances (i.e. drugs) in:
 - Pre-trial release
 - Probation orders
 - Conditional sentences
 - Parole

The Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act applies to anyone seeking emergency support during an overdose, including the person experiencing an overdose. The act protects the person who seeks help, whether they stay or leave from the overdose scene before help arrives. The act also protects anyone else who is at the scene when help arrives.

Works and Creators

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Rocky Hill

Opiate Drugs

People that sell the drugs
they should all be given
a life term sentence
for taking people's lives

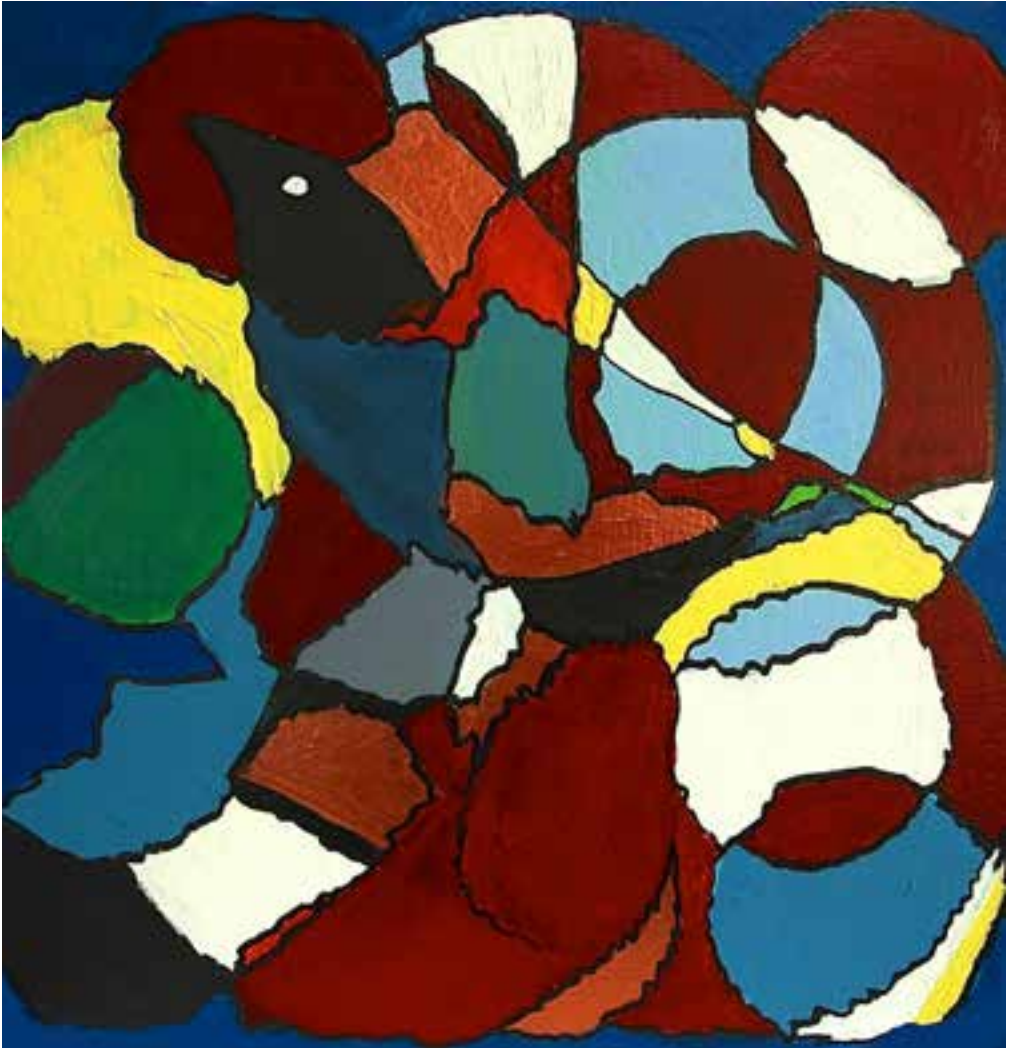
I have lost so many
innocent friends
who lost their lives
from opioid drugs

It's really so sad
that some don't have
a conscience about
killing people

Bless all my friends
that are in a place
that is so beautiful
at peace in their lives

Bless the people
that don't have
a conscience
in their lives
that sell the drugs
that kill
the innocent
people

Mary-Jo Dion



*Addiction is like the earth, it goes round and round.
It takes years until you are ready to find the exit.*

Patricia Brockmeyer



When I am sober and clean, I become that butterfly.

