



Winter 2014/2015

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Joanne Rife has joined the Peers team as Executive Assistant and Volunteer Coordinator. She brings over 8 years' experience as an administrator in both corporate and grass roots, non-profit organizations. Joanne's background also includes a certificate in Mental Health and Addictions support and a passion for helping others. She is a proud member of the Cheesecake Burlesque Revue, long-time Peers supporters. We are very pleased to welcome her.



Peers Indoor/Independent Sex Worker Social Group

Peers began running a monthly meeting group for indoor, independent sex workers in July 2014. I was privileged to be able to attend and to get to know the smart, savvy, witty and fun women who were also in attendance.

We were brought together to share our questions and concerns about Bill C-36, specifically how this federal legislation might affect our lives and our livelihoods. At the very first meeting I found myself looking around the room in admiration and awe at all these dynamic, diverse, and lovely people. I felt an immediate kinship with everyone in the room even

though I knew none of them. While there are many males that make a living in the indoor, independent realm of sex work, none of them were at that meeting. Truthfully, thus far it has been a gift to be part of a woman identified space in the context of sex work, but that is not to say that male sex workers are not welcome. All sex workers would surely benefit from a safe place to meet with others who are faced with the same challenges as they are.

While it was Bill C-36 that initially brought the group together, I believe that it is our common ground, and the relationships that we are

still in the process of forming with one another, that will be the glue that will hold us firm as we make our way into the future. The indoor, independent sex worker is often an incredibly isolated individual. Thus, it is vitally important for our mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being that we have a place to come together for support and friendship. I am incredibly grateful to PEERS for all the love, respect and affirmation that I have received since 2004. I credit all the people who have been a part of this unique organization from the day it was born.

-Lisa Ordell

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.safersexwork.ca

Donation Wishlist



- Sleeping bags
- Tents
- Make up
- Umbrellas
- Gloves
- Scarves
- Socks
- Coats
- Toiletries- razors, deodorant, toothbrushes, toothpaste etc.
- Clothing
- Food
- Leather couch for our new movie lounge

Why I donate

"I decided to make an ongoing monthly contribution to Peers because I really appreciate and respect the work they do to support and empower sex workers in Victoria. Knowing that I am helping Peers with their mandate of providing outreach services, education and employment training together with a warm smile, caring heart and no judgment makes me feel like I am a part of something pretty special."



-Kate Vallance, monthly Peers supporter

Bill C-36 Update

After holding focus groups with sex workers in Victoria, Peers prepared a briefing to provide the House of Commons' Justice Committee with its opinions on the harms to sex workers that could be caused by Bill C-36, a new law that further criminalizes sex work.

In July, two representatives from Peers were invited to Ottawa to appear at the Justice Committee's hearing regarding Bill C-36. They asked the government to listen to the voices of sex workers across Canada and the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada to decriminalize the exchange of sexual services between consenting adults. Peers also prepared a similar briefing for the Senate's Justice committee, which held hearings in August, and followed up by submitting the personal narratives of 15 local sex workers to Justice Minister Peter Mackay and local Member of Parliament Randall Garrison.

While we are profoundly disappointed in the passing of Bill C-36, which further criminalizes the sex industry in Canada and will result in reduced health and safety for sex workers, we have experienced incredible support for the rights of sex workers to health and safety locally. This powerful cross-sectoral collaboration to support the work of Peers will surely benefit sex workers in our region. In September, the City of Victoria passed a motion in support of Peers, urging the federal government to reject Bill C-36, citing the infringements on sex work-

ers labour and human rights the bill would cause. In addition, AIDS Vancouver Island, the Victoria Sexual Assault Centre, the Centre for Aboriginal Health, and the University of Victoria's Centre for Addictions Research each prepared statements directed at the federal government, in support of Peers and urging the federal government to consider

"While we are profoundly disappointed in the passing of Bill C-36 ... we have experienced incredible support for the rights of sex workers to health and safety locally."

the perspectives of sex worker led organizations and academic research in the formulation of new laws.

