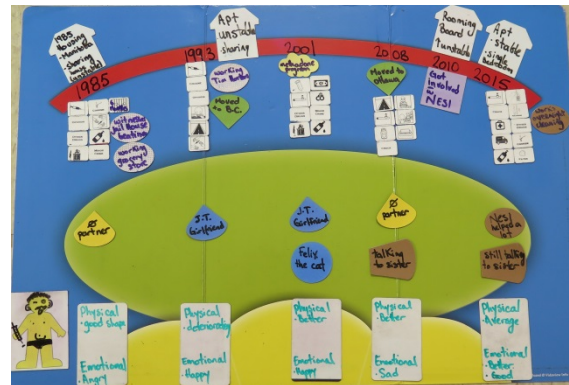
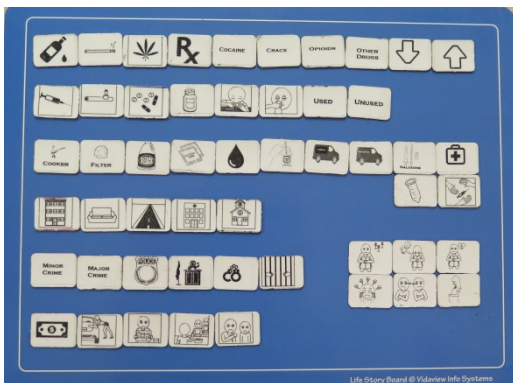




An Infosheet for Service Providers: Findings from the Life Story Board Study From The Participatory Research in Ottawa: Understanding Drugs (PROUD) Research Team

Study objectives:

- 1) To evaluate the Vidaview Life Story Board™ as a qualitative interview tool with PWID in a community-based research setting
- 2) To assess the conceptualization of harm reduction and use of harm reduction practices among people who inject drugs (PWID) in Ottawa



Socio-demographic portrait of 23 participants:

- 14 men, 9 women
- Mean age = 49 years
- Mean length of time injecting drugs = 25 years
- 75% lived in Centretown, Downtown or Lowertown
- 62% lived in an apartment or house
- 67% considered their housing to be stable

The Life Story Board findings:

- Participants thoroughly enjoyed participating in the study, partly because they were interviewed by people with lived experiences of drug use which allowed the following:
 - Validation of the use of harm reduction practices
 - Relating to personal experiences and not feeling judged
 - Enhanced sharing and learning (knowledge exchange)
- Participants considered the Life Story Board to be useful for the following reasons:
 - Helped jog memory
 - Enabled staying on track
 - Transparency

Harm Reduction findings:

1) What is the relationship of PWID to harm reduction?

- Participants' motivations for using harm reduction went beyond concerns about their health to include:



- Maintaining relationships with loved ones
- A desire for self-improvement

2) What types of strategies do PWID use to reduce harm in their daily lives?

- Community health and social services
 - Community Health Centres were highlighted
 - Used to get gear, housing support, counselling, information, medical care, etc.
 - Reasons why participants used these services included to:
 - Obtain moral support and positive social interaction from staff
 - Have a safe space and connection to the community at drop-in rooms
- Self-management practices
 - Moderation
 - Involvement or engagement in community
 - Cognitive strategies, such as increasing self-awareness or reflection
 - Behavioural strategies, such as getting out of house or staying active
 - Replacing one drug with another drug that the individual considers is less detrimental to their daily functioning
 - Modifying prescription instructions to suit everyday needs
 - Hiding drug use from other people

3) What do PWID consider to be barriers to using harm reduction?

- Discrimination and stigmatization – feeling judged, disrespected, rejected
- Rigid criteria – prevalent for opioid replacement therapy (mainly methadone), mental health services, accommodations
- Lack of awareness or misinformation – sometimes thought gear was the only service

4) What do PWID consider to be facilitators for using harm reduction?

- Peer support – receiving support from people with lived experiences was most helpful, and it was the most common way that PWID learned about harm reduction
- Continuity of care – development of relationships with specific service providers
- Gaining self-efficacy – occurred through improving appearance, getting education or skills, reconnecting with family, making positive change in the community, etc.

Suggestions to improve services and supports include:

- More peer support – having safe and informal spaces to talk about harm reduction would be beneficial (such as the environment created within this study)
- More awareness and accessibility – service providers should have access to and share information about services available internally and externally to their organization
- More opportunities to get involved and engaged in community activities, especially those aimed at helping people who use drugs or other marginalized populations
- More education and training for life and transferable skills – people who use drugs want to learn how to do things for themselves, rather than have someone do things for them
- More involvement in own care, including the planning/implementing of services for people who use drugs, while keeping in mind that “one size does not fit all”