



peers

Victoria

Resource Society Edition: Feb, 2014
February 2014

Peers drop-in opens as clinic

The organization and support of volunteers and our daytime outreach worker has allowed the PEERS drop-in to start opening once a week for 3 hours to provide health care to our clients.

Since opening Oct. 15, the drop-in has provided a lovely hot lunch made by our volunteers and nursing services through Cool Aid Community Health Centre and the Vancouver Island Health Authority street nurse program. The health-care teams provide on-site outreach health care and are adept at dealing with folks with multiple barriers who are often reluctant to seek health care elsewhere.

Peers had some concern initially about spreading the word of our limited opening. But each week has shown increasing numbers of clients. Some of the many services include well-women exams; testing, diagnosing and treatment of sexually transmitted infections; immunizations; and pregnancy testing and contraception information.

The nursing team can treat or refer for most infections and provide support, counsel and referrals for all health challenges, including mental health and addictions. During these

fall/winter months, flu shots are readily available.

The clinic uses non-judgmental harm reduction philosophy that reinforces trust in health care providers and return for follow-up care. The nurses strive to mentor students and provide expertise regarding determinants of health that most affect our clients.

We're delighted to have a local volunteer acupuncturist on the team. Clients are raving about the benefits of this integral service. All clients are seen on a drop in basis with no appointment necessary.

The backbone of our clinic is the nourishing hot lunch served by a dedicated volunteer. It's an important piece of the puzzle and is greatly appreciated by all.

Our daytime outreach worker provides support, guidance and referrals at the clinic. She's a familiar face who pulls the pieces of the afternoon together and is incredibly well-versed on challenges facing our clients and relevant issues in the community.

We look forward to continued success in the New Year. The plan is to continue providing care while adding other members of the community to the health care team. Thanks to all involved for their support and expertise.

Carolyn Showler is a Peers board member and retired Cool Aid nurse.

Who we are:

PEERS is a non-profit society founded in Victoria in 1995. We are dedicated to the empowerment, education and support of sex workers, by working to improve their safety and working conditions, assisting those who desire to leave the sex industry and increasing public understanding and awareness of these issues.

#1-744 Fairview Road,
Victoria, B.C.

V9A 5T9

Donate online @

www.safersex.ca

**Cheers for Peers!
Coffee House and
Dance Party
Fundraiser for Peers
Victoria Event
Centre
Feb 28, 2014
Sponsored by: Uvic
Anti-Violence,
Pride and Women's
Studies**



Merry holiday dinners at Peers; Red Umbrella Day

Peers hosted a wonderful holiday feast in December attended by close to 80 current and former clients, family, board members, staff and volunteers. Strong community support and the organizational skills of Patricia O'Byrne made it happen!

Special thanks to Donna Ingram of Esquimalt United Way Church, which hosted our holiday meal in cooperation with the Victoria Rainbow Kitchen Society volunteers Rocket Ogden - the wonderful chef, Scott Wylie, Bill Emery, Al Lindskoog and Marjory Acton. Thanks as well to Golda Lewin and Neahla Moffat for gathering cash and gift donations, and the UVic's Centre for Addictions Research, Departments of Sociology and Gender Studies, and School of Social Work for their support.

We're grateful to the 15 volunteers who helped serve the meal and prepared the gift bags, which included donations from Starbucks and the Aveda Institute (Douglas Street) as well as winter care items. The bags and holiday foods were distributed through day and night outreach in December and into the New Year.

More than 60 people walked for Red Umbrella Day in Victoria on Dec. 17 in recognition of the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers.

The 6th annual walk calls attention each year to the many forms of violence perpetrated against sex workers of all genders, and the urgent need for sex workers to have access to safe working conditions, legal recourse, health services, and "all

human rights and civil liberties" (World Charter for Prostitutes' Rights).

