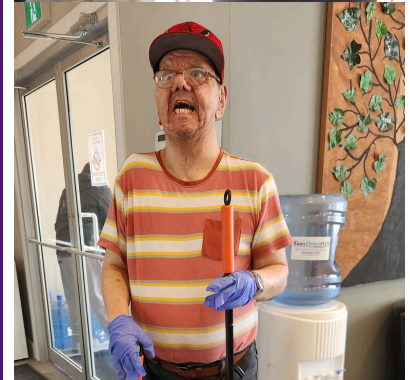




# WELCOME TO OUR NEWSLETTER

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# WHO WE ARE

## Mission & Vision

Initiatives for Just Communities is a non-profit organization that is committed to restorative justice practices. IJC works to create communities where each person, particularly the stigmatized and the vulnerable, has a place to belong.

We walk with people with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and intellectual disabilities, and those currently or previously incarcerated, to help them to achieve a better quality of life for themselves and their communities.

Circles of Support  
Accountability

El'dad

Open Circle

Touchstone



## LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This newsletter was produced on Indigenous lands where IJC works alongside Indigenous and non-Indigenous families, staff, and communities. Our offices are located on Treaty 1 territory – the original lands of the Anishinaabeg, Ininew, Anishinew, Dakota, and Dene Peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation.



# IJC MARKS GRAND OPENING OF WINNIPEG DROP-IN CENTRE

**On April 1, more than 75 people gathered at 555 Broadway to mark an important milestone - the grand opening of IJC's new drop-in centre. It was a remarkable day that looked to IJC's past, where we have come as an organization, and ended with promise and hope for what lies ahead.**

The event kicked off powerfully with smudging and a blessing followed by an opening prayer and drum song from Tim Barron, Jr., IJC's Knowledge Keeper. Holly Jonker, part of El'dad and one of IJC's Cultural Support Helpers, served as emcee and kept things rolling.

We were honoured to have Manitoba Minister of Families Nahanni Fontaine deliver remarks, emphasizing what makes this drop-in vital as a safe space for vulnerable people, somewhere where they can be shown "care and love and dignity and respect."

This was a common theme for the day. As IJC Board Chair Rev Canon Dr Murray Still noted, this drop-in centre is "a place where people can gather for healing, for transformation of their lives and for support." It reflects IJC's commitment to reconciliation and healing.



This event proved IJC’s vision statement that everyone belongs and flourishes in community. Speakers representing the three programs based in Winnipeg shared the impact those programs have had on people’s lives, described the communities formed in and around them, and challenged IJC to continue in its work.

Russ Hilsher, part of IJC’s Touchstone program and FASD advocate, and Harri Vallittu, a DSP with Touchstone, traced the history of Touchstone, their parts in it, and the power of restorative justice. Hilsher shared what long-term, authentic supports has meant to him and his journey to sobriety and finding his identity. “Without understanding we have no hope for justice,” noted Vallittu. “For me, the true measure of humanity is how we treat those less fortunate than ourselves.”

Kevin Drain, director of services, and Jen Brisson, associate director of CoSA and Open Circle, shared the story of those two programs, programs that run with the support of Mennonite Central Committee Manitoba and a large, committed team of volunteers.





IJC is grateful for the strong support it has been shown by the Winnipeg community. Representatives from several other organizations attended, including the Mennonite Central Committee Manitoba (with a special thank you from executive director Darryl Loewen), Community Living Disability Services, Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, Winnipeg School Division, Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries, True North Health, 1JustCity, and more.

Barron left attendees with the meaningful reminder that community stretches from the past into the future. Those that came before support us through the challenges we face in our lives. No one comes from nowhere and our past can give us strength and purpose. “We are loved by our Creator, and He is making each and every single one of us useful, and our ancestors are walking with us,” said Barron in his closing prayer. “We all carry so much strength, resilience, and spirit... And [our ancestors] are making us more resilient in our journey called life.”

The program concluded with a time of connection and light refreshments.



Photography by Mike Still

# New and better facilities



**The Touchstone drop-in is larger, more functional, and better designed than its previous location on Erin Street.**

At the former Erin St location, the offices and the drop-in overlapped, making programming challenging. The tables in the staff boardroom doubled as a ping-pong table. If one person wanted to watch a movie and another person wanted to play video games, someone had to wait. “Now we have a luxury of options,” explains Lambert Baiden, the former drop-in coordinator. “We can accommodate people with different interests at the same time, and we are able to have events without disturbing offices.”

