



# peers

Victoria  
Resource Society

## Down but not out: Major changes at PEERS

The PEERS Board of Directors regrets to announce that PEERS has had to close our daytime employment program, Elements, and the day-time drop-in program associated with it. However, our outreach services continue.

Elements has been part of our service continuum in various forms for over 15 years. Originally supported by both federal and provincial funding, for almost a decade Elements has been funded exclusively by the B.C. Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation.

Much has changed over the years, including the consolidation of employment programs. Contracts are now held primarily by larger employment agencies that subcontract to smaller non-profit agencies such as PEERS. We have struggled with a fee-for-service model as a means to serve our specialized client group.

While the staff and board made strenuous and dedicated efforts to accommodate these changes over the past year, it has proven too difficult. We will continue to search for alternate funding to restart daytime programs. **(Please turn**

**inside for more, including letters from our clients.)**

These changes are a devastating blow for the PEERS community and a crucial loss to our service continuum, staff, and the clients who have utilized PEERS.

We know both anecdotally and from research that peer-led services like ours are essential for current and former sex workers, many of whom are unable to access other support due to the stigma and discrimination associated with involvement in the sex industry.

In this difficult time, we are grateful that our Day and Night Outreach programs are secured by funding from the United Way, Vancouver Island Health Authority, Province of BC and individual and corporate donors. PEERS provides essential services to a large and diverse group of clients through these programs, and will continue.

Your support of our work has never mattered more. PEERS is committed to redeveloping its service continuum in a manner that furthers our commitment to support that represents the diverse needs and experiential perspectives of people in and from the sex industry.

### *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 @  
<http://www.peers.bc.ca/donate.html>

Visit us at:  
[www.peers.bc.ca](http://www.peers.bc.ca)

## The dream: \$300,000 a year would fund a new day program for PEERS

For 10 years now, PEERS has had much of its daytime drop-in services and group programs funded through a fee-for-service model. Basically, it's a system of pay similar to the way auto mechanics and many medical services are funded: By the "piece," whether that piece is a new carburetor, a new heart, or an element of an employment-training program.

There's nothing wrong with fee-for-service in general, but it's a tough system for populations that are working their way out of complex problems, particularly when payments are small and don't take into account the need for intense services. PEERS has faced growing financial difficulties trying to meet increasingly stringent fee-for-service contracts that are simply not a good fit for people struggling with mental health issues, addiction, trauma, disability and stigma.

So we are giving that contract up after all these years, and facing a very much changed immediate future as a result. We are devastated for the loss of our daytime drop-in and group programs, and want to assure the community that our day and night outreach services are still securely funded. But there is little time for mourning when so many vulnerable people continue to need our help, so PEERS very quickly needs to move on to the business of finding alternate sources of funding for daytime drop-in and group work. We know from

previous years that \$300,000 a year would fund: Group work for people going through difficult times (read our client letters on pages 4-5 to understand how important that is); two support workers who also help out our outreach staff, group work; a hot lunch and weekly Beauty Day for any past/current sex workers who want to come; and half of our administrative costs.

So that's the dream. We're looking for proposal possibilities, partnership opportunities, grants, and individual supporters so we can provide the drop-in, crisis response, medical clinic, police liaison, food and more that we know are so vital to the people who use PEERS services.

We're hoping you'll help us in any way you can: Donations; tips on funding opportunities or government programs; community connections; individual support.

PEERS has come back from many crises over the years. We are survivors. But we are deeply troubled by no longer having daytime drop-in space and group work/support for our clients. We don't want to be in this situation any longer than we have to.



### RIGHTS MARCH

*PEERS and our allies organized our first ever Sex Workers' Rights are Human Rights solidarity march on June 8 to show public support for three Canadian sex workers – Terry Bedford, Lebovitch and Scott - in their courageous fight against Canada's unjust prostitution laws.*

*The march brought out sex workers, community supporters, and MP Randall Garrison, as well as speakers including Dr. Fran Shaver (Concordia University) and PEERS board member Lisa Ordell.*

*Almost 3 years have passed since sex workers and their allies celebrated Justice Himel's landmark ruling Sept 28, 2010 that would strike down three major Criminal Code of Canada provisions. Those provisions result in high levels of violence and undermine the human rights of sex workers. The judge ruled that these laws violate the right to liberty and security that is guaranteed in Section 7 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Himel's decision states that the harm done to sex workers through the criminalization of prostitution outweighs any harm done to the community.*

*This decision, appealed by the Attorney General, was the impetus for the case heard this past June. PEERS acting executive director Lauren Casey was on hand in Ottawa for this monumental event.*

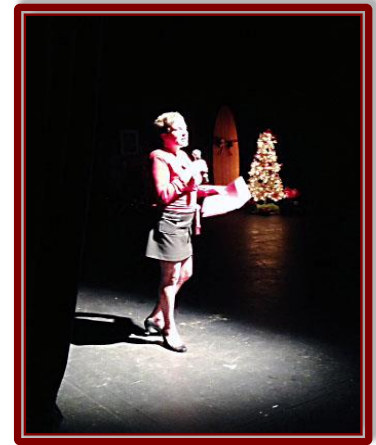
## Dear Friends: A Message From Executive Director Marion Little

It has been a very challenging year for us. However, the fact that we closed our 2012 books with a balanced budget and continued to operate into 2013 is a testament to the resilience and resourcefulness of our staff, board, volunteers, and program participants.

