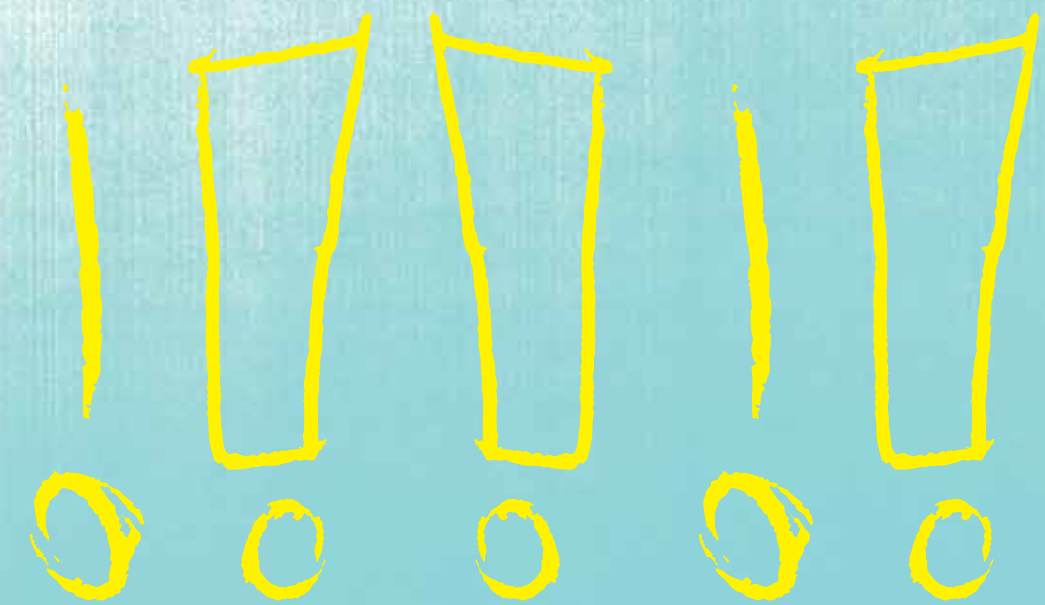

SUNSHINE HOUSE SOLVENT USERS' RECREATION PROJECT

It is generally accepted by people who use drugs, either recreationally or habitually, that solvent users or “sniffers” are at the bottom of the drug-using hierarchy. The Winnipeg Street Health Report (2011) cites that: “The rate of solvent and inhalant use among [homeless] respondents was three times higher than in the 2007 Toronto Street Health Report. There is a lot of stigma attached to ‘sniffing’ or using solvents and inhalants, meaning that the actual number of people using them is likely higher than reported” (p.23). That stigma can be experienced by solvent users in reactions from individual service providers, and also from organizations which may have exclusionary policies intended to refuse entry to this particular group. Many solvent users themselves relay histories of rejection and exclusion by family and intimate partners once their solvent use becomes known. In contrast to these experiences, Sunshine House has developed and retained a respectful relationship with this group.

The benefits of recreational programs have been well-described as primary prevention activities for acute and chronic diseases. In addition, there is evidence of physical and mental health improvement as a result of participating in recreational activities (Government of Manitoba, 2014; Hutchinson, 2011). For example: depression can be reduced; there is improvement of overall emotional well-being; isolation is reduced; there is reduction in anxiety and stress; and general improvement in quality of life (Government of Manitoba, 2014). However, among homeless individuals who participated in the Winnipeg Street Health Survey, 71% indicated that they do not participate in any social or recreational activities. The most common reasons cited were: 14% were too busy trying to meet basic needs; 12% did not know where recreation programs were or how to access them and 6% said recreation is too expensive (2011, p.17).



