



## POSITIVE OUTCOMES

# Dating, Disclosure, and Criminality

Monique Desroches



Photo  
from  
iStock

Less than a month ago Janet posted about HIV disclosure and criminalization on the PWN blog. It's a complex social justice issue fraught with many, many shades of grey and I'm not going to step foot into that legal labyrinth at this point. I will, however, share my personal struggles with disclosure.

I was diagnosed HIV positive in the spring of 1994. It was so traumatic I can remember the exact time – 12:42pm. The whole day is frozen in a capsule that I tend to pick up and inspect with far less frequency as the years pass. As you can well imagine, it was shocking news and in an attempt to get away from the grief in all my friends' eyes I drove across Canada and set up a new life in Vancouver. I would soon learn the grief came with me, as I only needed to look in the mirror.

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*The thought of disclosing to someone I care about and am interested in being with petrifies me.*

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I made a lot changes to my life in those early years after diagnosis. Most of them were very healthful and empowering. I quit smoking, I engaged in therapy to address a lifetime of abuse, I delved deep into a spiritual discipline, I returned to university and perhaps the most impactful of my choices: I embraced celibacy. I remain celibate today. It has been 18 years.

Initially my choice for celibacy was in reaction to feeling terrified of infecting someone, and so, I closed myself off from any and all physical intimacy. As I began to educate myself about HIV and become more comfortable with the virus I grew more at ease with being positive yet I was still not ready for a physical relationship. As the years passed I settled into celibacy and it stopped being a conscious choice.

The sting of HIV is mostly diminished in my life, but there are times when I am still haunted by it. Last year was one of those times. I was content knowing I would be single the rest of my life and I was certainly not looking for a partnership. You know where this is heading, right? Uh huh. I met someone who blew me away. He took me completely by surprise and all my dormant female hormones sprung into action. My chakras whirled in celebration.

We flirted but never took our attraction anywhere. It was over as fast as it began. Well, nothing between us even began. But I woke up and took notice of a different life! It had been a long time since I had connected to my alluring female energy. My goodness, fully inhabiting my body is amazing. You know what I mean? That amazing feeling of walking down the street with your head held high, with a gentle curve in your back, and your stride long and loose. You know it. The sway of your hips. The rise of your breasts. Blessed be. I love being a woman! I joyfully find myself ready to be with a man again.

And this is where I collide with the fact that I will need to disclose my status to the person I choose to be with. One of the benefits of celibacy is I don't have to tell anyone. But now I've gone and complicated the plot because before I become sexually active I will tell my partner I'm HIV positive. You see, I was infected by a man who knew full well he was positive

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and he kept that knowledge from me. I will not do the same.

I think about that exchange I'll be having in the future. I go over conversations in my head and with my friends. When do I disclose this information? Probably not really first date material. Second date? Maybe. I've been on a few dates recently and I can gauge a guy's comfort with STIs generally and HIV specifically when I toss out what I do with my life. I sit on the board of directors for the Canadian AIDS Society and I work at Positive Women's Network. Those two things open up a discussion. So far, I've been pleasantly surprised, but I haven't had to have that difficult conversation to date.

Quite simply, the thought of disclosing to someone I care about and am interested in being with petrifies me; therefore I'm kind of thankful the situation has not presented itself. But it will. It's inevitable and in that moment I will need to draw on all my HIV transmission awareness, my yogic breathing techniques and my unfathomable reservoir of courage. I keep reminding myself that when I do find myself ready to disclose it will be with a person that I have come to know and it will be with a person whom I already trust. I will still be shaking in fear, but I will disclose.

A version of this article first appeared on our blog on February 17, 2012. Follow the blog at [www.pwn.bc.ca/blog](http://www.pwn.bc.ca/blog)

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**HIV DISCLOSURE IS A COMPLEX ISSUE.** In Canada, the law says that if you don't disclose to a partner before you have sex, criminal charges can be laid against you. As this newsletter goes to print, the Supreme Court of Canada is deliberating on two cases of non-disclosure.

Learn more by visiting the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network:  
<http://www.aidslaw.ca/EN/stopcriminalization/index.htm>

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## A Cup Half Full

Shelley Hourston

Have you ever wondered about the people who seem to be naturally successful in life? They appear confident and competent and once they set a direction or a goal, they sail along with apparent ease until they “arrive” at success. When I was much younger I believed that life could be that simple. As I was growing up I believed the prevailing myth that life was “fair” and that success was earned by “playing by the rules” and hard work. I soon discovered that life was not always fair and hard work was not always enough to achieve my goals. I encountered successes and disappointments as we all do. As I approached 30 and was diagnosed with fibromyalgia (a chronic pain syndrome), I became ever more curious about how some people become resilient and able to carry on despite the inevitable challenges that unfold in life.