Thank you for the incredible outpouring of support and encouragement we've received. I'm confident that 800 PEERS Champions will step forward and commit \$20/month to help re-open our drop-in centre. I'm also confident that the provincial government will re-assign us to a portfolio and/or a ministry that will guarantee core funding in keeping

with the concluding recommendations of Wally Oppal's 2012 report "Forsaken."

I trust my beating heart. I trust that every time it contracts, it will expand again to nourish and support the precious life in my body. I trust that while PEERS is in the midst of an unexpectedly severe contraction, the community will rush in to ensure the necessary expansion. I trust that we as a community are committed to maintaining the healthy heart-beat of PEERS, and the precious life of every community member who needs our services. We can do this. We *will* re-open our drop-in centre doors in January. I invite you to be



part of both the effort and the celebration.

*(Photo: Marion at a Cheesecake Burlesque Revue fundraiser.)*

## PEERS in brief: The colour purple; a fond farewell

### Shades of Violet

A new peer-run support group at AIDS Vancouver Island is helping former PEERS Elements clients find a new way to connect with and support each other.

Violet is a peer run drop-in for sex workers held in the "cafe" at AVI, which donates the space every Wednesday from 2-4 p.m. The brand-new drop-in is informal but already a favourite for the sex workers who can no longer connect through the cancelled Elements program. Participants do a check-in, share a meal, and talk. We're grateful we've been able to use revenue from a fundraiser and a generous private donation to cover the cost of food and bus tickets.

While the group is barely 2 months old, participants are already volunteering to take turns as facilitators on a particular day. They're also talking about organizing clothing donations – maybe you've got some gently used

clothes you'd like to donate to a great cause?

\*\*\*\*

### Day/Night Outreach

PEERS day and night outreach teams continue to provide vital support to the region's sex workers, with services that span the majority of the week from 9 a.m. to 11 p.m.. We hope you'll get a chance soon to meet our new daytime outreach worker, Kristine Allard, who works 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays helping people find housing, connect to other services, access addiction services and resolve problems involving their children in government care.

Our night outreach team works 6:30 to 11 p.m. in two locations on stroll, bringing food, a helping hand, condoms and more in a mobile service led by workers with personal experiences of the issues faced by our clients. Donations of clothes, makeup, new underwear

and warmer clothes for the coming winter are most welcome.

\*\*\*

### Come for dinner!

Our staff and volunteer appreciation dinner is Sept. 12 at Prima Strada's Bridge Street location. Come along and applaud some terrific people! Please RSVP before the 12<sup>th</sup> to [admin@peers.bc.ca](mailto:admin@peers.bc.ca). See you there!

\*\*\*

### Bye, Dr. Val and Lynne!

PEERS extends heartfelt appreciation and gratitude to Dr. Valerie Cunningham and her medical assistant Lynne Campbell. Dr. Val has provided volunteer medical care to PEERS participants for the past 7 years. Her professionalism, generosity of spirit, compassion, and courtesy have been profound gifts. Lynne, has assisted with medical files and intake procedures, and her care and consideration have been great gifts. We wish them the very best.



# How is the loss of Elements and our drop-in affecting our participants?

Poignant letters from our clients on losing these vital services

I am a person with mental illness. I am on permanent disability. I have had issues with proper social interaction. I have been to Conflict resolution programs because of my behaviours. I have tried to do other programs but don't make it through the interview, mostly because I feel most people lie or dissociate or false advertise but I tell the truth. No bullshit here.

PEERS is the only program that I actually fit in and am accepted in, as quirky and different as I am. I do not use drugs or really party. PEERS helps me find me. It also helps me learn. These are some things that I have personally learned at PEERS: Treat people the way you want to be treated; any behaviours that I have that need to be changed to better myself and I don't change are insane behaviours. They taught me respect of myself and others. I learned communication skills and skills to express my feelings. I also learn about patterns and what I can do to change them. Identifying our problems is the key that allows us to change.

With PEERS closing, how can I learn to change and grow when I do not fit in any other program? PEERS is a unique program that turns no one away, even when no one else wants you. These staff members are special and unique and deal with many people on a broad spectrum of issues, most having mental health issues.