HOW COME IT
TOOK SO LONG TO
START THIS? —SHIRLEY
PARTICIPANT

PROJECT OVERVIEW

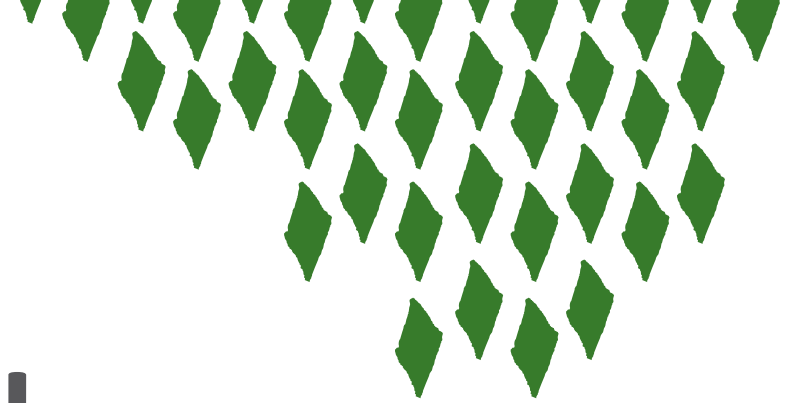
The Solvent Users' Recreation Project (SURP) provided an oasis of support and acceptance for some of the most marginalized individuals in Winnipeg. Not intended to act as a “treatment model”, the primary goal of the program was to involve solvent users in engaging and fun recreation activities. The active involvement of participants in all facets of the program, from ongoing program design to evaluation, and the demand for active participant engagement sets this program apart from many others where a more passive presence is expected.

The project launched with a drop-in art group held Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. In addition to painting a mural, creating a Sunshine House sign, beading and other crafts, participants discussed the recreation program and gave input into the activities they would like to see offered.

From that point, the program evolved into a series of modules that each lasted between 5 and 8 weeks, including bike repair, basic small building repair, boxing, auto mechanics, photography, drum making and music. Interspersed amongst these core modules were smaller activities, such as sewing, photography, spray painting, demolition and renovation, painting, and plant potting.

These smaller activities would happen concurrently with the modules to provide secondary activities for people to take part in. Due to high levels of interest, the number of program modules offered was increased and the pilot extended to nine months.

Each module involved volunteer facilitators providing training, assisting program staff and leading sessions. Participants registered for modules ahead of time and were assisted with bus tickets and transportation. Each module concluded with a community celebration honouring and acknowledging the accomplishments of those involved.



PROJECT DESIGN

In November 2012, Sunshine House partnered with Mount Carmel Clinic to pilot a recreation program created exclusively for the solvent using community. The goal was to enhance participants' quality of life, while seeking to improve participants' gross motor function, physical activity, and expand formal and informal social supports.

The SURP program was coordinated by Sunshine House staff and delivered in partnership with Mount Carmel Clinic (MCC). Mount Carmel provided in-kind resources such as staff time and financial resources for the program. Mount Carmel Clinic also offers a weekly solvent users support group, Survivors of Sniff (SOS), one of the only programs specifically for solvent users currently being offered in Winnipeg. The SOS group was used to inform clients of the pilot project, solicit suggestions for program delivery and share information about upcoming modules. Working closely with MCC ensured a cohesive and complementary connection between these two programs. MCC also provides supportive case management and housing services for people with addiction and mental health concerns

through the Chez Nous/At Home program. Involvement of staff from the Chez Nous/At Home program provided an additional level of support for clients of MCC and Sunshine House to further increase participation and engagement.

To support communication, decision making and ensure the project was well managed and meeting client needs, an advisory committee was established. The committee included representatives from:

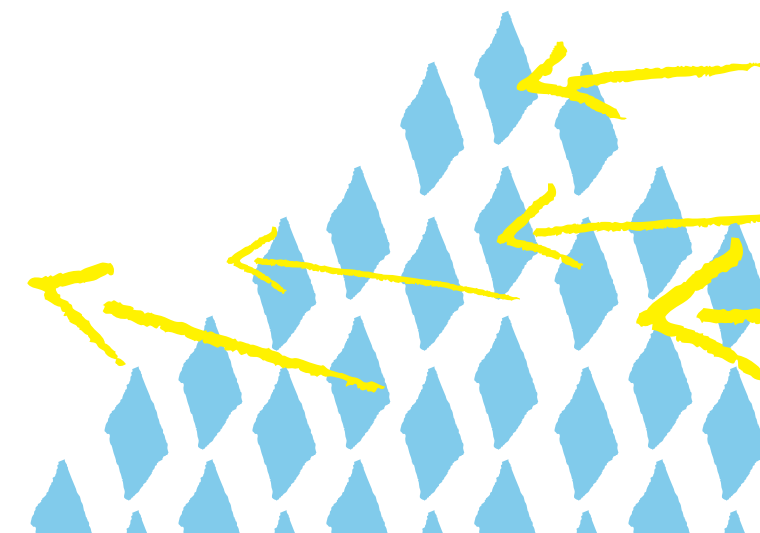
- Sunshine House staff
- Sunshine House Board of Directors
- Mount Carmel Clinic
- Community representatives, including a client representative
- Volunteers

