

# GET TO KNOW YOUR ED PATIENTS

## The Stories and Life Journeys of People Who Use(d) Substances

"Thank you for listening to what I have to say."

"Even the ones [patients] that are harder to manage will actually slow down a bit and be easier if you treat them with respect."

“

I'm still here and I'm still alive.

”



MR. D

Retired Engineer



After spending his youth and early adulthood in Winnipeg, Mr. D decided to find a fresh start in British Columbia. He was an engineer back home, and picked up some work when he arrived. He started drinking and smoking marijuana from a young age, but when he moved to BC, he was introduced to cocaine and crystal meth. It wasn't until he was in a horrible car accident that he started using opioids to help with his pain. He tried to quit opioids in the past, and even had a seven-year sober stretch after a stay in a treatment facility. Eventually, he started to have health issues which brought him to the St. Paul's Hospital where he was diagnosed with chronic kidney disease. It had progressed to the point where he required dialysis. Since this diagnosis, he's been on a journey to cut down his opioid use and be an active participant in his health care. In life, he is most proud of the steps he has taken to prioritize his health and participate in dialysis. He receives dialysis at St. Paul's Hospital and credits the staff for helping him navigate this new situation. "Thank you all for being there for me, I'm still here and I'm still alive."

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“If you give them the respect they deserve, then they'll treat you with respect.”

“I treaded lightly coming in but they immediately greeted me with a smile and treated me just fine.”

“

Thank you [St. Paul's staff] for *treating me like a human being*

”



MS. G  
SRO Caretaker



Ms. G, a proud Mi'kmaq woman from Nova Scotia, grew up in an environment surrounded by alcohol and drug use. She tried to avoid that lifestyle, having seen the effects it had on those around her. When she was 18, she had ruptured her appendix and was prescribed morphine to manage her pain. Unfortunately, a series of horrible car accidents led her to keep using opioids to manage her pain, and she was never able to stop. She's been in and out of emergency departments ever since. When she visited the St. Paul's Emergency Department, she was expecting the worst, having received poor treatment in other hospitals in the past. The staff were responsive to her needs and listened to what she had to say. She feels comfortable seeking care at St. Paul's in the future because of her positive experiences. Looking forward, she will continue her care-taking role at her SRO and support others who share a similar story. Simply put, "Thank you [St. Paul's staff] for treating me like a human being."

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“I shouldn't have to fight to not slip through the cracks.”

“Opiates don't just numb wounds, they numb things across the board, everything, like your psyche and emotions.”

“They treaded me as a person, as a *human being*, and the addiction is secondary.”

“

What's important to me is *freedom*

”

**MR. X**

Born and raised in the Lower Mainland



A local man, Mr. X, had a rough childhood navigating a difficult family dynamic in a low-income neighborhood. To get through the days, he turned to opioids to help “numb the psyche and emotions”. He is on a long-term journey of recovery, with hiccups along the way, and is hoping to stop using opioids for good one day. He first visited St. Paul’s Hospital Emergency Department not too long ago and was surprised at the positive way in which he was treated. He was sent by his community health center for an assessment and was immediately placed in the Fast Track and was treated very well by the staff for the three days he waited until a ward bed became available. “How they treat a person with addictions seems to standalone.” After having tried methadone and suboxone in the past, he was grateful to the addictions medicine team for telling him about Kadian. He looks forward to finding a new sense of freedom while on Kadian thanks to the care he received at St. Paul’s Hospital.

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"Growing up I was always shoved aside."

"They looked at me like I'm not an addict, I'm actually someone who came here to get help."

"You can't bundle everyone into one group. Addicts are different. Look at the bigger picture and meet the person where they are at, where they come from, and their individual situations."

“

I don't know what it is that keeps me using, but I'm not willing to give up either. I'm gonna keep trying until I get it, or I die.

”

MR. K



Mr. K, an Indigenous man from Red Deer, had a difficult childhood, facing abuse and abandonment by his adopted family. He left home at the age of twelve and had to learn how to fend for himself. When he turned 26, he knew it was time to make a change in his life. As he was trying to reconcile relationships with his adopted family, the pressures of juggling work and raising his newborn baby, led him to start using crystal meth. He soon left his family in Alberta and moved out to Vancouver. He has visited the St. Paul's Emergency Department for various health concerns and feels appreciated when staff take the time to figure out what's wrong and listen to his complaints. "Thanks for treating me like a person, that made me feel cared for, and I don't get that a lot." He feels strongly that people should be treated with respect no matter their background. One day, he hopes to reconcile with his children and stay clean.

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"A lot of loss was going on and that's when it started to go downhill."

"Thank you for keeping a watch on how your performance is and keeping an update on that. Where can you improve and do better? That's a good thing."

“

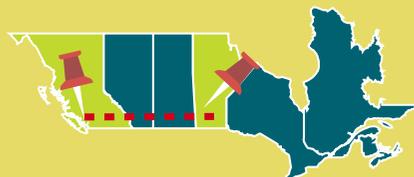
Loves cooking and being an Aunt.

”



MS. J

Cook



Ms. J is a lovely lady from Manitoba who has been a cook for over 15 years. Graduating from culinary school is one of her proudest accomplishments. Her life has not been without its difficulties as she turned to drinking and substance use to cope with the tragic loss of her brother and father. She moved out to BC for a fresh start, but unfortunately was introduced to opioids. After a scary overdose experience, she has worked hard to remain sober and focus on taking care of her health. Reintegrating into her Indigenous culture has helped her learn more about herself and move on from her past. As a frequent visitor to the St. Paul's Hospital Emergency Department, she has seen a vast transformation in her care and the care of people who use drugs over the past 15 years. "They'll steer them to somewhere they can get the help they are looking for," whether that's safe supply or overdose prevention sites. She's grateful for the help she's received over the years and the Department's commitment to improvement. She looks forward to getting back to her cooking and continuing to explore her love for food.

