

The Positive Side

A NEWSLETTER FROM POSITIVE WOMEN'S NETWORK | VOLUME 23 NUMBER 3 | SEPTEMBER-DECEMBER 2015



STRONG WOMEN IN NUMBERS

by Val Nicholson

SWIN is a peer-led montly support group for those who identify as Indigenous or Aboriginal women living with HIV.

We come together once a month at Positive Woman's Network and start our meetings in a good way. Because our cultures are diverse, our ceremonies may differ.

We give thanks for the food and say prayers and send healing thoughts to the hurting, the homeless, and those who are not with us. We share food, and then we smudge using traditional teachings. We use cultural items to help us on our journey as we share our stories and embrace our differences. I share stories and teachings from my Elders.

We have a sharing circle done in a good way with a talking stick where we check in and share our successes, our lessons learned, and what we are working on in our day-to-day lives.

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We are finding our cultures and traditions that have been lost to many of us for several reasons. We are currently working on our own health medicine wheels and starting to build resource binders with prayers, meditations, and handouts. Our newest project is developing a cookbook! We will be making medicine ties and have teachings on the importance of our traditional medicines.

One woman said this group is like coming home to culture and ceremony. Another woman said she was able to share for the first time as she felt this was a safe space and did not feel judged.

“I am learning a lot about myself and I have set healthy boundaries and I practise self-care,” said one woman last month.

When asked what they liked best about this group, women mentioned the teachings, the stories shared from our Elders, and being able to share our innermost feelings in the safety of this group.

“We are all learning together; we are family.” As with any family we eat, we cry, we laugh, we pray, we teach, we learn, we grow. WE ARE STRONG WOMEN IN NUMBERS!

We always end our meetings in a good way with a closing prayer, and when needed traditional medicines are available.

We welcome all Indigenous/Aboriginal HIV-positive woman to the SWIN group. Upcoming meeting dates at PWN are September 11, October 9, November 6, and December 4.

Sharing includes topics like these:

- **setting healthy boundaries**
- **having better sleep**
- **developing tools for coping with depression**
- **navigating relationships**
- **making connections in a new living space**
- **dealing with isolation**
- **managing our own health**
- **making doctor visits and managing medications**
- **practising self-care**
- **picking the right friends**
- **practising saying no**
- **learning to love ourselves**
- **accepting that we will make mistakes and believing in ourselves**

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One woman said this group is like coming home to culture and ceremony.

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STRENGTHENING SUPPORT FOR PEER RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

by Melissa Medjuck

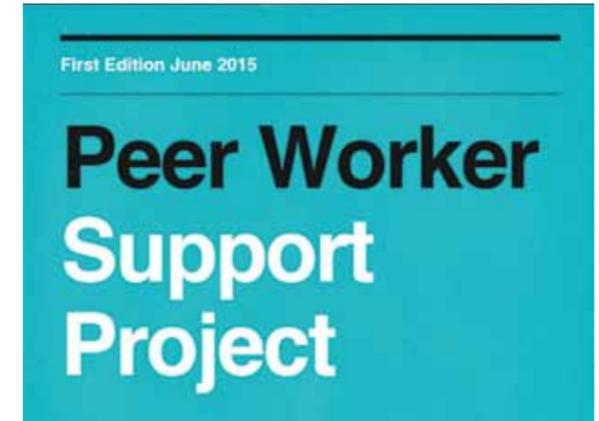
Increasing numbers of people living with HIV are becoming employed as peer workers, which can involve acting as research associates, health system navigators, counsellors, and more. Community-based organizations and researchers employ peer workers to integrate people living with HIV more meaningfully into programs and projects.

The job can be very challenging, and often peer workers find it difficult to seek support for themselves. “It takes time to get used to changing hats, from volunteer to client, or from worker to member, or client to worker. It requires time and practice and a certain degree of flexibility and discomfort at times. Boundary issues arise, training and ongoing check in/debrief can lessen some of the tensions and conflicts in this work.” This is what one participant said in a focus group organized by Positive Living BC as part of its Peer Worker Support Project.

Terry Howard, director of community-based research at Positive Living BC, saw the need for specific supports for the emotional, physical, financial, and personal impacts that peer employment has on workers. He also recognized a need for an industry standard of support when employing people living with HIV.

This led to consultations with the HIV community and the Peer Worker Support Project, which has produced a living document (one that can change over time) that will provide support options for peer workers and those who employ them.