Peers also held a public forum in September, exploring the benefits of decriminalizing the sex industry in Canada. Speakers included local sex workers allies, a member of the Victoria police, a constitutional lawyer, our local members of Parliament, and New Zealand sex-

work rights activist Catherine Healy. It was an informative event attended by 120 members of the community. We wish to thank Jody Paterson and the panelists for an amazing public education event. View the panel discussion in its entirety on our web site – just look for the link in our "Peers News Now" section.

Sadly, Bill C-36 was passed by the federal government on November 6, and will become law on December 6. However, there is a movement across Canada, led by sex workers and supported by allies, asking premiers of each province to refer Bill C-36 to the provincial courts to determine its constitutionality.

-Flora Pagan

Program Updates

Peers programs are going steadily and smoothly. The drop in program continues to see 13 people on average per day for lunch and health and wellness workshops, including biweekly health clinics in partnership with the Island Health street outreach nurses. Our day outreach program serves eight clients per day on average and administers 14 monthly housing subsidies to clients in market housing. Night outreach serves 15 clients on average per day on the Victoria sex work stroll and has recently moved to seven nights a week from six in order to better

support people during the cold winter months.

Casey Newman, the Peers Housing Support worker, has served 33 people in the first two months of the new project, found housing for 14 of these individuals and helped an additional 10 to maintain housing through support for paying bills and assisting with other emergent issues that threatened housing security or were needed by those in between housing (for instance, storage fees). Casey works with five clients per day and also spends time on night outreach, at Sandy Merriman House Women's Emergency

Shelter and at Rock Bay Landing, a gender-inclusive shelter. Her work at the Peers drop-in centre increases the opportunities for people in and from the sex industry to connect with this important new program at Peers.

Through all of the Peers programs and our partnership with the Township of Esquimalt to offer a small business training program, Peers serves 40-50 people in/from the sex industry in an average day. This is quite something for a small organization but it is especially important because the people who access PEERS regularly comment it

is their "welcoming place."

As one person noted: "I found through my experience that coming to Peers has been my place that has saved me. The people, staff and volunteers have showed me time and time again that they truly care about me, especially when I thought that no one did. Peers has helped me with increasing my self-esteem and also taught me that I have rights in my life. I love coming to Peers because I can be myself without judgment."

-Rachel Phillips

PEERS Visioning Session: Part 2

The future around funding continues to be uncertain for Peers Victoria, but the vision of an experiential organization walking alongside sex workers remains unchanged. That message came through clearly when staff and board members gathered in October to follow up on a summer session around how the agency will manage in coming months if base funding can't be found. A one-time grant of \$100,000 from the provincial Justice Ministry in 2014 permitted Peers to reopen its drop-in centre and guaranteed an operations base for other programs until March 2015. But what will happen after that funding runs out is an unknown at the moment, and the October session gave the staff and board members a chance to feel out other options for the future, which could include Peers having to close its centre in Esquimalt.

While that would be a drastic measure that all involved are hoping won't happen, participants made it clear that regardless of whether Peers has to end up sharing office space with another non-profit, sharing administrative functions or even selling its Esquimalt facility, its work with sex workers will continue. Peers remains committed to policies that ensure a strong experiential component among its staff and the provision of non-judgmental services - particularly outreach - based on harm reduction and supporting clients in their search for stable housing, help with mental health issues, and other basic needs.

But for now, let's just keep hoping that another \$100,000 can be found so Peers can continue its great work out of its own office!

-Jody Paterson

Upcoming Events

Nov 28: Sex Work and HIV/AIDS – A community education event with a great line up of speakers representing research, peer based sex worker, and health service organizations in Victoria and Vancouver who all share a common objective to reduce the spread of HIV and increase access to timely testing and treatment.

