



Annual General Meeting, 2011

PEERS Victoria Resources Society
#1 – 744 Fairview Road, Victoria
Wednesday June 27th, 2012
4:30 – 5:00 pm Open House
5:00 – 7:00 pm Key Note Speaker & AGM

www.peers.bc.ca

Executive Director's Report, 2011

Respectfully submitted by Marion Little

I am delighted to address you for the first time as the Executive Director for PEERS.

For those who are new to PEERS, we were founded in 1995 by and for sex trade workers with the support of community allies. PEERS is an impressive example of grassroots community development, providing programs and services to people who have been alienated and isolated from mainstream society because of their involvement in the sex trade. Many who participate in PEERS' programs and services are reluctant to access other social services, and many say we are the only place they feel safe and accepted. The people who have accessed our services tell us they have had their lives dramatically affected by PEERS in a profound and positive way.

PEERS is a registered Canadian Charity. Most of our funding is provincial, and the rest is contributed by charitable foundations, the local Health Authority, local service groups, faith communities, and private donors. Our support base is diverse, ranging from local police departments and businesses to a variety of faith-based groups to people who advocate for legalized brothels and the decriminalization of sex work. PEERS stands for human dignity, access to resources, safety from violence, and equal justice before the law. Whatever their stripes, our supporters stand with us as we advocate for and ensure these core human needs and rights are met.

Reports follow from each of our board committees and from each of our staffed programs detailing the outstanding efforts of the entire PEERS team. It is a compelling demonstration of their dedication to unconditional care and support. In 2011, between our Day and Night Outreach programs, our Elements program, and our Drop-In program, PEERS assisted approximately 515 people who specifically needed our peer-based supports.

I am honoured to serve alongside the PEERS staff, board, volunteers, and donors, as we work together towards increased safety, justice, equity, and wellness in our community.

Co-Chairs' Report, 2011

Respectfully submitted by Rachel Phillips and Susan Strega

Leadership

We begin by reporting on one of our most significant tasks of 2011, our leadership search. In late June of last year, Jody Paterson accepted a leadership contract with PEERS to help us navigate upcoming changes to the British Columbia Employment Service Model and hire a new Executive Director. Among many other activities, Jody led a consultation with staff and board about the skills and qualities we were looking for in an Executive Director. The results of this consultation were really helpful in updating our job description and job posting with a shared vision of leadership for the organization. We would like to thank Erin Gibson, formerly of AIDS Vancouver Island, who joined our hiring committee as a community partner and brought a very valued perspective and much insight.

We interviewed several excellent candidates for the position, and selected Marion Little because she brought extensive knowledge of the local service sector, leadership experience, commitment to collaborative processes, and passion for inclusive citizenship models.

Appreciation

We thank Jody again for working with us during the leadership transition and for her ongoing passion for PEERS and the people who form the PEERS community. As many of you know, Jody received an honorary doctorate from the University of Victoria this year for her outstanding commitment to social justice, including notably her advocacy work regarding improved conditions and services for those in the sex industry. She more than deserved the honorary degree and in her acceptance speech she reminded everyone that social justice work is not the work of heroes and saints, but the work of a collective and worker bees – people who show up and lend a hand. There are many such people at PEERS that we recognize today.

We would like to thank the 2011 Board: Hannah Rabinovitch, Cathy Tremain, Sinead Charbonneau, Caitlin Janzen, Amita Vulimiri, Brad Weldon, Candace McKivett, Rusty Russell, Lisa Ordell, and Tracie Fawkes. We would especially like to thank Cathy Tremain, who resigned from her position as treasurer after five dedicated years, for her hard work and for keeping us on track.

We thank our funders and the many people who donated to PEERS this year, both financially and those who have gifted us with their time. PEERS could not operate without the donors who help us stretch our bare bones budget. We are also grateful for the many volunteers who clean, make lunches, fix things, provide computer support, pick up donations, and do so much more to enrich PEERS, and we want to express our very deep appreciation the many hours they give.