Learning how to say no and look after ourselves is an ongoing, lifelong project. There is never enough training on boundaries and self-care. To provide some face-to-face practice, Positive Women’s Network teamed up with Positive Living BC to deliver a workshop in June. Melissa and Sangam from PWN, along with Terry from Positive Living BC, co-facilitated an afternoon session for Vancouver-based peer workers currently involved with community-based research projects.



You can read this new resource from Positive Living BC's Terry Howard by searching the title online or going here: <http://bchivcbr.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Peer-Worker-Support-Project-v2pdf>

Fourteen peer workers (seven men and seven women) attended. This spirited and lively group engaged in interactive activities about safety, triggers, coping skills, and boundary setting. The peer workers shared how they cope with issues arising in their jobs; having a venue for them to talk with each other and exchange ideas was meaningful.

One of the main messages of the afternoon was that boundary setting and self-care need to be prioritized each and every day—practice makes perfect. If we go one day without thinking about these topics, chances are that our self-care will fall by the wayside and our boundaries will be violated.

People left the workshop with a renewed focus on their wellness. “I am worth it,” said one participant. “Boundaries are the way we take care of ourselves. Today reminded me that I have a right and a duty to protect myself, say no, and seek support when I need it.”

DRUMMING AND GRATITUDE AT WEEKEND RETREAT

by Melissa Medjuck

“I have been living with HIV for 15 years and I have never been open to others, except doctors and nurses. This was my first time meeting anyone else who has HIV. I met so many powerful, brave, amazing women.”



We held our latest Wellness Retreat Weekend on Bowen Island from June 12 to 14. Twenty-four women attended—eight for the first time! Almost half of the women were from out of town, and six identified as having Aboriginal ancestry.

Support workers Sangam and Melissa were there to coordinate everything, and nurse Christina Chant came along to give medical assistance and support to members.

Weekend retreats help women from all over BC form new connections and create new informal support networks in their area.

“I needed to spend some time around other positive women, just being, and it was awesome,” wrote one member on the evaluation. All of the women said that they made connections with other women.

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Workshops

“My understanding of HIV really improved. I had no idea of all the helpful and healthy things I have missed out on. I’m ready ‘to live’ because of this.”

Women attended workshops focused on HIV education, self-care, and self-awareness. Six of the workshops were peer-led, and presenters also came from Oak Tree Clinic and the Dr. Peter Centre. For women living in rural communities, having access to health care professionals specializing in HIV during the retreat weekend is great.

A workshop on healthy boundaries showed women that boundary setting is a way of caring for ourselves. “I learned to not sweat the little stuff. I stood my ground and had boundaries (yay). I am so proud of myself,” said one woman.

Another member declared, “I know I will be okay if I keep up with a healthy lifestyle, exercise, nutrition and taking all meds as directed. I am on a good path, and this retreat weekend provides that ‘pep’ to keep going.”

Another woman said, “I am not a disease because I have HIV. I am a strong beautiful woman with a story of encouragement to tell.” Our hope is that self-care skills learned on the weekend continue when women go home.

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“One of the most sacred things that we have are our songs, because they have so many meanings”

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Gathering together

“I really enjoyed the gift of people.”

On Saturday in the late afternoon, our whole group gathered on the lodge’s lawn overlooking the ocean, where we made a circle beneath the totem pole.

We were joined by 11 members of the Wildflower Women of Turtle Island Drum Group, part of Battered Women’s Support Services Indigenous Women’s Program. They brought drums and other instruments for retreat participants to use and taught us several songs.

“One of the most sacred things that we have are our songs, because they have so many meanings,” explained Carol Kellman, Aboriginal nurse practice lead and one of the members of the drum group.

“Each woman in that group carries a song. When we’re at a gathering, it’s their job to explain the meaning of the song, and how that song came to the group, and what the intention is behind the song. It instills pride and it also shows non-indigenous people the depth and breadth of the culture, and the strength and resiliency of the women.”

The group ended with a gratitude song during which each of us got a turn to say something we were grateful for: “I was depressed, especially the last couple weeks,” said one woman. “I was energized at the retreat. Thank you. I am so grateful.”

The drum circle was a very powerful experience for all participants and a highlight of the weekend.

