

SAFER Use SPACE Zine



Art and reflections from the
YWCA Hamilton SUS Community, Winter 2024/25

By YWCA Hamilton, Keeping Six and the
Hamilton Social Medicine Response Team

EST. April 2022

est. April 2022

The Safer Use Space, or "SUS," is a collaborative effort between YWCA Hamilton, Keeping Six, and the Hamilton Social Medicine Response Team (HAMSMaRT).



It was opened in direct response to the number of women and gender diverse people in our community whose lives have been cut short because of the toxic drug supply.



It is the second gender-specific safe consumption site in Canada. And it has become so much more than a place to use drugs.



Our Impact

Service Snapshot from April 2024 - March 2025

Total Visits to the Safer Use Space

7,117

Total Drug Poisonings:

45

Fatal Drug Poisonings:

0

Calls to Emergency Services:

6

Consumptions Supervised:

2,026

Substance Use Safety Plans Made:

220

Our Impact

Service Snapshot from April
2024 - March 2025

Visits for Harm
Reduction Supplies:

4,395

Visits for
Support Only:

1,123

Over

500

Unique Guests
Served

Visits for Supervised Consumption:

1,599

Our Impact

Service Snapshot from April 2024 - March 2025

Wound Care Provided:

734

Reproductive Care:

168

Referrals to Healthcare Provider

186

Referrals to Detox:

20

Calls to Police Services:

0

Fentanyl Strips:

174

Xylazine Strips:

171

Naloxone Training:

45

Our Art

Our Space

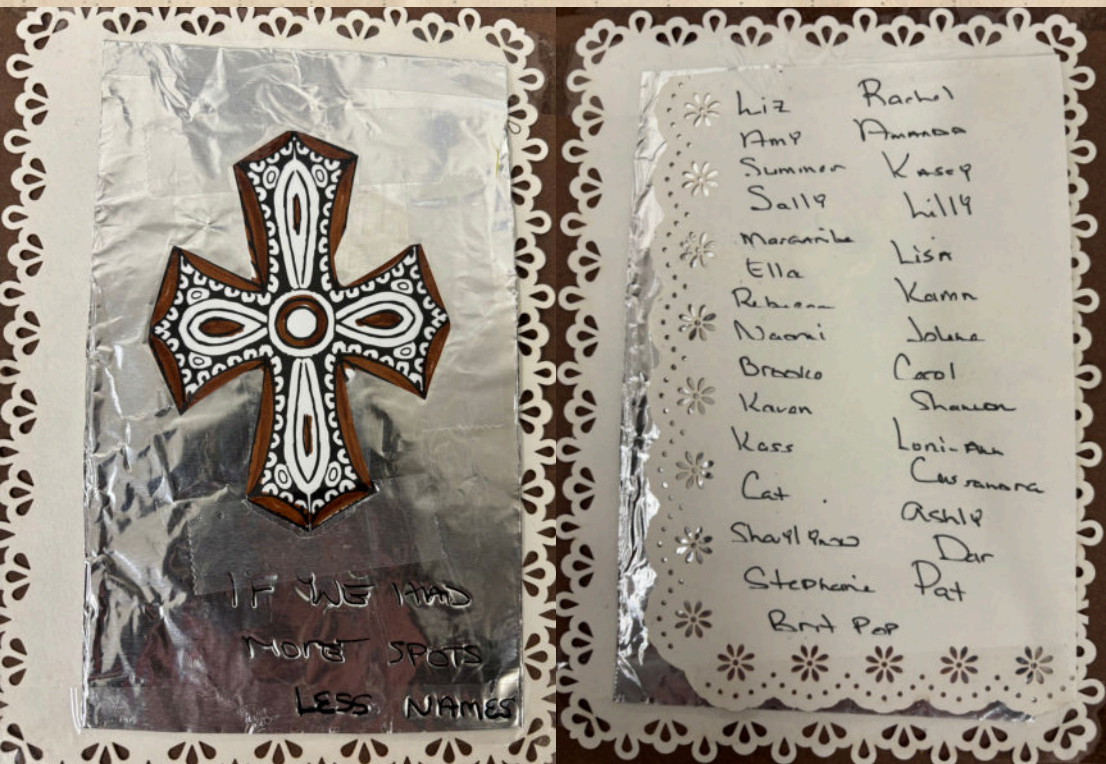
Our Stories

In Winter 2024-2025, we hosted three zine workshops for people who use SUS.