We thank our contractors. Marie Fournier, our Book-Keeper not only patiently attends to our financial management but, as someone who has been with the organization for many years, she also plays a significant role in keeping our institutional memory. We were also very fortunate to have Edie Dittman work with us over the last year. Edie has a wealth of administrative skills and experience and worked hard to help us get organized.

Last but not least, we thank the staff of PEERS. During our leadership search, the board had the opportunity to spend many hours involved in the day to day operations of PEERS and to do a lot of planning work in joint staff/board face to face meetings. The PEERS staff is a small, but very dedicated, knowledgeable, and resourceful, group and it was a privilege to work together. We look forward to more opportunities to jointly plan for the future development of PEERS.

The year ahead

In the coming year, our work will continue to be guided by some goals we set during some of last year's many meetings.

- We will continue to build our collaborative relationships and partnerships.
- We will continue to deliver talks and workshops to promote up to date knowledge about issues in the sex industry and the work of PEERS.
- We will reorganize service delivery to meet the current funding climate and seek new sources of funding to match our evolving knowledge of service needs among our clients.

It is no secret that, in common with many other health and social service providers, PEERS is extremely challenged by the current funding climate. Like other employment bridging programs in the province, we are also challenged by the administrative burdens imposed on us by the Ministry of Social Development when the government decided that all major contracts for employment services for the most challenged British Columbians should be shifted to a fee-for-service model, and awarded to for-profit businesses, leaving organizations like PEERS to operate as sub-contractors. The challenges are further compounded by an unwieldy computerized case management and billing system.

While 2012 will be a challenging year, we have every confidence that our great staff, committed volunteers and hard-working board will once again pull together. We look forward to working with you all.

Finance Committee & Treasurer's Report, 2011

Committee Members: Candace McKivett, Hannah Rabinovitch, Marion Little (ex officio)

Treasurer: Candace McKivett

PEERS, like many grassroots nonprofits, has faced immense financial challenges over the last few years with annual budget contractions due to the current funding climate for charitable agencies serving our most vulnerable community members. In 2011, the PEERS budget once again contracted from its 2010 figures, which the board and staff responded to by strategic staff and program changes. Despite these challenges, PEERS finished the 2011 fiscal year end on target, and with a small surplus.

In 2011, after our former Executive Director's term ended, the Board of Directors decided not to hire a new ED immediately. Instead, we chose to first undergo a period of internal reflection and assessment to determine what the organization needed. Being without a full-time ED for 8 months was a challenge administratively for staff, but also allowed a significant cost savings to the organization in 2011, despite the addition of two contract workers, and this contributed to finishing year-end with a balanced budget.

As we look ahead to next year's finances, a looming issue has already emerged on the horizon. The main funding change is that we no longer hold a contract directly with MSD for our Elements program and Drop-In Centre. 3 years ago or so, we received approximately \$30,000 per month to provide our Elements program and the accompanying Drop-In services. This figure has steadily decreased with accompanying staff and support cuts to the program. We now hold sub-contracts with 3 local employment agencies who have committed between them to provide us with a total of \$6000 per month during a 6 month transitional period which ends in September. After that, we will only receive income on a fee per service basis, and we will only be able to bill out for each service (ex. anger management workshop) once in each year-long billing period. This does not serve the best interest of our clients.

PEERS, along with many other non-profit subcontractors, has had significant trouble with the Integrated Case Management (ICM) system introduced by the Ministry of Social Development for billing purposes. We, and at least 3 other local non-profits serving vulnerable populations, have not yet been able to bill successfully for any of the services provided since the ICM system went live in April 2012. As such, after three months, we still have no sense of whether this new funding system will be feasible for maintaining the program.

Human Resources Committee Report, 2011

Committee Members: Sinead Charbonneau, Susan Strega, Amita Vulimiri, Brad Weldon

The HR Committee has had a busy and productive year after welcoming Marion Little as PEERS's new Executive Director in 2011.

In consultation with Marion and the PEERS staff, the HR committee has been working on developing new policies and updating existing policies and practices to continue strengthening the work environment and service delivery practices at PEERS. There has been a focus on organizing development and wellness activities for all the staff, as well as creating a 'workplace climate' document which concretely lists the elements and actions which staff collectively agree foster a respectful workplace environment.

