



peers

VICTORIA RESOURCES SOCIETY

ED Report

Spring at Peers Victoria is always a time of both looking back at achievements and challenges of the year gone by, and looking ahead to new programs and services. In other words, it's the season of grant reporting and grant announcements! We are happy to report that it looks like Peers is heading into a great year, with a number of major funders committing to support our programs. It's a great feeling to know that so many good programs are going to continue for local people with backgrounds in sex work.

Just in the last month, we have received word that the Capital Regional District has funded us for a third consecutive year under its Homelessness Partnering Strategy. That funding maintains our Housing Support Program, which in turn helps maintain stable housing for people at chronic risk of homelessness. We also received a two-year grant from Island Health that's not only helping to support our late-night outreach work, but will let us pilot a men and trans* outreach program. Many thanks to the Ministry of Justice, who awarded Peers two grants through its Civil Forfeiture Grants program in March. These grants support our Small Business and Training Program as well as our Drop-in Centre. An annual grant from B.C. Gaming will once again be a huge help in covering much of the costs of our seven-night-a-week Night Outreach Program. We are looking forward to enhancing this program with a used RV we are in the process of purchasing – thanks to all who helped us raise more than \$30,000 in our #rolls4strolls campaign to make this purchase.

These grants are in addition to those we heard about earlier in the fiscal year, including a generous grant from the Victoria Foundation to continue our Indoor Worker's Dinner Group. We also received a second year of funding from the MAC AIDS foundation to support the important work of our Health Support Program.

Hard to believe, but all of this wonderful funding still doesn't cover all our costs. We are indebted to our private donors, who are always there for us and ensure we can maintain our current level of services. Whether you're a monthly donor or just help when you can, thank you! And we love it when you fundraise for us. Many thanks to the Canadian Federation of University Women, which made Peers the recipient of its fundraising efforts on International Women's Day. Looking forward to raising the roof (and some money) at this year's Hot Pink! We'll see you there – on May 28th at the Belfry Theatre – with tassels on!

-Leah Shumka



Saturday May 28th promises to be a night of sass, sequins, and sex appeal at the 7th annual Hot Pink fundraiser! The Cheesecake Burlesque Review will be twirling their tassels onstage at the Belfry Theatre in support of Peers. Tickets are \$35 each and available through The Belfry. This event sells out every year so get your ticket without delay, and come prepared to score some amazing prizes at the silent auction. Doors at 7 pm; show at 8!

-Sadie Robin

Health Program

The Health program continues to support and connect people with medical and mental health services in the community. This has been happening in a range of ways from connecting with the many programs, support groups and services at the Cool Aid Health Centre and the Island Sexual Health Clinic, to helping and assisting people in the hospital. Since January we have hosted five well-attended health related workshops. We had the BC Schizophrenia Society come speak about mental health; the Victoria Sexual Assault Centre discuss the opening of their new 24 hour access clinic; and AVI came to provide Naloxone training. We also continue to hold our monthly testing clinics. We are also excited about a number of upcoming workshops focused around holistic approaches to health. In March we had a Cool Aid dietitian come talk about healthy food choices on a fixed income, in April we have our “Natural Stress Busters” series which will cover topics such as meditation, yoga and aromatherapy, to name a few. A big thanks to Trees Dispensary for the use of their space and for always making it so warm and inviting!

-Jenny Smart

Housing Program



Housing Support Worker,
Casey Newman

The housing program is going well! We have assisted 28 people who were chronically homeless find stable housing, and helped many more maintain housing. We help clients purchase household items, obtain rental subsidies, conduct housing searches, manage tenancy disputes, storage fees, and apply for subsidized housing.

The type of housing that is being acquired is a combination of market rental and subsidized housing. The waitlists for subsidized housing are at a record high with very little turnover in designated buildings, which means our clients are often waiting a long time for housing. There is also a real shortage of affordable market rental housing available with heavy competition for every posting. The focus of the housing program is on finding housing for those who are experiencing homelessness, but also to work closely to ensure that those who do obtain housing are able to maintain it. We are making progress with developing relationships with landlords, and hope to do more of this. We have completed seven new intakes since January 2016.