We invited folks to make art based on the prompts: "What is your fondest memory of the Safer Use Space?" and "What does the Safer Use Space mean to you?"

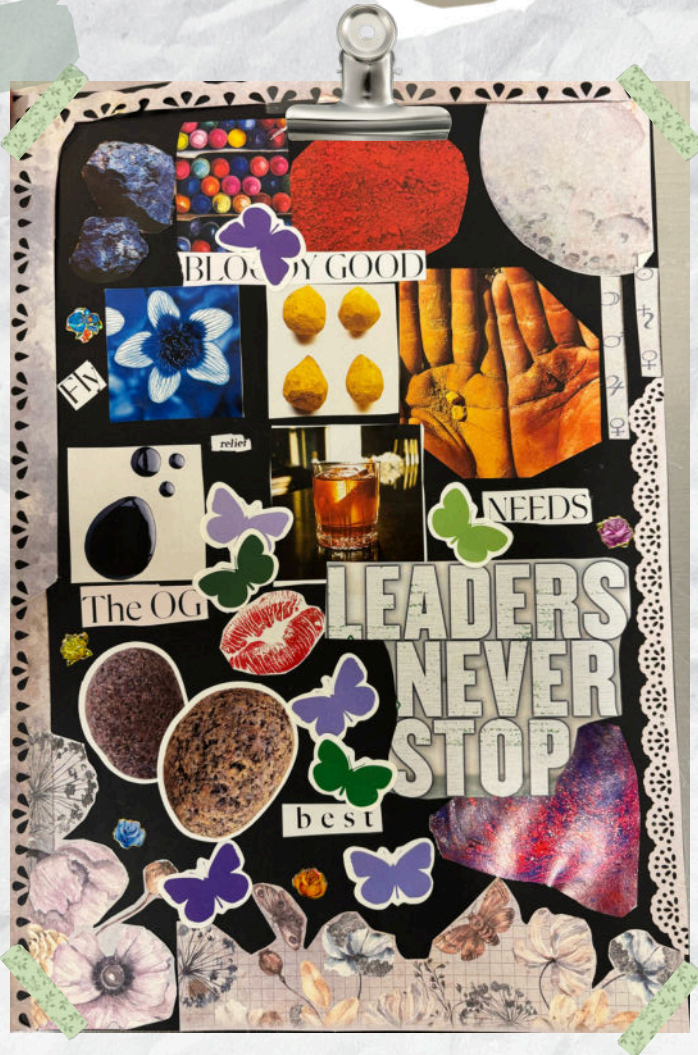
We also surveyed the participants about their experiences of SUS. This zine shares what we found.

"This mirror represents that if there were more injection sites where people were cared for, there wouldn't be so many losses. More injection sites equals less stones with names on them."



This piece honours community members who have passed away because of overdose or drug poisoning.

"The Safer Use Space at the YWCA is original. There is nothing else like it for women in Hamilton."



What Makes the Safer Use Space Special?

"The peers help provide a more personal connection; they have helped establish a trust, clinical personnel don't, because the experience and connection is authentic, genuine."

"That it is not exclusive to users and anyone having a bad day can access supports and/or have a confidant to converse and divulge to with ease"

"This one is different because you can come in and out and talk and learn."

"The snacks!"

"It is inviting - you feel comfortable here."

"The art programs"

"Employees and staff make you feel safe and calm and set the mood with their own energy and vibe. You don't see that often. They care to listen to our story and see us as people and treated us as such."

"It is unique! To watch it grow and see how it has reached more people over time."

“It starts today.”



