

Charity donation from women's group 'a thrilling windfall'



NATHAN DELONG TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL, Tuesday, December 12, 2017

SAINT JOHN • A Saint John charity got a large boost from a local women's philanthropic group earlier this week. AIDS Saint John received a \$22,000 donation from the 100 Women Who Care of Greater Saint John at the group's meeting Tuesday night at Lily Lake Pavilion. "This was a thrilling windfall for us," said Julie Dingwell, AIDS Saint John executive director. "It really affirmed that the community appreciates the work we do."

Tuesday's donation to AIDS Saint John – which supports people affected by the AIDS and HIV viruses – was the 19th from 100 Women Who Care of Greater Saint John.

As part of 100 Women Who Care, 100 or more women interested in local causes and community service meet for an hour and hear three five-minute presentations by charities nominated by members and randomly chosen beforehand.

Members then vote on which charity or non-profit group will get a large donation after the presentations. Each member writes a \$100 cheque to the winning organization and watches the donation get larger. There were 235 members who donated Tuesday night.

When AIDS Saint John was announced as the winner, Dingwell said, she was speechless. "It reflects well on all these people who voted for us and wrote us a cheque. We're very grateful to the 100 Women Who Care. "It's a large amount of money to win in one night. It's almost mind-boggling." She said the organization is still considering where to spend the money, but it will likely help cover support programs.

Those include transportation for people needing rides to the hospitals and helping people on social assistance pay for methadone, an opioid used to treat pain.

Services also include assisting with obtaining government identification and working with other agencies to find housing for people in need. "We see a lot of people living in dire poverty," said Dingwell. In addition to a support worker whose salary is fundraised, she said, a major initiative AIDS Saint John provides is a needle exchange program.

That program gives people access to new equipment such as needles, syringes, cotton swabs and safe inhalation kits. "We try to keep people safe and free of harm and stop them from acquiring other diseases before they make a lifestyle change," said Dingwell. "We want to keep them as healthy as we can in the meantime."

She said the New Brunswick government funds the needle distribution program, while the federal government pays for policy work surrounding disease prevention. Support program costs are covered through fundraising.

AIDS Saint John helps about 770 clients per year, said Dingwell.

In addition to Dingwell, a pitch for support Tuesday night also came from Gred Zed, chair of the Saint John & Area Community Suicide Prevention Committee.

Henry Yates, program co-ordinator for the fund and Brunswick News distribution director, presented a pitch about the Empty Stocking Fund.

The **Empty Stocking Fund** is a charity sponsored by the Telegraph-Journal that helps less-fortunate children and their families at Christmas.

Since its inception in 2013, 100 Women Who Care of Greater Saint John has donated more than \$454,000 to 19 charities.