The participants in the housing program that have acquired housing continue to show vast improvements in their health and well-being and we are working hard to place more of our participants in stable housing.

-Casey Newman

Volunteer Update

Our volunteer program has been very busy over the winter months. This was especially over the holidays, and events like our annual Turkey Feast held at the Rainbow Kitchen. Thanks to all the hardworking volunteers who helped make it a success!

More recently, we've had a number of new volunteers join the team helping out with everything from cutting hair on Beauty Day to cleaning, cooking, sorting donations and many other tasks that need doing.

As we head into spring, we have recently had some people volunteer their green thumbs and gardening supplies to fill up our garden box, which is now ready for herbs.

Thank you to everyone who volunteers their time with us— we are so appreciative of all you bring to Peers. If you are interested in volunteering with us, please visit our website and fill out an on-line volunteer application or call Peers and ask for Miranda.

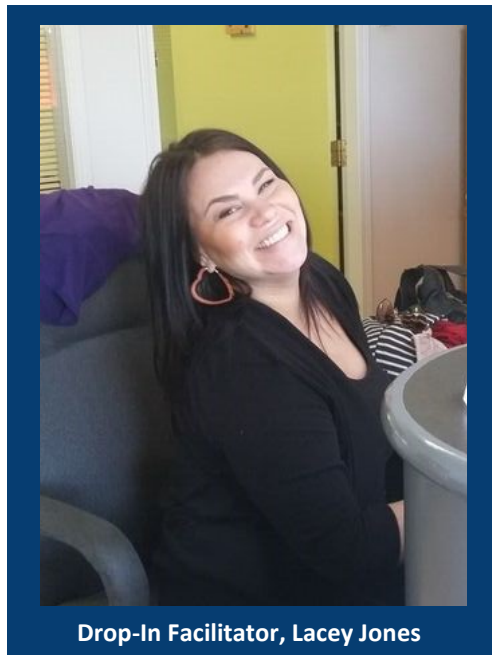
-Miranda Liebel



Volunteer Coordinator, Miranda Liebel (left)
and lunch volunteer Carley (right)

Drop-In Update

Peers Drop-In Program is as busy as ever. Lacey recently joined the team and is now facilitating the Drop-In Program alongside Sarah. Together they make a friendly, fun, and dynamic team. Drop-In provides a variety of different resources including referrals to our housing and health outreach workers. We have had a variety of workshops this season, including a mini art series where people express their ideas and feelings through creative expression. Bambi, Kat, and Bobby are offering beauty day every Wednesday for hair and nail care. The wonderful Cindy is here weekly preparing taxes for Peers clients, and we continue to have a legal clinic once a month. Each day our volunteers cook delicious and nutritious meals, and the beautiful Anna bakes cakes to



Drop-In Facilitator, Lacey Jones

celebrate birthdays for all Peers clients! Thank you to all who make Peers a happy and welcoming place. We welcome the arrival of spring with open arms; looking forward to flowers blooming and spending time with one another at Peers!

-Lacey Jones

Indoor Group

Since July 2014 Peers has been running the Indoor Workers Dinner Group. Originally conceived to discuss the harms of Bill C-36, we now have an ongoing rotation of about 25 participants! Indoor workers are often isolated due to the nature of their work/spaces, and our monthly dinner group provides a casual yet informative place to connect with each other as well as our Peers' programming.

Since December we have had presentations and discussions on topics ranging from internet privacy, financial planning, and small business opportunities. We are always looking to expand the group and welcome Indigenous people, people of colour, people with disabilities, and people representing diverse genders and sexualities. If you are interested in joining or know someone who may be, please email dropin@peers.bc.ca. Our next session is April 28th, and will focus on sexual health and well-being.