Dec 17, 5:30pm: Red Umbrella March

– This is an event held internationally to call attention to the need to end violence against sex workers and a time to remember those who have passed. It is collaboratively organized by a number of groups in Victoria and will begin at the BC legislative grounds and proceed to council chambers at Victoria City Hall. We will have speakers, an open mic, a community dinner provided by Deadbeetz food truck, and burlesque provided by Ruby Entertainment. Everyone welcome.



Dec 19, 6pm: Peers Holiday Feast – A holiday feast for all those involved in the Peers Community held at Esquimalt United Church (500 Admirals Rd) and provided by Rainbow Kitchen.

Student Support at Peers

In addition to working with a number of students from Camosun College's dental hygiene, nursing and mental health and addictions programs, Peers is currently benefitting from student support from the medical and law programs at the University of Victoria. Ruchi Liyanage and Tlell Brown Bentley from the Island Medical Program are currently completing a community service learning option at Peers. Each week they come to Peers to support drop in workshop activities including art-based therapies. They have recently designed and carried out a survey to determine health care access among clients at Peers who have hepatitis C. The results of this survey will be used to inform a staff training session and client workshop which will include action on increasing health care access for clients who are currently experiencing

barriers to optimal and timely treatment. Sumra Mahmood and Alisa Maegawa from the law program at the University of Victoria have taken on a project to examine the options for protecting health and safety in the sex industry using existing protections that apply to other workers and contractors. They are examining three sub-areas: a legal test for determining the contexts in which sex workers are contractors and employees; existing laws and provisions which may be relevant including the employment standards act, Worker's Compensation Board provisions, Human Rights Code, and income tax legislation; and determining which protections are unique to certain groups of workers and which protections are universal.

-Rachel Phillips

Small Business Training

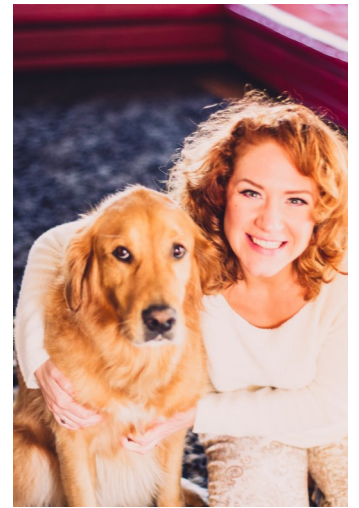
We have eight wonderful participants in the Small Business Training Program, offered through the Township of Esquimalt in partnership with Peers, Bridges for Women and Community Micro Lending. The curriculum covers personal foundations, personal finance, building your business plan, regulatory overview and basic business bookkeeping.

By April all participants will have created a complete business plan and have the option to apply for a \$5000 business start-up loan or a \$10 000 business expansion loan from Community Micro Lending. We already have a waiting list for the next class, please get in touch if you are interested!

-Julie Higginson

Volunteer Profile: Sarah Smith

I began formally volunteering by heading the Peers Beauty Boutique this past summer, although I have burlesqued for the cause countless times! Both the support of sex workers, and the work itself, are very important in my vision of how today's feminism can be practiced in real ways. In short, sex workers are the most generous, intelligent, kind, non-judgmental, fun, humorous, and resourceful people I know, and I will continue to do what I can to



support and stand with them in solidarity. Thank you so much for having me!

Board of Directors

The Board of Directors is responsible for facilitating and guiding the organisation through the use of peer-based governance principles and in accordance with PEERS' core values. Within that framework, the Board works with the Executive Director to address fund-raising and budgeting, strategic planning, policy development, oversight, and management.



-Bradley Weldon

Cathy Tremain
(acting treasurer)
CTB Bookkeeping Services

Flora Pagan *(secretary)*
Coalition to End Homelessness

Natasha Potvin
(member at large)
AIDS Vancouver Island, Sex Worker Rights Activist

Carolyn Showler
(member at large)
Retired Street and Cool Aid Nurse

Leah Shumka
(member at large)
Research Associate, Centre for Addictions Research, Sessional Instructor, Department of Women's Studies, University of Victoria

Susan Strega *(co-chair)*
Professor, School of Social Work

Bradley Weldon
(co-chair) Lawyer, Private Practice, Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner

Executive Director's Update

The fall has been bustling at Peers! We organized two public education events, one on decriminalization in September and another on HIV/AIDS in November. We have also begun planning for December 17's Red Umbrella march, which is led by a collaboration of many organizations including Peers, the UVic Women's Centre, Anti-Violence project, Pride, Students of Color Collective and many others who all support this event each year.