Carrie Larson

Dance the 96 Street Hustle

Here on the street I sit
Looking for a hustle
Picking up anything to sell

I'm sick and weak
Trying to get
My fix

When I do
I go into
A cloud of bliss

Numbing my mind
For an hour or two

Then back at the hustle
For my next fix

Numbing my feelings
To escape reality

I want to quit
That world

I can't escape it
I've OD'd a few times
But still
It doesn't stop me

I got too clouded in my head
When I did too much

It blocked my hearing
Seeing
Breathing

Gabriel Sunshine

The Voice that Grows Louder

I was working in Fort McMurray as a scaffolder. I've spent the better part of my adult life up there, inside camps working for oil companies. Most of that time I was, and still am, an addict. This is how I finally reached rock bottom.

I was working a 7&7 shift, which is seven on working days, seven off. I would put my name in for overtime and every time I'd get the chance for more days off.

Days off weren't what people thought they'd be. Most would picture relaxing and heavenly wonders – a dream if you will.

But not mine.

My days were four days of a nightmarish hell, diluted with so much dopamine that the human brain would think it was, in fact, in heaven. I would drown my liver with booze and suffocate my lungs with crack residue. I am surprised my organs haven't given out.

Finally, I felt that "give up and quit" feeling inside me. Mentors, and other people had told me about it. It was when I was on the town bus, late for work, looking out the window. I was heading back to camp, contemplating which strategy would work best to fulfill my suicide. As I thought deeper and deeper a voice inside me grew louder and louder.

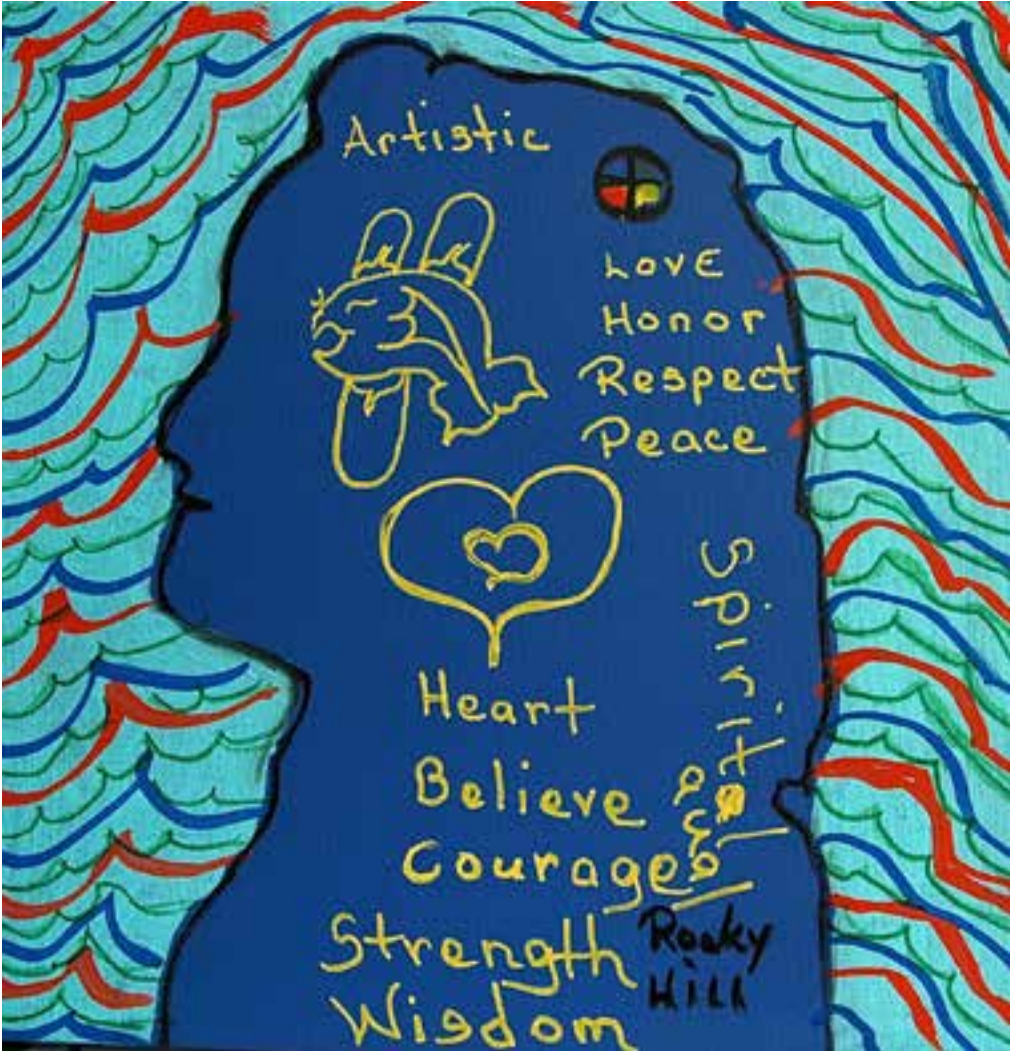
The Voice was crying out, asking for help.