This year's vibrant event portrayed the grief and loss, passion, and strength that characterizes the sex workers' rights movement. We were honoured to have Tracie Fawkes, Lisa Ordell, Sinead Charbonneau, and Natasha Potvin speak on sex-work topics including the law, stigma, violence and colonialism. PEERS executive director Marion Little read poems written by clients of Peers, and Ruby Red Entertainment infused the event with joy, sexiness, and body positivity.

The candlelit walk to the legislature was followed by dinner, entertainment and a public discussion in space provided by AIDS Vancouver Island. Food For Thought catered the lasagna dinner. Much thanks to these UVic organizations for their financial support: the Women's Centre, Anti-Violence Project, VIPIRG, Students of Colour Collective, Pride, and the Gender Studies Department.

Great work by the planning committee: Natasha Potvin, Sadie Robin, Tracie Fawkes, Rachel Phillips, Sinead Charbonneau, Billy Yu and Alyson Kowalewsky. Thanks to Annie Morgan Banks for leading the art projects and to Golda Lewin for child minding.

Thank you, Victoria Foundation, for \$1,530 that will help pay for support staff, lunch and program costs at our weekly medical clinic and drop-in. We're grateful to the foundation and its donors for supporting this vital service.

From our front lines

Our three-day-a-week day outreach service has been seeing a greater volume of people needing advocacy and support.

The needs take many forms: accompaniment to income assistance appointments; access to food banks; replacement of lost identification. Lack of affordable housing is an ongoing and pressing barrier. Many clients are either living in shelters, on the streets, or in compromised living situations, risking their health.

But we also see many successes. One person helped by Peers got all her identification replaced, enabling her to open up her first bank account. Another will be moving into her own apartment after many years homeless.

My wish is that we could have funding for day outreach to run 7 days a week so support would be there when it was needed.

~Kristine Allard, Day Outreach Support Worker



Dear Friends: A Message From Executive Director Marion Little

Hello dear friends! Heartfelt thanks for your generous support during PEERS' hour of need. Together you've raised over \$30,000 since our funding crisis was announced in September, with \$20,000 of that in December alone. That marks one of the best fundraising months in our history. We now have 38 people contributing through the "Hearts for Our PEERS" automatic monthly donation program.

We're excited about a Victoria Foundation grant and ongoing fundraising from the burlesque community that together has opened our Drop-In Centre for a popular wellness clinic Wednesday afternoons. But we still need to secure \$200,000 in annual core funding, crucial to PEERS' survival. It would re-open the Drop-In Centre 5 days a week and ensure a reliable continuum of care for sex workers. Without annual core funding, the entire agency remains at risk of closure. So we continue to make our case to the BC government.

I'm delighted to announce that in November, PEERS won a provincial Ministry of Justice award for "outstanding work in community safety and crime prevention." Citing this award, alongside the 2012 Oppal



Commission report "Forsaken" (which recommends 24-hour funding for all existing crisis centres serving sex workers), we've been writing to the Ministers of Justice and of Social Development since early October. We persist knowing that we are one of only five agencies in BC serving sex workers, and that one in Vancouver was granted core funding last year. Please write these ministries to ask that the Oppal Commission's funding recommendation be implemented for PEERS immediately.

While we've been submitting grant applications steadily, we were struggling to raise community awareness about PEERS' financial crisis. Luckily, a small fundraising firm called Frontier generously offered us reduced rates and considerable pro bono work until the end of March to create a temporary fundraising website, a Pay Pal

account for on-line donations (Canada Helps still works), a Google grant, fundraising materials, an on-line mailing list, and a year-end mail out. They're learning about us on the fly and are open to feedback. Your opinions matter - please contact me so we can include them. We'll return to a more content-based website in April.

