



2016-17 SHEELA BASRUR CENTRE

A Year in Review

Public health leaders in a time of transformation: Sheela Basrur Centre programs in action

As we mark 10 years since the passage of the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion Act, the legislation that created Ontario's first public health agency, Public Health Ontario, we also reflect on public health's ongoing relevance. Ontario faces new and emerging challenges to the health of our people and communities, often, with implications well beyond our borders. Moreover, Ontario's Patients First Act and the modernization of the Ontario Standards for Public Health Programs and Services have set the stage for an expanded role for public health within the health system.

In earlier transformations, Dr. Sheela Basrur's role as Chief Medical Officer of Health for Ontario was singular and impactful. Today, that legacy remains timely and relevant as leadership, vision, commitment and collaboration are needed for success. Many others have taken up the call of public health leadership for Ontarians.

The public health landscape continues to change. We cannot predict the next public health crisis or threat to the wellbeing of our population and our communities. However, the sector can prepare by honing the skills demonstrated by our great public health leaders. These qualities of leadership, integrity, openness and

collaboration so integral to Dr. Basrur and Dr. Donald Low remain needed and relevant today during times of crisis.

The Sheela Basrur Centre (SBC) programs anticipate and respond to the evolving needs of the sector. Our training programs prepare current and future public health professionals to tackle today's issues, supporting their leadership in protecting and promoting the health of Ontarians. We are excited about our new crisis communications workshop presented by the Centre, focusing on the current opioid epidemic (more information is provided in the "Communicating During a Public Health Emergency" article). This program and others offered through SBC are vital to building the capacity of public health leaders while contributing towards a larger vision – strengthening our future public health workforce and advancing the sector.

VISION

Strong voices for public health. Leaders for change.

MISSION

To strengthen current and future public health leaders by equipping them with the knowledge, tools and training to communicate effectively on key issues.



Sheela Basrur Centre

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UPCOMING EVENTS

**Crisis Communications
Workshop**

November 2017

**Student Travel Bursary
Call for Applicants**

January 2018

Sheela Basrur Lecture

March 2018

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Supporting Public Health in the North Through Local Ideas and Innovation



2016 Student Travel Bursary recipient, Danica Desjardins (centre) hosting a local radio show in Arviat, Nunavut.

The Student Travel Bursary supports students in pursuing their travel placements abroad, enabling a deeper understanding of public health from an international perspective. Through this experience, students witness how public health programs work in diverse communities while enhancing their leadership skills.

Queen's University student, Danica Desjardins, was awarded the 2016 SBC Student Travel Bursary. As part of her Masters of Public Health practicum, Danica travelled to Nunavut to complete a four-month placement with the Aqqiumavvik Society. She participated in the design and facilitation of a community based project focusing on strengthening mental health outcomes within the Inuit community.

Danica reflects on her time spent in the North immersed in Inuit culture and what she learned through her placement during this once-in-a-lifetime experience.

SBC: What was the focus of your four-month placement in Nunavut?

DD: During my placement, I was fortunate to be able to work with the Aqqiumavvik Society which is a grassroots organization in Arviat, Nunavut led by Shirley Tagalik that promotes health and wellness through a variety of means, including workshops and media. Working with the Aqqiumavvik Society, I assisted with two main projects. The first, led by Queen's University MPH student Jessica Baumhour, was the creation of a Family Support Team pilot program aimed to improve school attendance in Arviat. The second project with which I was involved was the Inuuqatigiitsiarniq Camp Program (ICP). With the idea of recognizing and healing from past trauma in mind, Shirley Tagalik and five planning committees outlined ICP as a series of retreats for different groups of the population – namely Elders, youth, families, men, and women – to get together and discuss pertinent issues that they might not otherwise have the opportunity to do. These retreats focused on the importance of strong, healthy relationships, in keeping with the Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (Inuit traditional knowledge) principle of inuuqatigiitsiarniq, meaning respecting others, relationships, and caring for people.

SBC: What struck you the most about your colleagues at the Aqqimavvik Society?

DD: The Society is comprised of a small team of people from Arviat, each with their own unique focus on a certain aspect of wellness including youth outreach and mental health, environmental health, and health research. Despite their varied educational backgrounds, each of the individuals share a visible passion to improve health in their community with a very keen focus on Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit. If I had to pick one thing that was

most striking about this team, I would have to select their resourcefulness. Operating with a very tight budget and often facing a certain degree of tension with the municipal government, the Society stretched their limited resources creatively in order to serve their community.