Through research and many conversations with creative and successful people I’ve identified a few helpful strategies for navigating rough seas. I’ve found that these approaches fit nicely into two models or frameworks that have helped me see a broader perspective. In my experience, a wide angle view offers space for hope—that invisible lifejacket that keeps us from sinking when we fall overboard.

### Life is a story

Life is a story. This may sound cliché but reclaiming our power in directing our life story can be a game changer. Like all stories, a life story has a beginning, multiple chapters—some action-packed and some quiet—and it will have an end. We act out parts of our story with other characters—some we choose and others we don’t. We share parts of our story regularly. For example we might describe to a friend a comical scene we observed on the bus or we might arrive home frothing and angrily share a story about the rude customer service person who refused to listen to or respond satisfactorily to our broken toaster experience. Sometimes we make a choice to withhold part of our story when we attach shame or judgment to it or if we feel uncertain about how the listener will react. In some cases we bury stories so deep that we forget about

them ourselves. We can listen to others’ stories and learn from their experience or find inspiration in their courage, persistence and resilience. Most importantly, through stories we can see evidence of change. In some cases our action changes the situation or maybe we change our reaction or perspective in response to an event. As time passes, change that was not apparent in the moment becomes recognizable in the story. Reflection on our own stories and the stories of others is helpful for personal development and for understanding and appreciating others. Life review, reminiscence, guided autobiography, therapeutic journaling and storytelling are a few of the ways that we can use our own life story in positive ways.

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Photo from morguefile.com



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Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry (AI), originally created as a tool for organizational development, is now also used as a coaching and personal development model for individuals. At the heart of AI is constructivism or the notion that each of us constructs our knowledge and understanding of the world through our personal experiences and reflection. AI draws from positive psychology research and is based on the premise that within any system—culture, organization, or individual—something is positive and working well. Success is created by identifying these positive elements and magnifying or multiplying them. Rather than the standard problem-solving approach, AI seeks and builds on the positive found in stories of individual experience.

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.....

Lillian: an appreciative story of hope

One of my co-workers, Lillian, is an advocate at my office. She is someone who inspires me to move forward on days when I'd rather crawl under the covers. Lillian had a brain and spinal cord injury over 20 years ago. She spent a year in hospital and then returned to school and completed two master's degrees! Lillian believes that school played a big part in regaining her memory. She says, "For too many years my life was defined by and revolved around what I couldn't do. I felt jailed by my disability and as a result, I saw myself as a victim and powerless. But I've also experienced the freedom of seeing the cup as half full rather than half empty. With this new perspective, I have the courage and willingness to try new things. My disability no longer defines who I am but rather my disability is only part of who I am. Once there is a shift in perspective, there is a shift in feeling and behaviour." ("Lillian Wong: A Glimpse of Possibilities." Transition Magazine p. 6, Summer 2009 <http://bccpd.bc.ca/docs/transhealthsummer09web.pdf>)

Moving toward a "cup half full"

The field of positive psychology provides a wealth of exciting research and activities to shift our thinking toward the "cup half full." Psychologist Barbara Fredrickson developed the "broaden-and-build theory" of positive emotions, documenting the benefits (both psychological and physical) of a positive or happy mood (<http://fredrickson.socialpsychology.org/>). Feelings like gratitude, interest, awe, contentment, joy or love "broaden and build" a positive mood even after the experience has passed, creating a buffer to protect us from negative emotions. By combining story tools such as guided autobiography or journaling and Appreciative Inquiry we not only see what makes us feel positive emotions but we begin to recognize strengths, wisdom and hope we had never thought possible. Kierkegaard said that "life must be lived forward, but can only be understood backwards." The secret is finding ways to do both at the same time.

*Shelley Hourston is program director at the BC Coalition of People with Disabilities' Wellness & Disability Initiative/ AIDS & Disability Action Program. For information about free Cup Half Full workshops or teleseminars for people living with HIV, contact her at [wdi@bccpd.bc.ca](mailto:wdi@bccpd.bc.ca) or 604-875-0188 (toll-free 1-877-232-7400).*



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## LITERACY LIVES GRADUATION

### Every End Is a New Beginning

*Melissa Medjuck*

Literacy Lives is a six-month pilot certificate program, which ran from September 2011 to March 2012 at the Simon Fraser University (SFU) Harbour Centre. The program involved learners creating, setting into motion, and evaluating their own community capacity building projects. The program sought to increase awareness about HIV and to support learners in developing and expanding their literacy skills. On March 19, 2012, twenty-one learners graduated from the program, receiving a Certificate in Community Capacity Building.