We have also been busy submitting grant applications and running service programs, all the while trying to stay abreast of developments with Bill C-36. We wanted to make sure the Peers community contributed to the debate going on in Canada right now about the health and safety of sex workers. We have also been participating in a network led by the Victoria Sexual Assault Centre to raise awareness and capacity to address sexual violence among diverse groups in our community.

I volunteered at Peers for seven years prior to stepping into the role of Executive Director so I knew the organization well and was familiar with the challenging areas as well as the strengths of the organization. Despite this prior knowledge of Peers, I have really been impressed by a number of things over the last few months. First, our programs are needed, appreciated and highly utilized, and there is something unique about Peers which is not replicated in other service environments. The core mission of Peers to provide non-judgmental, sex worker-led harm reduction and education services is as relevant today as it was at the inception of the organization, and it is the "by and for" aspect of the organization that gives Peers its character and uniqueness. Peers has always welcomed allies in

carrying out its mission, and allies have played important roles in the organization, but they too operate from a foundation of sex worker leadership.

A second thing I have learned is that the work of supporting sex workers by building supportive community settings and offering immediate services to support housing, food security, and health and safety for those who need it is both a practical and essential part of the local health and social service continuum. There is no shortage of opportunities for Peers to expand its role in public education and service delivery given the necessary level of resources. We are able to make a real difference operating part-time programs and we are thankful to have had the funds from the Ministry of Justice and Attorney general this year, which allowed us to reopen our drop in centre, as well as ongoing funding for Night Outreach from Island Health the Province of BC - Gaming.

But the reality is that Peers largely operates without a secure funding base, and directs the vast majority of funds towards direct client services. This means that administrative and organizational infrastructure within the organization is minimal and the hours of our programs are such that we are available only during what we consider to be peak access times (11-3 during the day, and 7-11 at night).

It is hard when you close the doors, or leave at the end of your shift on stroll, when you know that some of the clients literally have nowhere to go. In some cases, we'll see these clients the next morning and they will have been outdoors all night. It is true that the public and non-profit sector has, in general, adopted austerity measures, and this is felt perhaps most profoundly by small grass roots organizations.

Despite these challenges, I am happy to



Executive Director Rachel Phillips at the Peers

say that the work is fantastic. In fact, that is my only complaint: with additional resources, there is so much more we could do to contribute to the community, especially because Peers tends to attract a committed following of donors, volunteers and staff who believe passionately in the mission of the organization.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the community support for Peers' work over the past year. Victoria is a community that embraces the core values of Peers, and that is an accomplishment that is a direct result of our 20 year longevity as well as a tendency of Victoria residents to lean towards progressiveness in health and social services. From those who donated and organized community events to help keep our drop in centre running and who partnered with us to plan community education events, to the leaders who stepped out from all corners to publicly support sex workers and declare that the criminalization of sex workers as envisaged by Bill C36 was not evidence based and would increase the potential for harm, it has been a year marked by really valuable partnerships.

Meanwhile, we will keep our fingers crossed that our grant applications are successful and we will look forward to continuing our essential services, community education, and collaborative partner roles in 2015!

-Rachel Phillips



peers

VICTORIA RESOURCE SOCIETY

Date: _____

I want to support *PEERS Victoria Resources Society* through donations.

Donation type:

___ One time ___ Monthly

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

___ \$20 ___ \$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.

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

I have certain recourse rights if any debit does not comply with this agreement. For example, I have the right to receive reimbursement for any debit that is not authorized or is not consistent with this PAD Agreement. To obtain more information on my recourse rights, I may contact my financial