Members of the Advisory Committee (7) were recruited and selected on the basis of their knowledge and interest in the adult solvent using population in Winnipeg, including a representative from the solvent using group. The advisory group met every two months to receive updates on the project and to provide input and support on planned modules. At every meeting, feedback was shared by community members who reported on the overall response to the project from the participants themselves. The advisory group was also consulted on “big picture” components and provided oversight on decisions related to client safety (boxing, auto mechanics), program duration (expanding the pilot from six to nine months) and dealing with challenges as they arose.

Project delivery was led by the Project Coordinator, an individual who “has a unique ability to access ... huge networks of skilled artists and artisans who became involved in many aspects of the program willingly and enthusiastically” (advisory committee member statement). For example, he secured contributions and partnerships to support the auto mechanics module including a suitable workspace, donation of a vehicle, a certified mechanic who volunteered to train participants and partnership with Freight House to share vehicle use in return for insuring and storing the vehicle. In addition to the skills and social supports gained by module participants, Sunshine House and Freight House now have access to a safe, functioning vehicle for transporting clients.

The Special Projects Manager also played a key role in facilitating the partnerships and acting as a liaison to share program updates with stakeholders, meet with funders and ensure proper administration of funds. The Special Projects Manager worked with the advisory committee and evaluation committee to ensure the project's reporting needs were met. With a variety of backgrounds and skills represented on the project team, including community members, volunteer facilitators, organizational partners and academics, the Special Projects Manager provided a communication function that ensured information was shared in ways that could be clearly understood by all members.

Partnerships were struck purposefully to serve as structural supports to SURP. In each case, formal agreements (contracts) were designed to meet specific needs of the program, with Sunshine House acknowledged as the lead partner in agreements. All agreements cited goals and objectives of SURP in the preface. Each agreement was completed by signing the policy of confidentiality which governed handling personal and sensitive information gathered throughout the project.





MODULE ONE: ART



LOCATION: Sunshine House
LENGTH: Ongoing
GOAL: Get loosened up

MENTOR: Various
PARTICIPANTS: 12

Descriptions of the modules are drawn from the Program Coordinator's experiences and final report.

We began our project with an art module because of its inviting, open and expressive nature and its foil as a social elixir. Local artist James Culleton was brought in during one of the Sunday brunches to sketch the room. James has an interesting style. He keeps his eyes fixed on the subject, never looking at the paper. The result - interpretive line drawings that deconstruct a character or a place while revealing unexpected characteristics at the root of the subject - is quite unique, and a perfect style to promote eye-hand coordination. Using an overhead projector, this work was projected onto a 5 by 7 foot canvas, and the group traced it. I was surprised at the steadiness of participants' hands, and concentration on smooth, accurate details.

Accurate tracings were not what I was expecting from this group because some solvent users experience shaky hands or loss of coordination.

Once James's work was traced on the canvas, people would need to interpret the clustered lines on the canvas, to discern what was a person, what was a fixture of the room, what was a table, and then get to colouring it.

At this point, the group recommended a friend of theirs by the name of Ray Flett, a local artist they knew from Siloam Mission. I was willing to bring in as many connections and talents as were recommended to me, so I jumped on the opportunity to get connected with Ray, a local artist, who did most of his work out of the many soup kitchens and benevolent establishments around Main and Higgins. A caring man with a generous heart, Ray became our artist in residence from the early stages of the project.