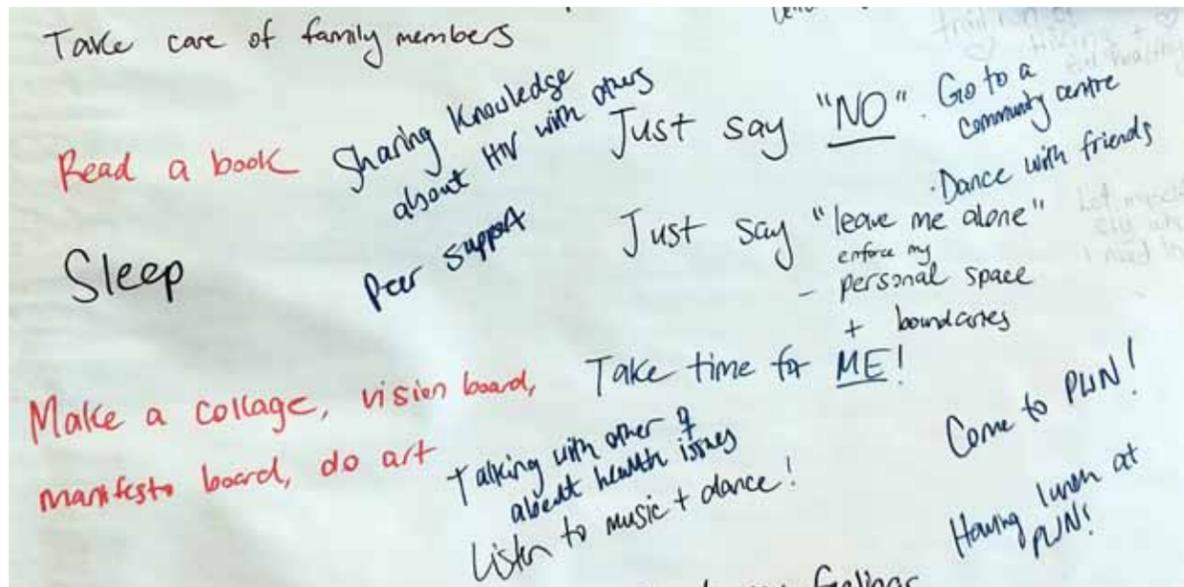
Until next time

A dynamic and energetic group of women explored self-care and made new connections. Women always express how important retreats are, and we will offer another one in the near future. Many thanks to all who had the courage to come to the retreat, share their lives honestly, and care for each other.

We’re grateful to our funder PHAC for providing resources for this program.

HOW DO YOU TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF?

by PWN members



In the drop-in space, all kinds of conversations are shared, from jokes to health tips.

Not all PWN members can make it in because of scheduling or distance, so we recently asked women to record their ideas on paper so we could share them.

What do you do for self-care? How do you stay healthy and well?

Here are some of the responses. Hope these help!

Connect with others

- Go to a sweat lodge
- Spend time with friends
- Take care of family members
- Be sure to talk openly with my doctor and say how I really feel
- Snuggle my dogs; spend time with animals
- Have a sleepover with friends
- Karaoke! Dance! Sing!
- Go to the community centre
- Come to PWN
- Talk with other women about health issues
- Listen to music
- Drink a nice beverage like a mocha

Honour your body

- Sleep
- Get a foot soak, apply nail polish
- Do yoga
- Walk
- Swim at the local pool
- Take a bath with Epsom salts and lavender
- Detox my body
- Run or hike
- Dance with friends
- Eat healthy

Look after your feelings

- See my alcohol and drug counsellor regularly
- Just say "no"
- Enforce my personal space and boundaries
- Take time for me!
- Talk about my feelings with a peer or counsellor
- Get peer support
- Write in a journal
- Read a book
- Make a collage, vision board, manifesto board
- Do painting or art therapy

INTERNATIONAL AIDS CONFERENCE ROUND-UP

by Erin Scatter



The International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS made themselves heard at the conference.

This year the International AIDS Society conference descended upon Vancouver, bringing visitors from around the world from July 19 to 22. Here are six articles worth reading if you want to catch up on what happened. You can find them all online.

"The science is in. And Insite works" (Macleans)

Perhaps the best part of this article is that Dr. Julio Montaner is described as looking "more like a country doctor than a troublemaker," but the larger point is that researchers and health workers from around the world visit Vancouver's supervised injection facility to learn from it—because it works. Insite is "part of a harm reduction strategy that has made B.C. a world-beater in the fight against the deadly infection—and a pariah in the eyes of Stephen Harper's Conservative government."

"Young woman stays undetectable for twelve years off treatment after early HIV therapy" (NAM Aidsmap)

There was some buzz among members at Positive Women's Network about this story. Was the young woman free of HIV? Could this be considered a cure? Not quite, but it's still worth reading about.

To make sure you're getting accurate info instead of media hype, I recommend turning to NAM Aidsmap, a reliable source of information.