The HR Committee has worked with PEERS staff and clients to obtain feedback on Marion's performance as Executive Director for her 6 month performance evaluation. Staff and client feedback has been very positive. The HR Committee prepared and presented an evaluation report to Marion in May 2012. The HR Committee has also been working on updating hiring policies in consultation with PEERS board and staff - new outreach workers were hired this year, and we are preparing to hire a new executive assistant to assist Marion with administrative duties. The HR Committee is committed to continue building a more supportive and inclusive workplace at PEERS, and is looking forward to working on additional collaborative activities with Marion and the PEERS staff in the new year.

Fundraising Committee Report, 2011

Committee Members: Rachel Phillips, Caitlin Janzen, Scott Vannan, and Tracie Fawkes

Fundraising at PEERS went well this year with several great fundraisers and ongoing help from our generous donors. In 2011, PEERS ran fundraising events including the Victoria Idol competitions, the Vicki Reynolds education event, and the Hot Pink Show featuring the Cheesecake Burlesque Revue.

In total we raised \$25,899 dollars through these events. We would like to thank the staff, contractors and volunteers who worked very hard to organize these events.

PEERS also raised \$23,770 dollars in donations from individual and corporate donors and we give a heartfelt thanks to these individuals and groups.

The Fundraising Committee has a number of goals this upcoming year. After many successful years, we have decided to reinvent our major fundraiser, Victoria Idol and propose something equally fun and exciting. We would like to thank all the producers and volunteers who made Victoria Idol so successful for many years. With the help of Scott Vannan, a local real estate agent, we will also be developing our fundraising plan, thinking about new ways to connect with donors and how to best share the important work PEERS does with all members of the community. We are really looking forward to this strategic exercise as we know that the work of PEERS is essential and that our community supports us.

Staff Report: Drop-In, 2011

Staff: Roberta Hunter, Megan Lewis (also Elements), Sarah Stewart (also Elements)

Community Partners: Dr. Valorie Cunningham & Lynne Campbell (Medical Office Assistant)

The PEERS Opportunity Centre provides an unconditionally welcoming drop-in space for people who are, or have been, involved in sex work. We provide breakfast, hot lunches, a computer lab, fresh clothing and household goods (through generous community donations), peer counseling support, harm reduction supplies, bus tickets, referrals to community resources, a pleasant gathering space, and wellness information.

Over the course of the year, our volunteer doctor, Valorie Cunningham, provided medical care to approximately 60 individuals who have no other medical care provider. Valorie has been submitting applications over the past few years to secure funding for a regular clinic here with a paid doctor and assistant to ensure ongoing sustainability. We hope 2012 or 2013 will see these efforts succeed.

In 2011, we provided these services to the 75 Elements program participants as well as approximately 50 individuals who accessed our drop-in services only. In partnership with the Community Social Planning Council, we distributed 2600 bus tickets to Elements participants, Day Outreach clients, Night Outreach clients, and Drop-In Centre visitors.

Quotes from our clients:

"I love it. It just feels good to be here." (Drop-In Client)

"If it weren't for this place and these people, I don't know, I'd probably be dead." (Drop-In Client)

"There's nowhere else I can go and trust I won't be judged. I can just relax here and be myself."
(Drop-In Client)

"I need to know I can come here. It's really bad for me when I can't come in. Being here makes a big difference for me." (Drop-In Client)

Staff Report: Elements Program, 2011

Staff: Megan Lewis and Sarah Stewart

Community Partners: Dvora Levin (poetry group), Heidi Exner (AVI, health & wellness group), Alicia Barauyai (yoga class), Joanne Hauge (knitting group), Kayla Magdalena and Gwynne Waggoner (on-site hair salon)

Overview

Elements is a life skills, trauma response, and pre-employment program that works to highlight participants' strengths and respond to participants' individual goals and needs through workshops, creative projects, and one on one support. We believe in providing practical, useful support that is relevant to people's real lives, and that both acknowledges and critiques the structural barriers (such as poverty, racism, and violence) that our participants face.