He took command of James's painting, and brought Sunday brunch to life - huddled, hungry looking, weather-worn individuals, painted in sombre greys and browns, with jet black braids hanging down from toques and hats, waiting for their breakfast. The other half remained Culleton-interpretive whimsy with psychedelic colours and shapes. Only a discerning eye would be able to find the puzzle that is Joey, one of the regulars, splotches of green to denote the weed leaves on his favorite shirt. The comic book realism and interpretive kaleidoscope of the painting now coexist beautifully on the West wall of the Sunshine House, a marriage of styles that the project set out to forge.

Ray Flett remained with us throughout the project as artist in residence, doing commissioned work when we needed things beautified. His mark is now all over the Sunshine House.

Art served as the continual thread throughout the project. Arts and crafts, pleasant and simple, readily available, were promoted for the duration

of the program. This provided a secondary foundation of activities for people to engage in, and for the project to fall back on.

Martha Wellington, Studio 54-era artist, came in to refurbish the 13x8 foot South wall with a new scenic backdrop (replacing the Northern Manitoba wilderness wallpaper with an enchanted West Coast forest), and then adorning this backdrop with wax paper drawings of mythical creatures. The result is quite hypnotizing: Bears, deer, turtles, fish, birds, ghosts, a unicorn, a sasquatch inhabiting the forest. This fantasy greets the patron when entering the Sunshine House, and works to disarm and enchant the street weary. I like to think that such a scene initiates outside-the-box creativity that the project looked to foster.

Other art projects included flower pot and birdhouse painting, book binding, photography, and graffiti. There was always something for us to do.

A friend of Ray's, Freda Watson, came in to instruct the group on beading. A woman with a strong presence and authority, in bright red lipstick and a "Jugs and Buns" t-shirt, she led the group in traditional beadwork. With the combination of cultural knowledge and sensual insights, she wove a spell over the group, and in the blink of an eye, everyone had made wonderful beaded earrings. Mine went to my niece.

I was able to see some of the finer points of the culture and gained an insight for aboriginal artisanship, and was impressed by the technique.



I GET AS EXCITED
TO COME TO
SUNSHINE HOUSE
AS I USED TO GET
FOR BINGO. -DWAYNE
PARTICIPANT



MODULE TWO: HOME REPAIR

LOCATION: Sunshine House

LENGTH: 6 weeks

GOAL: Build and fix things

MENTOR: Brad Hignell

PARTICIPANTS: 11

For the carpentry module, under the tutelage of Brad Hignell, the group built many practical things for Sunshine House - desks, shelves, tables, a wheelchair ramp, and a bench for the front. Most of the building was done from recycled wood reclaimed from other fixtures around Sunshine House. Brad was more than happy to be at our mercy, and built whatever we wanted him to; the participants were very happy to be involved in all aspects of the building process. This production-driven module facilitated workmanship and provided a platform for sharing knowledge and creativity. It also promoted a sense of ownership and entitlement over the work, an invaluable element in promoting confidence.





MODULE THREE: BOXING

LOCATION: Elite Boxing Club

LENGTH: 10 weeks

GOAL: Push physical limits

MENTORS: Jude Ormond

& Kent Brown

PARTICIPANTS: 7

The boxing module was no walk in the park. This was a very intense anaerobic and strength building module, and the trainers cut us no slack. This gave me the opportunity to see how tough some of these people are. These participants were tough as nails and resilient, never quitting an exercise, refusing to be outdone by the trainers and giving everything they had. Laughing in the face of the work, and at the positions that their bodies had not been in a long time. Puking (well, one of our guys did, a good 4 times one day). My body was wracked in pain for a good 5 days after the first session.

Most participants, I would say, had experienced violence that goes hand in hand with poverty and addiction. Aggressive in nature, I was aware that this module might bring out emotions in people, so there were usually a couple of workers on hand in case the emotions got the better of people. One

woman, whom I partnered with for a punching exercise, was overcome with emotion when she held the bag for me.

On the whole, though, the module worked amazingly as an outlet for aggression and energy. Driving home after the sessions on Friday night, people would be tired, relaxed and content. Most would just head home, too exhausted to carry on into the night.

Of particular note is the accomplishment of one participant who did so well in the gym that he was provided with a free lifetime membership. He continues to attend the gym to train and has been involved in his first boxing match.