SBC: What would you say were the biggest challenges faced by this community?

DD: Community members often mentioned lack of employment opportunities as a huge challenge, contributing to poverty, dependence on social assistance, and even straining family relationships. Closely related to this, many spoke of a disjointed education system, which struggles to strike a balance with Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit while providing students with the skills they need to succeed in and beyond secondary school. Another challenge is certainly food security, since the sky-high prices of healthy foods at the local grocery stores are



Danica Desjardins (left) and head of Aqqimavvik Society, Shirley Tagalik (right).



A sunny day in Arviat, Nunavut.

completely incompatible with a high poverty rate. The general sentiment among the community members was that the root of arguably all of these problems stemmed from colonization, and the solutions are difficult to discern. Beyond its challenges, Arviat has so many strengths that make it a tight-knit, vibrant, and hope-filled community. First and foremost is the connection to the Inuktitut language and traditional Inuit culture held by so many of the individuals; however in my eyes, the biggest strength of the community is its youth. Representing 60% of the population, the youth in Arviat are smart, driven, proud of their community, and ready to make a difference. Shelby Angalik, TD Scholarship for Community Leadership winner in 2016, and Ruth Kaviok, recently elected President of the National Inuit Youth Council, are two of many examples!

SBC: What public health aspects did you apply to the work you did?

DD: Likely the most important thing was conducting a needs assessment, which we did by completing one-on-one interviews with various stakeholders throughout the town. Certainly, Arviat can be considered a low-resource setting relative to communities in Southern Ontario, so we also applied principles of global health work. From a more theoretical standpoint, we also conducted informal literature reviews (this was difficult to do with the slow broadband speeds in the North!) and designed a program evaluation for the home visiting program.

SBC: What aspect of your placement did you find the most challenging?

DD: Definitely adjusting my program to meet the needs of the community, and taking a step back from the leadership role I had in mind. I wanted to make sure that this program would be sustainable and I had my own ideas about how that might look, and initially, I got very frustrated when the project didn't move in the direction I wanted it to.



A Nunavut Day inuuqatigiitsiarniq collage.

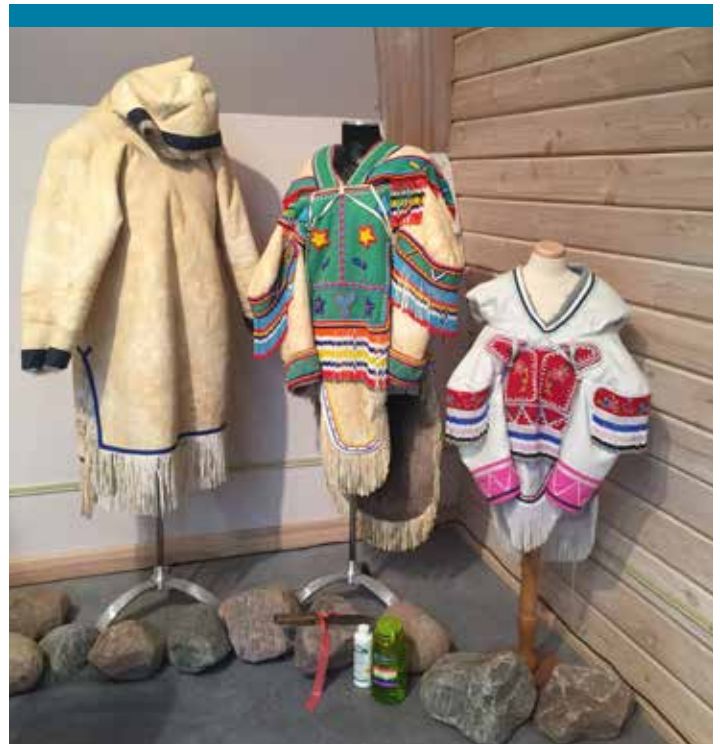
It took a while for me to finally take a step back, give myself a “reality check,” and stop perpetuating colonialist attitudes. If I truly intended this program to serve the community, then I needed to hand it over to them. Once that happened, I saw how the planning committees could direct the project infinitely better than I ever could have, and I started focusing on what I could contribute to fill in the gaps they identified. Two of the committees were particularly passionate about the work they were doing and that is ultimately what shaped the end goal of the program - to start tough conversations about colonialism and forced relocation.