“And it starts with you.
Stand up for what you
believe in. You'll inspire
others to do the same!”

"Today, I am in my early 40's, a mother born + raised in Hamilton, Ontario. I am a University & College Grad, I have lots of hopes + dreams and I have been a drug addict for 11 years + homeless off + on past five years. I am just one of many people who have benefitted from "The Safer Use Space."

My Story -> I am just 1 of many who have accessed the "Safer Use Space" for many years + without the space I only faced problems with the law, judgement from others, unsanitary + unsafe surroundings, and find it to be a shame the space will no longer be.

A time without the space sticks out in my head daily. One day, -20 outside, Tim Horton's, Cannon and Sanford. I was "dope sick". I obtained a "rig" already made + without much thought I used it. Sitting behind the dumpster in the cold, I tried like 10 times to get a vein.

Finally, I thought success! I was wrong, the burn was unbearable, it wasn't what I thought. Within 24 hrs an abscess formed 1st one ever. Since, I have spent 5 wks+ in every hospital in Hamilton. I have seen the worst of the worst, dirtiest of the dirtiest trap houses, etc.

I am now HIV+ (undetectable), Hep C, mental health, list for longer note. I then came to learn about "SUS". A warm friendly place to safely use. It has been such a relief knowing I had a safe clean place to go whenever to get "gear" - harm reduction, wound care, a snack or a place to use, this place was there for me. Sadly, I am not sure where I will run to when it's closed. Hopefully, my past won't repeat itself."

P5 PLUS

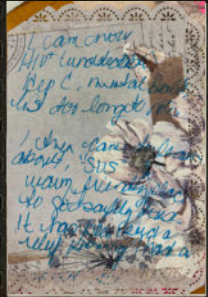
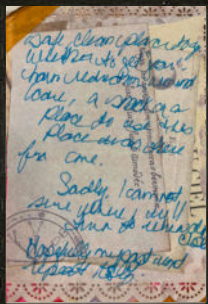
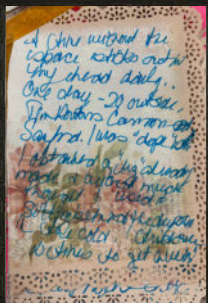
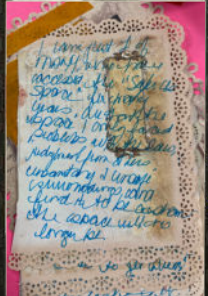
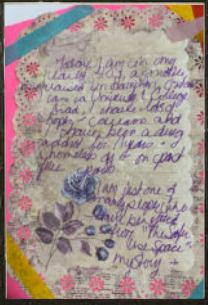
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P5 PLUS

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"SUS is a community."



"Just knowing this place is here, day or night, even on holiday days - it means a lot to me. When I come here, the girls ask me how my day was and there isn't many places like that. It's like a community."

What Other Supports Have You Accessed Through SUS ?

"Wound care
and first
aid
supplies."

"Referred to
Positive
Health
Network"

"Snacks and
hygiene
supplies"

"Safer sex
supplies"

"I got
referred to
the Program
for Pregnancy
and Substance
Use (PROSPR)."

"Pregnancy
test"

"Referral to
(YWCA's)
Transitional
Living
Program"

"Drug test
strips"

"Keeping Six
- peer
support
groups."

"Lice
treatment and
hair care."

"Art projects,
art groups and
art supplies."

"Doctors and a
psychiatrist
from HAMSMaRT"



SAFER

• for People
• for Communities
• for Health Care

"You can just come and feel safe - just knowing it is here take a lot of stress off my mind"

"Employees and staff make you feel safe and calm and set the mood with their own energy and vibe.

You don't see that often. They care to listen to our story and see us as people and treated as such."



Safe IS A PLACE

2015 AUG..



You deserve to feel safe

"I feel safer knowing there is trained staff on."

Does Having Peer Support Workers Impact Your Use Of This Space ?

"I like it when there's staff here who used to do drugs, you can talk about it, when you feel comfortable. That helps us to understand it more, and use less."

