

# Toxic Drugs in Algoma

## Interviews with People with Lived and Living Experience (PWLLE) of Drug Use and Family and/or Friends

The purpose was to better understand the experiences of people in Algoma who use drugs to help influence positive change.

### What we did



**28**  
interviews  
with PWLLE<sup>1</sup>



**12**  
interviews  
with family  
and/or friends

### What we heard

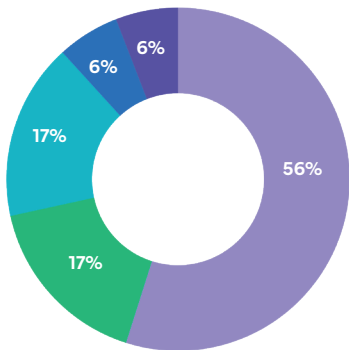
**14 years**

Average age  
of starting  
substance use

#### Most common reasons for starting substance use:

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)<sup>2</sup>
- Grief/loss
- Peer pressure
- Relationship problems
- Coping with mental health issues
- To self-treat pain

### Readiness of PWLLE to stop using drugs:



#### Stages of Change

- Pre-contemplation:** no intentions to stop
- Contemplation:** thinking about stopping or getting ready to stop
- Preparation:** ready and may have had plans in place already to stop
- Action:** had made changes to reduce or stop their substance use
- Maintenance:** stopped or in recovery



#### Barriers to people using services:

- No housing
- Not interested in services
- Religious component of programs
- Kicked out of program
- Judgement/stigma
- Finding a counsellor
- Staffing



#### What PWLLE would like society to know:

- Addiction is an illness, not a choice
- Everyone should be treated like a human
- Why people use drugs
- Everyone has a story
- Not everyone who uses drugs is the same



#### What has been helpful for PWLLE:

- Peer support
- Counselling/therapy
- AA/NA
- Opioid Agonist Therapy
- Housing
- Supportive staff



#### What PWLLE need to stop or stay in recovery:

- Counselling/therapy
- Safe home
- Program to follow
- Good mental health
- Activities to stay busy
- Positive mindset
- Drug-free environment
- Replacement substance



#### Recommendations from family and/or friends:

- More services (e.g., support groups, day treatment)
- Better hours
- Better communication between agencies
- Affordable housing
- Help kids at a younger age
- Protect instead of punish

1. Limitations: Only people accessing services were included, so there continues to be a gap in understanding the needs of people who do not access services. Data primarily represents perspectives from people living in Sault Ste. Marie, a more urban setting.  
2. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are stressful or potentially traumatic events that occur within the first 18 years of life. ACEs are recognized as forms of abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction (e.g., family substance use, domestic violence).