Designed with participants’ needs at the forefront, the Broadway drop-in recognizes the complex challenges many face—including homelessness, food insecurity, and limited transportation.

“The challenges participants face here [in Winnipeg] are different than ones that live rurally,” says Lambert. The drop-in offers laundry facilities, a full kitchen, and a clean and comfortable place to keep warm. It also distributes clothing donations and runs a food bank, its deep freezers and shelves stocked by Harvest MB and the Leftovers Foundation.

Not only that, but the new location also features a multi-purpose area that can function as a confidential meeting place, a quiet room, a workshop space, or even a health clinic.

The atmosphere in the Broadway drop-in is noticeably different from the Erin Street space. Participants struggled to make it to the old location because of its distance from the places they lived. Now people come every day. “It feels very homey now,” Lambert says. “Participants feel safe. And that’s the environment we want to create.”

More improvements are still ahead. Plans are underway to add a shower and gender-neutral bathrooms. IJC also hopes to expand its Indigenous services and cultural supports to its Touchstone participants with programming offered at the drop-in. If you haven’t visited yet, be sure to check it out!

*A version of this article appeared on our website February 23, 2026.*



Photo by Jeff Stapleton/CBC



# Participants gain insights at CanFASD Conference in Toronto

From a report by Trevor Utech

**With the support of Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries (MBLL), Visions and Voices was able to send two presenters, along with their support staff, to the 2025 CanFASD Conference in downtown Toronto last October. The theme was *Shaping the Future of FASD: From Evidence to Action*.**

This opportunity allowed participants to learn of current research, various FASD strategies across the nation, and new practices and studies related to FASD.

Both presenters reported that the conference was highly informative and motivating. They were inspired to pursue future opportunities to contribute directly to national and provincial conversations on FASD. They expressed a strong interest in returning as presenters at a future CANFASD conference, believing their lived experience and perspectives would add meaningful value for attendees.

Some highlights included sessions on:

- **National Strategies & Research:** Attendees gained insight into several ongoing studies and innovative approaches being implemented across the country.
- **FASD and Aging:** One presenter found the session on aging with FASD particularly impactful, noting its relevance and depth.
- **Inclusive Education:** Another presenter was highly engaged in sessions focused on inclusive classroom practices, aligning with their personal advocacy goals.
- **Manitoba resources:** One resource discovered during the conference was the ‘InSight Mentoring Program’, part of the Government of Manitoba’s FASD strategy. InSight is an outreach program connecting pregnant or recently pregnant women who use substances with mentors. The program connects with the seven grandfather teachings, and participants are offered smudge medicines and kits. Attendees felt this would be a great resource for Visions and Voices presenters, as well as other individuals supported by IJC.





## RENNIE KIRKNESS

Rennie Kirkness has been a participant in IJC's El'dad Day Program for two and half years. If you've spent any time in the Mitchell office, you will probably have seen him with a shovel or broom in hand, clearing the entrance after a snowfall or sweeping and mopping the offices. Whether it is shoveling, sweeping, or spreading sand, Rennie seems to always be hard at work (though he assured me he only cleans inside twice a week). When asked what he likes about it, he'll smile and tell you that he likes everything. He likes being busy, and he likes talking to people.

Staff report that he never complains and is always willing to complete his tasks. It's no wonder then that they refer to him as "the hardest working man in show business." Thank you, Rennie, for your dedication!

# SPROUTING



# IJC and MITT launch hands-on Culinary Arts Program

IJC has partnered with the Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology (MITT) in offering interested participants a course in Culinary Arts this spring.

Participants gather three times a week at Crossview Church in Steinbach for classroom instruction and hands-on experience in mixing, baking, cutting, safety, and everything else that is needed to succeed in the kitchen. This customized course offers each student a Success@Work micro-certificate after approximately 60 hours of coursework.

For many of the students, this is their first time in the kitchen creating foods from scratch, though you might not know it just by observing. As they worked on their food, topics of conversation ranged from the best way to get sticky dough off your hands to which spices and other tweaks to a recipe would elevate the dish to proper protocols of a restaurant kitchen.



Photo courtesy of Jacklyn Reimer

With these certificates, participants have greater access to jobs in community and become eligible for further courses in culinary arts. But importantly, participants also learn new skills that will help them in their daily lives. One participant remarked, “Before this, I only knew how to make KD [mac and cheese] in the microwave.” By the end of the course, students will have mastered several recipes and skills, from cutting vegetables for meal prep to baking delicious pizzas to making beautiful presentations.

