

September 2014

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After 2 ½ years as the Executive Director, Marion Little has left PEERS to return home to Ontario to be closer to family. We have so much gratitude for her work with PEERS. Marion made many positive contributions, including establishing significant new community connections and allies. Her persistence and determination to get the provincial government to deliver funding so that we could re-open our day programs finally paid off in the form of a one-time

grant. Although these funds do not ensure long-term financial stability for the organization, they provide PEERS' incoming executive director, Rachel Phillips, with a foundation to build on over the next year. PEERS is very fortunate to have someone with the mix of skills and experience that Rachel brings. She has a long association with PEERS as a volunteer and as a board member, and served as the board's co-chair for the last 3 years. Rachel also brings a wealth



*Outgoing ED Marion Little*

of knowledge through her long involvement in sex work research, including managing some groundbreaking projects, for example about indoor sex work in Canada.

-Susan Strega

## 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](http://www.safersexwork.ca)

## We Have a New Website!

PEERS is pleased to announce the launch of its new website! With the help of Beacon Hill Communications Group, we have created a site that is informative, easy to navigate, and pretty great to look at too! Some of the features of the new site include a live news-feed. Located on the main page, this feed highlights PEERS announcements and events as well as other issues of concern to sex workers and allies in our community. We have also created a *Sex Work 101* page with lots of great information and links for sex workers, social

service providers, and the general public. Other new content includes a list of our *Core Values* as an organization, bios of our *Board of Directors*, and links to our most recent AGM and financial reports

and newsletters. Please be sure to click on the *Donate* link as well to see what is new there!

[www.safersexwork.ca](http://www.safersexwork.ca)

-Leah Shumka



# PEERS Presents as Witness at Bill C-36 Hearings



Natasha Potvin (L) and Rachel Phillips in Ottawa

On July 10, 2014, Natasha Potvin (board member and retired sex worker) and Rachel Phillips (researcher and current Executive Director) presented on behalf of PEERS' members to the Justice Committee regarding C-36. In making the presentation we drew on materials from the focus group held with PEERS clients in April regarding how the laws affect their lives and testimony from a group of people currently involved in different parts of the sex industry who have come together to form an "ad hoc C36 committee". Our presentation can be found on the [PEERS Facebook page](#). The experience had both ups and downs. It was wonderful to have the opportunity to bring the voices of Victoria sex workers to the federal government on such an important

issue. We were so pleased to have the support of local MP's including Elizabeth May, Randall Garrison, and Murray Rankin, but it was also evident that the current Conservative government is not listening to the voices of sex worker advocacy groups, or the large body of research in Canada, which demonstrates the unintended negative effects of criminalization on the health and safety of sex workers. For example, researchers and sex workers have argued convincingly that criminalization of communication, procurement, advertising group indoor environments (i.e. escort agencies), does not reduce demand, but it does limit sex workers use of safety enhancing strategies and access to justice supports when they have been victimized. Despite these challenges regarding legal

reform in Canada to support health and safety, we press forward in solidarity with many sex work advocacy groups across Canada and with support from the Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform who have played a pivotal role in keeping groups informed on how to contribute to this important public debate.

PEERS continues to meet with local sex workers to inform them on developments with C-36 and we will submit a brief to the Senate process which commences in early September. In this brief, we will outline not only the perspectives of local sex workers, but also the many allied service agencies and organizations in our region who support our work to address stigma and uphold the constitutional rights of people in the sex industry.

## 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

**Candace McKivett** (treasurer)  
Indigenous Perspectives Society  
**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

## Re-Opening the Day Centre

With funds from the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General, PEERS was thrilled to be able to reopen the Day Centre in late June. The drop-in centre is an essential link within the PEERS service continuum, not just for the sex work community, but also the allied organizations and PEERS supporters who tend to do their work during office hours. The Day Centre is open for drop in **Monday to Thursday 11am to 2:30pm**. Coffee, snacks and lunch are served each day and drop in clients have access to the clothing room, computer room, bus tickets, the health clinic on

Wednesdays, harm reduction and safer sex supplies and an opportunity to connect with the support staff. Although it is the summer, which historically tends to be slower at PEERS, we had an average of 6.5 drop-in visitors each day in July and 116 drop ins overall. In August the average daily drop ins had increased to 10 people and we expect it to keep increasing into the fall.

We are building on the services available through drop in at the day centre and are planning a number of workshops for the fall focusing on various aspects of wellness, art and recreation. We

### Drop In

Come see us at the  
PEERS Drop In Center,  
Monday to Thursday 11:00 - 2:30

We have lunch, support staff, clothing room/household give away room, safer sex and other harm reduction resources, bus tickets, computers, education workshops and outings... and more

**PEERS "Wellness Wednesdays"**  
On Wellness Wednesdays we have a beauty boutique and health clinic (open for nurse visit until 3pm).

