



Downtown Community Court 10 year Anniversary



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DOWNTOWN COMMUNITY COURT

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Downtown Community Court (DCC) marks a decade in operation

The first Community Court in Canada opened in Vancouver, in the heart of the downtown eastside in 2008.

Now into its 10th year of operation, Downtown Community Court (DCC) continues to model how a court can work with the community to create better outcomes for offenders.

Through collaborative partnerships with health and social services and justice agencies, along with relationships within the community, DCC has looked to create unique

solutions to complex problems.

With the current opioid crisis, DCC provides wrap-around care to clients needing access to addiction treatment and supports,

housing, mental health and primary care, Indigenous supports, Income Assistance, and access to Alternative Measures and programs, both at DCC and in the community.



Our Partners Make it Happen

Much of the success of the Downtown Community Court has been as a result of the partnerships with community agencies, businesses and stakeholders. DCC works

collaboratively with a number of partners to provide supports and services to our clients and ensure public safety is maintained. Over the years, annual events that bring

together DCC and the community have been held, including many anniversary events, BBQs, public forums, and community connections.

From the Bench - by Honourable Judge Tom Gove

Vancouver's Downtown Community Court is an efficient problem solving court that opened in September 2008. Those working in the criminal justice system had come to realize the traditional approach of convicting and punishing repeat offenders was not effective in changing ingrained behaviour. A large portion of the offenders regularly committing crimes were (and still are) addicted to drugs, have mental health issues, are homeless and without life purpose. We explored ideas from other communities; for example, Brooklyn's Redhook Community Justice Centre taught us that fixing small problems helps prevent larger ones. Cleaning up the community and solving the social challenges leading to individuals' crimes improves communities.

Two major achievements of DCC have been: firstly, the Alternative Measures Program wherein first offenders accept help and do some work for the community. Seldom have we seen them return with a new offence. Secondly, the Case Management and Mental Health Programs identify and provide offenders with intensive early intervention and services to enable them to address their offending behaviours. These approaches have reduced the rate of crime in downtown Vancouver, improved the lives of many, and made the community a better place.



Looking back by Kelly Connell, DCC Defence

I have had the great joy of working with the Downtown Community Court (DCC) as full-time defence counsel since before the court officially opened its doors. Working with an amazing team on the nuts and bolts of the first community court in Canada, I saw the amazing efforts put forth by experts from many different disciplines. We often struggled to sort out the most effective and efficient way to run a courthouse, and, more importantly, the best ways to positively

impact the lives of our clients and the health, safety, and livability of our community. We knew that we would get the best results if we were willing to look outside our strict mandates, to see how our interests overlapped with other Ministries' and organizations, to inquire about evidence underlying a proposed practice, and were willing to revisit procedures

and programs to ensure they were producing the results that we hoped they would.

DCC's strength still lies in the ongoing willingness of those involved to continue to discuss and challenge procedures, programs, and ideas, ensuring we are always moving towards better outcomes for our clients and our community.

"We always knew that we would get the best results if we were willing to look outside our strict mandates ..."

My "Safe Haven" by Mannix, DCC Alumni

Mannix cycled in and out of custody for years before finding a "Safe Haven" in Downtown Community Court (DCC). He credits Judge Tom Gove, DCC's first lead Judge, as helping plant a seed that gave him hope he could change his life. "Drugs were just a symptom of my pain," he recalls. After his father passed away, he started to see how things had to change in his life. The positive changes he made he attributes to the support he received from the team at DCC, in particular to his Probation Officer, Shawna Bubenko, who never gave up on him. Shawna met him in custody and helped him find housing and support to get into addiction treatment. After treatment, Mannix took the opportunity to use the programs and supports the team had to offer at DCC. He attended addictions programs at DCC and began doing Community Work Service (CWS) with his CWS Supervisor, Stan Leong. He also credits Stan for showing him he could give back and contribute to the community in a meaningful way. "I still have hard days..., but now I can help others.... DCC was my catalyst". Today, Mannix has the tools and supports in his life to stay clean and sober and a job he loves with Harbour Lights. He has community in his workplace, at his church, and through NA/AA groups.

The Community Advisory Council (CAC): Representing the community—by Regiane Garcia, PhD., CAC Chair

DCC's Community Advisory Council consists of 6 volunteer members: Dr. Regiane Garcia (UBC), Chair; Perry Omeasoo (Vancouver Coastal Health), Co-Chair; Kevin Hawken (Salvation Army, Harbour Light); Louise Schwartz (Recycling Alternative); Albert Fok (Chinatown Business Improvement Association); and Norm Leech (Vancouver Aboriginal Community Policing Centre). Judge Jodie Werier, DCC; Judge Jim Bahen, DCC; Judge Elizabeth Burgess, DCC; and Sharon Lockhart, Director of Integrated Programs, BC Community Corrections, also sit on the CAC.

The CAC's Terms of Reference define the Council as an advisory body with the goal of serving as the "voice" of the broader community and to provide advice to the DCC on relevant issues and matters of concern to the criminal justice system.

It is important to honour the calls to action in the Truth and Reconciliation process in Canada, and this includes promoting Indigenous people at the tables and in discussions about DCC and the community. The CAC currently has two members from the Indigenous community: Norm Leech, Executive Director of the Vancouver Aboriginal Community Policing Centre, and Perry Omeasoo, First Nations Mental Health Liaison Worker, Heatley Community Care team.



Dr. Regiane Garcia ("Regi") is a member of the Downtown Community Court's Advisory Committee, currently serving as the chair of the Committee and a post-doctoral researcher on global health at the University of British Columbia's School of Population and Public Health.