Positive Women's Network (PWN) collaborated with SFU on the program, along with Health Initiative for Men, PHS Community Services, Vancouver Native Health Society, Vancouver Coastal Health, YouthCo, and Dr. Peter AIDS Foundation. The support team at PWN acted as community coordinators; we liaised between the learners and the program, provided support to the learners, met regularly as a team, and attended classes in rotation with the learners. We recruited six PWN members for the Literacy Lives program and were thrilled to see all six women graduate.



At the graduation ceremony at SFU's Harbour Centre, a packed house got to watch each learner's photovoice video project. Photovoice combines photography and social action; learners represented their experience of the program through photographs and images, putting them in a video format and developing narratives to go with their photos. The photovoice video projects evoked laughter, tears, and cheers from the audience.

Supporters of the Literacy Lives program gave speeches of congratulation at the ceremony. We heard from Shanthi Besso (Project Manager, Literacy Lives), Jo Lemay (Curriculum Developer/Lead Instructor, Literacy Lives), William Booth (Project Community Liaison Manager, Literacy Lives), Judy Smith (Program Director, SFU Community Education Program), Spencer Herbert (BC Provincial MLA for Vancouver-West End), and Dr. Yvonne Tabin (Associate Dean, SFU Lifelong Learning). After the Certificates in Community Capacity Building were handed out, learner Patience Nyoni led the crowd in a triumphant "Farewell" song, which was followed by a celebratory feast for all attendees.

The graduation ceremony marks the beginning of a new chapter for these twenty-one experts in community capacity building; MLA Spencer Herbert summed it up best when he said, "I am amazed and impressed by the community capacity building projects the Literacy Lives graduates have accomplished, but I am even more excited about watching what they do for our communities now that they are done the program."

Supporters of Literacy Lives are currently trying to secure funding so that this program can be offered again.



## CONGRATULATIONS!

Six members of Positive Women’s Network graduated from the Literacy Lives program. These hard-working, dedicated, passionate women are inspirational. From all of us at PWN, congratulations to the graduates and everyone involved in the program!



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## Finding Your Way to the Best HIV Care

Janet Madsen



**Are you newly diagnosed?  
Are you new to Vancouver?  
Are you looking for a doctor?  
Are you feeling a little overwhelmed by  
must-do tasks for HIV care?**

If you nodded yes to any of these questions, you might be interested in a program at Positive Living BC that could help. The Patient Navigator program pairs people with HIV with HIV+ peers to get the care they need. Patient navigators help folks understand health care options and choices. They also help connect you with HIV community services.

If you would like to connect with a woman navigator, there are three on the patient navigator team. They can accompany you to women-specific services, including Positive Women's Network, if you've never been before.

Making your way to your best care for HIV health and support doesn't have to be something you do alone.

*If you'd like to learn more about the program, call 604.908.7710 or email [navigators@positivelivingbc.org](mailto:navigators@positivelivingbc.org)*

### Here's the word on peer navigators from the Positive Living BC website:

Peer Navigators are trained and educated on the health issues surrounding HIV/AIDS, STIs, self care, disease progression and safer sex. Through a series of supportive discussions, they use everyday language instead of jargon or medical terminology to make topics easier to understand.

Their role is to support you in gaining knowledge and developing HIV self-management strategies, providing you with the important information you will need to achieve your goals while living with HIV.

Talking with someone who is HIV+, like yourself, can reduce the stress and anxiety. Having good mental health and social supports are important to keep your HIV in check, improve your emotional health in areas of self-esteem, depression, shame and stigma, battling isolation and building support networks.

If you've been HIV+ for a while and want to address some of your health concerns, Peer Navigators can also help you starting or changing medications, dealing with aging while being HIV+, maximizing your quality of life or helping you connect to appropriate services.



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# Spring **BOARD** 2012

**Living Out Loud**

**Thursday, May 3  
10:30–2:30 p.m.  
Blue Horizon Hotel  
Vancouver**



**KEYNOTE: HIV and Mental Health  
with Dr. Myles Blank**

**SESSIONS** will include **HIV and the Law** (Micheal Vonn, BC Civil Liberties Association), **Patient Navigation for People with HIV** (Glen Bradford, Positive Living BC), and **HIV Research, Community and Social Media** (Melanie Kuxdorf, Canadian HIV Trials Network).