The louder it cried, the more my problem solving skills worked on a solution to my pain.

Union members get rehab paid in full for them so I asked my job steward for guidance and went from there. I started upon my road of recovery. I went from darkness to light and back again.

This is how I changed my life.

Rocky Hill



Art is a big part of my healing journey.

Doris McAdam

Alcoholic State of Mind

Sips take the life
One part hateful drink
Pieces slip away
Takes the night away
Hits you like thunder
Slaps you like lightning

I long for a drink
Ache for a sip
Sip the drink
Laugh sadly
My mind has gone away

Pieces, a silent drink
Quietly stands with you
Sip of cruelty
Slowly drains

Johnny McDonald



This is me tripping out and everyone is watching me.

Craig Wolfe

Left Behind

Addiction consumed my soul-mate forevermore.

We met in the summer of '08. I was the handyman, she was my boss. She told me from the outset that she liked meth. I told her not to let it consume her, as it would easily destroy everything she loved and cherished.

Then the American recession hit in '09. With the stress of losing our jobs and the difficulties that ensued, her chemical romance overwhelmed her. She put it before her children, me, and her schooling – everything she loved and cherished.

She was found by her six-year-old daughter.

We were left with the emptiness of a world without Vanessa.

Even though she thought she was a bad mother, no child should be without one. Children need to be loved and cherished.

Charlotte



*The Creator is the most powerful force.
When I see a bison that's how I feel.
I get angry enough to fight for what I believe in.*

Larry Anderson

My Poppy

the blood red flower commemorates valour

the flower of the same name

the flower of a different colour

rages a different battle

a tiny pill, a needle

the addicts' treasure

who remembers them?

Sarah Potts



This represents me. It's about me running away and hiding within myself. It's about my addiction hurting my family.

Rocky Hill

Prayer

I drank alcohol and did drugs
Because I was in so much pain in my life

Alcohol was like a painkiller for me
I used to think
That I can wash away all my pains

My drug addiction was like a wish that
I can be happy all the time

But that never works

Until one day I had the courage
To change my ways

Creator,
Change me!

Daniel



This painting represents the feeling you have when you wake up and your boots have been stolen in the middle of the night leaving you barefoot and ashamed.

Mary-Jo Dion

The “Addict Label”

There is no other way to describe that big word: addict. When I first started down the road to sobriety, clean from everything,

I wasn't ready to admit, even to myself, that I was an addict.

It was really hard to do, but I knew it had to be done.

I didn't do it alone. I went to detox. There, I was struggling.

Should I stay or should I go? But I was there with others going through everything. Some were going through it harder and left. I wanted to leave too but I stuck it out.

I didn't leave. If I had, I might have been a failure. Thank God there was one word, defeat, that stuck in my mind. Even as I sit and write this, that word spins in my mind.

I am not a happy camper when I'm being judged as an addict. But everywhere we go, we are named. “Addict” is just a name. It hurt for a while but eventually, the hurt slowly goes away.

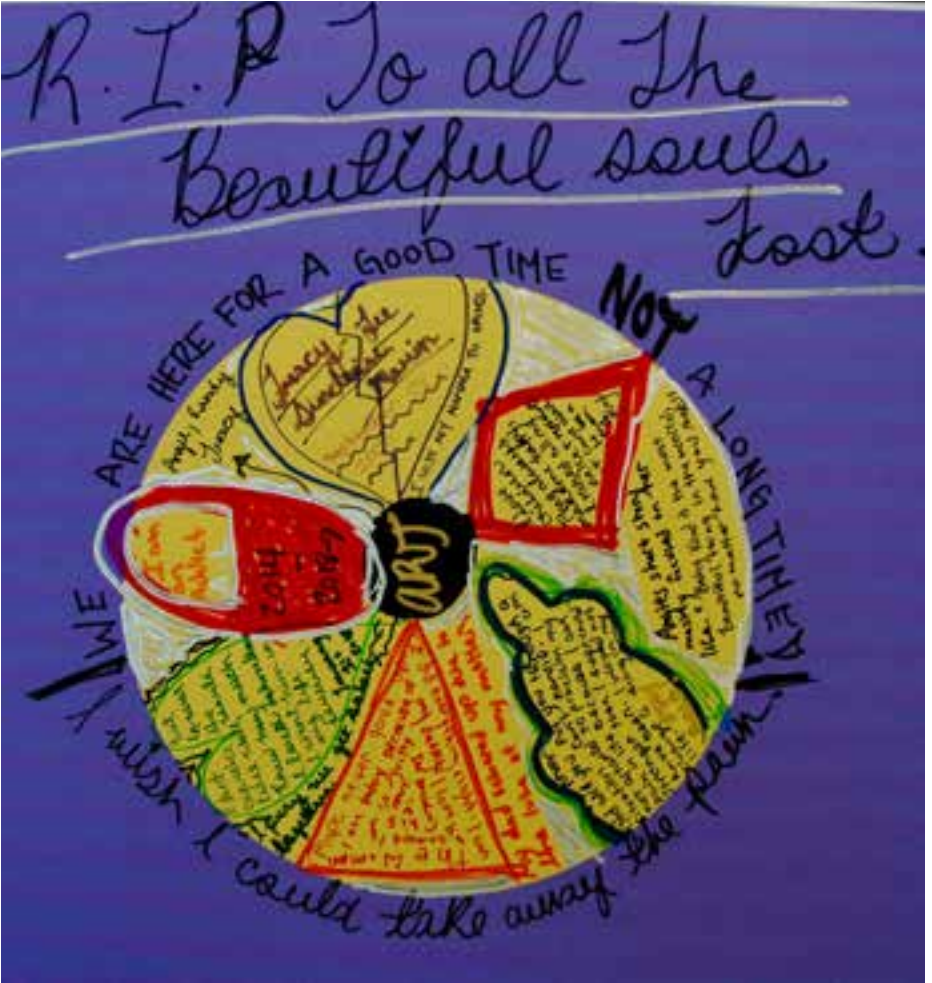
The ones who point the finger are usually afraid of change. Now it really makes me think: no one got me here, to a clean life. I can say one thing: I am an addict and I can't turn back. I'm so proud to be alcohol free. Drug free. I earned everything I own, even my new life today. I prayed and my prayer was answered.

