



peers

VICTORIA RESOURCES SOCIETY

## Executive Director's Report

A lot happens at Peers in between newsletters – as our many program updates can attest! There have been a number of positive changes made over the past few months and one of these includes improving our data collection methods. Doing so has allowed us to gain an accurate picture of our program reach and impact. We know for instance that the number of individuals we are reaching is growing each quarter, and we are maintaining or increasing the number of harm reduction supplies, hot meals, and community referrals we are providing. We have also been focused on fostering Peers' sense of community with fun social events, and through new projects like the #sexworkstories series, discussed below.

Moving forward with these positive changes we are now looking to give Peers Victoria a facelift. As we all know, the physical spaces we occupy say something important about who we are and what's important to us, and they can instill a feeling of pride and dignity. At Peers this is no different. Given some of the funding challenges we have faced in recent years, our physical space has gotten a bit run down. The awning that welcomes people in, and shelters them from the wind and rain is in significant disrepair. The signage on our front is out of date and does not reflect our name change made in 2004. Of course, such changes cost money, so in a bid to help us pay for some upgrades and maintenance we are launching our "look good, feel good" campaign. We hope to hoist a bright new awning and update our front entrance with our proper name and logo. We are also planning a mural for one of our inside walls that will reflect the lives, hopes, and aspirations of our clients. We are excited to announce that we have a very generous private donor willing to match, dollar-for-dollar any donations raised up to \$3,000 to help us with this facelift. In other words, every dollar that is donated by the community towards these maintenance costs is worth double up to \$6,000 – enough to pay for our new awning! Please consider donating, even a small amount, to this initiative, and help us give Peers the makeover our clients deserve.

On another note, my time as interim Executive Director of Peers is coming to an end. Rachel Phillips is coming back from her parental leave in October to resume her role. (Welcome back Rachel!) This has been a challenging but also extremely rewarding year for me. Never have I worked in a job that required such a broad skill set and encouraged such personal investment. What stands out most are the things I've learned and the relationships I've built with clients and staff; these are some of the most dedicated, resourceful, and genuinely caring individuals I have ever come across. I will miss my daily interaction with them, and sharing in the on-the-ground change that happens every day at Peers. I go back to my position on the Board of Directors with an even deeper commitment to this organization, and an even stronger sense of ally-ship with sex workers. Thank you for this opportunity.

–Leah Shumka

It's time to dig out your lederhosen and polish up those wooden clogs for this year's

### Odd Fellows - Bastion 4 Lodge **ODD-TOBERFEST!**

All proceeds from the event are going to support Peers Victoria. **Saturday October 15<sup>th</sup> at 6pm 1315 Douglas St**

Individual Tickets are \$75 and include:  
Full German Schnitzel Dinner (Vegetarian available);  
2 Alcoholic drinks;  
Bobby Dazzler Band;  
Silent/Live Auction.

Tax receipts available. To purchase tickets contact Shiromi Silva [shiromitahr@hotmail.com](mailto:shiromitahr@hotmail.com) and go to their "Odd-tober" Facebook event page for more details. The word on the street is that tickets are selling well, and they sold out last year, so don't delay in purchasing yours.

## Indoor Workers Group

The monthly meeting group for indoor-based sex workers is going strong! Membership has been steadily increasing and a tight-knit, supportive community has formed around these regular gatherings that take place at the Peers Drop-in space. Sarah and Carin - who are a highly compatible team - lead the group and ensure that the activities and supports offered to the participants are in line with their present needs and desires. In recent months, the group has hosted a Q&A session with a team of doctors and nurses, a town hall-style meeting with the Victoria police, and a self-defense workshop.

Coming up in September the participants will be receiving a follow-up to the self-defense lesson, as well as a craft-making session with Jenny from The Make House. Members regularly report high degrees of satisfaction with the support group, and Peers is grateful for the funding that allows this group to meet every month over dinner. We hope there are many more years in store for the indoor workers group!

—Carin Gill

# Housing Program

The housing market is very challenging right now, with few vacancies in market housing and fierce competition for every posting. Some of our folks are getting accepted into supportive housing, which is fantastic. However, the wait lists for supportive housing are very long at this time, with very little movement as there are few openings. Nonetheless, we continue to do new intakes as the need for housing is so high among those who access our services – it is the number one referral made both through our Night Outreach and daytime Drop-in Programs. Currently we are spending a lot of time supporting those who have already obtained housing to maintain it, which means assisting with things like landlord disputes, helping with overdue utility bills, and providing social support.

Despite the challenges, we have had a lot of success with this program overall and the funding provided to us by the Capital Regional District

through their Homelessness Partnering Strategy. We are in the third year of the program and have housed 37 people to date. In some cases, we have housed folks more than once since the program began, so overall this is a phenomenal success.