TO REGISTER, contact 604-692-3000 or [pwn@pwn.bc.ca](mailto:pwn@pwn.bc.ca).  
A limited number of travel scholarships are available. Contact us for details.



Abbott is the exclusive pharmaceutical sponsor.

Thanks also to additional sponsors Deloitte and Vancouver Coastal Health Authority.

Presented by Positive Women's Network





Hey PWN members...

# Would you like to provide peer support to other women living with HIV?

Then apply to attend

## PWN's Peer Support Training



Learn about supportively listening, developing communication skills, giving emotional support, sharing knowledge, setting healthy boundaries, and providing practical help to women living with HIV.

The training is happening **May 9, 10, 16, and 17**, from **11am to 4pm** in Vancouver at Positive Women's Network.

We will provide a child care subsidy for women who fit in order to attend the training. We have limited transportation and accommodation funds to support members travelling from the Fraser Valley and area for this training!

**Applicants will be screened for suitability.**

**Spots are limited! Deadline for applying is Friday, April 13.**

**For more information and to apply, please contact**

**Melissa or Sangam at PWN**

- Lower mainland: 604-692-3000
- Toll-free: 1-866-692-3001
- Email: [pwn@pwn.bc.ca](mailto:pwn@pwn.bc.ca)

Special thanks to our sponsors!



## AIDS 2012: Watch for Women International AIDS Conference, July 22-27

Janet Madsen

The theme of the AIDS 2012 international conference is “Turning the Tide Together.” What will that mean for women and girls? Hopefully, not disappointment. There’s already been reaction to the announcement of plenary speakers. In a recent article on the Body, Kellee Terrell pointed out that despite women representing half of the world’s population of people living with HIV, only six of fifteen speakers are women, and none are openly HIV+.<sup>1</sup> Other activists have voiced this concern as well.

But folks from the HIV community are working hard to make sure women’s issues will have space to be explored, discussed, and energized to make the change that girls and women need.

Before the action of AIDS 2012 gets going on July 22 in Washington DC, the Living 2012 Positive Leadership Summit will take place. This is the 3rd International Conference of people living with HIV, and it is scheduled for July 19 and 20. The programme isn’t set at the time of this writing, so I can’t tell you whether women’s issues will be front and centre, but in the 2008 report sexual and reproductive health rights, particularly for women, played a significant role. Check their website as we get closer to the time: [www.living2012.org/en/](http://www.living2012.org/en/)

The Positive Leadership summit will bring positive people from around the world to work together to develop a list of priority advocacy items and strategies. These will then be developed into documents that can be shared with networks around the globe. It will also be a time for personal connections to be made, strengthened, and supported so that positive voices are heard at AIDS 2012 in the days that follow. Peer connections extraordinaire!

For AIDS 2012 itself, the Athena Network ([www.athenanetwork.org](http://www.athenanetwork.org)) is developing the Make Women Count campaign to connect women from around the world in the Women’s Networking Zone. They are posting information online about the Women’s Networking Zone—a hub for the world community to gather and share resources through panels, workshops, discussions, art, and films. Follow updates here: <http://www.athenanetwork.org/index.php?id=49> (retrieved March 14, 2012)

As in previous years, the Women, Girls and HIV Investigator’s Prize<sup>2</sup> will be awarded to recognize research in resource-limited settings. This is another level of recognition for girls’ and women’s vulnerabilities in the HIV epidemic that need addressing. Recognition has gone to work on preventing HIV transmission as a result of cross-generational sex as well as sexual and reproductive health access, among other themes.

I look forward to hearing more about what’s being done to address cultural norms on gender violence, the biological vulnerability of females, and the need for women-controlled prevention methods like microbicides. Although I won’t be at the conference itself, staff here at PWN will be following updates and sharing them with our community via Twitter—if you’re on, check #AIDS2012. We will also publish information in upcoming newsletters.