SBC: How has the experience changed you?

DD: Ultimately, I feel (and I hope) that this experience has made me a better ally to the Inuit people. Certainly, it made me even more passionate about standing-up for Indigenous rights, and reinforced the notion that I have a responsibility to use my privilege as a non-Indigenous person not only to advocate for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people, but to first and foremost amplify their voices. There is likely nothing that I have to say about Indigenous rights and healthcare that the people themselves haven't been saying for generations and the best thing I can do as an ally is to make sure that we stop ignoring them.

SBC: Would you like to return to the North in the future?

DD: In a heartbeat! There is a huge place for public health in the North. Beyond resolving the disparities in disease rates that exist between the North and South, public health professionals can provide support for local ideas and innovation. For many of us in public health, our first reaction is to take on a leadership role in creating programming to address health problems, but my brief experience in Arviat taught me that this should not always be the case. Instead, southern public health professionals should use their skills to facilitate local solutions to these problems. On a personal note, I also met my partner, who was doing research for her Masters of Science thesis in botany, while in Arviat, so the North has a special place in both of our hearts.



Traditional Inuit clothing on display at the Margaret Aniksak Visitor Centre.

Congratulations to Danica on the completion of her placement and her Queen's University, Master of Public Health program. This unique opportunity provided invaluable experience in the development and delivery of vital public health programs to Canada's Aboriginal community.

“ There is a huge place for public health in the North. Beyond resolving the disparities in disease rates that exist between the North and South, public health professionals can provide support for local ideas and innovation.

— Danica Desjardins

Communicating during a public health emergency

It was Dr. Basrur who provided the calm reassuring voice for Torontonians and Canadians during the 2003 SARS outbreak. Her message was clear, constant and vital to building trust in public health. In keeping with Dr. Basrur's remarkable communications abilities, the Centre has expanded its training to include crisis communications.



Crisis Communications Workshop attendees. Photo credit: Leila Brown.

Levels of uncertainty tend to run quite high during an emergency which, in some situations, can cause conflicting messages to be released to the public. Last November, York Region and the Sheela Basrur Centre (SBC) partnered on a one-day crisis communications workshop focusing on messaging and communications during an emergency and the stakeholder collaboration that is required during a health crisis.

Over 50 York Region stakeholders attended including representatives from neighbouring public health units, hospitals, Community Care Access Centres, Local Health

Integration Networks, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Public Health Ontario, paramedic and police services.

The workshop explored crisis communications research, theory and best practices during health emergencies while maintaining a strong focus on stakeholder alliance. Elements like communications coordination, transparency and listening were highlighted and provided the foundation for the workshop and group exercises.



If we share the wrong information will the public still trust us?

— John Rainford, The Warning Project

Illustration: Erica Bota.



Crisis Communications Workshop attendees
Photo credit: Leila Brown.



John Rainford, workshop facilitator and director of The Warning Project
Photo credit: Leila Brown.

Learning through experience

John Rainford, Director of [The Warning Project](#), facilitated this interactive and lively session. The Warning Project is a partnership of leading international practitioners, academics and consultants committed to helping organizations build capacity to better communicate during emergencies or other high risk events.

The workshop included an infectious disease outbreak scenario that challenged participants to apply their knowledge in a mock emergency situation. The difficulties of navigating through an emergency risk situation were touched upon and included factors like stigma, building trust in a community, uncertainty, economic dilemmas and panic. The participants also examined the challenges posed by cross-jurisdictional communications and practices.

Overall, this workshop provided a successful forum for the partners in York Region to dialogue about crisis communications processes while moving towards the bigger goal — organizations working together during an emergency, keeping their messages clear, aligned and consistent.

Future crisis communications workshops

Building on the success of last year's crisis communications session, SBC will be offering a two-day workshop this fall focusing on the current opioid crisis. This workshop aims to enhance crisis and stakeholder communications skills while exploring best practices and lessons learned in relation to the opioid epidemic.