We recently began partnering with Pacifica Housing, working with a landlord liaison to help forge new housing opportunities within the private rental market. While overall housing improves the health and well-being of clients, in some cases it can lead to feelings of social isolation. In turn this can lead to depression and other health concerns if the on-going and longer term one-on-one supports we provide are not available. Moving forward we hope for additional funding to help us provide clients with the social supports required for “housing readiness”, and this includes most notably mental health and addictions supports. At the same time, more ongoing social supports are required for those we have housed.

—Casey Newman

# Small Business Training Program

The Small Business and Training Program is set to begin its third consecutive year thanks to

funding from Civil Forfeiture. This year the program will run from October 3rd

to February 23rd. Some of the skills-building we will focus on this year include personal money management, understanding credit scores and how to repair “bad” credit, resume writing, developing a personal business plan, applying for a community micro loan and, new this year, how to research, propose, plan and finance a social enterprise. Participants will finish the program with an up-to-date resume, a business plan and the skills to go even further.

—Julie Higginson

# Hot Pink! Event



Our 7th annual Hot Pink event was a great success with over \$10,000 raised for services at Peers Victoria. Thank you to the Cheesecake Burlesque Revue, Boxers are Brief Boylesque and Silk n Sass Dance Studio for lending their talents to raise money

for Peers while providing some wild entertainment.

Thank you also to the many local businesses who supported our silent auction and our gratitude to those who purchased all the great items. Our silent auction gets bigger every year despite the fact that local businesses are inundated with donation requests, which is a real testament to the value we hold in the community. Thank you to everyone who participated in the photo booth and shared their message of support for sex workers' rights and to all of you who come back each year to support this fun event for a great cause. Finally, many thanks to the Belfry Theatre for providing such a well-organized and beautiful venue for our event.

See you next year!

—Rachel Phillips

# Drop-In Program

Summer has been a busy time for our Drop-in Program with more people accessing our services than in the previous quarter, and lots of activities and events. In June we participated in the annual Pride Parade and had a great response from those in the crowd, many of whom enthusiastically cheered for Peers! In July we had a beach day at Langford Lake. Clients were provided rides to the lake, a delicious lunch, cold drinks and ice cream treats. It was nice to be off-site and enjoying each other's company in the sunshine.



We have held eight educational workshops over the past three months, covering a range of topics. For example, Island Sexual Health came and offered an information session on STI's and safer sex. AIDS Vancouver Island came and spoke about their programs and services and spoke about the stigma associated with HIV. The Victoria Native Friendship Center also came and discussed the services

they provide, and we connected with Laura the youth addictions worker based at VNFC. We also had Collette Jones, a Snuneymuxw woman, come and give a workshop about Indigenous peoples in Canada, focusing on challenging myths and stereotypes. Other activities over the summer have included having Susan our acupuncturist come in every other Monday to help clients alleviate pain and stress. As well, Stephanie volunteers every second Wednesday and offers stylish haircuts and colour for all Peers clients. We've also had Laurel, a local lawyer, come in and discuss legal issues with clients confidentially and free of charge.

And of course the amazing and wonderful volunteer cook and kitchen manager Anna has come in and baked many yummy cakes to celebrate our clients' birthdays. We are now looking forward to the fall, which promises to bring many new workshops and events with all of our new practicum students coming in to help out.

—Lacey Jones

# Men and Trans\* Outreach Program

We are pleased to have launched the Men and Trans\* Outreach Program at Peers last few weeks. While Peers has had men-specific programming in the past, it has been almost 10 years since we have had the funding to do this important work – so thank you to Island Health and their STOP HIV Community Grant for funding this project for the next two years.

This is an important project because although men and trans\* people make up a relatively small portion of the sex work population in Victoria, they tend to be socially isolated and access health and social supports less frequently. At the same time, men who have sex with men (MSM) continue to be disproportionately affected by HIV. Our goal is therefore to provide a point of social connection and support for men and trans\* people working

in the industry, provide them with relevant and up-to-date health based information, options for testing and treatment and referrals to relevant social services.

Our new program currently involves doing evening outreach two nights a week at parks where MSM sell sex. Our team includes Jenny, our health support worker, and a new Peers recruit, Bobby. Welcome Bobby! Our plan is for this program to be responsive to the needs of male and trans\* sex workers and evolve based on their specific needs. In the future this many include men and/or trans\* specific drop-in programming or even a monthly meeting group, similar to our indoor workers group.