There are two groups of people that we work with regularly. The first group includes *Elements* program participants who are enrolled in the 6-month program and who attend classes regularly. The second group is made up of former *Elements* participants who continue to access support services like counseling, employment support, advocacy, referrals, and so on.

Elements Participants

In the first group, enrolled *Elements* participants, we estimate that we served approximately 35 individuals over the course of the year. Most of these participants completed only part of the *Elements* program, attending for a while and then taking other paths as things came up in their lives that they had to shift their attention to. We had four program graduates in 2011, and celebrated with other participants a great number of personal successes that included reconciliation with estranged family members, leaving abusive relationships, moving further ahead on their recovery paths, and discovering skills and abilities they didn't know they had. Participants reflecting on the program say things like: "It helped me finally believe once and for all that I'm strong." Many of the people who join *Elements* do so because of a friend's recommendation; word of mouth is our biggest referral source.

Follow-up Participants

In the second group, follow up participants, we estimate we served approximately 40 individuals. We are very proud of the ongoing relationships we have made and maintained and of our reputation as being a reliable source of information and support for members of our community. We often hear people say things like: "I didn't know what to do, but I knew if I came to Peers you'd help me figure it out" when they are at critical junctures in their lives.

Highlights from 2011

- The publishing, in collaboration with Rock Bay Landing writers, of an anthology of poetry written by participants (and a cd recording of the poetry), many of whom believed that they couldn't write poetry until they did so. The anthology was nominated for this year's Monday Magazine Best of the City prize under the 'best poetry book' category.
- Several *Elements* participants and staff taking centre stage to perform in *The Vagina Monologues*, a fundraiser for Peers.
- A trip for 14 out to the waters off of San Juan Island to watch orcas play, courtesy of Prince of Whales Whale Watching, last August.

Staff Report: Day Outreach, 2011

Staff: Liza Slavica

Community Partners: BC Housing, Streets to Homes, Pacifica Housing, Cool Aid, CASH, and Our Place

Overview

Day Outreach ensures critical supports for sex workers (past or present) by providing counseling, transportation, accompaniment, systems navigation, and advocacy. Core areas include access to housing, medical care, and community resources. 62 people accessed Day Outreach in 2011.

Housing Support "Having home security and steady income has helped tremendously" (Day Outreach Client) In 2011, PEERS provided 14 housing subsidies per month, through BC Housing, so clients were able to keep affordable, stable homes. We also provided emergency funds for a further 23 clients to ensure housing or avert eviction, often in partnership with other agencies. The main focus of housing support work is finding and maintaining safe, stable, affordable housing for those facing homelessness or unstable housing. Among other support activities, this involves contacting potential landlords, viewing apartments, finding financial resources for damage deposits and rent, as well as assistance moving into new homes. This also includes assistance navigating eviction and arbitration/ residential tenancy act concerns. Our clients say, "Coping with crises is something I'm still working on, but all challenges in my life are becoming easier" and, "Staying in a quality apartment building, not on the street or a cheap motel, automatically gives me pride and more confidence."

Medical Assistance and Medical Appointments

Many clients are medically vulnerable and rely on support and transportation to meet their health and medical needs. Day Outreach provides referral for medical care, accompaniment to clinics/ specialists/ pharmacy, hospital visits, rides to hospital, support with detox, and assistance accessing dental care. Once or twice a month, clients' cherished pets may also require a visit to the vet. Day Outreach provides rides and assistance with this too!

Community Support and Advocacy

PEERS Day Outreach collaborates with many community services to ensure client access to necessary resources. Many clients were assisted through advocacy for supports needed from the Ministry of Social Development and from the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Help was also given to secure I.D., clothing, and food, as well as transportation for appointments (car-rides, bus tickets, and taxi vouchers).