I thank all the people who opened their hearts to help us with change.

I am happy, and nothing can change things – except for me.

Hi, my name is Mary-Jo and I'm an addict.

Angela Leblanc



Rocky Hill

My Heart Cries Out

I have never used
Opioid drugs
it's really so sad that
there are so many
innocent people
that lost their lives

I always pray
that one day
everyone will stop using
while they are still alive
still have a hope to survive

I made a choice to quit drinking
firewater forty-five years ago now
I quit all my drug addictions
since then I've been on
a healing journey

I always pray
for the addicts
all over the world
that one day everyone
will just stop
go back to living
their lives

Bless each
and every
one

Rainer Stratkotter



Syringes and arm tie-off band in a plastic container that I found deserted on the ground in the McCauley neighborhood.

Lee Pahtayken

Two Sides of Life

My addiction is meth smoking.

I've been on drugs for about four to five years ...I can't tell. My days have turned to years. The world is a blur.

And yes, it's true what they say about drug use for a long period of time – your world turns into a big nightmare. You start having conversations with your inner self. Not realizing that you're speaking out loud for other people to see and to talk about.

In many ways, there are two worlds out there, the world of drugs and the world of the clean and sober. Every single one of us has two sides.

The positive side

and

the negative side.

All you have to do is pick a side and then accept the results.

You need to plan good long-term goals.

The best thing about that is being victorious in the end.

With a drug-free world.

Barry Koenig



The bear spirit guided me to sobriety.

Craig Wolfe



*Some people feel that they can see the light at the end of the tunnel
but they can't get there because they are so lost.*

Michael Vaughan

Treasures and Floods

To me, one day at a time means the steady dripping of ground water in a cave; echoing into a silent darkness slowly crystalizing layers of onyx into a growing hidden treasure.

A sudden downpour draining into a dry ravine in the badlands, rushing down to the river floodplain carrying with it a massive load of debris to add to the alluvial fan buttressing the valley wall.

Sarah Potts



Addiction makes my mind go in circles... round and round.