Visit the [SBC website](#) this fall for more details or email us at SBC@oahpp.ca to receive more information on this event.



What health crisis did not involve some level of uncertainty?

— John Rainford, The Warning Project

Students leading the charge on crisis communications

The Communications Student Award recognizes students for their creative and engaging communications strategies on critical public health issues.

Congratulations to Michelle Pensa Branco, our 2017 Communications Student Award recipient. Michelle, a second year Masters of Public Health student at the University of Waterloo, was awarded the SBC Communications Student Award for her innovative crisis communications plan focusing on public health emergency response.

Students were asked to create an emergency communications plan that identified strategies for use in the wake of an environmental disaster that is common in areas of southwestern Ontario — a tornado. Taking the role of the public health unit, students were to not only address the public health issues that could potentially arise during a crisis, but also take into account possible communications risks.

The Winning Campaign

Leading Through the Storm: Public Health Communication for Rural Disasters

Focusing on the identification of relevant stakeholders, the coordination of messages, and limitations impacting the distribution of important public health messages, Michelle's plan tackled several crisis communications challenges. The plan outlined strategies for building trust within affected communities, communicating with uncertainty and developing consistent messaging during a power outage.

“While communication is a key challenge with populations facing different levels of health literacy in our day-to-day work” explains Michelle, “clear messages that compel people to do what they need to do to protect their families and their fellow citizens takes on new urgency in crisis situations.”



Michelle Pensa Branco beside her award-winning communications strategy. Photo credit: Connie Tsang.

Michelle's plan was displayed in poster format at The Ontario Public Health Convention in March 2017. Michelle's ideas for tackling communications challenges during a public health crisis highlighted the scope of work beyond public health that is crucial to the success of an emergency response during a disaster.

“Distilling a complex message and striking the right tone for the target audience is an on-going learning for any public health professional, but applying that knowledge in a crisis situation without the benefit of time, consultations and full information is really an extraordinary skill.

— Michelle Pensa Branco
Communications Student Award recipient

A lesson in leadership and communications

The Centre's Don Low Communications Fellowship honours Dr. Donald Low, former microbiologist-in-chief at Mount Sinai Hospital and medical director of the Public Health Ontario Laboratories. The fellowship seeks to empower the next generation of public health professionals to advance their communications skills, equipping them with the tools necessary to become effective leaders and spokespersons.

Congratulations to our 2016 Don Low Communications Fellowship recipients, Robert Muhong and Patricia Simone! Both Robert and Patricia were honoured to have the opportunity to advance their skills in the areas of risk and crisis communications.



Robert Muhong

Since 2010, Robert has been the Environmental Health Program Manager at the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit (NBPSDHU). Before his current position, Robert worked as a public health inspector at the NBPSDHU and also at the Restigouche Public Health Division in New Brunswick. Robert has been an active member of the Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors since 2002.

“...the individuals I became acquainted with through the course [fellowship] are part of a network of colleagues I can now call on from organizations like Health Canada, Public Health Agency of Canada, and the Environmental Health Program at the University of Alberta.

— Robert Muhong

Robert Muhong attending the *Applied Risk Communications for the 21st Century* course.



Patricia Simone outside the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health building.

Patricia Simone

At the time the Fellowship was awarded, Patricia was the Emergency Manager at the Middlesex-London Health Unit. Within that capacity she has also achieved certifications and specialist training in risk management, business continuity, incident management systems, critical incident stress management, and occupational health and safety.

“ I was amazed that this was actually a program that is highly sought after globally and through this course [fellowship] I met some remarkable attendees from Australia, New Zealand, Italy and England.

— Patricia Simone

Building professional capacity and networks

As part of their fellowship learnings, both recipients attended the *Applied Risk Communications for the 21st Century* course at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health in Boston in 2016. This three-day course provided in-depth knowledge in risk and crisis communications while enhancing practical skills in both areas. Through the course, both Robert and Patricia learned techniques for devising crisis communications messages in order to effectively communicate with the public and stakeholders. Upon completion of the course, Robert and Patricia felt confident in their ability to evaluate the impact of risk, which benefitted both of them in their roles at their health unit. Emotional intelligence was also touched upon within the course, stressing the importance of being mindful of crisis situations that may call for a level of sensitivity and for public health professionals to tailor their communications to specific audiences.