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“HIV transmission from mother to child nearly eliminated in Canada” (CBC News)

Canada’s doing well when it comes to diagnosing women with HIV before they become pregnant—and that’s the key to preventing transmission from mother to baby. In particular, Aboriginal women and intravenous drug users are now getting medication at rates comparable to other groups of pregnant women with HIV. “We’re finally reaching all of these groups who were, for one reason or another, more marginalized,” said Joel Singer, a professor at UBC’s School of Population and Public Health.

“The day the HIV treatment pendulum stopped swinging” (The Body)

Taking HIV meds upon diagnosis benefits people’s health immensely. A study called START has shown that “early HIV treatment works so demonstrably well in almost every conceivable way, across ages, sexes, races and risk groups.” But this doesn’t mean we’ll see an immediate expansion of treatment. Few people with HIV will want to start medication early, and few doctors will support it, said Zunyou Wu, the director of China’s National Center for AIDS/STD Control and Prevention. Treating people who show no signs of sickness, and who may feel ill for the first time because of the HIV meds, will be a challenge.

“UN Women to highlight the unique barriers to treatment faced by women living with HIV/AIDS” (UN Women)

Given the focus on HIV treatment and early treatment, a group of four organizations—UN Women, AVAC, ATHENA network and Salamander Trust—commissioned research on access to care and medication for women living with HIV. “The study was designed and governed by women living with HIV and aims to ensure that their voices, and concerns about specific barriers to access, remain front-and-centre in discussions,” said UN Women. Women face more challenges in accessing and staying on HIV treatment than men, and their testimonies make clear that unequal gender relations are at the heart of the issue.

“UN human rights committee slams Canada for record on women” (CBC News)

Alright, this piece didn’t come from the IAS conference, but it was released immediately following and highlights a number of issues in Canada that contribute to HIV transmission or affect people with HIV. The UN human rights committee has criticized the Canadian government on a number of fronts, emphasizing just how much work needs to be done at home. Here are examples from the article:

- Business: “Human rights abuses by Canadian companies operating abroad, in particular mining corporations,” should be addressed by an independent authority and a framework that give victims the possibility of legal remedies.
- Gender equality: The committee notes “persisting inequalities between women and men” in Canada and wants better equal pay legislation across the country,” with a special focus on minority and indigenous women.”
- Violence against women: Continued violence against women in Canada, and the “the lack of statistical data on domestic violence,” led the committee to call for better legal protections for victims, and for more shelters and services.
- Missing and murdered aboriginal women: In the wake of reports on murdered and missing women, the committee said “indigenous women and girls are disproportionately affected by life-threatening forms of violence, homicides and disappearances.” It said there should be a national inquiry.
- Bill C-51: Canada’s new anti-terror law allows mass surveillance, too much information-sharing, and a no-fly list that lacks proper governance and appeal, the committee says. It suggests Canada should review the act and allow for better legal safeguards.
- Police use of force: The committee notes excessive force during protests such as those at the G20 in 2010 and recommends prompt, impartial investigations, along with prosecutions of those responsible where warranted
- Refugees and immigration: The committee worries “that individuals who are nationals of designated ‘safe’ countries are denied an appeal hearing against a rejected refugee claim before the Refugee Appeal Division and are only allowed judicial review before the Federal Court” — increasing the risk they may be sent back.

WE'RE SEARCHING FOR A NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



For the first time since 1993, Positive Women’s Network is hiring a new Executive Director when longtime advocate Marcie Summers steps down. We are looking for a fantastic candidate to take the organization into the future.

POSITIVE WOMEN’S NETWORK

Positive Women’s Network challenges HIV and changes women’s lives. As a community living with and affected by HIV, we provide leadership on the complex realities of HIV-related health and social issues for women.

PRIMARY ROLE OF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Reporting to the Board of Directors, the Executive Director is responsible for the establishment of the organization’s goals, policies and strategic directions, and the effective operation of the organization.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- Lead the ongoing development and implementation of PWN’s vision, mission, and strategic priorities within the organization and community
- Build and maintain strong relationships with collaborating organizations, government agencies, funders and other stakeholders through community advocacy and outreach
- Act as chief staff spokesperson for PWN with the media, government agencies, relevant community groups and other key stakeholders
- Develop and maintain sound financial plans, performance measures and controls to protect PWN sustainability
- Human resource management in team-based environment

SKILLS, QUALIFICATIONS, EXPERIENCE

- Bachelor’s degree required; master’s degree preferred
- Significant experience (10+ years) working in the non-profit sector, preferably in HIV-related field

- and in women-focused organizations
- 5-10 years’ work experience in a senior leadership position or equivalent
- Knowledge of the Canadian and BC HIV epidemic, especially among women, as well as knowledge and experience with broader women’s sexual and reproductive health issues

SALARY + BENEFITS

Salary and benefit package to be discussed based on past work experience, education and qualifications.