—Leah Shumka

## Health Program

The health program continues to run evening workshops which include an STI testing clinic and overdose prevention training on stroll three nights a month. These workshops are very well attended with as many as 29 people attending. Since May, a total of 40 people have been tested on stroll by the Cool Aid nurse. We are also very happy to say that we are now a naloxone (overdose prevention) training site, which means we can train in the use of naloxone and dispense kits. A total of 65 people have completed the overdose prevention training and 67 kits have been given out since May. Other workshops we have done in the evenings on-stroll have included a natural health and wellness workshop series, which were a lot of fun. These included yoga, acupuncture and aromatherapy sessions.

The health program also offers one-on-one support with doctor's appointments and accessing treatment for Hep C and HIV and we have been connecting people with the Hep C group at Cool Aid. We have seen many people getting started with the new Hep C treatment, which is fantastic! This comes on the heels of our collaboration with AVI, SOLID, VPWAS and Hep C BC in the planning and march for World Hepatitis Day held on July 28<sup>th</sup> which brought a great turn out. The health program continues to be a popular resource for Peers clients!

—Jenny Smart

## Night Outreach Program

Night outreach has been busy over the summer months, as the temperatures go up so do our numbers. In total we have provided services to 146 individuals in the last quarter (we see as many as 300 different people over a 12-month period); this is higher than the previous four quarters. As a result, we are handing out many more harm reduction supplies (we have doubled the number of syringes distributed from the last quarter, for instance) and referrals to primary health care, mental health and addictions, social services, and housing are much higher than previous months. We do the most referrals for housing, with referrals in the triple digits. This points to the large number of people who access our services who are chronically or episodically homeless.

We have always given out bagged lunches to our clients which include a sandwich, yogurt, granola bar, and an orange but in the past few months have been able to offer various fruits to choose from – which our clients love! Unfortunately, as we get further into the year, the donations we received at Christmas time start to dwindle but our numbers keep rising. We continue to need women's hygiene products including deodorant, new underwear, makeup, lip balm, clothing, shoes, and as the weather starts to cool down, warm jackets and winter gear. –Tammy Arnault

# #SexWorkStories Project

How would sex workers talk about their lives if given a public forum to share their stories? We're finding out with the launch of our new project #sexworkstories, a collection of personal narratives from Greater Victoria sex workers. There are four #sexworkstories up on the Peers web site now, and more in the works. The diversity of experiences just among the four people who have shared stories so far highlights the diversity of the sex industry itself, and that people work in it for all kinds of reasons.



Sex workers' voices are scarce commodities in the public sphere – no surprise, given that stepping up to speak your truth is a dangerous thing for anyone who has experienced the extreme stigma that goes along with acknowledging to the world that

you've worked in the sex industry. Social media has opened up many more avenues for sex workers to talk about their lives and their work, but as long as the industry remains criminalized, stigmatized and shamed, it will be difficult for people who work in it to talk openly about their experiences. Through #sexworkstories, we're striving to give people with lived experience an opportunity to talk about the things that matter to them. They're talking about their families, their dreams, their typical work week, and sharing some great ideas about how sex work could be made safer.

If you're a sex worker and want to share your story, please contact us at [ed@peers.ca](mailto:ed@peers.ca) – we'd love to be featuring new stories on an ongoing basis. You can write your own and we'll help you edit it, or come on by to Peers to organize an appointment for an interview if you prefer. Either way, you'll be able to read the final version of the piece before it's published. Watch our social media feeds for news of a national version of #sexworkstories coming soon via the Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform, of which Peers Victoria is a proud member.

–Jody Paterson

## Volunteer Program



"Volunteers are love in motion!" ~ Unknown

We are so grateful for all of our dedicated volunteers, from our weekly lunch cooks and donation sorters, to our bi-monthly acupuncturist and hairstylist, as well as our computer and tech supports. It is an understatement to say that the time they volunteer with us makes a difference given we could not offer all the supports we do without their energy, investment, and commitment.

In June 2016 we had an energetic and efficient group of women from the Odd Fellows spend a Saturday afternoon at Peers cleaning everything and anything, including our refrigerators and night outreach van, and leaving behind bags of clothing donations! In July 2016 Serve the City volunteers from Saanich Baptist Church came to Peers and power washed our outside stoop, as well as installing new blinds and a new hose. Thank you so much to all of you!

Our programs and services are enhanced by our many volunteers and as such, we are always looking to connect with new people. At this time, we are looking for aestheticians and/or chair massage or other types of bodywork practitioners to volunteer during our Drop-In Program. If this is you, please contact Miranda at [admin@peers.bc.ca](mailto:admin@peers.bc.ca) or check out our website at [safersexwork.ca](http://safersexwork.ca). –Miranda Liebel



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VICTORIA RESOURCES 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.*

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Donor Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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