Constance Williams

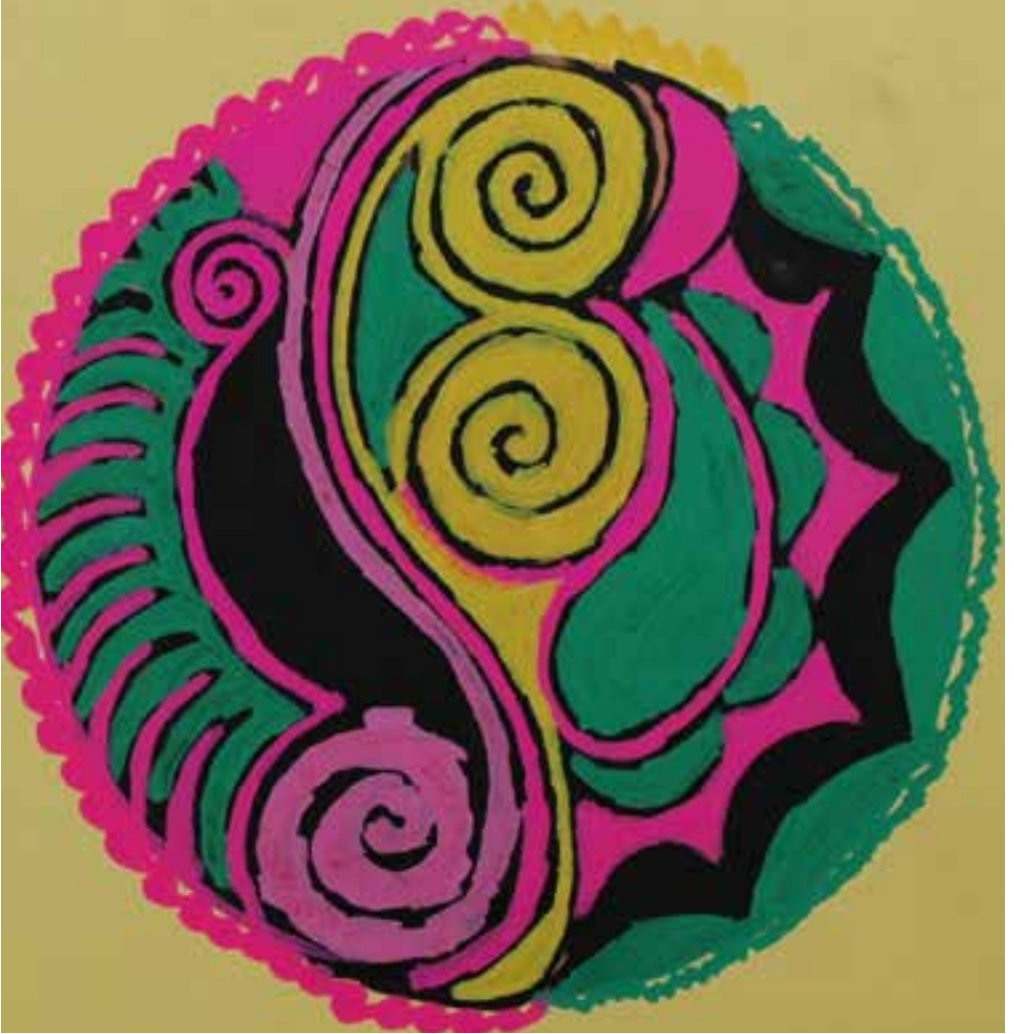
Dear Family

Always, forever, with love to my family:

Thank you for not giving up on me and my wandering curious soul and heart.

I love all of you and the entire human race as well as Mother Earth.

Anonymous



Don't give up your life.

Rocky Hill



*If you talk to the sun it's warm and gives you that feeling of love.
The sunshine can heal.*

Lee Pahtayken

Addiction

I was raised with revenge towards violence.

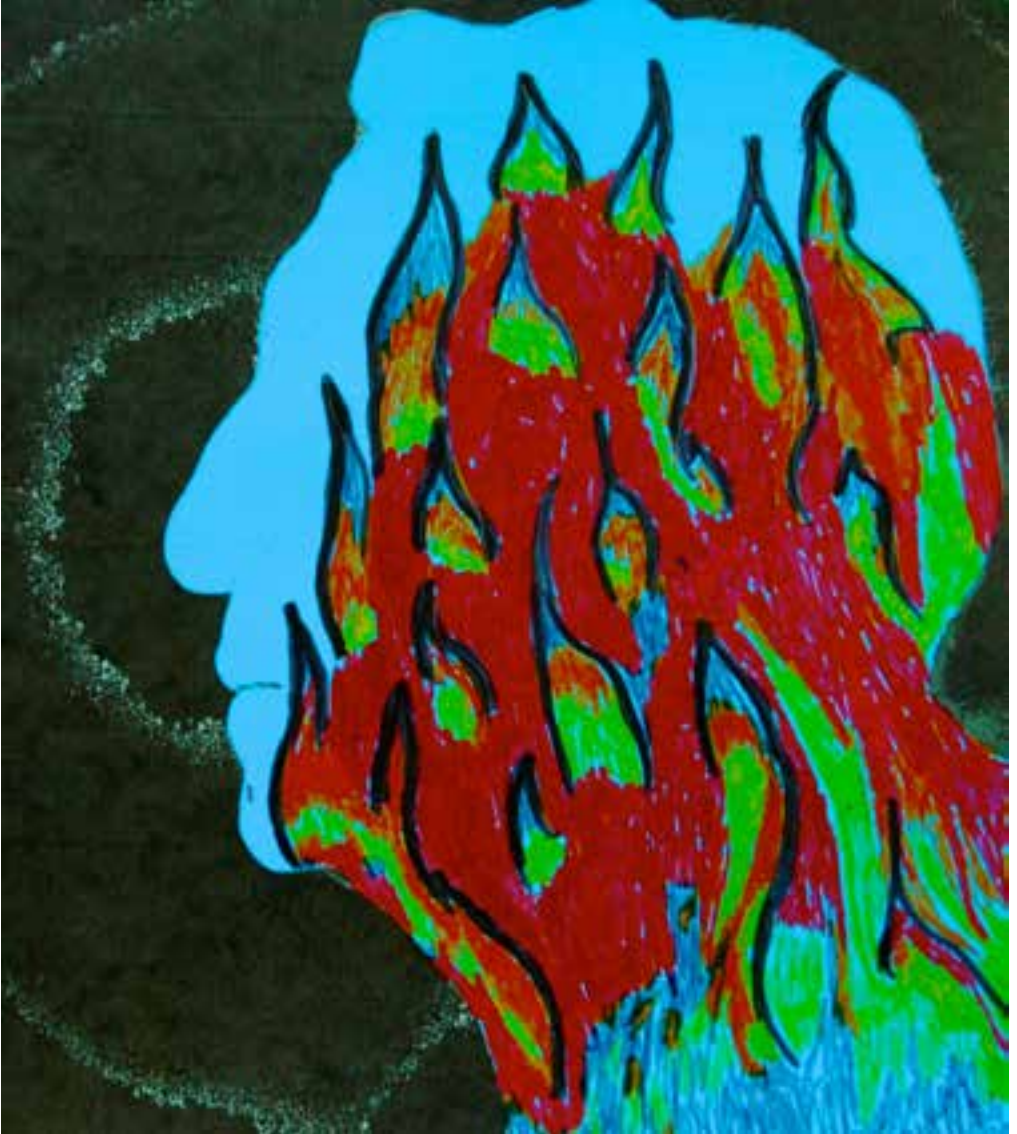
A lot of confusion. No trust.