In August we have weekly barbeque (Tuesdays), special outings, and a weekly \$50 draw for a gift certificate - come by and put your name in the draw

For more information contact 250.388.5325 ext. 0 or email [info@peers.bc.ca](mailto:info@peers.bc.ca)  
Address: 1-744 Fairview  
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have also recently developed a poster to continue to get the word out that the drop-in centre is back in business. Thank you to Sarah Smith and Les Ames for poster design.

-Rachel Phillips  
& Isha Matous



## Day Outreach Update

Day outreach has been actively assisting folks with housing, doctor visits, court appearances and advocacy around various social issues. I have been very successful in making connections within the community to be able to refer folks to specialized services when needed. My current caseload is approximately 60, which makes for busy days! In July, four new people come into the program and there were 48 points of contact, which is a

little less than usual on account of holidays. I administer 14 rental subsidies directly to landlords each month, which are funded through BC Housing. There are currently 2 additional rental subsidies available for individuals who qualify. Day outreach operates **Monday to Wednesday, 8:30 am to 4:00 pm. (250) 744-7690.**

-Kristine Allard



*Kristine Allard and Jonathan Degenhardt, Outreach*

## Night Outreach Update

Night outreach is currently out in the community 6 nights a week **Tuesday to Sunday from 6:30pm to 11:30pm.** We are hoping to increase to 7 nights in the near future. We provide peer support, advocacy, referrals, food, bus tickets, harm reduction supplies, hygiene products and have some clothing donations. Night outreach has been busy in recent months, with an average caseload of 66 individuals in April through June. The average number of service encounters was 263 per month in the same time frame. We start the night parked on Pembroke and Government and move over to

Rock Bay halfway through the shift. We used to have an RV in which the clients could come in sit down, warm up, eat, change clothes (if need be), and have a more private one-on-one with staff if they wanted. We are now in a minivan which serves most of our purposes adequately. The biggest drawback to the van is that people are no longer able to come in and sit down and warm up. It also affects our ability to more private one-on-ones due to lack of space.

-Tammy Arnault



*PEERS is looking to obtain another small RV through fundraising or donation. If you can help, let us know!*

## PEERS Visioning Session

A half-day visioning session last month brought PEERS staff and board members together to build on the strong foundation that the sex worker organization has maintained throughout many periods of economic challenges. PEERS has been rebuilding in 2014 and that work will continue into 2015, and the visioning session involved two points to ponder: "Where is

PEERS at right now, and where does it need to be?" The answers are still a work in progress, but the group was unanimous in its support for ensuring PEERS continues to be experiential, without morality or judgment in all services, welcoming, passionate and supporting/advocating from a strength-based perspective.

-Jody Paterson

### PEERS Announcements

#### Housing Support Worker

PEERS has a new housing support worker supported by a Housing Partnership Strategy Grant. Call 250.744.0171 and ask for Casey.

#### Decriminalizing the Sex Industry: Beyond the Myths

1:30pm Friday, September 19  
Ambrosia Centre, 638 Fisgard Street  
[Join our Facebook event](#)

## Cheers to PEERS Volunteers

PEERS is very fortunate to have many fantastic volunteers who contribute in numerous ways to our organizations. From the many hours our board members contribute to volunteers who cook lunch for our drop-in centre, these people allow us to keep our doors open. Volunteers also teach knitting, give acupuncture treatments, pick up and sort donations, maintain our computers, maintain our building, fix our electrical system and clean on a weekly basis or help with spring cleaning. We have dedicated volunteers who fundraise for us, serve turkey feasts for us, and just generally pitch in when needed. And last but not least, we thank the Cool Aid and Island Health street nurses who volunteer at our medical clinic.

-Patricia O'Byrne

### Program Volunteers

Joanne Hauge (Knitting), Anne Dost (Cool Aid nurse), Caroline Meggison

(Cool Aid Nurse), Lisa Neufeld and Lisbet Rygnestad (Street nurses), Susie Shields (Acupuncturist), Monika Joosok, Yvette Sellars, Vanny Baron and Jennifer Young (Lunches), Sarah Mirron aka Ginger Kittens (Beauty Day)

### Operational Volunteers

Patrice Snopkowski (Website), Bonnie Sawyer (Cleaning), Braden Young (Computer Tech. Support), Gloria Hoeppner (Mustard Seed Food Bank, Winner's, Home Sense Deliveries), Karl Schreiner (Building Maintenance and Repairs), Brad Webster (Auto Repairs), Kacie Poskitt (Donation Organization), Ron Stubbington (Electrician).

### Seasonal Volunteers

Saanich Baptist Church (Spring Cleaning), Esquimalt United Church (Turkey Feast), Gillian Ley, Lynn Stokes, Nasstasia Yard, Patty Rozon, Kat Lenaghan, Elaine Osborne,



*Longtime volunteers is Jennifer (L) Hilary Young serving their wonderful lunches with a "mother's comfort food" flair.*

Bonnie Sawyer, Mary Clare Kennedy, Marie Campbell, Meghan Weston, Gabby Rutman, Genevieve Nevin, Deb Rutman (Turkey Feast)

Poetrython), Rosie Bitts, The Little Elves Foundation's Gifts, Christina Chan, Heart & Hands Community Acupuncture.

