

1-744 FAIRVIEW  
ROAD, VICTORIA  
BC V9A 5T9  
250-388-5325

# PEERS



## Thanks to:

Dr. Cunningham

Board of Directors

ADM's committee  
on prostitution and  
gaming

BC Housing

Canadian Women's  
Foundation

City of Victoria

Coast Capital  
Savings

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Victoria Foundation

United Way

And all our other  
supporters



ISSUE 3

NOVEMBER 2007

**Prostitutes Empowerment Education and Resource Society**  
**Supporting people involved in the sex trade since 1995**  
**(250) 388-5325 fax: (250) 388-5324**

## PEERS Mission Statement

PEERS is a non-profit society established by ex-prostitutes and community supporters. We are dedicated to the empowerment, education and support of prostitutes. We respect those involved in prostitution and we work to improve their safety and working conditions. We assist individuals who desire to leave the sex industry and strive to increase public understanding. We are dedicated to continuing our work to create a safe, respectful and healthy environment for those with a history of sex trade work.



## VICTORIA IDOL

The Re/Max Victoria Idol Auditions have been rolling along with 70 candidates vying for the prestigious spots at the Final Show Jan. 19 at Alix Golden Hall. Jody Paterson and her team of volunteers are working hard to make this yet another resounding success. Tickets are available at all Thrifty Foods stores south of Mill Bay and at the door. Buy in advance as the finals

sell out each year.

## PEERS VOLUNTEERS

Many thanks to our committed volunteers who coordinate Elements' hot lunches, Outreach sandwiches and grocery shopping. Our volunteers also contribute their valuable time to Victoria Idol preparing flyers, selling tickets working long hours at the many venues. They always have kind words and smiles along with endless compassion.



**This is a season of family and community sharing.  
Give graciously and be kind to each other!**



Donate to PEERS on-line through Canada Helps! Click 'Donate Now' at [www.peers.bc.ca](http://www.peers.bc.ca)



**Tracy Fawkes**  
'Behind Closed Doors' Project

## A Shout Out to Friends of PEERS

Our clients are the recipients of generous donations from many services in Victoria. This season the retail outlet, **Winners**, is highlighted in recognition of their weekly donations of clothing, bedding, toiletries and much much more.



PEERS is going to thank its' donors at our **Spring Gala** March 10, 2008 at the Victoria Events Centre on Broad St. The **CheeseCake Burlesque** will be putting on a show and PEERS will be selling our debut CD from our songwriting workshops facilitated here at PEERS.

## What's New At PEERS

This Fall our FASD National Networking Project began. This exciting project will see the implementation of developing working groups across Canada in order to develop innovative strategies for addressing FAS and sex work.

We also have one year of funding for a project in Family Group Conferencing (FGC) which is helping us create a model for FGC with our Mom's who are in conflict with the MCFD.

Collaborative Care Homes project—run by Tracey Pawson.

Dr. Cunningham is our onsite doctor every Wednesday afternoon, available for clients if needed.

16 Step Program run by Marcela Mrnka on Mondays 3:30 to 6:30pm.

The Behind Closed Doors Project started in Spring 2007, 50 interviews were conducted and the coordinator Tracie Fawkes has now established a working relationship with Agency owners and sparked interest for the indoor workers to either attend Peers or volunteer. As a result of the interviews we know 'in-reach' services are needed and wanted by agencies and their workers.

**1-888-PEERSBC**

## *A Message from our new Executive Director*



**"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."  
Martin Luther King Jr.**

Some of you may have noticed this quote on my email. It speaks to me of the need we all have here at PEERS to ensure that we are not silenced by power over paradigms and well intentioned ideologies. It would appear that this sentiment hit home very strongly at our Annual General Meeting last week where we had 7 experiential women stand for election to our Board. We now have 10 experiential women out of 15 directors on the board.

Now some of you may not realize, but PEERS is in the unique position of having a constitution that allows employees to be Board members. This means that 5 of PEERS staff are now on my Board. I think this is what we mean by grassroots. Congratulations to all the women who work so tirelessly for our society and for those who chose to invest further in the work of assisting former and present sex workers.

In the 4 months I have been here, PEERS has taken on two new programs; Family Group Conferencing for our Mom's who have children in care that could benefit by a process of respectful and safe dialogues with MCFD. Jane Dutly M.A.L.T. with the Victoria Dispute Resolution Center is guiding this endeavour and along with our experiential trainee, Theresa Riggs, and the skilled assistance of Elizabeth Miles and Kat, they are developing a model for intervention that we believe will meet the unique needs of women in the sex trade and their children. We will submit proposals based on the success of this initiative.

