



**Ally Centre  
OF CAPE BRETON**

# ALLY NEWS

April 2024

## Out of the Cold

Since Fiona in September 2022, Cape Breton has been seeing uncommon and quite severe weather events that led the Ally Centre to look at what can be done to meet the ever-growing needs of our service users.

It became quite apparent during the height of the state of emergencies, Fiona, Flooding, Polar Vortexes and the Snowstorm of 2024, that folks who were sleeping rough were not considered in the emergency planning process.

We began to look at the gaps in services not being offered in the community, or that folks did not have access to for one reason or another. We did a deep dive to see where we could start help bridging the gaps in service delivery in the community for service users. The Ally Centre has always taken on a client focused approach; when asked - folks expressed an overwhelming need for a safe space to sleep.

It is important to note that we understand the complexity in offering service delivery for each organization; we wanted to offer an option for folks that found themselves without any access to services.

We began to reach out to our funding partners for help to provide these wrap around services that folks expressed a need for. Luckily, the Dept of Community Services and Reaching Home also saw the need for our service expansion and quickly made it available for us to open the doors for those most in need.

Ally Centre staff instantly offered up their time



to help cover the first ever overnight shifts at the Ally Centre.

We started off opening only during extreme weather warnings, but, with client input it became much more apparent that we needed to remain open to those exposed to the elements on an ongoing basis.

We have since seen 51 unique overnight guests at the Ally Centre since we opened our doors nightly on February 11th, 2024. We have also had the pleasure of hosting stays for several fur babies too (3 cats, and 3 dogs). Our capacity is hosting 15 folks a night and have been reaching capacity each night.

The Ally Centre looks forward to continuing our work and expansion in the housing sector- which would not be possible without our funding partnership and dedicated staff. We also want to take the time to thank the community for its endless support of blankets, hot meals, and compassion. This is truly what community looks like!

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### Where to find us:



75 Prince Street,  
Sydney



902-567-1766



[www.allycentreof  
capebreton.com](http://www.allycentreofcapebreton.com)



[www.facebook.com/  
CB.4.harmreduction](https://www.facebook.com/CB.4.harmreduction)

## MESSAGE FROM OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

We meet monthly with our Executive Director, Christine Porter, and Operations Manager, Megan Peters. Current members of the board include: Judy Kelley, Chair; Emily MacArthur, Vice-Chair; Jean MacQueen, Treasurer; Holly Kennedy, Secretary; Alicia Francis; Becky Nicholas; Emily MacLeod; Kevin MacCormack; Shelley Allen; and Winter Cullen.

**The mission of the Ally Centre of Cape Breton is to create supportive environments to reduce harm and promote health.**

In order to maintain our mission, we identified five key performance areas to focus on:

- |   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| ✓ Harm Reduction and Health Promotion Programs and Services | ✓ Education and Advocacy |
| ✓ Organizational Development and Human Resources            | ✓ Research               |
| ✓ Community Leadership and Partnerships                     |                          |

We are proud to administer or house the following programs and services:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| • Sharp Advice Needle Exchange                       | • Take Home Naloxone Program                   |
| • Peer Backpackers                                   | • Peer Six Overdose Prevention Site            |
| • Mobile Supportive Spaces                           | • Food Bank                                    |
| • The Ally Health Clinic                             | • Foot Care                                    |
| • Outreach Street Health                             | • Music Therapy                                |
| • Peers Leading the Way to Testing and Referrals     | • Sex Workers Encouraging and Empowering Peers |
| • Confidential HIV Testing, Counselling and Referral | • Managed Alcohol Program                      |

Since COVID, it had become apparent that we need to do more than advocate for housing for our clients and thanks to the tireless efforts of our Executive Director, Chris Porter, we have stepped up to help create supportive housing options. We are thrilled that we will operate and support residents of New Dawn's affordable supportive housing development expected to open late this year that will house up to 25 people who otherwise would be without a home. For more information on this Rapid Housing Initiative click [here](#).

