

Meewasin Rotary Supports Services to At-Risk Youth in Saskatoon

The Rotary Club of Saskatoon Meewasin has partnered with the Saskatoon Downtown Youth Centre Inc., commonly known as EGADZ, to provide support services for At-Risk Youth in Saskatoon. The project has two components:

- The **Ground Zero** residence recreation room furnishing project and
- The supply of **Backpacks** and necessities project.

EGADZ Youth Services

EGADZ is a non-profit registered charity that started with a Youth Drop-in Centre in downtown Saskatoon since 1990. Several community and government agencies recognized that, while each was addressing some aspect of the 2000 youth who hung out in downtown Saskatoon, they could better serve these youth by working together and providing leadership role in providing alternative programs for each of these “hard to serve” youth.



These youth had a diverse range of complex social and personal problems that required a variety of programs and services and a long-term strategic, wholistic approach to identify their dysfunction and recovery therapy process, as opposed to a “band-aid” quick fix solution.

Today, EGADZ provides a range of services to youth to about 1000 youth with an at-risk lifestyle. Youth access these services from a couple times per year to 300 or more per year.

- Drop-In Centre –a safe, inclusive, and supervised environment where young people can access recreational activities and a broad range of cultural, education, training and health services.
- Residential – My Homes provides a range of housing from Staffed Homes to Supported Independent Home. In addition, Baby Steps provides services to children in care) and Ground Zero provides a safe home for youth while they find long term housing.
- Outreach Services – the EGADZ Outreach Services includes (1) Street Outreach (includes food, hygiene supplies, clothing and referrals) and (2) Operation Help that provide services to youth who are leading or at risk of being involved, in sexual exploitation. Outreach provides services to 75-100 people each night, and as high as 150 some nights.
- EGADZ Educational & Employment Support Program – includes School Support Program that assists youth in school, a Day Support Program, an Employment Training Project (assist youth to obtain summer employment) and an Employment training program that provides basic work skills.
- Teen Parenting – parenting skills to teen parents.

Meewasin At-Risk Youth Projects

The Rotary Club of Saskatoon Meewasin partnership with EGADZ has include two projects,

1. Ground Zero Recreation Room

Ground Zero – Restart, Renew Emergency Youth Transition Home is the latest of EGADZ residential services to at-risk youth. Since opening its in July of 2021, a total of 74 youth have utilized Ground Zero as an Emergency Placement. During November 2021 to January 2022 an average of 18 youth utilized Ground Zero each month.

Like all other EGADZ programs, Ground Zero was designed by youth, for youth. It has 10 bedrooms that can accommodate 16-to-18-year-olds for 30 days, with potential for extension. It is inclusive and supportive of youth of all races, genders and sexual orientations.

The furnishing of the Recreation Room, which is sponsored by the Meewasin Rotary Club is one of the more popular common areas of the Ground Zero home. The room includes: Arts/Crafts table, flat screen TV, Bean Bag chairs, Leather recliners, and storage units for the arts, crafts and games. Some of the youth often prefer hanging out and sleeping on the beanbag chairs.



Ground Zero showed its resilience as a program and as an invaluable resource to youth in the community. On multiple occasions, Ground Zero granted exemptions for youth with extenuating circumstances to stay, despite being full. In all of these situations, Ground Zero transformed the downstairs recreation room to feel like a safe and comfortable 11th bedroom. The extensions include a 17-year-old male was being discharged from the Calder Treatment Centre had to wait for transportation to Prince Albert; a 16-year-old male whose home had no water or electricity and had to wait seven days for a bedroom at Ground Zero; and a 16-year-old female needed a safe place to stay after drinking episode in the community.

Samantha, a member of the youth team that designed the home stated that Ground Zero is at the leading edge of a “sea change” in how the child welfare system helps vulnerable kids. Jurgens, another youth, stated that “A lot of homes do not feel like homes...this is a home.” It is important to feel safe, “especially if it's your first time in the system, you really want to feel safe. You want to feel like you’re OK, because you might come from a really bad situation.”

Meewasin Rotary provided \$5000 to furnish the recreation room in the Ground Zero Home. This room, like the rest of the Ground Zero Home was designed by the Youth Team.

School supplies and clothes are the most common needed items. A majority of backpacks are distributed at the beginning of school year along with school supplies.

The youth who are admitted into Ground Zero often have only the clothing on their backs. Some refer to the luggage as Samson soft side as youth often use garbage bags and pockets to carry their lifes possessions. Access to luggage, duffle bags, and backpacks are critical for youth in our community so they can have access to their belongings. Like the youth at the Drop-In Centre, the youth at Ground Zero utilize their backpacks for several different purposes, taking their new backpack to their first day of school, packing it with their belongings as they move to their long-term placement, or utilizing their backpack for lunches/snacks to take along to their appointments.



In December 2021 EGADZ distributed about 369 food packs, 57 baby supplies, 73 hygiene packages, 1,060 meals and 823 water bottles. Over 100 youth per month benefit from this project.

Bicycles for Youth. Les Ferguson, a member of Meewasin Rotary repairs bicycles that are donated by member Rotarians and others and donates them to youth. He has repaired and donated 15 bicycles to At-Risk Youth at EGADZ in 2021.