PEERS volunteers are the best!

*Every time I've come here since it has been closing, I been really sad. I feel different about PEERS. Also it was a good place to vent. It helped me with problems and finished my probation order to come here. I really sad that I won't be able to come here for the great food and company. Plus it help me get my Wal-Mart cards to get food at the end of the month. Please think about not closing the PEERS program.*

*When I first started going to PEERS I was a broken shell of a girl. I had just had my children removed because of drug use and because of an ex who beat me over and over, which left my children traumatized. I had lost all hope for life and spent many months in the mental hospital because I kept trying to end my life. The first few weeks at PEERS I was a closed-off and very detached person. I would freeze with anxiety just from being around people. As time went on I felt more and more safe and started to wake up every morning excited to go to class. I made friends. My life today is so much better and I have my children back and am free from drugs. This place closing makes me so sad because there are so many women out there who need the help and support to thrive. I pray someday you will open again.*

*At first I was in shock, then a little disturbed and upset and worried and wondering what I was going to do to keep myself in routine. Worried that my depression will set in without having some routine and friendship I have through PEERS. Then I wanted to go find Christie Clark and wring her neck or make her aware of the loss!!!! She could do something for votes – could we petition the government to reopen or petition government for funds to reopen???? This should have never happened in Vancouver and it shouldn't be happening here! People are suffering. This is one of the best programs I have ever been to – and I have been to a lot. This program is a form of treatment that works!!!*

*I am 23 years old and am strong and healthy. I have PEERS to thank for that. Three years ago as a vulnerable escort, I was a victim of domestic abuse, sexual violence and was doing sex work 70 hours a week. I was broken. Sent from Victim Services, I made an intake appointment to begin attending PEERS. I was so nervous, I was afraid of being judged. Then I met Sarah. She was the counsellor and intake worker. She was very comforting and reassuring. She told me Elements was a program to support me while I was in the sex trade as well as help me transition out of it. I was reassured that the women were very welcoming and that everything shared in Elements was confidential.*

*The Elements program changed my life! Meeting other woman who had quit working in the sex trade really motivated me. The structure of coming to classes really helped me. Through worksheets, check-in and counsellor-led classes, I worked through my trauma and addiction. I found the group setting really helped me feel a part of something. Hearing women's stories that were similar to mine, I knew I wasn't alone. I knew my feelings were normal. We girls in*

*Elements became like a family. We consoled while maintaining healthy boundaries. PEERS taught me boundaries.*

*In the past, I had been through lots of therapy. I found I didn't get the same kind of healing. I couldn't open up the same as being at PEERS. At PEERS, like the name, everyone is a peer. I knew that the counsellors and other women, clients or staff had "been there, done that." It was the first time ever I had felt understood. PEERS helped me to recover from my post-traumatic stress disorder. I had survived a near-death experience. The counsellors helped me work it out and walked me through the court process. They also came with me to court. When I was afraid to leave my home, a counsellor transported me to and from PEERS to keep me safe. PEERS not only helped me with my emotional needs, but also my physical. I was taught safety precautions to keep me free from STDs and unsafe clients. They provided me with a "black list" of all dangerous clients to avoid. They provided me with a female doctor who made STD tests and other checkups comfortable and thorough. She never rushed me, and I felt safe in the comfort of PEERS. It always provided basic needs – a*

*nutritious hot meal daily and when I didn't have groceries (or the money to buy them), PEERS would send me home with a care package.*

*I always looked forward to Friday, Beauty Day. We girls were pampered with haircuts, manicures and massages, making us feel beautiful and helping our self-esteem. All of these were done by professionals. I was also welcome to help myself to the clothing room. Today I think of all the skills and abilities I have learned and taken from PEERS, and they help me each day.*

*At PEERS I attended poetry classes, where my poems were published in two books. It helped my self-esteem enormously. I also learned yoga and knitting, which will help me for the rest of my life. They help me through tough times.*

*To whoever reads this, I hope you have a better understanding of the importance of PEERS. It has saved my life. I am distraught that my safe haven is being taken from me. I need PEERS. The love, support, safety and resource is a necessity for Victoria. Please, please reconsider.*

# peers

VICTORIA RESOURCE SOCIETY

#1--744 Fairview Rd,

Victoria, BC

250.388.5325



Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

PEERS Victoria Resources Society

1-744 Fairview Rd

Victoria, BC V9A 5T9

Tel: 250-388-5325

E-mail: [finance@peers.bc.ca](mailto:finance@peers.bc.ca)

**\*\*You have certain recourse rights if any debit does not comply with this agreement.**

**For example, you 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 your recourse rights, contact your financial institution or visit [www.cdnpay.ca](http://www.cdnpay.ca).**

**PEERS is deeply grateful for the many members of the community who are rallying around us with encouragement and support at this time. Many thanks!**