I continue to be inspired by the strength and perseverance of our clients and the dedication of our staff and volunteers who don't just keep people alive, they provide them with the love and support to thrive. The unconditional love and support are life saving, especially for people with substance use disorder. As the late Dr. Margaret Dechman often said, *"the opposite of addiction is inclusion"*.



Judy Kelley, RN  
Chair, BoD

I feel grateful to be a part of the Ally Centre board. The staff and volunteers do such incredible work for the community. It is such a kind and welcoming place because of the staff, volunteers, and clients. Our community is lucky to have a space dedicated to nonjudgmental support and harm reduction. Every single human being deserves compassion, dignity, and support.



Emily MacArthur, MSW, RSW  
Vice-Chair, BoD

# ALLY HEALTH CLINIC UPDATE

Having a health clinic at the Ally Centre was the dream of service users, staff and Board for many years. Access to health care services is a challenge for many but try adding the stigma that comes with mental illness, substance use disorder, sex work, or homelessness. For many it was almost impossible to access care and most delayed seeking health services until they were very ill or in an emergency situation.

Developing and providing barrier free access, following well evidenced models from other Canadian cities.... services that would be accessible "where people are", in a non-judgemental environment using a harm reduction approach was what was needed. Years of research and advocacy finally resulted in very humble beginnings of the Ally Health Clinic in 2015.

Janet Bickerton RN, has been involved in every step of the developmental process and until recently has been the clinics part time coordinator. Janet shares....

"It is amazing the growth, respect and partnerships that have evolved. It has often been a bumpy road but we stayed the course and can be extremely proud of the quality of the health services provided by compassionate and top notch health professionals. Most important, our clients feel respected and safe when they come for help to the clinic"

While she will be staying on voluntarily to provide needed foot care for clients, she will be handing over the torch to a new clinic coordinator thanks to 3 year funding via the Nova Scotia Community Health Center Association.

## Health Clinic Personnel

Sharon MacKenzie RN  
Outreach Street Health

Dr. Monika Dutt  
Primary Care physician

Melissa Dakai, RN  
Nurse Practitioner

Joanne Boudreau  
Confidential testing nurse

Jillian Roach BSW RSW  
Social Worker

Donna Nicholson, RN  
Nurse Practitioner

Dianne MacInnis  
Clinic Administration



Janet Bickerton RN, former Clinic Coordinator, now volunteers and provides foot care regularly



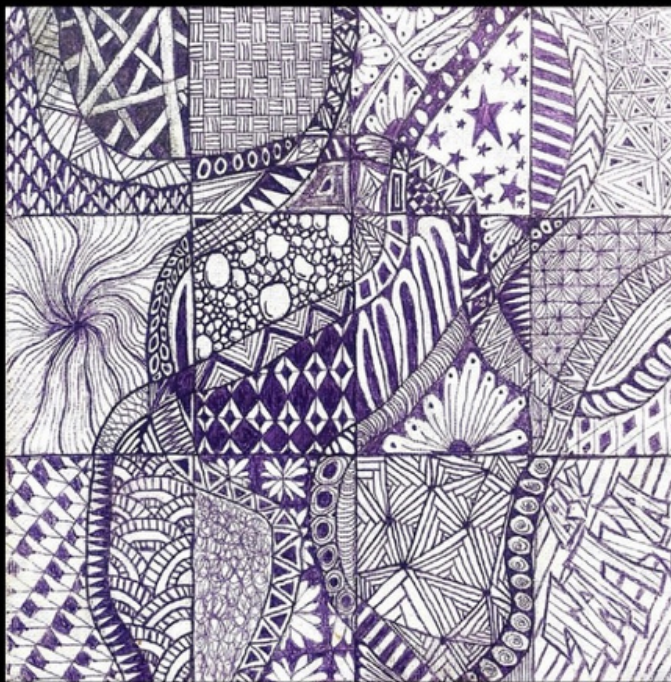
# TUESDAY TUNES

Most Tuesdays at 3:00, Shelley Allen comes to the Ally Centre with some interesting instruments, a guitar, and some songs in mind. Shelley sets up in the common area and she is usually joined by some regulars and other folks are generally curious about what is happening. They start singing and playing and before long more people participate in their own ways. Very often some of the staff will join for a song or two, pick up an instrument and jam or dance to the tunes in the kitchen area. The clients connect with each other through songs and stories and for those moments get a reprieve from the stress of the day to day struggle. Even those who don't actively participate seem to enjoy listening to others make music. All are welcome, included and encouraged.