Calling all mid-to-senior level public health professionals

Applications for the 2018 Don Low Communications Fellowship competition will open this spring. Fellows receive training to enhance their ability to communicate

effectively, create engaging stakeholder relations strategies, and craft messages for journalists, politicians, government officials and the general public. The Fellowship is open to experienced public health professionals from all disciplines (e.g., nursing, medicine, inspection, nutrition, health promotion) actively working in the Ontario public health sector. Up to two fellows may be chosen to receive the award for a maximum of \$5,000 per Fellowship.

[Visit the Sheela Basrur Centre website](#) for more information about the Fellowship.



Catching-up with the Centre's Alumni

Our award alumni is a group of diverse public health professionals and students from across the province. This year, we visited with a couple of our alumni to find out where they are now and how their SBC learnings have supported them in their current roles.

Kathleen Dooling

Award recipient: 2014 Don Low Communications Fellowship

Fellowship experience: Medical Journalist internship at ABC News

Former position: Associate Medical Officer of Health at Peel Public Health

Current position: Medical Epidemiologist, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Protection (CDC) (Atlanta, GA)

We were happy to catch-up with Kathleen, who, since her fellowship, has moved across the border and taken on the role of Medical Epidemiologist at America's leading public health institute — Centers for Disease Control and Protection (CDC). In her current role, Kathleen oversees the Herpes Viruses Unit and is involved in work on scientific inquiry to support evidence-based vaccine policy and understanding the burden of herpes viruses in the population. Kathleen's work demands a high-level of communications with both internal stakeholders, like the many multi-disciplinary public health teams she works with daily, as well as external stakeholders, like vaccine policy makers.

Kathleen has had the chance to apply her skills in mass media that she learned through her fellowship by taking on the role of host for the CDC's [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#) (MMWR) podcast series which explores relevant and topical public health issues. "I'm more aware



SBC alumna, Kathleen Dooling, recording an episode of the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

of the power of the media in disseminating public health messages," says Kathleen. "But I'm also aware that the messages must be correctly packaged. As public health professionals, we have a duty to be expert health message packagers."

“ My internship at ABC News, supported by the Don Low Communication Fellowship, was an important factor in the success of my application to the MMWR.

— Dr. Kathleen Dooling

Kaitlynn Almeida

Award recipient: 2015 Communications Student Award

Winning campaign: Gold for Gonorrhoea — a communications plan aimed at increasing physician awareness and adherence to the provincial guidelines for recommended gonorrhoea treatment

Graduated: Queen's University, Master of Public Health (2016)

Current position: Specialist, Regional Programs and Performance Management, Cancer Care Ontario



SBC alumna, Kaitlynn Almeida.

We also caught-up with Communications Student Award recipient, Kaitlynn Almeida. Shortly after receiving the award with her teammates from Queen's University, Kaitlynn landed the role of Coordinator, Regional Programs and Performance Management at Cancer Care Ontario, and now holds the title of Specialist in this area. With a focus on improving the quality of cancer services for patients in Ontario, Kaitlynn engages, liaises and collaborates with the Regional Cancer Programs. She has also been involved in the implementation of a news release template designed to recognize exemplary regional or hospital performance on key quality improvement indicators. Her position affords her the opportunity to collaborate with internal stakeholders, working towards the goal of achieving provincial and regional improvement on performance metrics. An excellent communicator, Kaitlynn applies her communications skills in her engagement with internal and external stakeholders focusing on clear and concise messaging and facilitating discussions to encourage collaboration and progress.

When asked if she was able to apply the skills she learned through the award to her current role, Kaitlynn explained, "I applied the knowledge and skills I gained through the SBC Communications Student Award process to develop a presentation for healthcare providers to encourage this group to initiate conversations around sexual health with their cancer patients. This was part of a knowledge translation project that I led focusing on Cancer Care Ontario's [Interventions to Address Sexual Problems in People with Cancer](#) guideline in 2016."

“ I applied the knowledge and skills I gained through the SBC Communications Student Award process to develop a presentation for healthcare providers to encourage this group to initiate conversations around sexual health with their cancer patients.

— Kaitlynn Almeida

A special thanks to our award recipients for their contributions to this article. SBC is pleased to have supported both Kathleen and Kaitlynn in their career development.