"Absolutely. Having someone you can relate to is important to me. I gravitate more to people who can understand - lived experience."

"Yeah. I use it because it's here. I'm interested in doing the course to become a peer worker."

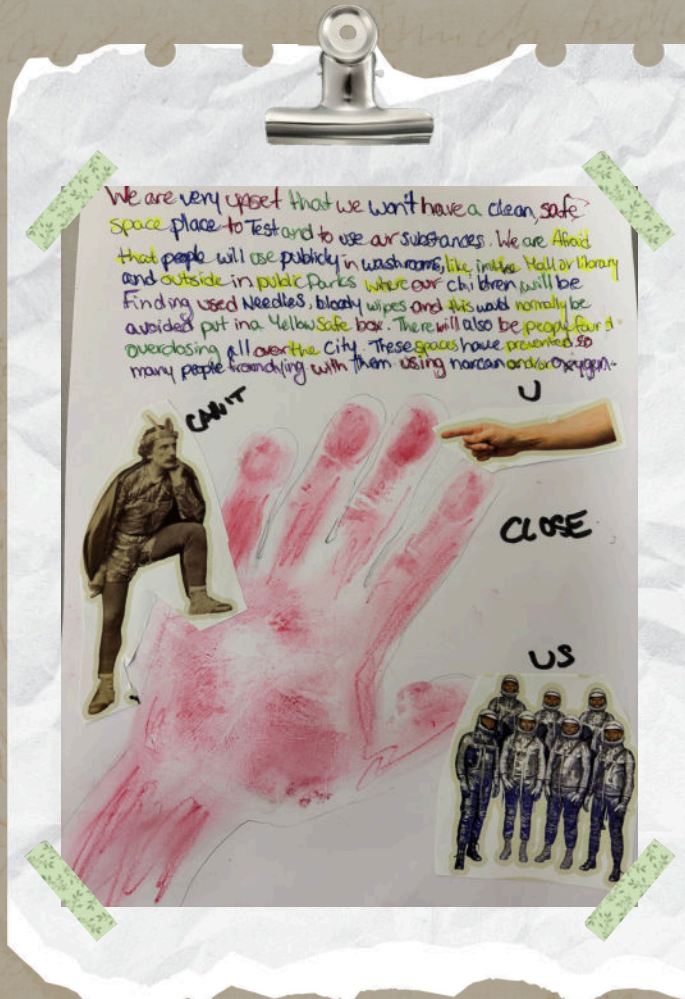
"It makes it better. We can connect better in that way. People don't understand without that experience."

"They understand, which if you haven't fully lived it, you just wouldn't get it."

"It makes the space less judgmental - I like that"

"A lot better to have people that have experience."

"U Can't Close US"



"We are very upset that we won't have a clean, safe space place to test and use our substances. We are afraid that people will use publicly in washrooms, like in the mall or library and outside in public parks, where our children will be finding used needles, bloody wipes, and this would normally be avoided, put into a yellow safe box. There will also be people found overdosing all over the city. These spaces have prevented so many people from dying with them using Narcan and/or oxygen."

"Whenever I come here, I know I will get what I need. A snack, supplies, someone to talk to. I know if I come here I don't have to use alone. It has been good for me."



What Does a Gender-Specific Safer Use Space

Mean to You ?

"I feel safer because this is women's only"

"As of right now, it really matters to me because there are so many men outside."