Native Court Worker and Counselling Association of BC (NCCABC) provides support to Indigenous clients at DCC through on-site Aboriginal Case Worker (ACW) Kevin Hill. The role of the ACW is to link Indigenous clients at DCC to communities and agencies and ensure clients before the court receive culturally sensitive treatment. The ACW works as part of the Case Management Teams, and this role is unique to the DCC. Kevin connects Indigenous clients to housing, addiction treatment (of client's choice), and health care supports. When the client is ready, they can be connected to culturally appropriate services to help support them in the community.

Kevin has hosted DCC tours for local Indigenous groups and those from other parts of Canada. A few of the Indigenous groups that have visited DCC include the Moosonee, Thunder Bay, and Manitoulin Island nations in Ontario. Kevin is Mohawk from the Six Nations in Ontario and is part of the Turtle Clan.

DCC Integrated Programs and Teams

Collaborative teams provide a number of onsite programs for clients at DCC to help support and transition them into the community. Programs are co-facilitated onsite by staff and include: SMART—Self-Management and Recovery Training; Crime and Consequences (Elizabeth Fry); Art Studio and Art Therapy (Adler University); Anger Management; Dealing with Triggers; and Take Home Naloxone (Narcan) Training. Programs that work to move clients out of the Criminal Justice System are Alternative Measures and the Community Work Service Street Crew Program. The Mental Health Program (Bail) helps to connect clients to mental health services and supports in the community, with the goal to have clients' matters stayed when possible.

VICTIM COURT SUPPORT CASEWORKER

The role of the two Victim Court Support Caseworkers is to focus on the needs of the victim and provide the necessary supports that will enhance their personal safety and aid in their recovery following a traumatic criminal incident. The services they provide include emotional support to help victims deal with the impacts of the crime; practical assistance; information about the justice process explained in plain language; and updates on their case. They help victims develop a safety plan and provide referrals to community agencies that can help them meet their ongoing needs.

Within DCC, Victim Court Support Caseworkers collaborate with both Justice System and Community Partners to help reduce the level of anxiety and trauma victims of crime experience.

Vancouver Aboriginal Transformative Justice Services Society (VATJSS) is contracted to provide the Aboriginal Alternative Measures (AM) Program for Clients referred by DCC Crown Counsels. AM can be used in cases involving less serious offences. The accused is given the opportunity to accept responsibility for the crime and make amends to the community without going through the formal Court process. VATJSS uses Traditional Indigenous philosophies to provide a transformative approach to mend negative patterns.

DCC clients work with the

VATJSS Justice Coordinator, Robyn Smith. The client goes through an interview/intake process and creates a Healing Plan. Robyn's goal as the Justice Coordinator is to support the client to complete their Healing Plan within a month to make things right with "what put them in the situation", "who was most affected", and lastly, "something for themselves" to help the person get closer to their purpose. When the Healing Plan is successfully completed, the client is granted a Stay of Proceedings (SOP). This gives the opportunity for the clients to receive a Restorative approach and to receive referrals to cul-

DCC Summer BBQ for Clients

Part of supporting DCC clients is to help them transition successfully back into their communities. In addition to offering ongoing support with housing and life skills training, DCC staff provide opportunities for clients to participate in activities in the community. An annual BBQ was hosted this summer by the Case Management



DCC clients and staff enjoy a BBQ at Crab Park

team staff for DCC clients at Crab park. Despite the cloudy weather, there was no rain, and clients enjoyed a BBQ lunch, socialized, and even tried a game of Frisbee. A big thanks to the staff who helped make this event a success.

Vancouver Aboriginal Transformative Justice Services Society (VATJSS) by Jenna Forbes

turally appropriate resources in the community.

It has been with great pleasure to have been housed within DCC and work collaboratively with the teams to best support in diverting Indigenous Community Members out of the court system when possible. We have had great success within DCC and look forward to working with them and their ongoing commitment to be innovative in their approach to justice.

Robyn Smith is Haisla, Tsimshian, and Nisga'a Nations. She is originally from Kitimat.

Thank you to all our Partners in Health, Justice, Social Services and the Community

The success of the DCC did not happen overnight. A lot of work and planning went into DCC before it first opened its doors in September 2008. Many ideas put in place at the beginning had to be reviewed or abandoned and new ones created to meet the needs of the client population. DCC continues to evolve today. We want to thank all of you who have been involved in the DCC, whether in the past or currently, and acknowledge the contributions you have made to DCC helping clients and contributing a safer community. From all of us at DCC, a

big **Thank you** to all of you: Elizabeth Fry Society; Native Court Workers & Counselling Association of BC; Vancouver Coastal Health; WATARI Counselling & Support Services Society; VATJSS; BC Housing, Orange Hall; Forensics Psychiatric Services Commission (PHSA); Dr. Bill McEwan; Public Prosecution Service of Canada; Vancouver Police Department; City of Vancouver; Ministry of Attorney General—Court Services Branch; BC Prosecution Service; Justice Services Branch; OCJ; Legal Services Society of BC; UBC; Ministry of Social Development

and Poverty Reduction; HAVE Café; Carnegie Centre; Downtown Eastside Women's Centre; Mission Possible; Binnars' Project (Van.); Adler University; Business Improvement Association; Aboriginal Front Door; Eastside Works; The Open Door; WISH; ICBC; QUEST Food Exchange; UGM; VEEES; Greater Van. Family Services; Acupuncture; Sprott Shaw College; Bean Around the World; The View (Bloom group); DTCV; VCRT; VISU; UGM; Salvation Army; Harbour Lights; INSITE; Recycling Alternatives; VACPC; City of Vancouver, and many others.

