

# vandu

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vancouver area network of drug users

acap year end report for 2002-2003

# 1. Project Information

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- 1.1 Organization: The Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU)  
Name of Project: Starting an Illicit Drug Users Group  
Health Canada Project number: 6763-10-2000/3080482
- 1.2 Start date: April 1, 2002  
End date: March 31, 2003
- 1.3 Amount of funding: \$20 000.00
- 1.4 Person completing this report: Jill Chettiar, member coordinator, 604-662-3809
- 1.5 Report prepared April 15 – 30, 2003



## 2. Staff

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The position for this project was Project Coordinator. The first Project Coordinator was David Cunningham, who was hired June 1, 2002 and had to leave the position for personal reasons in early August, 2002.

His replacement was Robert Wepler, who worked in the capacity of Project Coordinator from August 15, 2002 through to March 31, 2003.



## 3. Objectives

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3.1 What were the original project objectives (refer to the approved funding proposal)?

The original project objectives were:

- a) To set up a user-run illicit drug user group in the Commercial Drive area of Vancouver.
- b) To describe the process of setting up the user group in a formal written report.
- c) To train those organizing the drug user group:
- d) The role and practice of Conscientizing Research;
- e) The role and practice of Popular Education;
- f) The role and practice of Community Development.

3.2 Are there any changes to the original objectives? If so, how and why?

There have been no changes to these goals and objectives.



# 4. Activities/Workplan



4.1 Outline your workplan for the duration of the project.

TASK	Apr/02	May/02	June/02	July/02	Aug/02	Sept/02	Oct/02	Nov/02	Dec/02	Jan/03	Feb/03	Mar/02
Development of Commercial Drive Advisory	X	X										
Hiring of Community Organizer		X	X									
Begin Meetings			X									
Recruit Volunteers			X	X	X							
Relevant Volunteer Training Workshops				X	X	X	X					
Creation of Project Report								X	X	X	X	
Dissemination of the Report												X
Evaluation Written												X





4.2 A suggested reporting table (see appendix) is provided to respond to the following sections:

*Objective: To set up a user-run drug user group in the Commercial Drive area of Vancouver.*

**Activity 1:**

Recruiting members for the user group (active and former users of illicit drugs as well as their supporters) and having them meet once weekly.

**Target Population and Their Involvement:**

Drug users and their supporters make up the target population for this activity. They were involved in recruitment and the determination of the direction of the Commercial Drive chapter of VANDU. It was important to recognize that the issues faced by users in this area of Vancouver would be different than in the Downtown Eastside, where VANDU mainly operates. It was crucial to have the full input and participation of these new members in order to ensure the success of the group. As people became members, they took on the task of drawing their peer group in. This was done by word-of-mouth as well as by leafleting and posterizing areas of Commercial Drive that are known to be congregation points for drug users. New members were key in helping to pinpoint what these areas were.

**Changes in Timetable & Activities:**

There was a slight delay in this activity due to a change in staff.





## Outcomes, Challenges and Successes:

Initially, the challenge facing the Commercial Drive group was finding a stable and consistent place to meet and organize. Ideally, we could have rented a space somewhere on or around Commercial Drive, but this was not possible for financial reasons. Over time, we were able to establish a relationship with the people running the MOSAIC office on the Drive and were allowed to hold our weekly membership meetings there.

This weekly meeting of the membership of the group was very successful on several fronts. First, it allowed an opportunity for people living in this area who are addicted to illicit drugs to come together and organize around the issues that affect them. It became not only an opportunity for the sharing of relevant health information, but also for the sharing of personal insights about life on the Drive as a user. This sharing was important for the congealing of the membership. The success of this active is best exemplified by the growth and stability of the membership numbers, despite the fact that many of the initial members were seasonal travelers.

## Indicators:

The major indicator of the success of the weekly meetings is that the membership of the Commercial Drive group grew to 78 over only 8 months. We managed to reach and engage our target population in a meaningful way through this activity.





*Objective : To create a volunteer program for a peer-run Needle Distribution program.*

**Activity 1:**

Enlist members of the new Commercial Drive Chapter of VANDU to become part of this volunteer program. Follow-up with training workshops (e.g. VCHA's '59 Minutes to Save A Life' and VANDU's Best Practices for Needle Distribution workshops as well as informal 'on-the-job' training from Project Coordinator.

**Target Population and Their Involvement:**

The target population for this activity is drug users living on or around Commercial Drive. They were involved in the foot patrols that went out at least three times a week to distribute needles. There was training about epidemiology, basic first aid and the regular VANDU Needle Distribution Best Practices workshop that was required to be taken by each member before they went out on the patrols. Eventually, with enough experience and demonstrated responsibility, volunteers were able to move into supervisory roles. Peer-to-peer programming such as this is key to the success of VANDU in two ways. First, it creates a low-threshold point of entry into health information for people on the street who have little or no access to conventional medical facilities. Second, it serves to concretize the concepts of harm reduction for the person who is sharing the clean equipment and health information. We have found in the past and also with this project that this is also an excellent way to recruit members for the group. People begin by seeing the foot patrols and over time may become curious or comfortable enough to ask about volunteering themselves or becoming a member of the group.