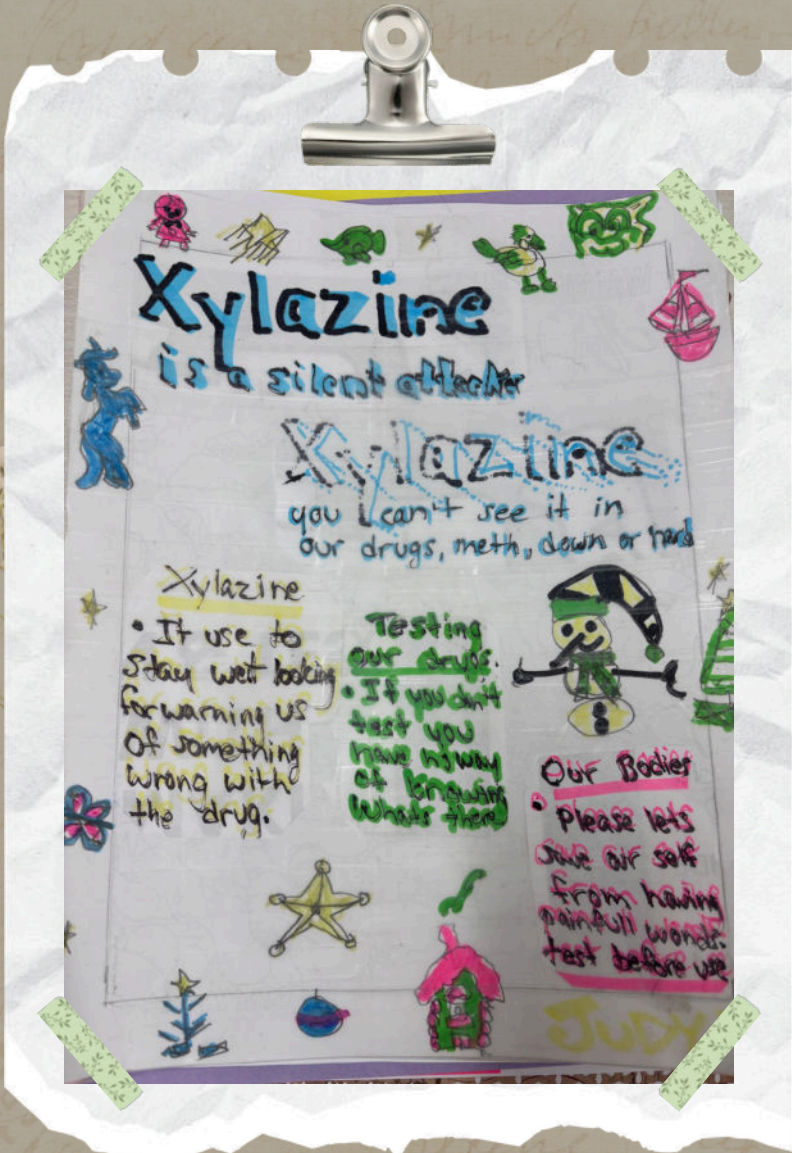
"I love that we listen to a lot of music."

"A safer use space means a safe place to use at and not get sexually assaulted when persistently going on the nod."

"I feel a little more comfortable. You can be a little more open."

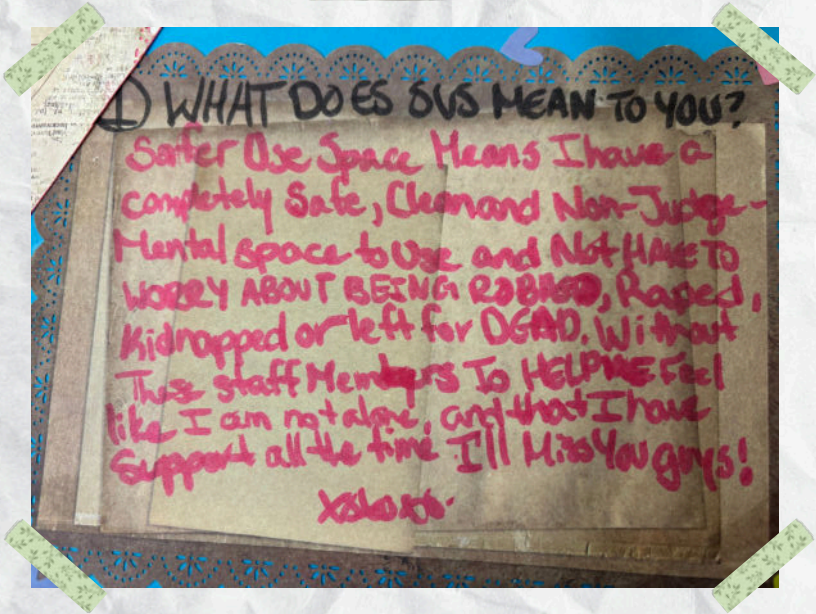
"You don't have to worry about people seeing you as their next victim. Feels less judgmental"

"We keep each other safe"



"I made this to display in the Safer Use Space to let the other girls know about the risks of xylazine and the testing kits available."

