

Photovoice 2018

"What does being a Peer
Worker mean to you?"



SKYLARK
CHILDREN | YOUTH | FAMILIES



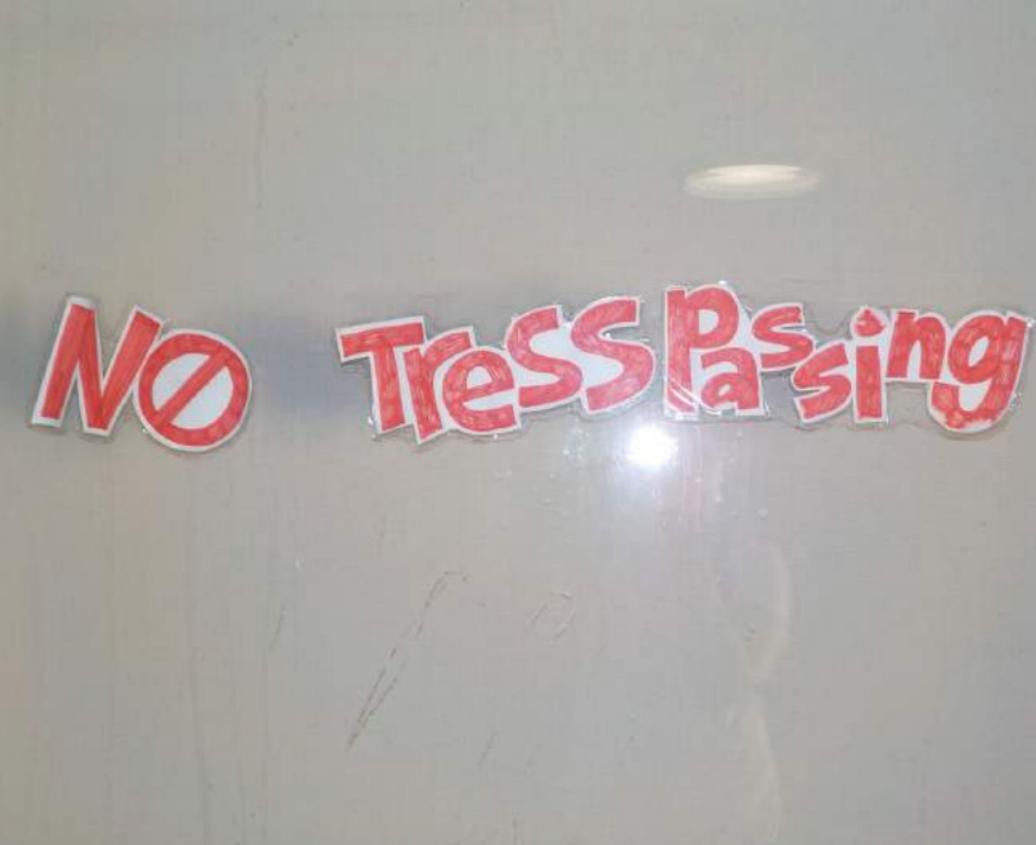
I used to frequent this youth drop in a lot before I became a peer at Skylark. It's not that I can't go here anymore because I work here. The staff always make sure I know that I am welcome and missed, but it's just that... I don't like coming to Eglinton on my days off anymore. I almost hate it. Eglinton is changing and I don't like feeling like I don't belong here anymore. I don't like that I don't see people I can see myself in anymore. I don't like that they closed Candy Mountain and replaced it with Rollnation- what the hell is a 'sushi burrito'? I don't want that. I want margarita flavored jelly beans. I want this neighbourhood back.



I feel like peer workers and the idea of harm reduction are slowly creeping in. You may not think that they're there, but they are and they may be right around the corner. It's in your communities. It's everywhere and you can't deny that people who use drugs and who do sex work are part of all communities.



We as peer workers are trying to create a world where people can use whatever creative outlet they want or think is reasonable for them to use to do whatever they chose to do. The world that we live in currently has standards of what creativity looks like and what it should be or shouldn't be so there's creativity the norm and then there's creativity in and of itself as a concept that's so broad that we can't understand it and it goes beyond what we've created as a society to be creative.



NO TRESPASSING

This photograph relates to my experiences as a peer because it sometimes feels as though we (peers) are encroaching on the space of the agencies we work for. A hallmark of being a peer is talking about topics like drugs, sex and sex work but unfortunately, we get the impression that we're not supposed to be doing what we've been hired to do. It can feel as though we are trespassing.



This relates to the *working in the field as a peer* because I feel like we're locked out of certain conversations and the person that's telling you that is the master of all things, which is usually "The Man", the corporation, the institution or whatever form it may appear to you. But maybe, since the shed is already disintegrating, one day we might be able to get in. The lock may still be there, but the shed itself may come down and then you can get in, even if the lock is still on the shed. It's like nature (change) is eating away at the structure of the shed and the master is trying to hold onto what little control that they have.



To me, this photograph symbolizes the degradation of the system by nature.

I don't think this degradation was man-made, I think the brick is just reaaaaallll old and it's falling down and no one has gotten around to fix this safety hazard. It reminds me of how you sometimes have to tread lightly as a peer worker, never quite sure of when your staircase may give out. This becomes even more true given the growing professionalization of the industry. This photograph can represent the structure built by peer workers coming down because of professionalization or it can be interpreted as the structure of professionalization being broken down by peer workers. Either way, it's being broken down by something but is still structurally sound.

Level the
playing field

theGISnews.ca



Caution:
Slippery
trip
hazard.