**Changes in Timetable & Activities:**

None.







## Outcomes, Challenges and Successes:

Attached as an appendix to this report are some aggregate statistics of the Needle Distribution numbers. Considering the relatively small capacity of the Commercial Drive chapter of VANDU (i.e. in terms of time and volunteers), these numbers are quite astounding.

Any amount of clean injection equipment that can make it into the hands of active injection drug users is excellent. The other thing that was passed from peer-to-peer that cannot be graphically displayed is information. This was health information and/or harm reduction information as well as support that cannot be measured on any graph.

This activity was tremendously successful in activating the membership of the group as well as reaching out to all different types of drug users the are living or working on or around Commercial Drive.

## Indicators:

See Appendix.

Also, it is worthy of note that throughout the program it was demonstrated that peer-to-peer interaction was effective in reducing the numbers of used syringes discarded carelessly in certain areas. This is a huge success in terms of building bridges between users on the Drive and the wider community there.



*Objective: To describe the process of starting a user group in a formal written report.*

### **Activity 1:**

Informal information gathering from Commercial Drive membership.

### **Involvement of Target Population:**

The target population for this activity was the membership of the Commercial Drive Chapter as well as any other users living in this area who were not attending meetings. The main points of information gathering were the weekly meetings and the mobile needle distribution patrols. These distribution patrols were opportunities for volunteers in the program as well as the Project Coordinator to actively solicit opinions and other information from drug users in the area about what kinds of things would make the group more useful or accessible to them. It helped us learn about what the needs of this community are and eliminated the guesswork. This outreach was a huge factor in the forming and shaping of the culture and direction of the group.

### **Changes in Timetable or Activities:**

None.

### **Outcomes, Challenges and Successes:**

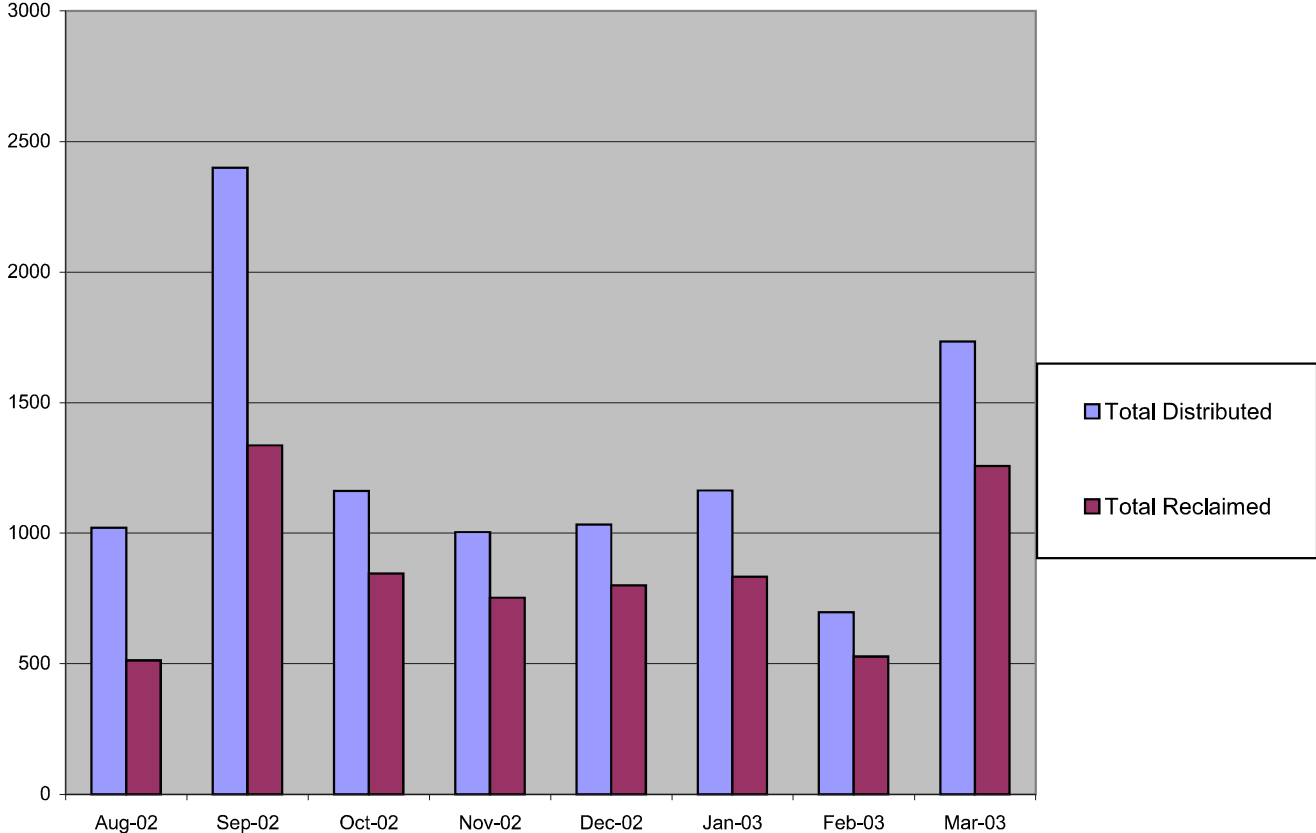
We recognize that there is a plurality of voices and needs within the user community. The greatest challenge for this or any of our activities was trying to synthesize them all into a cohesive, inclusive group. We realize that this is virtually impossible, but if we try and accommodate as broad a group of people as possible, we increase our ability to access our target population.