The greatest success for Day Outreach is witnessing new connections with our community and reduced isolation. It has been fantastic to move people into new homes, to help them get to counseling appointments, to bring them to the Drop-In Centre to see Dr. Val, and to make sure they have a fridge full of food when their kids come home from school. The intangible results of Day Outreach work are the most rewarding: seeing increased personal strength, self-esteem, self-confidence, and empowerment in the clients. Success can best be measured through improved health and quality of life (reduced crisis state; reduced anxiety; improved understanding of emotions; strengthened coping skills). A client aptly describes this experience herself, "I feel safe enough to look forward instead of being stuck". This includes healthier nutrition, physical exercise and sleep, increased healthy friendships and healthy social interactions; increased creative exploration and expression, "I find myself testing my interests and just 'going for it'".

Eloquently, a Day Outreach client reflects this saying, "I am work in progress - I'll never give up". She articulates the increased hope and possibility all 65 clients have expressed over the past year.

Staff Report: Night Outreach, 2011

Staff: Kelly Ransome, Theresa Riggs, Liza Slavica, Brittney Curran, Tammy Arnault, Kristine Porter, Dave Macmain

Community Partners: Shelby Munk (VIHA Street Nurse), Betty Poag (VIHA Public Health Nurse), Dr. Valorie Cunningham (PEERS Medical Clinic), VicPD Special Victims Unit (Todd Wellman, Kevin Lastiwka, Sue Law, and Sandi Begg), and VicPD Beat Team (Lisa Forcier and Nick Kreiger)

Overview

The Night Outreach Team provides a mobile drop-in centre for sex workers on the Victoria stroll (Discovery St, Government St., and Rock Bay Ave). We also make scheduled visits to supportive housing and local shelters. Our team ensures an unconditional space where sex workers can find counselling, regular meals, harm reduction supplies, referrals to other community agencies, peer support, and a safe place to share stories. Recently, we have made tremendous progress in helping client's access service to Victoria Detox. In the event of a bad date or other assault, our team provides hospital transportation and accompaniment. We also provide support when making a statement to the Special Victims Unit.

An important service PEERS provides to sex workers, and to the wider community, is the Bad Date Sheet. This documents up-to-date information about violent or abusive customers every time harm is reported to us. In 2011, the Bad Date Sheet was condensed into one page, as opposed to multiple pages, keeping the most recently reported bad dates in the forefront. We distribute the Bad Date Sheet to other community agencies around town, such as: Rock Bay Landing, Sandi Merriman House, Aids Vancouver Island, Victoria AIDS Resource & Community Service Society, Solid, VicPD, and Our Place. In 2012 we hope to distribute this important document more widely in the community.

Night Outreach has built stronger relationships with the VicPD Special Victims Unit (SVU). This has led to arrests and convictions of dangerous violent offenders who have committed crimes against sex workers. Because of their involvement and these arrests, our clients are safer. Alongside Todd, Kevin, Sue and Sandi, we continue to support an increasingly positive relationship between sex workers and local police, where both are treated with courtesy and sex workers are protected from violence. We have also formed new relationships with the VicPD Beat Team. The respectful presence of Lisa and Nick on stroll has increased people's trust in reporting bad dates. PEERS plays a key role in bridging the gap between sex workers and law enforcement, which has helped keep our clients safer.

Night outreach has gone through staffing changes and policy re-writing over the past year. It's been hectic at times, but we have come through it all with a strong team whose goal is to provide the best possible service. We are very proud to have banded together through all the changes over the year, and are moving forward in solidarity to provide excellent service to our clients.

Quotes from our clients

"If it wasn't for you guys, I would starve."

"I hate Mondays, because you guys aren't out and I don't get to eat."

"I didn't know I could catch STI's from unprotected oral sex."

"I would be dead right now if you had not advocated for me to get treatment."