<sup>1</sup> Terrell, Kellee, When Will Male HIV/AIDS Leaders Make Women and Girls a Priority? March 9, 2012, [www.thebody.com/content/66151/when-will-male-hiv-aids-leaders-make-women-and-girl.html](http://www.thebody.com/content/66151/when-will-male-hiv-aids-leaders-make-women-and-girl.html)

<sup>2</sup> Women, Girls and HIV Investigator Prize, [www.aids2012.org/Default.aspx?pageId=450](http://www.aids2012.org/Default.aspx?pageId=450)



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## Events and Program Information

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
drop-in	11:30 – 3:30	11:30 – 3:30	11:30 – 3:30	11:30 – 3:30	--
lunch	--	12:00 – 2:00	--	--	--
office	9:00 – 4:00	9:00 – 4:00	9:00 – 4:00	9:00 – 4:00	9:00 – 4:00

### PWN Grocery Schedule

**Schedule subject to change.**

Regular grocery hours are 12pm to 2pm on Tuesdays.

#### APRIL

April 3 – **Open**

April 10 – **Open**

April 17 – **Open**

April 24 – Food bank closed

#### MAY

May 1 – Food bank closed

May 8 – **Open**

May 15 – **Open**

May 22 – Food bank closed

May 29 – Food bank closed

#### JUNE

June 5 – **Open**

June 12 – **Open**

June 19 – Food bank closed

June 26 – Food bank closed

You must be registered to access the grocery, which is a partnership with AIDS Vancouver. To sign up, see a PWN support worker or your case worker at AIDS Vancouver.

### Aboriginal Women Support Group

A support group for Aboriginal women living with HIV will meet monthly, beginning on April 11 from 12 to 2 p.m. at Positive Women's Network.

The group is jointly sponsored by Positive Women's Network and Oak Tree Clinic.

If you have any questions, contact Valerie Van Clieaf, PWN Support Worker:

valeriev@pwn.bc.ca  
(604) 692-3005 / 1 866 692 3001



Photo courtesy of Manataka American Indian Council



## Events and Program Information

### SpringBoard 2012: Living Out Loud

Join us for our annual conference event!

This year's SpringBoard takes place on May 3, 2012, from 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at the Blue Horizon Hotel.

Our keynote speaker is Dr. Myles Blank, who will discuss HIV and mental health.

There will be sessions on HIV and the law (Micheal Vonn, BC Civil Liberties Association), patient navigation for people living with HIV (Glen Bradford, Positive Living BC), and HIV research, community and social media (Melanie Kuxdorf, Canadian HIV Trials Network).

To register, please contact [pwn@pwn.bc.ca](mailto:pwn@pwn.bc.ca) or call 604-692-3000.

A limited number of travel scholarships are available for out of town members. Please contact us for details.

### Peer Support Training

Interested in developing the skills to support women living with HIV?

Positive Women's Network is holding a set of four-day trainings on May 9, 10, 16, and 17, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

A child care subsidy will be available to women who need it in order to attend the training.

There are also limited transportation and accommodation funds available to assist members travelling from the Fraser Valley and area for the training.

Applicants will be screened for suitability.

Spots are limited. The deadline for applying is Friday, April 13.

For more information and to apply, please contact Melissa or Sangam by phone at 604-692-3000 or toll-free at 1-866-692-3001, or by e-mail at [pwn@pwn.bc.ca](mailto:pwn@pwn.bc.ca).

### PWN at the Canadian Conference on HIV/AIDS Research

Two abstracts submitted by Positive Women's Network have been accepted by the Canadian Conference on HIV/AIDS Research.

PWN staff will present the posters at the conference, one on social media and HIV health and the other on trainings for service providers who work with people living with HIV.

This year's annual Canadian Conference on HIV/AIDS Research takes place in Montreal from April 19 to 22.



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# connect with us



**Positive Women's Network**, a partnership of women living with and affected by HIV/AIDS, supports women in making informed choices about HIV/AIDS and health. We provide safe access to support and education/prevention for women in communities throughout British Columbia. The Positive Women's Network provides leadership and advocacy around women's HIV/AIDS health and social issues in the national and local health care communities.

## Thanks to our supporters!

The work of Positive Women's Network is made possible by grants from the Provincial Health Services Authority of BC, the Public Health Agency of Canada/AIDS Community Action Program, and BC Gaming & Enforcement, as well as the following sponsors, whom we would like to thank:



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**Janssen** for sponsoring our lunch program.



**MAC AIDS Fund** for their contributions to our support and outreach programs.



**Merck Frosst Canada Ltd.** for supporting our food program.



**RBC Foundation** for supporting our Wellness Workshop Series.



Our portable housing subsidies and food program made possible by support from **Shooting Stars Foundation**.

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Unless otherwise noted, all materials and graphics in this newsletter are written and produced by the PWN Health Promotion Team (janetm@pwn.bc.ca).