In later years, hidden enemies were stronger than the rest. Hiding behind smiles.

I learn as I go from the mistakes I make.

I get stronger and wiser.

Barry Koenig



My grandfather got me out of addiction through the Native culture. He was a medicine man and helped me get off drinking and drugs.

Larry Anderson

Janus Syndrome

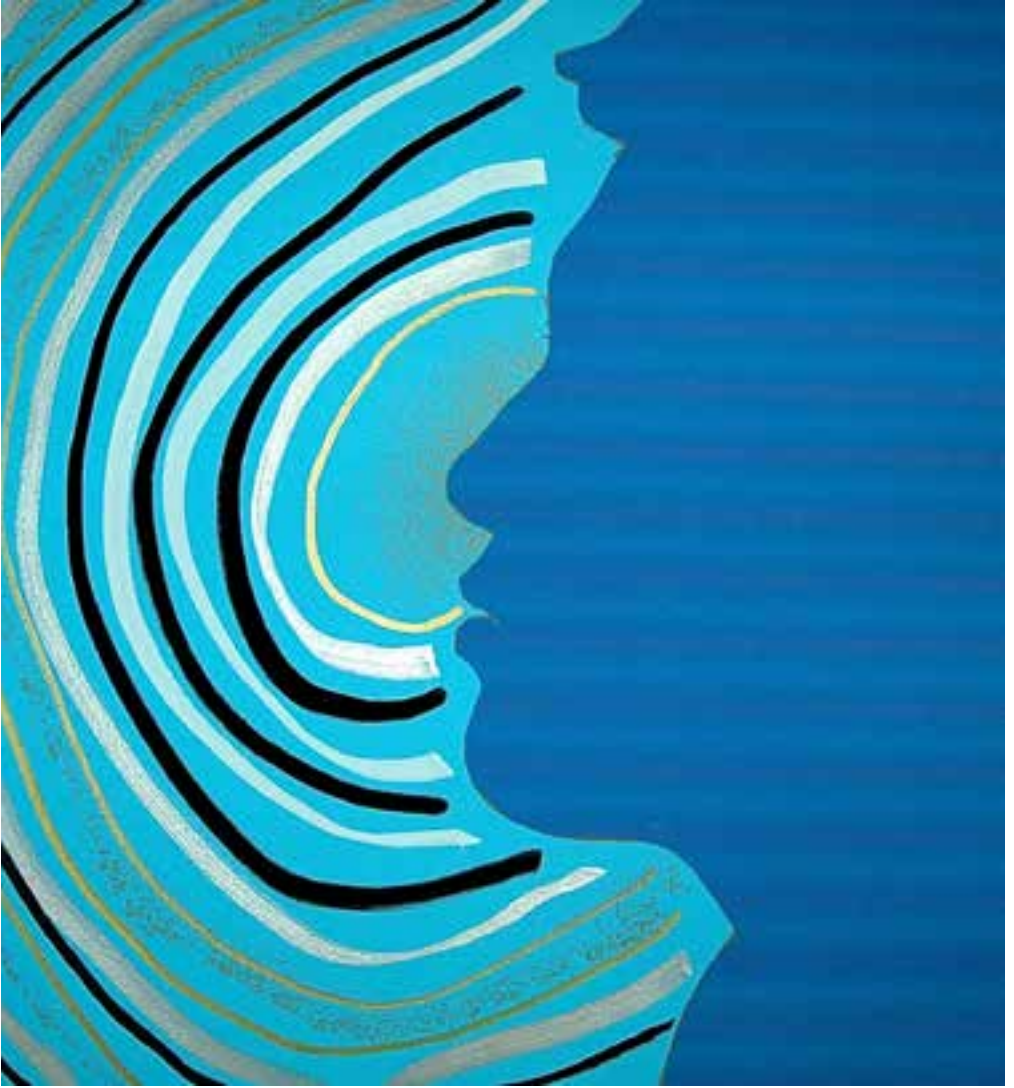
pain without fault

is the medicine

pain without gain