### Fundraising Volunteers

The fabulous Cheesecake Burlesque Revue, Sarah Mirron aka Ginger Kittens and Sadie Forbes, Cambie Events, Ministry of Casual Living (24-hour

**Pitching in when needed**  
Neahla Moffat, Golda Lewin

### Newsletter Volunteers

Amanda Farrell-Low, Kate Vallance

## Community Fundraisers Make all the Difference

Cheers for Peers! Coffee House and Dance Party Fundraiser for Peers sponsored by: Women's Studies Equity and Outreach Committee, Uvic Anti-Violence, and Uvic Pride and was held at the end of February and was a great success. People loved the DJ and playlist and the event raised

close to \$4,000. The Zontas organized a lovely luncheon and fashion show fundraiser and donated \$2080 of the proceeds to PEERS. Rachel and Marion had a wonderful time at the event and are grateful to the Zontas for their ongoing support of our organization and women's economic op-

portunities. Parkland Secondary School students donated \$5,000 in partnership with the Youth and Philanthropy Initiative. We love the youth groups - never doubt the power of a small group of youth to contribute in profound ways to the community.

Cadboro Bay United Church contributed a donation of \$1,000 with a lovely message about their support for PEERS' services and organizational values. Christ Church Cathedral donated \$1,150 and we thank them for their ongoing support.

-Rachel Phillips



# The Voices of PEERS

I have been a sex worker for almost a decade, and searching for a sense of belonging and community has been a struggle over the years. It has been difficult for me to open up to other people and to feel safe. Talking about some of the bad experiences I've had at work – or even the ordinary aspects of my day to day life as a sex worker – is not something I can do with everyone.

I reached out to PEERS a few months ago when I moved to Victoria. I knew I would be in the city for a little while and I wanted to have a support structure in place in case I ever needed it. I didn't know anybody in Victoria prior to moving here. The staff at PEERS have exceeded my expectations.

I had expected that they would be non-judgmental and I was confident that they would be able to provide the services listed on their website. However,

I didn't expect them to be so friendly and so easy-going. They made me feel like an ordinary person. It is difficult to describe how incredibly liberating this feeling is, and what a relief it is, to someone who does not have any experience of marginalization. The stigma of being a sex worker can be overwhelming, and the simple act of being treated like a regular human being is very meaningful to me. Before reaching out to PEERS, I had been somewhat isolated. I spent much of my time working on activism from behind a computer screen. I've written several editorial articles about sex work and the harms of criminalizing the sex trade, and these pieces have been published in the *National Post*, the *Ottawa Citizen*, and the *Toronto Star*. It has been exciting for me to contribute to this important cause and to have my voice heard, but it has also been a lonely endeavour. I'm glad I reached out to PEERS, because now I am starting to feel like I belong to a community. I don't feel alone anymore.

-Celine Bisette

## PEERS Beauty Boutique 11:30-2:30 Wednesdays.

We offer lunch, hair styling, manicures, pedicures, and other pampering treats on a first come first serve basis.

These services are in high demand, so come early to avoid disappointment.

Call us for details 250.388.5324 ext. 0 or email: [info@peers.bc.ca](mailto:info@peers.bc.ca)  
Address: 1-744 Fairview



The Beauty Boutique is part of our **PEERS "Wellness Wednesdays"** so guests may also want to see some of the other health and wellness practitioners on site Wednesdays including nurses, acupuncture, and support staff.

**peers** [safersexwork.ca](http://safersexwork.ca) "a place by and for sex workers"

Thank you to our beauty day volunteers and to Sarah Smith for organizing!

## PEERS focus groups

PEERS board members and staff held two focus groups this year to discuss Bill C-36 and PEERS services with those engaged in sex work. With the release of the proposed framework to govern sex work and the re-opening of the drop-in centre, PEERS consulted with 25 local sex workers in different parts of the industry around how these laws affect their lives and how to best provide services. Those who participated in the focus groups were unanimous in opposing criminalization of the sex industry and described many ways in which criminalization contributes to discrimination, isolation, and lack of safety and security.

Staff and volunteers also handed out written surveys to sex workers to obtain information about the diverse health, housing, and support needs of workers. The results of this survey with 30 persons are now available at PEERS. A small selection of findings include that over 40% of clients identified as First Nations or Metis, the median number of years working in the sex industry is 10, 21% report having a job outside the sex industry, 51% report being in a committed relationship, and 35% report having a bad date in the past year. We thank UVic student Katrina Barber for her help compiling the results.

-Flora Pagan



# peers

VICTORIA RESOURCE SOCIETY

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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: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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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](mailto:finance@peers.bc.ca) or by phoning the number below.

PEERS Victoria Resources Society  
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Victoria, BC V9A 5T9  
Tel: 250-388-5325  
E-mail: [finance@peers.bc.ca](mailto:finance@peers.bc.ca)

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