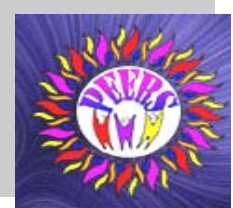
The second is a FASD mother and children Collaborative Care home project. Tracy Pawson B.S.W., R.S.W. has taken on the task of working with our Mom's to develop this project. We have been given funding by the Victoria Foundation to establish 3 trained and supported homes for our FASD moms and their children. Our first placement will take place early in the New Year.

Elements continues to be the cornerstone of our work. Lisa Osbitsch facilitates the program with currently 20 participants. Our two support workers, Imogen Burr and Sarah Schlatter continue to provide the supports required to keep the participants in the program. We have this contract for one more year. It goes out for request for proposals (RFP'S) in January so we will be working diligently to ensure that we are awarded this contract again as it provides the main vehicle by which women and men can exit sex work and secure new employment. Alicia Koorn is our energetic outreach worker and is working hard to bring women into the program and into PEERS.

One of my projects for this coming year, aside from always finding more money, is to work towards an online program. Given the isolated and secret nature of sex work particularly inside work, cyberspace provides an opportunity to reach people all over the world in connecting and creating not just personal growth towards change but communities of sex workers who united, can create the same process of empowerment as PEERS has done in its grassroots formation.

There is always so much to be done here and without our donors and our volunteers and our dedicated staff we could not even begin to address this issue but we do. With your help each and everyday we open the doors for individuals to enter into a process of development and change. Thanks for everything you do for us and remember; what is sent comes back – three fold.

Chris Leischner M.S.W., R.S.W  
Executive Director





**Cheryl Winsor live at the Halifax Forum 'Other Voices' performing 'Stay Down Blues'**

**Cheryl has recently been accepted as the new Executive Officer of the CNCEW**

**Cheryl facilitates 'Songwriting as Therapy' at PEERS**

## A PEERS SUCCESS STORY

### *From Poverty to Professional*

Cheryl Winsor

*"PEERS has done some amazing things for me. When I arrived here in early spring I was what I call a basket case. I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life, or even if I wanted to be alive. Going through the Elements program helped me to sort out my negative feelings and attitudes about myself and I was able to reclaim my focus and pick a direction. I have been moving forward ever since and have been through many changes."*

Before entering the Elements program, Cheryl was employed in sex work off and on for more than twenty-three years. She was raised in foster homes from the age of six months old and was placed in reform school at the age of thirteen, a sexually exploited youth. She has experienced violent abuse and discrimination and has found creative ways to process her past through art and music.

For the last three months she has been working at the reception desk at PEERS after graduating the six months long 'Elements' program. She also graduated from the four month Portfolio Learning Assessment (PLA) course and is eligible for practitioner training and also serves on the PEERS Housing Committee.

She recently attended and was a participant in the very successful Halifax event called 'Other Voices' a forum created to give the experiential voice (first voice) a venue to be heard by government officials, social agencies and legal organizations including police. Cheryl is a social activist, artist and singer/songwriter/producer. She has inspired and encouraged others through creativity with art and music.

Cheryl has recently been appointed the Executive Officer Position for the CNCEW - Canadian Coalition of Experiential Women.

She has also been appointed as co-chair on the Board of Directors of PEERS. As a human rights activist one of the ways she approaches this is through her music with songs like 'Fuck You' a song about violence against women and 'Stay Down Blues', a song about the de-humanization of sex workers.

Cheryl also facilitates the 'Songwriting For Healing' workshop at PEERS starting up again in March 2008.

### Songwriting For Healing

Songwriting For Healing is a workshop designed to express suppressed feelings and is part of the Elements program. It is a safe, fun and creative way to 'vent' emotions and hopefully glean some understanding of oneself in the process.

The group writes the words together and then music is added. Cheryl then records the music on the computer on multi-track software, adds the voices of the group, mixes and then burns a copy for everyone in the group. Participants can later sing along with the recording at home as often as they want.