# ALLY ARTIST CORNER

Submitted by Tanya Ellsworth



# SPOTLIGHT ON:

## SHARP ADVICE NEEDLE EXCHANGE (SANE)



The AIDS Coalition of Cape Breton started the Sharp Advice Needle Exchange in 1996 - twenty-eight years ago. A needle exchange is an important harm reduction program which exists to support people who use drugs to protect their health and to help with the changes they want to make in their lives. The priority populations consist of people who currently use drugs through injection or inhalation and are at risk of sharing or reusing equipment. Harms related to sharing or reusing equipment include blood-borne infections such as Hepatitis C and B and HIV; and wounds and skin and soft tissue infections that can develop into sepsis.

The Sharp Advice Needle Exchange program provides safe injection equipment (clean needles, alcohol swabs, filters, ties) and sharps containers for safe disposal of used needles.



Our fixed site and outreach program provides opportunities to make connections with people who have been marginalized, build trusting relationships, provide education and make referrals to other health and social services.



### Some numbers this past year...

SANE provided services to **1452** unique clients and **314** were new clients to the program. There were **13,830** recorded transactions throughout the year.

**625,220** syringes were distributed

**626,352** syringes were disposed of properly

**16,820** pipes kits were distributed

Watch for the our Peer Backpackers in Sydney, New Waterford, Glace Bay, North Sydney and Sydney Mines. They will be out there cleaning up our streets of improperly discarded needles and handing out safe supplies during peek times throughout each month.



## Employee Recognition

**Fran** Coles has been with Sharp Advice Needle Exchange since 1998. When Fran began her career, the exchange was giving out a mere 2,200 syringes a year. Fran brought with her a knowledge of the needs of the population and an already established trust which has proven to be her greatest asset. Fran was instrumental in the establishment of our Natural Helper Network and has been discretely and dependably providing outreach to all communities in the Eastern Health Zone for the past 26 years!

# WORDS OF APPRECIATION:



As our Reaching Home funds ended for this project on March 31st, we had to say farewell to **Diane Penny**, the Coordinated Access Project Lead. Diane started this position just before province wide shut down for COVID19 and she quickly pivoted to being instrumental in maintaining the Comfort Site we opened next to our former location on 150 Bentinck St. Amid all the fear and uncertainty that first came with COVID, Diane supported our homeless population through some of their most trying times. She kept people safe, warm, fed and comfortable.

Coordinated Access is about getting agencies working together to help people who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness in CBRM to access housing and supports. Diane had been working hard to get service providers from various organizations trained to be able to do the Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT) and use Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS). Service providers use the VAT to identify individuals who would benefit most from high-impact interventions such as supportive housing.

Diane spent the last few months in her role as Coordinated Access Lead doing vulnerability assessments with the clients of the Ally Centre in preparation for placement in the RHI or other supportive housing that may come available. This step is key to insuring those who need housing the most receive it.

Diane has certainly contributed to our Nation's goal to end homelessness! Thank you Diane. We hope to work with you again soon!

## A TRUE ALLY

**Beth MacCormick**, more fondly known as Dr. Beth, has been our faithful friend and physician since the inception of the Ally Centre.

Even before the AIDS Coalition of Cape Breton opened in 1992, and stigma and discrimination stopped people from being tested and seeking treatment for HIV. Dr. Beth was there for us - seeing those who were afraid and worried about their gender identity, substance use or HIV status being revealed. Most importantly treating every person with respect and dignity.

Beth upon her retirement as a well loved family physician in Sydney Mines, returned to her roots by working as a physician at the Ally Health Clinic. Beth started her medical career working in Halifax at the North End Clinic caring for those most at risk in community. She brought with her incredible knowledge, skill, compassion and love.

