

## Webinar 3: Gender Informed Approaches to Substance Use Treatment

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Many substance use treatment programs have developed gender informed services, including programming specific to men, women, and transgender populations. In this webinar, staff from three different organizations in Toronto discuss some of the successes and challenges in developing these programs.

### Renascent Addiction Treatment (Toronto)

**Mandate:** Renascent provides addiction treatment for individuals with serious substance use concerns who are seeking or needing an abstinence-based approach. The organization follows a 12-step recovery model and works closely with clients' loved ones (including offering parenting programs and children's programs). Renascent provides "population specific" treatment for men, women, and the LGBTQ+ population.

**Program Development:** In the 1980s, women-specific programming grew out of requests from women for specific programs and concerns about safety. In the 1990s, Renascent developed a LGBTQ+ specific program as they found that many LGBTQ+ individuals were not engaging in other treatment programs, felt unsafe, and reported high substance use and low service availability. These programs developed because there was a critical mass of clients and staff requesting the program. All programs are delivered by staff from that particular population. Key program sessions focus on issues unique to the experiences of recovery of that population, e.g., self-esteem, anger and trauma in women-specific programs. They also collaborate with other organizations such as eating disorder services, child welfare, and the human trafficking police program.

### Responding to Treatment Requests from Transgender

**People:** Approximately one year ago, Renascent conducted a full organizational audit in relation to improving services for trans people. Since then, they have made a number of shifts, including changing washroom signs, trans friendly posters on bulleting boards, revised language in family program brochures, and discussing people's pronoun of choice during first contact.

### The Jean Tweed Centre (Toronto)

**Mandate:** The Jean Tweed Centre has been providing services to women and their families from across Ontario for 35 years. The programming is informed by the experiences of women accessing services, including their experiences of trauma and violence. The Centre provides a continuum of services, including: support and stabilization, residential and day programming, on-site childcare, wrap-around services, outreach (i.e., pregnancy and parenting, concurrent mental health concerns, justice), and supportive housing. The Centre's work is informed by an understanding of how substance use is influenced by gender and other social determinants of health.

### Responding to Treatment Requests of Trans People

Many organizations have undertaken a number of initiatives to response to the unique substance use treatment needs of transgender people. This has included:

- Inclusion policies
- Website and promotional materials marketing services to trans people
- Creating welcoming physical spaces
- Review of program curricula
- Staff training
- Changes to language, i.e., using preferred pronouns
- Updating infrastructure (i.e., non-designated washrooms)

**Program Development:** The programs at JTC have evolved in response to the voices of women. The organization uses a trauma-informed lens overall and also provides trauma-specific treatment. (“*Trauma Matters: Guidelines for Trauma-Informed Practices in Women’s Substance Use Services*” can be downloaded from <http://jeantweed.com>). Some of the initial programs were supported by fundraising efforts; other services have been offered with other community organizations using a gender lens.

**Responding to Treatment Requests from Transgender People:** Several years ago, JTC developed an inclusion policy that was shared with funders and collaborators and conducted staff training on access for trans women. JTC has addressed infrastructure by creating private washrooms (rather than men/women designated washrooms), worked to create welcoming environments, and has begun to review language and program curriculum.

### Breakaway Addiction Services (Toronto)

**Mandate:** Breakaway provides a range of addiction services, including a youth and family outpatient clinic, supportive housing, a methadone program, and street and community outreach. All programs are based on principles of harm reduction. The street outreach team includes a staff member who works specifically with women with opiate addiction concerns. Breakaway also offers a Pieces to Pathway program, a peer-led substance use support program for LGBTQ+ youth ages 16-29 years old which resulted from a needs assessment and consultation process with LGBTQ+ youth.

**Program Development:** The harm reduction and outreach teams include a women-specific component. The teams found that many women, especially street-involved women and women who have been involved with the sex trade, were uncomfortable with mixed-gender settings. Two initiatives for women include a group and loss group which addresses grief related to child removal and a “Join In, Stay Out” group to help women avoid repeated incarceration.

**Responding to Treatment Requests from Transgender People:** Programs have evolved in recognition that programs must be *available* (need for LGBTQ+ specific services not just generic services with accommodation); *accessible* (reduce barriers such as location, making first contact with staff, preferred pronouns, accommodation from other clients); and *acceptable* (staff includes peers, low barrier intake, flexible programming).

Each of these organizations recognize gender as an area that is always evolving and requiring shifts in practice.

#### Presenters:

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