The messages sent by these two photos are linked. It tells me that we (peers) are walking around all these tripping hazards designed by a system that wants you to just stop moving forward and stay in place. Maintain the status quo. “Level the playing field” is calling for a dismantling of those tripping hazards so people can finally get achieve that dream of an equitable society.



Everything that is going on in Parkdale, like it's being ripped away so it seems fitting that the name is partially missing from this photo. "The community is being ripped away from the community".



In peer work, hope is always this concept that's there. You know *what* you want and you know *what* your goals are, but there are barriers to reach it because of the limitations that come with peer work.



This appealed to me because of the idea of kings and queens in relation to power and status, but the quotes around it, questions, what does that power really mean? It is the work of peers to challenge the idea of power and the systems that are in place.



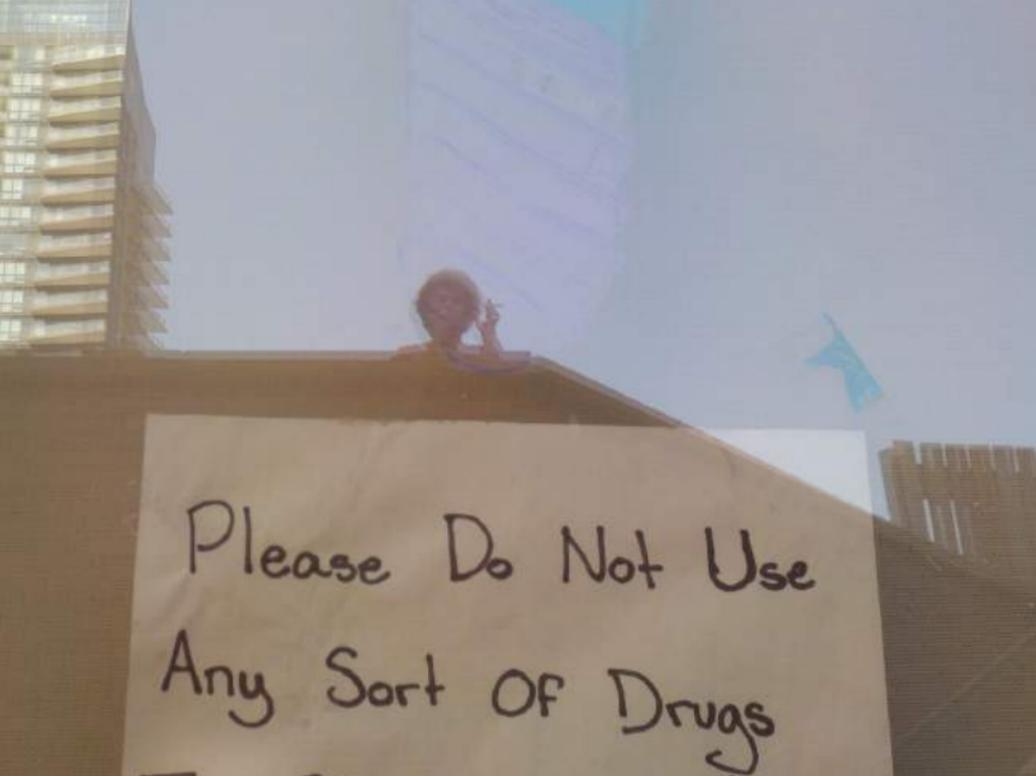
They fill in that blank with whatever fear tactic they think will work or don't fill it in at all and just say danger. Our job as peer workers, we're there to filling the blank to provide information on why things are dangerous.



I find that especially, coming into a peer role, specifically in harm reduction, there's the part of me that has been someone who does not want to get people like 'alarm force' involved in my life. I don't want protection necessarily from some corporation or government powers and coming into the role at a bigger organization that is forced to answer to the bureaucracy, it can make me feel frustrated as a peer worker very often and I feel like this picture sums up my sentiments very concisely. We have to have alarm force displayed there, but I don't necessarily have to be happy about it.



I took this picture because- the premises first of all, are not under video surveillance so it's hilarious and misleading. There's no surveillance there and I think it's meaningful and connects to peer work because the sign is old and decrepit but it still sends the message that you can be penalized for existing there. For me, this is symbolic of all of these old and decrepit systems that are in place to penalize people for existing that don't work or are enforced semi-often for certain types of people, how you speak and how you present yourself. It's ominous on the one hand because it does say "under video surveillance" but it doesn't say what you can and cannot do there- just that you're being watched. On the other hand, there's not a thing there, no camera, no one is really watching you so hopefully its representative of where the system is going to go and people will realize that you have a little more freedom than you may think you do, but people still listen to those warnings.



Initially, I chose to take this picture because I thought it would be cool to take a picture of the sign and then I realized the woman made it even better. It seems like she's watching us to make sure we don't use any drugs, while she is standing there smoking a cigarette. So she's doing drugs but we can't. I think that overtly relates back to peer work and the way that peers are accepted as young people or as employees, but not both at the same time. You can come in and we can treat you well and you can work for us, but we'll be watching you and please do not use any drugs. It's like we're under different rules than they are.



The way I interpret this image it is that we have a lot of mixed messages coming at us as peers; there's so much going on in the world and all we're trying to do is make it better for the people who are often forgotten. I think we sometimes forget to be optimistic and that these are our communities that we are trying to support. We forget that we have control and power of our own world. In a society, sometimes peers are super marginalized, but our world is always going to be ours and I'm talking about the world of peer work and the world of people who use drugs or engage in sex work. That world is always going to be ours.