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Martin Street clinic making a difference

Mark* is a young man who has mental illness and substance use problems, despite personal challenges, is committed to staying off drugs, finding secure housing, and taking care of his health. It's not easy, especially because he has a mental illness that includes psychosis, a debilitating condition that impacts people's perception of reality when they are ill. But he is succeeding – he is involved with the Martin Street Clinic, no longer homeless, attends regular Narcotics Anonymous meetings, and is managing his symptoms with medication and counselling.

Although he has some difficulty communicating – his language can be disorganized – when asked about the team at Martin Street, Mark is clear.

"If I have a problem, I talk to them about it and see what they think," he says. "When I was homeless, they gave me a lot of helping hands to find something. It helps to have someone who can take that extra five minutes. They helped me with my housing at first. They helped me with my feelings. They helped me get on my meds again."

"The new meds they prescribed basically saved my life," he says. "I was getting pretty confused." Mark is one of more than 750 clients supported by the team at Martin Street since the centre opened in Penticton two years ago.

A partnership between Interior Health, South Okanagan Similkameen Division of Family Practice, and numerous other community agencies, the centre provides mental health/substance use and primary care services to a targeted at-risk population in Penticton.

Dr. Kyle Stevens has been involved in the clinic since the beginning.

"I think it's going really well. In the last year, we have shifted from spending time getting to know the patients, to a point now where we are advancing care plans into a preventive realm for many of our patients – an area some people haven't been in decades," says Dr. Stevens.

"We have opportunities to do simple interventions like mammograms and screening for diabetes. It's exciting because we're seeing these people become engaged in a differed aspect of their health care. That's come with building trust. The patients know they are valued and respected as they walk in."

Dr. Stevens says having services under one roof is necessary to provide wrap-around care, and the location of the centre is also key. Many of the patients live within the downtown core, and sending a



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patient with diabetes up to the health centre to see the diabetes nurse educator, for example, just wasn't successful. An addictions support worker is available for consultations, as are harm reduction services, such as naloxone kits and training to reverse overdoses.

"It's only been a couple of years, but we see a lot of people moved in a positive direction," says Social Worker Lisa Birch. "It's been really exciting and effective to provide this style of service to the clients." "Today, for example, there was a woman here who I helped in part to find housing. She is also getting a bit of help from the Intensive Case Management team, an occupational therapy assessment, and a wheelchair. It took four different groups of people but it was really smooth and effortless."

Lisa has met with more than 1,400 different people over the last two years. "I am one cog in a wheel. I increase the effectiveness and efficiency in the centre.

"It's been nice to help stabilize people."

From the perspective of clients like Mark, the work of the team here is both necessary and greatly appreciated.

"They're here and they're here to help. I feel great for them helping me," he says.

(*Patient's name has been changed to protect his privacy.)

Interior Health is committed to promoting healthy lifestyles and providing a wide range of quality health-care services to more than 740,000 people living across B.C.'s vast interior. For more information, visit www.interiorhealth.ca, follow us on Twitter [@Interior_Health](https://twitter.com/Interior_Health), or like us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/InteriorHealth>.

The South Okanagan Similkameen Division of Family Practice is part of the [Divisions of Family Practice](#) initiative, funded by a joint committee of the Government of BC and Doctors of BC. There are 35 Divisions of Family Practice in BC, encompassing more than 230 communities.

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Photo attached: Dr. Kyle Stevens and Social Worker Lisa Birch are part of a special team supporting patients at Penticton's Martin Street Clinic in downtown Penticton.