Beth is now turning more toward her love of music, that she shared with her late husband, Leon Dubinsky. She and her daughter Ella Dubinsky are creating and performing around the island - in fact they will both be performing at an upcoming free song release event .... "Can't You Help Me" ....in support of initiatives to house the homeless. April 13, 3-5 pm at Sacred Heart Downtown.

Dr. Beth... Thank you so much for everything! You are loved!





# UPCOMING EVENTS



## Service Based Homelessness Count

will take place in Eastern Nova Scotia  
(Cape Breton Island, Antigonish and Guysborough Counties)

### JUNE 2024

- ▶ A Service-Based Count (SBC) is an indirect estimation method of counting the number of people experiencing homelessness or risk of homelessness. The information will be collected from service providers over the month of June. Information collected will be useful to identify gaps in service delivery and support action to address homelessness.
- ▶ For further information please contact [peggy.vassallo@nshealth.ca](mailto:peggy.vassallo@nshealth.ca)



Join us to show support for efforts to end  
homelessness in our communities.

Free Admission - Donations Welcome

(doors open at 2pm)

To listen to "Can't You Help Me" - [Click here](#)

# LAST TIDBITS

## Ally Centre Hours of Operation

### Sharp Advice Needle Exchange

Monday to Friday 9:00 am to 8:00 pm

Saturday & Sunday 10:00 am to 4:00 pm

### Overdose Prevention Site

Monday to Friday 9:00 am to 8:00 pm

Saturday & Sunday 10:00 am to 4:00 pm

### Ally Drop-in

Monday to Friday 9:00 am to 8:00 pm

### SWEEP (Sex Workers Support):

Saturday and Sunday from 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm

### Health Clinic

Monday to Friday from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm

### Confidential Testing for HIV, Hep B & C, and STI's

Monday, Tuesday and Thursday from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm

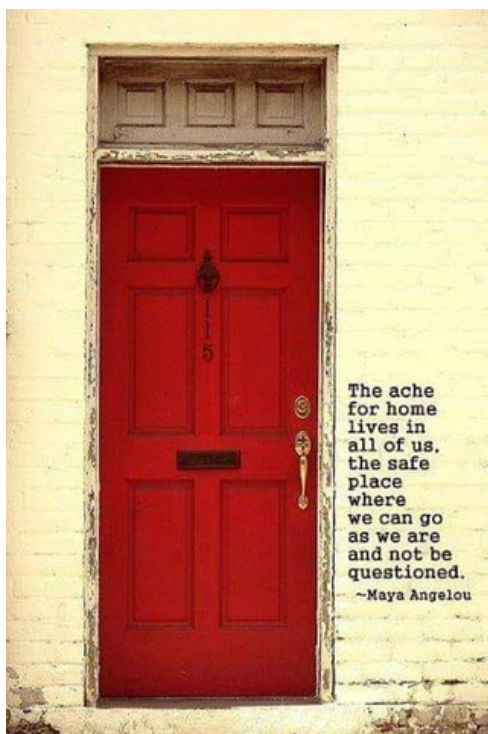
### Take Home Naloxone Program

Monday to Thursday from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm

### Coordinated Access (Homelessness)

Monday to Friday from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm

 <b>MOBILE UNIT SCHEDULE</b>	
<b>MON</b>	GLACE BAY: 10AM - 1PM NEW WATERFORD: 2PM - 4:30PM
<b>TUES</b>	NORTH SYDNEY: 10AM - 1PM SYDNEY MINES: 2PM - 4:30PM
<b>WED</b>	GLACE BAY: 10AM - 1PM STERLING MALL: 2PM - 4:30PM
<b>THURS</b>	GLACE BAY: 10AM - 1PM NEW WATERFORD: 2PM - 4:30PM
<b>FRI</b>	NORTH SYDNEY: 10AM - 1PM SYDNEY MINES: 2PM - 4:30PM



The first step toward  
changing someone's life  
for the better is keeping  
them alive to make that  
decision for themselves.

Harm reduction matters.

Michael Nolan

**JUSTL♥VEMORE**