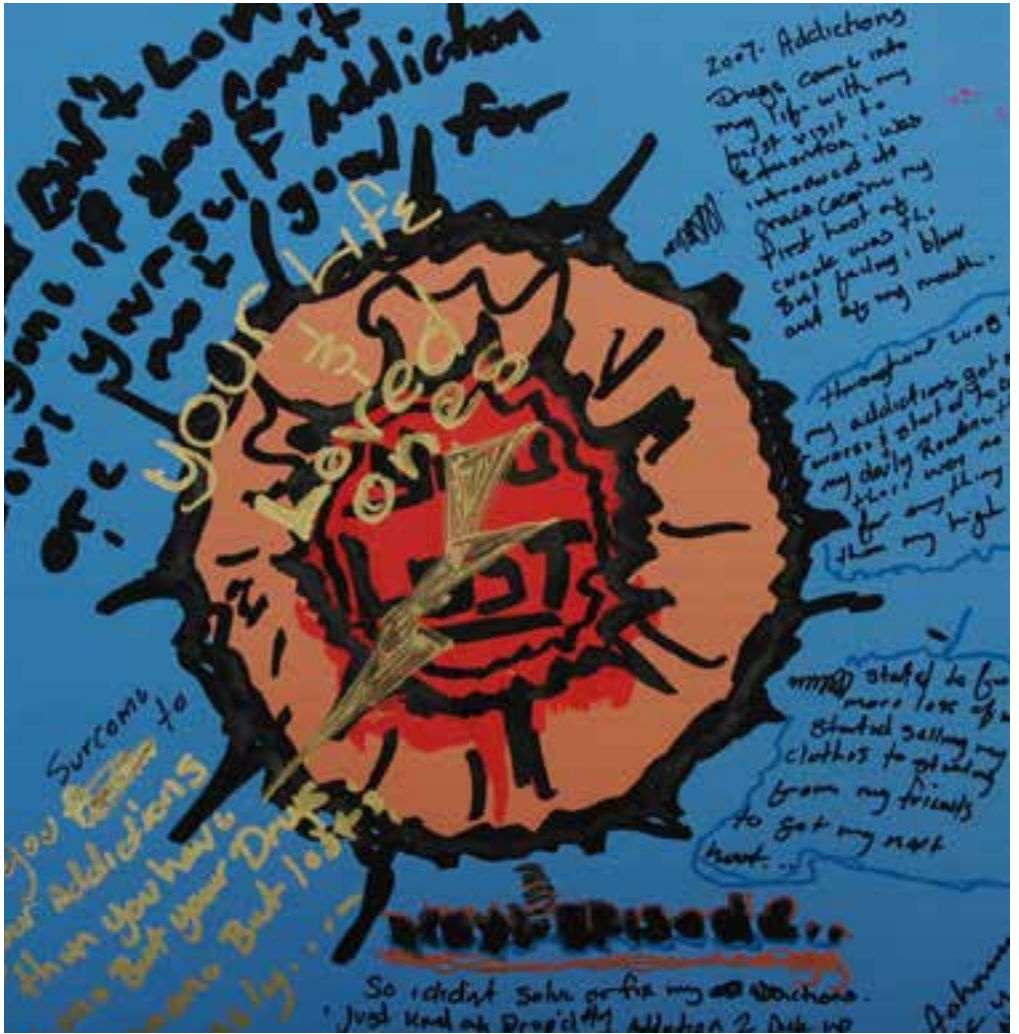
is the addiction

Sarah Potts



This is what it's like to come down after a high.

Johnny McDonald



*Mary Anne
Apraku-Anderson*

Looking Ahead

Being homeless in Edmonton changed my view of life in many different ways.

I've experienced many things and learned something new every day.

I've lost many friends due to drugs, gang activities and family issues like domestic violence.