MODULE FOUR: DRUM MAKING

LOCATION: Sunshine House

LENGTH: 6 weeks

GOAL: Connect with tradition

MENTOR: TJ Spence

PARTICIPANTS: Drop-in

TJ, nephew of one of our regulars, a singer and drummer, was brought in to facilitate this module. For our drum making module, we used willow branches for drumsticks that the facilitator and I cut from the bushes next to the train tracks. Then we wrapped the tips in strips of electrical tape and pieces of leather cut from a jacket that one of the patrons had donated. They look completely authentic, like they were pulled out of the hand of a Cree drummer 500 years ago.

We bought a full elk hide from Manitoba Buckskin, and figured that we would need to soften it in the bath for a the weekend. By the time Tuesday rolled around, the skin was softened, perhaps too much. TJ, not one to waste a precious hide, insisted that we hang it in the basement to allow it to harden again. So we did, draping it over chairs, and after a day or so, it had hardened into a giant bowl shape, and we had to put it back

into the bath to soften again. When it came time to cut the hide for the drum, it was so porous and soft that one could pull it apart with their hands. It also smelled rotten. It was unusable. We had wrecked it. It was a sad learning experience. With bowed heads, we phoned up Manitoba Buckskin and ordered another elk hide, this one pre-cut, and delivered to us by the owner.

We finished the drum, and it is a thing of beauty. A drum bag was made as well as a painted drum base. After the drum was blessed, the Red Sons Singers were invited to break it in with traditional songs for our wrap-up feast. I was asked to sit in and drum with them, and, head bowed in reverence, did my best to hang on, though I felt as though I was being carried by a herd of buffalo. These songs, sung with abandon and urgency, brought tears out of the most hardened individuals.





MODULE FIVE: MECHANICS

LOCATION: Margaret's Garage
LENGTH: 6 weeks
GOAL: Get the van running

MENTOR: Cory Klym
PARTICIPANTS: 8

This was probably the most fun that I had for its cowboy, greasy, off the cuff nature. It took place in the hit-or-miss month of April where one week we would be in our T-shirts, the next we would be bundled up with a massive propane heater blaring full blast. Coffee and soup were served out of big vats in the garage, and the facilitator, Cory was a star, at encouraging the group, handing out encouragement (and cigarettes) like they grew on trees, and showing incredible patience for people's abilities. If someone was feeling shy or left out, Cory would bring them into the fold and provide them with some task or another, and make them the centre of the group.

The vibe was jovial, the work dirty, and it fostered a bond between group members. The van had spent 2 harsh winters behind someone's house, windows smashed. When we unveiled it after 6 weeks of working on it, it was revelatory for everyone. It was truly a thing of beauty: a van we had brought back to life. An allegory for the whole project!



MODULE SIX: BIKE REPAIR

LOCATION: Bike Dump
LENGTH: 6 weeks
GOAL: Build or fix a bike

*MENTORS: Brad Hignell
& Camille Metcalfe*
PARTICIPANTS: 7

This module took place over the month of June at the Bike Dump in Winnipeg. We had issues with consistent participation for this module. Perhaps this was due to the nice weather. The ones that did come regularly, though, received a thorough hands-on experience in bicycle building, repair and maintenance. Everyone who participated seemed to have some experience with bikes, and were comfortable working independently of the trainers. They were not shy to ask for assistance, though, when they needed it.

The atmosphere was relaxed and people were content to tinker away, drink coffee and listen to the radio. A very pleasant time for those involved, and it was nice to be able to change sites from the Sunshine House. The dynamic shifted a bit, and it was nice for me to be on a more neutral, common ground with people.