The course is taught by Sean Leslie-Bernard, a Red Seal-certified chef, a board member of the Canadian Culinary Federation in Winnipeg, and founding chef of the Oxbow Natural Wine Bar and Restaurant in Winnipeg. After a successful career as a chef in Winnipeg, Sean joined MITT as an instructor in their Culinary Arts and Design Program, supporting students entering the food industry.



Photo courtesy of Jacklyn Reimer



# HIGHLIGHTS FROM AROUND IJC



## NEW WOMEN'S CLUSTER APPROVED

El'dad's application for a new cluster in Mitchell was approved in February. Once ready, this cluster will support up to six female participants, each with her own bedroom and personal space. This home provides an important transitional step for women who are working on their independence.

## NEW LOCKERS AT THE RANCH

New lockers were installed early this spring at the Ranch, providing participants with a secure space for their personal belongings, such as their bags and shoes. These upgraded storage spaces contribute to a safer, more organized workplace.



## GOODBYE, TREVOR!

Trevor Utech, IJC Associate Director of Services, wrapped up his work with us on April 8. Over the last 16 years, Trevor has done it all from DSP to Director and has made a lasting, positive impact on everyone he has worked with and supervised. We will miss him and wish him all the best as he starts his next chapter.

## CONFIRMED: THE BEST HR TEAM AROUND

IJC's Human Resources team has been selected as finalists for two HR awards by Chartered Professionals in Human Resources Manitoba (CPHR MB). The award will be announced April 16. Either way it is a well-deserved honour. Congratulations!



# COMMITTEE HIGHLIGHT: Participant Advisory Committee

**The Participant Advisory Committee (PAC) exists to give participants a voice in the direction IJC is headed.**

“It’s important that when an agency is supporting participants that participants have a voice in how they are being supported,” says Bernadette Bouvier, PAC co-chair and El’dad case manager.

Every three weeks, committee members gather to discuss issues and barriers participants are dealing with as well as opportunities. The committee provides a safe space for participants to say exactly what is on their mind. Ben McGillivray, PAC co-chair and former IJC board member, notes that in the committee “we can freely talk about things without feeling restricted or judged. We have a voice.”

For each issue, the committee prepares recommendations, which are then presented to IJC leadership. Those recommendations are taken seriously, with results such as new equipment or services, presentations and workshops, or the removal of barriers that staff may not have been aware of otherwise.



**Are you interested in joining the PAC?**

**Or do you have an issue to discuss?**

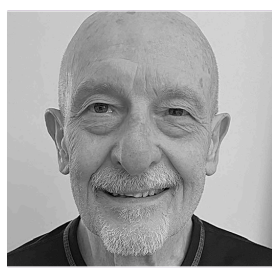
**Contact them at**

**[ParticipantAdvisoryCommittee@initiativesjc.org](mailto:ParticipantAdvisoryCommittee@initiativesjc.org).**

# IJC BOARD OF DIRECTORS



**Murray Still**  
*Chair*



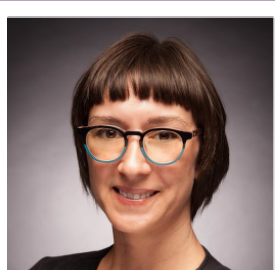
**Ken Friesen**  
*Vice-Chair*



**Bonnie Berg**  
*Treasurer*



**Victor Mate**



**Shosana Funk**



**Darryl Loewen**



**Helen Peters**

# IJC SHARED LEADERSHIP TEAM



**Don Shackel**  
*Executive Director*



**Kevin Drain**  
*Director of Services*



**Kaylee Yoon**  
*Director of Finance*



**Kelly Woods**  
*Assoc. Director of Case Management*



**Brittany Pedden**  
*Director of Human Resources*



**Bella Harder**  
*Assoc. Director of Services*



**Trevor Utech**  
*Assoc. Director of Services*



**Jen Brisson**  
*Assoc. Director of CoSA & Open Circle*



**Jeremy Hawbaker**  
*Grant and Communication Officer*



**Angela Godlewski**  
*Senior Manager of Operations*

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## JOIN OUR COMMUNITY

### REFERRALS

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### VOLUNTEER

(CoSA & Open Circle)  
[cosawpg@initiativesjc.org](mailto:cosawpg@initiativesjc.org)

### JOB OPENINGS

Visit our Website:  
[www.initiativesjc.org](http://www.initiativesjc.org)



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204-326-1050

 **Website:**  
[www.initiativesjc.org](http://www.initiativesjc.org)

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