At the end of the day, I realize that I don't want to be a part of those negative situations.

Flora Paintedstone



*My mom was an addict when she was pregnant with me
and I have fetal alcohol syndrome. I don't feel normal.
It breaks my heart when I see people doing that kind of stuff.
Addiction makes a person feel lost and alone.
Their heart is broken.*

Dino Robinson

The Challenge

My name is Dino and I'm a rodbuster from Vancouver.

I plan to go back to my job. I went the wrong way doing drugs which fucked me up and that's why I'm here in Edmonton. I'm realizing drugs aren't worth it.

Life is too short and I love life and I'm ready to change and do good again.

Saying all that, I'm afraid to go back to Vancouver 'cause I don't want to do the same old thing, being an addict and using all the time.

I'm so fucked up after doing damn fentanyl. It's like my life has had to start all over again.

I know this but I still feel left out.

It's like no one cares about my story.

But in my heart, I know that the Creator is with me and I'm not alone.

Rocky Hill



*The bunny is a beautiful creature. Sometimes
they bring people a message.
Animals can guide people out of addiction.
They show people how to live.*

Mike

The Social Crisis of Opioids

Ethos starts the chain
that binds perpetrators
to their victims.

The gripping drama
of ruined lives
fixes our gaze.
A distraction from
the casual links
to the makers of the drugs
creating havoc.

Fourteen billion in revenue
is the binding force
holding the manufacturers fast
to the addicts
they laboured to fabricate.

Striving to profit
from societal ruin
is the ethos
of lone predators.

Mary-Jo Dion



*This painting is about mood swings and struggling with problems.
When I was an addict I didn't have to worry about problems.
Since I have been sober, my life hasn't been the same.*

Robert Burniston

The Only Cure

The sidewalk smacks you
right in the face
and the dope
won't kill the pain

All roads lead to the same dark place
and you search for a sign
from above

The answer is simple
the answer is plain
the only cure
is patience and love

Rainer Stratkotter



The opioid epidemic killed a dear friend of mine by a fentanyl overdose.



Used syringe box and an arm tie-off blue band that I found in a Bissell Centre washroom.

Dino Robinson

Merch Fix

It seems like I was trapped on heroin use.

I got to the point where I could not wake up in time to do my job. After 30 days of no sleep, I knew my addiction was taking off 'cause I could not wake up.

Off work now, I pick cans and any nice "merch" I find.

Merch is short for merchandise and you'd be surprised at what people throw in the garbage: nice jeans, runners and even jewellery.

I pick up this stuff and sell it.

I also stole from someone but I tried not to do that often.

It seems cool to sell merch for my addiction 'cause it's a good way to make money

for my next fix.

That's how I take care of my addiction.

Rocky Hill

I CAN SAY THAT FOR MYSELF I KNOW THAT I'M NO BETTER THAN ANY ONE WE ARE ALL BEAUTIFUL EQUAL HUMAN BEINGS AS ONE

I MADE A GOOD CHOICE FOR MYSELF TO QUIT DRINKING ALCOHOL ABOUT FORTY FOUR YEARS AGO WITH MY WILL POWER



I ALWAYS PRAY THAT ONE DAY EVERY ONE CAN MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICES FOR THEM SELVES ALL MY RELATIONS

I MADE A GOOD CHOICE TO QUIT MY DRUGS IN MY LIFE BECAUSE I TOOK MY LIFE FOR GRANTED

Dino Robinson

It's all up to Me

I blame myself for my addictions.

I started using by hanging with people who I thought were my friends.

I didn't want to be alone.

I made choices I thought were right but were wrong in the end. I've hurt lots of people.

I never cared about anything or anybody because of drugs.

I plan to have better thoughts and make better choices in my life and feel good about them.

I'm on the right track now.

One day at a time.

Publication assistance and digital printing in Canada by



Bissel Centre would like to thank:

The Government of Alberta



The community members who donated cameras.

The Paint Spot
Signworks Plus

Facilitators



Lea Storry is an author, editor and publisher. She also teaches memoir writing to people of all ages and walks-of-life. She's a former journalist who believes just like everyone can sing, everyone can write.



Agnieszka Matejko is a visual arts writer and community based artist. She engages non-arts based groups in public art projects. Her recent collaborative works include *Word On the Street*, a Canada Council, New Chapter funded poetry installation sandblasted into the sidewalks of McCauley.



Leif Gregerson is a McCauley poet with a passion for reaching out to those who need help the most. He has written fourteen books, of which four are poetry collections. Before being a part of the Opioid Awareness Project, he held workshops for *Word On the Street* poetry project. Leif is proud to say that most of his fiction, non-fiction, and poetry can be found in the Edmonton Public Library. He is also a regular contributor of articles and poems for the *Boyle-McCauley News*.