Small Business Training Program

The Small Business Training Program for 2015/16 wrapped up in March. Five participants have covered basic bookkeeping, income tax, PST, GST, invoicing and receipts, contracts, agreements, marketing and DIY website building. Participants are working on the final version of their Community Micro Lending business plans. One participant has sold out of her baked goods at an Esquimalt Farmers' Market pop-up. Another participant has made her first \$5 with her business and is working on packaging for her product, based on the 'cost of goods sold analysis' of the different options available. Challenges with health and child care are familiar to all women business owners; having a supportive group like this to discuss strategies can make all the difference.

Thanks to Sarah from rubyentertainments.com
Joanne from toyandming.com
Kate from womeninneed.ca
Charlane from imsewexcited.ca and Leanne from cvvmagazine.com for sharing their experience with the class!

-Julie Higginson

Red Umbrella Day

On December 17th we held our annual Red Umbrella Day March in recognition of the International Day to End Violence against Sex Workers. Many showed up to advocate on behalf of sex worker rights, despite the heavy rain! Thanks to those who shared their first hand experiences at the event to combat sex work stigma and stop the violence. A huge thank you as well to the UVSS, The Anti Violence Project, UVic's Gender Studies department, and VIPIRG for helping sponsor this event.



Night Outreach

Night Outreach continues to serve people seven nights a week on stroll and has been quite busy this winter; we had one night where we provided supplies, support, and referrals to over 30 individuals. We have also benefitted from the continuation of monthly educational workshops for night outreach clients held at Trees Dispensary on Rock Bay, which are very well attended. We have had more testing clinics with Karen from Cool Aid, a medical marijuana workshop put on by Trees staff, a Hep C info workshop facilitated by Hermoine, and a couple more Naloxone trainings done by Heather of AVI. The naloxone training is becoming increasingly popular and important due to many overdose alerts being issued by Island Health over the winter, many lives have been saved due to this training. All workshops have been well received and we are happy to have this additional prevention education initiative as part of the night program. Thanks again to Trees Dispensary for allowing us to use their wonderful space to host these workshops. Thanks also to the community partners who have been part of the workshops. With the weather warming up we are seeing increasing numbers and as always are in need of clean gently used clothing, hygiene products, make up, sunscreen, aloe vera gel and lotions.

-Tammy Arnault

Sex Workers as Peer Health Advocates: A Community-University Partnership

Cecilia Benoit at the Centre for Addictions Research of BC (CARBC) at the University of Victoria is heading a research project funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research to develop and implement a pilot program training sex workers to become peer health advocates. The program has been developed by and with sex workers, and coordinated by Lynne Belle-Isle from the Canadian AIDS Society. By networking in their circles – with colleagues, clients, managers and their own intimate partners – peer health advocates will provide valuable health information in the community in order to increase health and safety at work and improve access to non-judgmental health and social services. This project has been highly collaborative, building on a long partnership with Peers Victoria – who have been involved at all stages of the project, from grant writing,

to peer health advocate recruitment, to providing the welcoming and nurturing space to run the program. Other important partnerships have included: CARBC, the Canadian AIDS Society, AIDS Vancouver Island, Vancouver Island Persons Living with HIV/AIDS, the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network, the Cool-Aid Clinic and Island Health. The training curriculum is based on evidence of effectiveness of health intervention strategies for sex workers in other countries which adopt an empowerment strategy. The team, including the newly trained peer health advocates, some of whom are long-time clients of Peers, has been documenting the development, implementation and delivery process of effective peer health advocacy, and will report findings in a subsequent newsletter. Stay tuned!

-Lynne Belle-Isle



RV Update

Our RV-buying committee has been hard at work tracking down a suitable new vehicle for our night outreach program. After exploring all of our options on the island and not finding the perfect fit, we have expanded our search to the mainland. The hunt continues!

Thank You!

A huge thank you to Amanda Farrell-Low who has designed and formatted our newsletters over the past five seasons! We wish her all the best on her latest adventure.



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VICTORIA RESOURCES SOCIETY

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Donation type:

☐ **One time** ☐ **Monthly**

If monthly, please debit my bank account: (*attach VOID cheque*)

☐ **\$20** ☐ **\$50** ☐ **\$75** **or Other Amount** _____ (specify)

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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.

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