We believe that the true success of this initiative is that we have reached a target population that was previously not being addressed. The validity and strength of this project has been further recognized and confirmed by the fact that the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority has agreed to fund a more comprehensive version of this project for a one-year pilot.

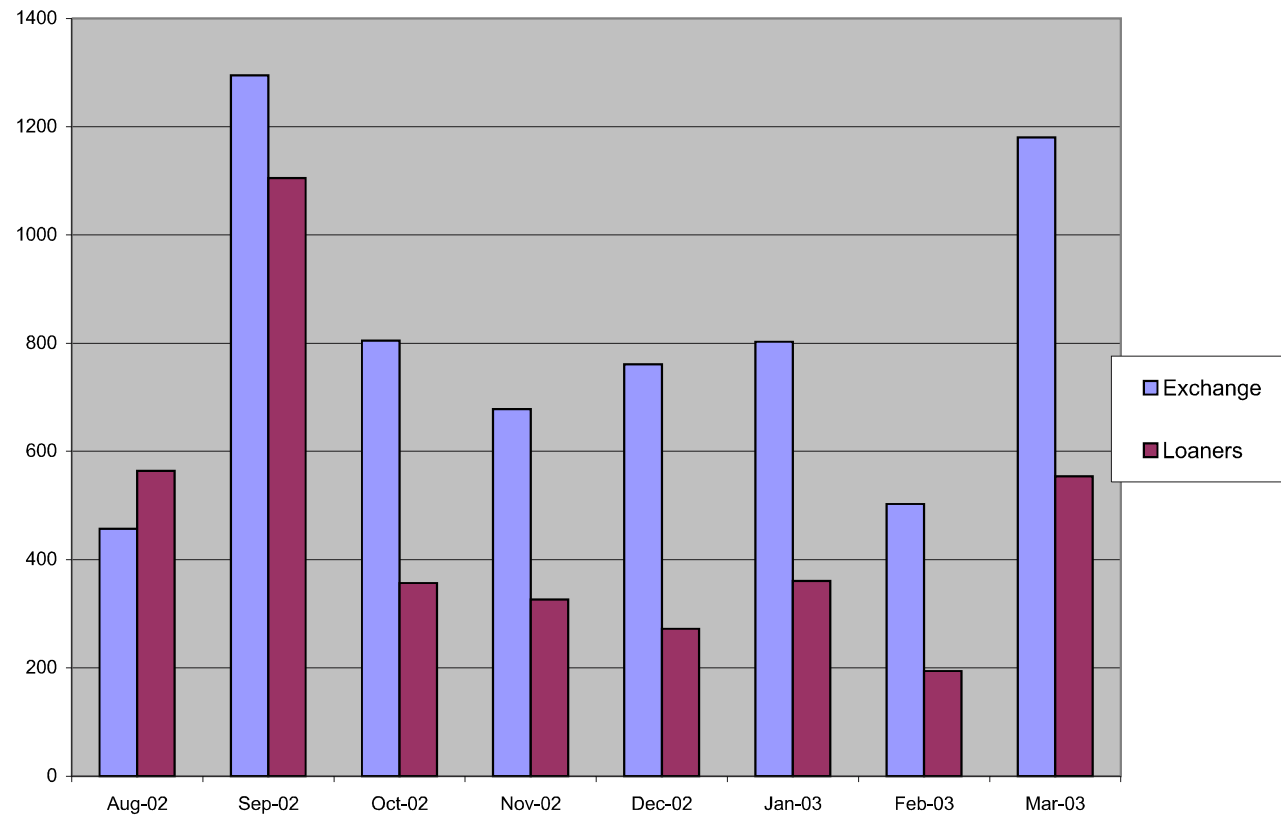
It is important to note that it was the decision of the group on Commercial Drive to take on some service provision as part of their activities, i.e. the peer-to-peer needle distribution program. In doing so, they were able to access a greater number of users.



Needle Distribution Statistics - Commercial Drive



Needle Distribution Breakdown



Needle Reclamation Breakdown