On December 20, PEERS celebrated the landmark ruling of *Bedford v. Canada*. People arrived in tears saying they felt like persons before the law for the first time. I was deeply moved to witness "1929" finally arrive for consenting adult sex workers. We are fortunate in Canada to already have strong labour laws which prevent exploitation, ensure safety and protect employment standards. Our child protection laws prevent harm and exploitation of minors. Our anti-trafficking laws address human trafficking and exploitation of all kinds. We are encouraged to hear that the highest court in Canada has acknowledged the need to protect the human rights of sex workers, and we'll be watching with interest how the various levels of government respond to the ruling over the coming year.

Thank you again for your support and encouragement. Together we'll keep PEERS alive!

Federal Government Public Consultation Regarding Prostitution

The federal government is currently inviting the public to share their views on prostitution legislation. Please take a few minutes to participate: <http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/cons/curr-cours/proscons-conspros/index.html#2014--02--17>

B.C.'s Criminal Justice Branch announced this month that it anticipates pursuing only cases of exploitation or coercion related to prostitution now that the Supreme Court of Canada has struck down four of Canada's key laws governing sex work. B.C. is the fifth province to announce changes to its law-enforcement approach as a result of the ruling.

Hot Pink!

Was a sold out success! The fabulous **Cheesecake Burlesque Revue** was joined by special guests, the **Boxers Are Brief** boylesque troupe. Everyone was treated to a special performance from our own Marion Little (or Goldie LaMay as she is known onstage). Big thanks to the many businesses who donated to the silent auction – our biggest yet. More on Hot Pink in our next newsletter!

Community fundraisers make all the difference!



ECC Photography

A note from our fine friend Ginger Kittens (aka Sarah Smith), whose group Ruby Entertainment and Events has raised more than \$4,000 for Peers through its monthly burlesque shows at The Cambie in Victoria.

“Peers serves a function in our community that is not otherwise being served, and sadly is struggling to find funding. We feel strongly that the approach to educate, empower, and provide resources to women, aligns dead on with our own feminist values. As burlesque performers we see a natural alliance with all women in

the sex industry. For many, PEERS has provided a beacon of light during desperate times and genuine care and understanding in not so desperate times. Our aim through our monthly show is to raise much needed funds while humanizing the trade and destigmatizing the labour through art and performance. We believe strongly in Peers' work.”

Special thanks to Homospun (homospun.wordpress.com), the UVic Poverty Law Club, and The Local General Store (thelocalgeneralstore.ca) for their fundraising efforts on behalf of Peers.

Golda Lewin celebrated her 25th birthday with a fundraiser-party in support of Peers. Golda's friends and family came together with material and monetary donations and managed to raise \$450 dollars in addition to

creating 44 gift bags filled with toiletries and other items. “It was a great party!” says Golda. “I chose Peers as the focus for my community contribution this year because I wanted to call attention to - and attempt to address - their recent budget cuts. My goals were to raise awareness of the challenges experienced by clients of Peers, to provide information on the vital role it plays in supporting past and current sex-trade workers, and to facilitate discussion and action based upon the needs of Peers and its clients.”



Scenes from a fine December



Red Umbrella Day photos: Qué Banh, The Photography Elf



Thank you!



peers

VICTORIA RESOURCE SOCIETY
#1--744 Fairview Rd,
Victoria, BC
250.388.5325



Date: _____

I want to join "Hearts for Our PEERS" and support
PEERS Victoria Resources Society through monthly donations.

Please debit my bank account: (*attach VOID cheque*)

___ \$25 ___ \$50 ___ \$75 or Other Amount _____ (specify)

The debit will be processed to your account on the 16th day of each month or the next business day.

Signature: _____

Donor Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

This donation is made on behalf of: _____ an Individual _____ a business

I may revoke my authorization for pre-authorized donations at any time, subject to providing notice of 10 days. Cancellation can be done by emailing finance@peers.bc.ca or by phoning the number below.

PEERS Victoria Resources Society, 1-744 Fairview Rd
Victoria, BC V9A 5T9
Tel: 250-388-5325, E-mail: finance@peers.bc.ca

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PEERS is deeply grateful for the many members of the community who are rallying around us with encouragement and support at this time. Many thanks!