MODULE SEVEN: MUSIC


LOCATION: Sunshine House
LENGTH: 6 weeks
GOAL: Learn the basics of the guitar

*MENTOR: Vince Andrushko
& Adrian Spence*
PARTICIPANTS: Drop-in

For the this module, a couple of established local musicians, Vince Andrushko and Adrian Spence, were brought in to teach the group the basics of the guitar. The two took the group through the basics of stringing and chord structures and eventually led the group through old classics. The group's response to this was unanimous. "This reminds me of [insert reserve name here]." "This reminds me of the [insert Main Street bar here]". "My dad used to play this one." "Hey, do you know [so and so]..." The songs spilled forth, one into the next, and people's ears became more discerning. "That's not how it's played!" The wellspring of creativity had been struck. Before long, the group had created a batch of original

songs. An engineer was brought in to record one of them, and the film makers shot a video for it. Introducing "Saturday Night," a song dedicated to the errant misadventures on the streets of Winnipeg. A song rich in irreverence and local humour, with a 1-2-3 shuffle that will raise the roof of Main Street bars everywhere. This track is a harmonious collaboration between musicians and non-musicians, each adding their own flavour, reinforcing the community joviality that the project sought to capture.





MODULE EIGHT: PHOTOGRAPHY

LOCATION: Sunshine House
LENGTH: 6 weeks
GOAL: Share your perspective

*MENTORS: Chris Friesen
& Matt Purchase*
PARTICIPANTS: 18

The photography module took place at the Sunshine House. This was spearheaded by Chris Friesen of the film crew.

The initial plan was that 8 participants would be involved. Each person was given a disposable camera. The loose design of it was that they would go out, take shots, return with them, and receive critique and guidance, and head out with another camera to see if there was any improvement or further technique. This was very popular, and the group swelled to 18, too many to focus on the previous plan, so people just shot what they wanted to, and put them into handmade photo albums. It was neat to see snap shots of people's

day-to-day experiences. People were able to use the camera as a tool for expression as well as simply capturing a moment in their lives, and it was nice to see people cherishing these things, as they carefully bound them in handmade photo books. This was definitely a module that made people feel good.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

The Solvent Users' Recreation Program provides just that: an environment where one of the most marginalized groups of substance users can come, as they are, and participate in recreational activities that are meaningful to them.

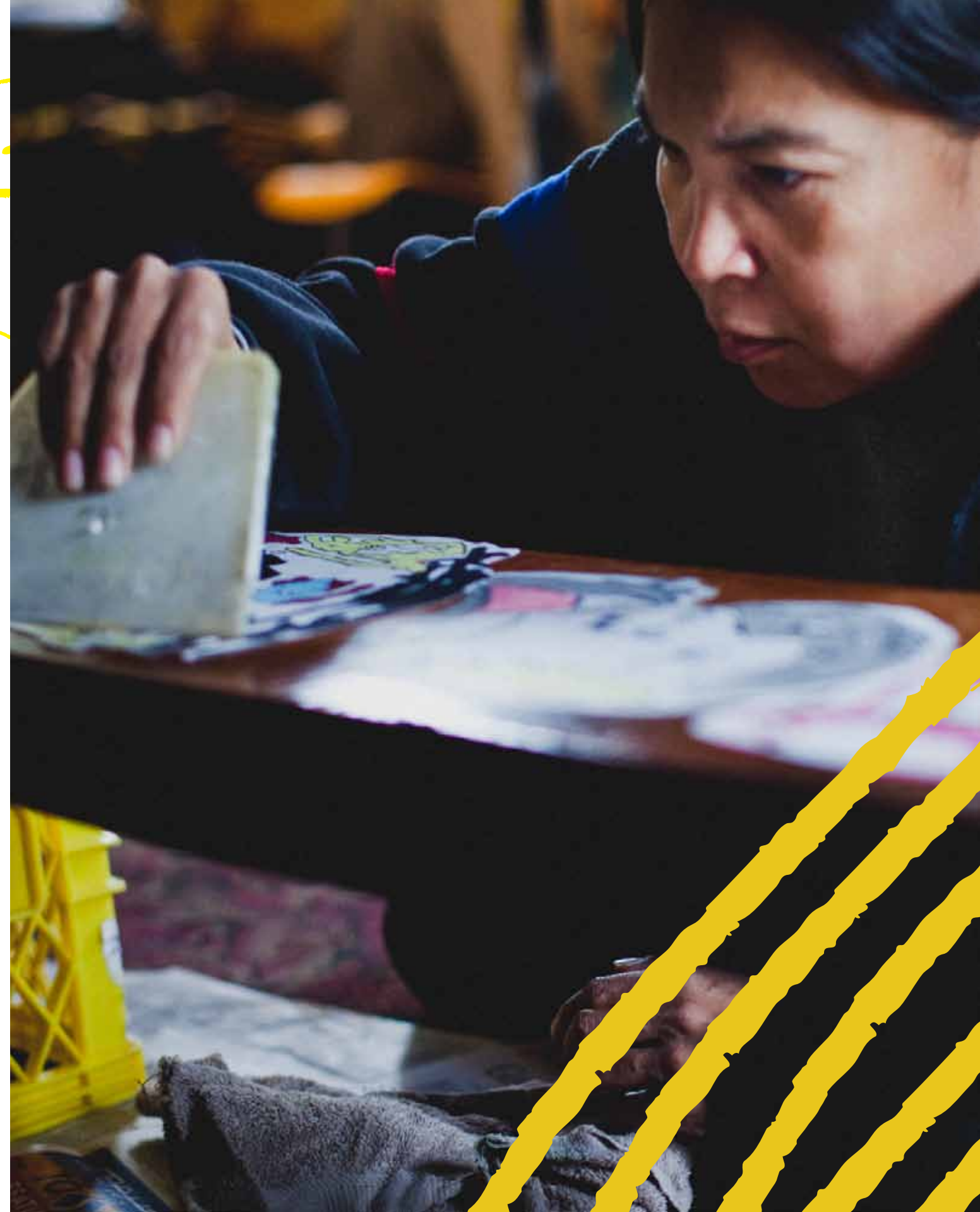
The Solvent Users' Recreation Project was tremendously successful. Through rich partnerships, and drawing from a pool of talented, creative, and enthusiastic staff, trainers, and volunteers, Sunshine House was able to provide the structure and the energy to implement a unique program for an underserved population.

