

Avenue B receives \$28,000 donation



Debbie Rathwell, co-Founder of 100 Women Who Care of Greater Saint John with Avenue B Harm Reduction executive director Julie Dingwell.
Photo: Submitted

Matthew Daigle | Telegraph-Journal

A Saint John harm reduction centre has received a large boost in finances as it heads into the summer.

Avenue B Harm Reduction received a \$28,000 donation from the 100 Women Who Care of Greater Saint John on Tuesday, according to a press release from 100 Women Who Care. This marks the second time the organization has received donations from the group, receiving \$23,000 in 2017.

Avenue B, along with two other organizations, gave its pitch to members of the 100 Women Who Care. Treasurer Sarah Rose Werner said the news of them being invited to give a pitch came out of nowhere.

"This sort of came out of nowhere at very short notice and it's really quite amazing for us. It also comes at a time when this money is really needed," said Werner. "Avenue B is primarily not a poverty reduction organization, we're a harm reduction organization. We do education support, but how do you educate someone who's really thinking 'I'm thirsty, I'm hungry?'"

Werner said Avenue B will be using the money received to enrol 10 families in a local monthly food purchasing club. She said \$3,000 will cover a full year for the families.

Avenue B will also be using funds to continue its partnership with Fresh Start Services For Women, said Werner, and in particular to buy and provide water for clients, along with other items.

Having food and water for clients is going to be the most important thing, she said.

"There are people who do not have access to drinking water on hot summer days, they're outside all day, and they have no water because there are no public water fountains anymore," said Werner. "People take it for granted that if you want water, you can walk into a store and buy a bottle of water, or you can go home and get some get water there. What happens when you have no money, and what happens when you have no home?"

Werner said donations like these are important for Avenue B because while they get provincial and federal funding, it can't be used for things like basic needs, but instead for harm reduction.

Tuesday's ceremony also marked a milestone for the 100 Women Who Care. The group is celebrating its 10-year anniversary in Saint John and officially passed \$1 million raised in that time.

"We've generated \$100,000 a year over the past 10 years," said Debbie Rathwell, co-founder of 100 Women Who Care of Greater Saint John. "I think that speaks volumes about the women in our community that are passionate and caring about the most vulnerable and what's happening in our own backyard."

During the event, Rathwell announced she's stepping away from the organization. Replacing her will be Grand Bay-Westfield mayor Brittany Merrifield, along with Shannon Merrifield.

Rathwell said they currently have 309 members in the organization.

"We've got so many caring, giving women, and we've had several that have been with us since day one. It really is a milestone," said Rathwell. "I really just feel honoured to have had the opportunity to meet so many incredible women."