## **Outreach Needs Your Help**

### **Selected PEERS survey results:**

Most urgent needs:

Food, 79%

Counselling, 73

Housing, 65%

Budgeting, 61%

Addiction treatment, 58%

Mainstream job, 58%

Medical attention, 53%

Help with mental health  
issues, 47%

Advocacy around chil-  
dren in care, 23%

#### **Health concerns:**

Dental problems, 49%

Mental-health diagnosis,  
46%

Hepatitis-C, 28%

Diagnosed learning dis-  
ability, 25%

Diagnosed Fetal Alcohol  
Spectrum Disorder, 16%\*

## **Late-night and Daytime Outreach**

Nightly outreach from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. on Victoria's outdoor prostitu-  
tion stroll. Services offered include needle exchange, condoms,  
food and coffee at our mobile drop-in, as well as referral, advocacy  
and hospital/detox visits. Outreach in the downtown and to support-  
ing agencies Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

**Drop off cash donations Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.,  
at our office at  
1-744 Fairview Road, Esquimalt.**

**Mail cheques to: PEERS Victoria, 1-744 Fairview Road, Victoria,  
BC V9A 5T9**

## **Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) Prevention and Education Services**

PEERS staff facilitate a weekly support group for birth **mothers of  
children with FASD. Contact Jan at 388-5373 for more infor-  
mation.**

### **PEERS National Networking Project Final Report**

This document is the result of a three year national project focus-  
ing on the prevention of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. For  
more information on this project contact Janet Christie at (250)  
388-7940. For information on the FASD Community Circle Soci-  
ety—contact David Gerry at (250) 383-0818.

**[Click here for the final report in PDF format \[364 KB\]](#)**

## **\$\$\$ Scholarship \$\$\$**

Dependent upon funding, PEERS offers scholarship awards to past and current  
sex workers who qualify each year. Applicants must be over 19 years of age  
and demonstrate financial need. Monies are paid directly to the post-secondary  
or training institute that the applicant will be attending. Scholarships paid out  
during 2006 totalled \$3000. Inquire at our main office, or call (250) 388-5325.

## Staff and clients fun stuff



**PEERS  
camping  
trip to  
Gordon  
Bay**



*‘Camping with the staff makes me feel closer to them when I’m in programming.’*

*C.J.*

Staff and clients have been getting together every year for the Annual Camping Experience. This provides a fun opportunity for the clients to connect on a personal level.

## PEERS Annual General Meeting

This year is an exciting year for PEERS. The AGM saw seven experiential women interested in being board members. All seven were elected and the board stands 15 strong. Approximately 25 staff and visitors were at the meeting, where Cheryl Winsor and Marcela Mrynka were elected as co-chairs of the board. Longtime board member Susan Strega gave an overview of 2006 and expressed the gratitude of the board to the staff, volunteers and clients for the hard work they do at PEERS. We said good-bye to another long time board member Suzanne Murphy as she has been with PEERS for 2 years offering her wisdom, time and energy. A moment of silence was observed for the passing of Jannit Rabinovitch, one of PEERS original founders. Several new board members were elected, Dusti Foster, Marcela Mrynka, Theresa Riggs, Tracie Fawkes, Cheryl Winsor and Cathy Tremain. We were treated to an interesting presentation by Leslie Whittaker of the Victoria Police Department and Diane Turner, Attorney General. The next AGM will be Fall 2008.

## Halloween Party 2007

Halloween was full of colorful characters like Mellow as Vaperella and Vickie as a hippie chick! There were prizes in various categories and many Halloween treats.



## The Jannit Rabinovitch Award



Lauren Casey

Congratulations to Lauren Casey for winning her co-workers' votes for this award. To keep Jannit's memory alive this award will be given to the employee most exemplifying Jannit's commitment to PEERS. Lauren has worked on a variety of regional initiatives involving PEERS as well as national organizations committed to the advancement of equality and human rights for sex workers, striving to improve their living and working conditions.

Lauren is a former Executive Director of PEERS as well as designer of the successful 'Dare to Dream' workshop facilitated at PEERS.



## PEERS Board of Directors and Staff

### Meet our Board!

Kelly Czmielewski  
Tracie Fawkes  
Carol Foster  
Sher Knox  
Marcella Mrnka  
Rachel Philips  
Theresa Riggs  
Barb Smith  
Gwen Smith  
Susan Strega  
Rikki Swin  
Gwen Taylor  
Cathy Tremain  
Leslie Whittaker  
Cheryl Winsor  
and a fond good-bye to Suzanne Murphy

### Our Hard Working Staff

Chris Leischner, Executive Director  
Vicki Pilot, Executive Assistant  
Lisa Osbitsch, Elements Coordinator  
Imogen Burr, Support Worker  
Sarah Schlatter, Support Worker  
Alicia Koorn, Outreach Worker  
Tammy Arnault, Outreach Worker  
Cheri Jacobs, Outreach Worker  
Dusti Foster, Outreach Worker  
Theresa Riggs, Outreach Worker  
Monse Vidal, Outreach Worker  
Marie Fournier, Accountant  
Tracey Pawson, Social Worker  
Jane Dutly, Mediator  
Joni Ramsay, Receptionist