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"They, [the staff], were so helpful and understanding of what I was going through."

"Bear with us, some of us are just a bit scared and worried. Talk to them, get to know them, get their trust and then you'll be fine. Some people have been through so much, they want to hide the truth. Once you get their trust, they're open to your help and suggestions."



Try to let all the negative experiences go and just start over



**MS. T**

**Goal: Complete her studies in Indigenous Health at SFU**



Ms. T was born in a small town in Alberta and grew up in Edmonton. As the oldest child, she was responsible for raising her younger sister. She started drinking in high school and ultimately began using opioids and crystal meth after graduation. At the same time, she was coming into her own as a transgender woman. When she accessed health care, for various reasons, she felt stigmatized. During her most recent visit to the St. Paul's Emergency Department, she felt the staff "were so helpful and understanding of what I was going through". She encourages staff to not be quick to dismiss people who use drugs. "Bear with us, some of us are just scared and worried. Once you get our trust, we're more open to your help and suggestions." From her life experiences, she knows how important it is to be able to let go of the past and start over. She is hopeful that optimizing her health will help her return to school, complete her degree in health sciences, and further explore her culture.

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"When I have nothing, even just giving me a smile or something goes a long way."

"Thank everyone for their hard work and doing their due diligence."

**Goal:**  
Looking forward to getting his health back on track



**MR. H**  
Musician



Music has been a part of Mr. H's life from a young age. He can simply pick up an instrument and learn the basics within a day. It was music that led him to move from his home in Alberta to Vancouver. Unfortunately, he was introduced to opioids and experienced a series of health crises as a result. He's proud of the steps he has taken to seek help despite the mental and physical challenge of doing so. He has visited the St. Paul's Emergency Department over the five years he has lived in Vancouver. He appreciated how the staff "took [his situation] seriously because they realized - he's obviously in pain". In particular, he's thankful for the quick connection to the Addiction Medicine team who restarted him on methadone which he knows will help him in the long-term. He wants to "thank everybody for their hard work and doing their due diligence. When I have nothing, even just giving me a smile goes a long way." He hopes to break out of his "loop" of addiction and start playing his music again.

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"When I was in my addiction, nothing else mattered."

"You have all these labels on you as soon as they hear your address is in the Downtown Eastside."

"Thank you for your dedication and passion for caring for others. You're doing good care."

"They involved me in my care and that made a huge difference in my experience."



Proud grandmother,  
HIV Patient Advocate,  
Researcher



MS. N



Ms. N, of Mi'kmaq and Haida descent, grew up on the Island and had to learn to overcome obstacles from a young age. Dealing with past trauma and the challenges of being a single mom, she was introduced to cocaine as a way to cope with her significant demands. When her kids graduated high school, she moved out to the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver and starting using other substances. She then got diagnosed with HIV and lost her housing. She recalls a moment where she heard the banging of drums on East Hastings. She rushed over and found an Indigenous ceremony in progress. She began to weep, and from that moment, her life turned around. Now, she is a proud grandmother and health advocate for people who use drugs and those living with HIV. She works to support others as they navigate the health system and spearheads research projects to improve the care of people who use drugs. She strongly believes in the power of words and has worked to de-stigmatize and remove labels. When she visited the St. Paul's Hospital Emergency Department, she felt most respected when the staff "treated [her] as a human" and interactions were "reciprocal and respectful". Looking forward, Ms. N is excited to continue her international advocacy work and bring awareness to health challenges experienced by those living with HIV and people who use drugs.

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“As a peer navigator, I've had the chance to present things to others from an Indigenous perspective, a two-eyed seeing approach.”

“Offering to chat or offering a sandwich, that makes the experience so much better because it makes them think - wow this person cares about me.”



“  
People just need someone to listen to them.  
”

### MR. FISCHER

Peer Navigator, International advocate for people living with HIV/AIDS, community garden director, and electric scooter fan.



Mr. Fischer is a proud Mi'kmaq man from the East Coast who has worked hard to advocate for the health and social needs of people living with HIV. After his diagnosis of HIV in 2012, he started using crystal meth with the intention of escaping from his reality. Eventually, he came to realize he needed to regain control of his life, and began to volunteer with AIDS Vancouver, ultimately helping him cut down and stop his drug use. Throughout the years, he is grateful for the Fast Track at the St. Paul's Hospital Emergency Department, where the quiet environment and quick access to care “makes a big difference when you're not feeling well.” His personal experience with peer navigators at St. Paul's Hospital led him to become a peer navigator himself, helping guide and support others through their health journeys. He strongly believes in the importance of having allies and advocates for patients who otherwise face barriers to accessing care. Simply offering to chat or provide some food goes a long way. He looks forward to continuing to be a peer navigator and proponent of health systems change both at a local and international level.

# Thank you ED Staff!

- from patients who use substances that you've helped over the years

"Thank you for your dedication and passion for caring for others. You're doing good care."

"Thanks for treating me like a person. In this world, I have two strikes against me, one I'm aboriginal, and two, I'm an addict. I can even say three strikes because I have a criminal record. Having [you] treat me like a human made me feel cared for. I don't get that a lot."

"Thank you for having patience with me."

"Thank you all for being there for me, I'm still here and I'm still alive".

"Thank you for keeping a watch on how your performance is and keeping an update on that. Where can you improve and do better? That's a good thing."

"Thank you for listening to what I have to say so you can figure out what was wrong with me."

"Thank you for treating me like a human being."