Sheela Basrur Centre at TOPHC 2017

Kicking off The Ontario Public Health Convention (TOPHC) in March 2017 was the [Sheela Basrur Lecture](#), which focused on the coordination, communication and leadership required during an environmental emergency.



Delmarie Sadoway (left) and Dr. Chris Sikora (right) speaking at the annual Sheela Basrur Lecture at TOPHC 2017. Photo credit: Connie Tsang.

Wildfire at Fort McMurray Alberta: Local action through leadership, communication and collaboration, took the audience on a day-by-day account of the emergency response to the Fort McMurray wildfires, the largest forest fire in Canadian history. The session covered the response from the point the disaster was declared a state of emergency and the mass evacuation of 82,000 people, to the re-entry of its residents into the region.

The lecture was presented by Alberta Health Services – Edmonton Zone’s Dr. Chris Sikora, Medical Officer of Health, and Delmarie Sadoway, Executive Director, Public Health, Primary Care and Chronic Disease Management.

To watch the full lecture, please visit the official [TOPHC website](#).

Celebrating Public Health in Ontario

Celebrating public health in Ontario

“Sheela Basrur’s leadership has inspired the trust of Ontarians as well as the trust of her colleagues, in knowing she will always safeguard the public’s health.”

— Excerpt from the Legislative Assembly of Ontario transcript on December 22, 2006

The lessons learned from the SARS outbreak in Ontario in 2003 inspired a vision for a solid and unified public health system that would be able to withstand the next public health emergency to hit our province, preparing our workforce to face the crisis head-on. This inspiration for systemic change within the public health sector was the vision of Dr. Basrur, the then Medical Officer of Health

for the City of Toronto and later the Chief Medical Officer of Health for Ontario, who worked tirelessly to contain the SARS outbreak. She identified gaps and sought to strengthen and revitalize the public health system in Ontario.

Dr. Basrur’s vision came to fruition with [Operation Health Protection](#). Spearheaded by Dr. Basrur, this three-year action plan would lead to the creation of the province’s first public health agency through the passage of the [Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion Act](#) in 2007. To commemorate the tenth anniversary, we honour Dr. Basrur’s vision and contributions towards the passing of this legislature. As a result, Ontario’s first public health agency, [Public Health Ontario](#), was formed and its headquarters named in honour of Dr. Basrur.

Please help us keep Dr. Basrur’s legacy alive by [donating](#) to the [Sheela Basrur Centre](#).

Help support our next public health leaders

SBC training programs and awards are geared towards public health professionals and students, with a focus on communications and leadership development. We are looking for generous supporters like you to contribute to the Centre to help us continue delivering our successful public health professional development programs. Your contribution means professionals and students across Ontario can strengthen their skills to become tomorrow's public health leaders.

Donate to the Sheela Basrur Centre

Our programs

Programs like our Media Training Workshop and Don Low Communications Fellowship are essential to the renewal of public health in Ontario. As public health issues continue to make headlines, our work in this sector is vital to the health and well-being of all Ontarians. The knowledge and training acquired through our programs and awards help to build capacity of future public health leaders and strengthen the public health system in Ontario.

Visit our website to learn more about what programs we offer [students](#) and [professionals](#).

Contribute to the Sheela Basrur Fund

Contributions made to the [Sheela Basrur Fund](#) support the Centre's programs and activities. Your donation will help provide current and emerging public health professionals access to experts in the media and public health sector, cutting-edge information and knowledge, as well as a wide range of communications resources.

Donate your public speaking proceeds

Do you have a speaking engagement coming up? Consider donating your proceeds to the Centre through our [Sheela Basrur Fund](#).

All donations are tax-deductible and are managed by our partner the [Toronto Foundation](#), a registered, public, non-profit organization that connects philanthropy with community needs and opportunities.

Be part of the leaders for change

Join our growing network of supporters by becoming an SBC champion. Help spread the word about SBC's programs by:

- promoting the Centre at your next event;
- sharing SBC promotional materials (email us for details);
- encouraging your colleagues to sign up for our [newsletter](#).

Interested in supporting SBC?

We would love to hear from you. If you are interested in donating, becoming an SBC champion or have any questions, please contact us at 647-260-7100 or SBC@oahpp.ca.