"Safer Use Space means I have a completely safe, clean and non-judgmental place to use and not have to worry about being robbed, raped, kidnapped or left for dead. Without these staff members to help me feel like I am not alone, and that I have support all the time. I'll miss you guys... xoxo"



Think your tough and
Free, No one is or are
From, addiction

Live your life
free from Blame
Shame.

"Think you're
tough and
free, no one
is or are
from
addiction."

"Live your
life free
from Blame
and shame."

"It is an
escape from
chaos

outside... I
am grateful
this space
exists!!!!"

This space is very important for people with mental health issues. It is an escape from chaos outside.

It is a place to collect your thoughts and get some time to relax and sometimes have a snack. Talk with an individual and discuss problems.

I am grateful this space exists!!!



"Safer use space means to me that women or men, people can have a solid, for sure space that they can depend on for their D&C. And not have to be outside. Also, it's safe. They supply new needles and other user needs, tools, and drinks, snacks, & washrooms. Also, you may socialize with others respectfully."

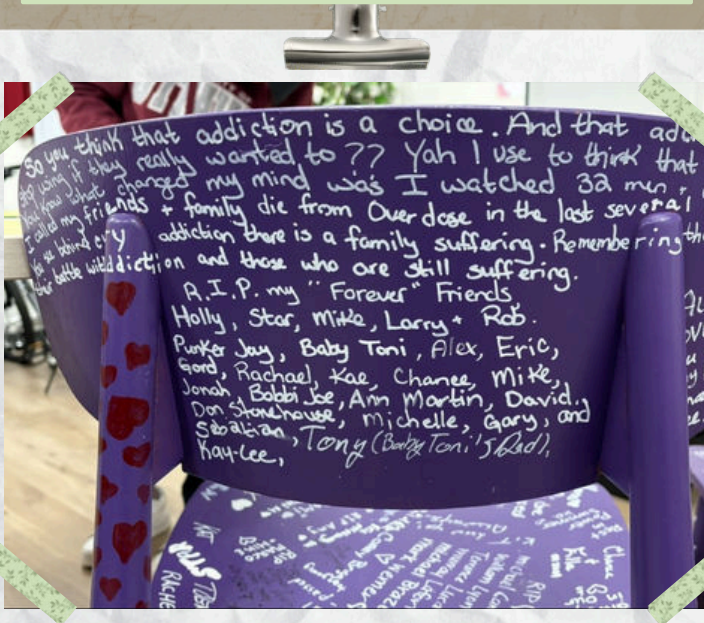


"My fondest memories of SUS is the relaxing recliners, heaters, and being able to take a nap in the warmth. Also, the people and staff too."



We carry the weight of too many losses – lives cut short by overdose and drug poisoning. Each name, each story, each absence is a reminder that behind the statistics are people who were loved deeply, and who deserved safety, care, and dignity.

Now more than ever, we must acknowledge that safer use spaces are not optional. They are life-saving. Closing them has real and devastating consequences, leaving people more vulnerable to a poisoned supply and increasing the risk of preventable deaths.



Harm reduction is not just a policy or a program; it is compassion in action. It is a commitment to valuing human life, to meeting people where they are, and to giving them the chance to survive today so they can choose tomorrow.

We owe it to those we've lost, and to those still with us, to fight for these spaces and to remember: harm reduction saves lives.

Every time we get a second chance, we are given a possibility to start over. Every time we get a second chance, we are given a possibility to start over. Every time we get a second chance, we are given a possibility to start over.