2011 Night Outreach Summary

Approximately 325 individuals accessed the Night Outreach RV in 2011. We provided:

4812 Counselling Sessions

1217 Referrals (150 Mental Health/ Addictions, 802 Social Services, 265 Health Care HIV/HCV)

708 Participants at educational events for the wider community

Research Report Excerpts: Night Outreach Survey, Nov. 2011

Research completed by the Night Outreach Team in collaboration with Hannah Rabinovitch and Dr. Rachel Phillips, Centre for Addictions Research of BC

*Based on 20 respondents

Demographics

Average age: 38 years

Gender: 100% Female

Education: average level achieved, Grade 9 (89% had not completed high school)

11% reported some college or university training

22% reported some trade school training

30% identify as First Nations

60% identify as a person with a disability

85% had visited the PEERS office

80% reported being recipient of income assistance (1 person had applied, but was denied)

Sex Industry

60% entered the sex industry before age 19

75% indicated they are currently working in the sex trade

14.7 years: average number of years in the sex industry

1 out of 20 indicated "sometimes" regarding having a pimp (26% reported ever having a pimp)

Health

Greatest health concerns: Hep C, HIV, pregnancy, aches and pains from living outdoors, cardiovascular problems, Multiple Sclerosis, dying, weight, infection

75% reported ever having a bad date

55% reported the bad date to someone

30% had a bad date during 2011 (all reported that bad date)

90% have seen a doctor in the past six months

70% reported they have a doctor they can see whenever they need to

28% reported a time when they needed a doctor in the past 6 months, but couldn't access one

40% have been to Emergency in the past six months

56% have been tested for blood borne infection in the past 6 months

78% have been tested for sexually transmitted infections in the past 6 months

11% reported sharing a needle or cooking equipment in the past 6 months

33% reported reusing a needle in the past 6 months

67% reported sharing a crack pipe in the past 6 months

22% reported being pressured into having unprotected sex in the past six months

Changes respondents would like to see in health care services:

- Accommodations and better treatment
- Not being judged and being treated with dignity (especially regarding addictions)
- More service
- If you know your Personal Health Number that should be enough to access services (as opposed to producing a Care Card)
- Nicer nurses
- Easier access to doctor and to a dentist
- Easier access to prescriptions.

Being treated with dignity, courtesy, and without judgement, appeared as repetitive themes throughout the research findings.

Needs

75% said "I'd like to get find another way to earn money other than the sex industry"

15% said "I want to continue in the sex industry but need other kinds of support"

50% said "If there was a detox and treatment bed available right now, I'd take it"

55% said "I live in crappy housing and really need to move"

25% said "I live in shelters and on people's couches; I really need a place of my own"

85% said "I need help in a lot of small ways to get my life on track"

20% said "I need help connecting with my kids, who are in the care of someone else"

5% said "I'm having a baby and want help with substance use"

10% said "I am in an abusive relationship and need help with what to do"

Heartfelt thanks to our dedicated 2011 volunteers!

Board members

Rachel Phillips, Susan Strega, Hannah Rabinovitch, Cathy Tremain, Sinead Charbonneau, Caitlin Janzen, Amita Vulimiri, Brad Weldon, Candace McKivett, Rusty Russell, Lisa Ordell, and Tracie Fawkes

Program Volunteers

Dvora Levin (Poetry Group), Alicia Barauyai (Yoga Class), Joanne Hauge (Knitting), Dr. Valorie Cunningham (Medical Doctor), Lynn Campbell (Medical Assistant), Muriel DeGreef (Hot Lunch), Jeffrey Errick (Hot Lunch), Monika Josok (Hot Lunch), Meghan Revsinig (Hot Lunch), Betty Rudge (Hot Lunch), Jennifer Young (Hot Lunch)

Operational Volunteers

Patrice Snopkowski (Website), Jill Aschenbrenner (Computer Tech. Support), Jill Bates-Smith (Donation Delivery), Gloria Hoepfner (Mustard Seed Food Bank Delivery), Frank Rudge (Building Maintenance and Repairs), Brad Webster (Auto Repairs)

Seasonal Volunteers

Saanich Baptist Church (Spring Cleaning)

Fundraising Volunteers

The Victoria Idol Team, The Vagina Monologues Team, and the fabulous Cheesecake Burlesque Revue

Deep gratitude to our hard-working 2011 staff & contractors!

Sarah Stewart, Megan Lewis, Liza Slavica, Roberta Hunter, Kelly Ransome, Theresa Riggs, Brittney Curran, Tammy Arnault, Kristine Porter, Dave Macmain, Marcella Mrnka, Jody Paterson, Edie Dittman, Marie Fournier