In general, volunteers and facilitators observed that participants were most engaged with hands-on activities such as mechanics, bike repair, drum building and boxing. Women were observed to be more likely to enjoy sewing and arts and crafts.

Photography was also a very popular activity for all participants; this module had the highest number of people registered.

This module involved teaching about photography and providing disposable cameras. Eighteen disposable cameras were distributed to participants, all of which were enthusiastically used and returned. At the end, all of the participants were excited to see their photos developed and create their own personal photo book.

The boxing module was successful and fun for participants. Due to the time (Friday evenings) and location of the gym (East Kildonan), the coordinator had more difficulty recruiting participants for boxing than any other module. To support participation, he provided transportation to and from the gym and spent time trying to find and encourage participants to come out to the gym on Friday



evenings. Despite his efforts, many did not feel comfortable travelling so far out of the downtown, a neighbourhood they know well, to go to an unfamiliar area. As a result, while there was room for 12 participants in the boxing program, only 3 to 5 people attended each week.

Given the diversity of modules and activities offered, the program succeeded in meeting a wide range of interests and needs. Running multiple modules back to back offered a variety of options in a short time period so that if an individual didn't like a particular activity, they could simply wait a few weeks for a new module to begin. The changing nature of the project also facilitated volunteer involvement by keeping time commitments brief and time-limited. The variety of activities and individuals meant that the project involved a broader range of people than had the focus been on a single activity.

“AT THE END OF EVERY SESSION, PEOPLE'S SPIRITS SEEMED BOOSTED, AND A GENERAL SENSE OF SATISFACTION WAS PALPABLE. IN THE VEHICLE WHEN I DROVE PEOPLE BACK AFTER THE SESSION, THE TALK WAS CASUAL, FRIENDLY, AS EVERYONE (MYSELF INCLUDED) FELT AS THOUGH THEY HAD JUST DONE SOMETHING CHALLENGING TOGETHER. WE WOULD TALK ABOUT WHAT WAS DIFFICULT, WHAT WE ENJOYED THE MOST, THINGS THAT WE WANTED TO WORK ON NEXT TIME. DURING THE ACTIVITIES, THERE WAS USUALLY A LOT OF LAUGHTER, ESPECIALLY WHEN THINGS WERE STRENUOUS OR EXPOSED PEOPLE'S LIMITS/LACK OF KNOWLEDGE.” – JD, PROGRAM COORDINATOR

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