HOURS

- Full time (36 hours per week). Possibility to negotiate a four-day work week.
- Travel required; evening and/ or weekend work required from time to time

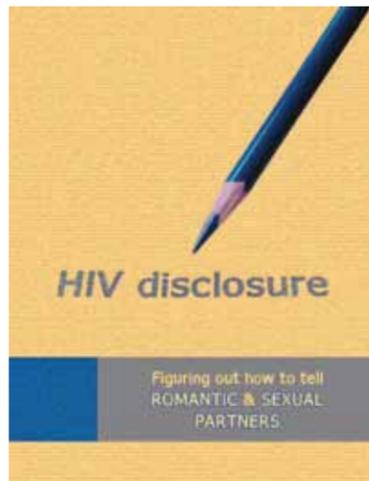
APPLICATION

Please provide a resume including three work references, a cover letter, and a brief writing sample (e.g., 1-4 pages of a grant application, article, etc.). Please send materials electronically to pwnboard@pwn.bc.ca by September 14, 2015.

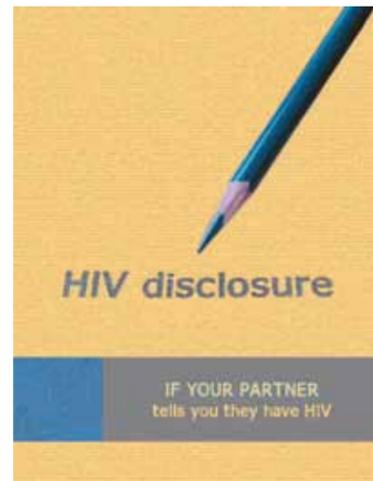
We strongly encourage applications from Aboriginal women, women of colour, immigrant women, women with disabilities including women with HIV, and economically disadvantaged women.

NEW RESOURCES ON DISCLOSURE

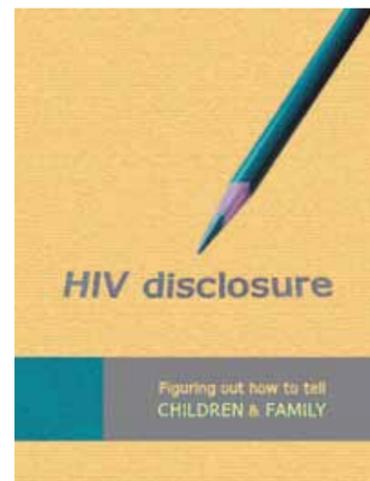
We've been working on a series of resources to support you with HIV disclosure. If you're interested in any of them, let us know and we can send them to you!



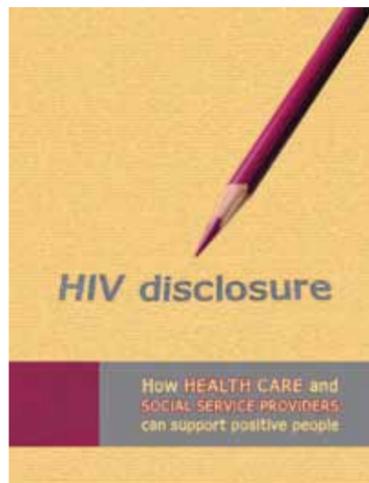
A new resource to help you think about disclosing to partners.



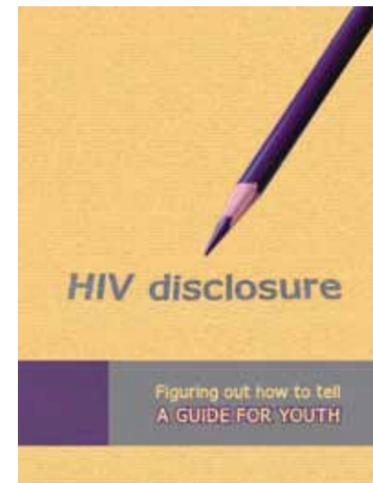
A new resource you can give to your partners when you disclose.



A new resource to help you think about disclosing to kids and family.



A new resource for service providers who work with people with HIV.



Coming this fall!



You should have received a copy of our new brochure on HIV disclosure and the law along with this newsletter. If you didn't and would like one, please contact us.

Events and announcements

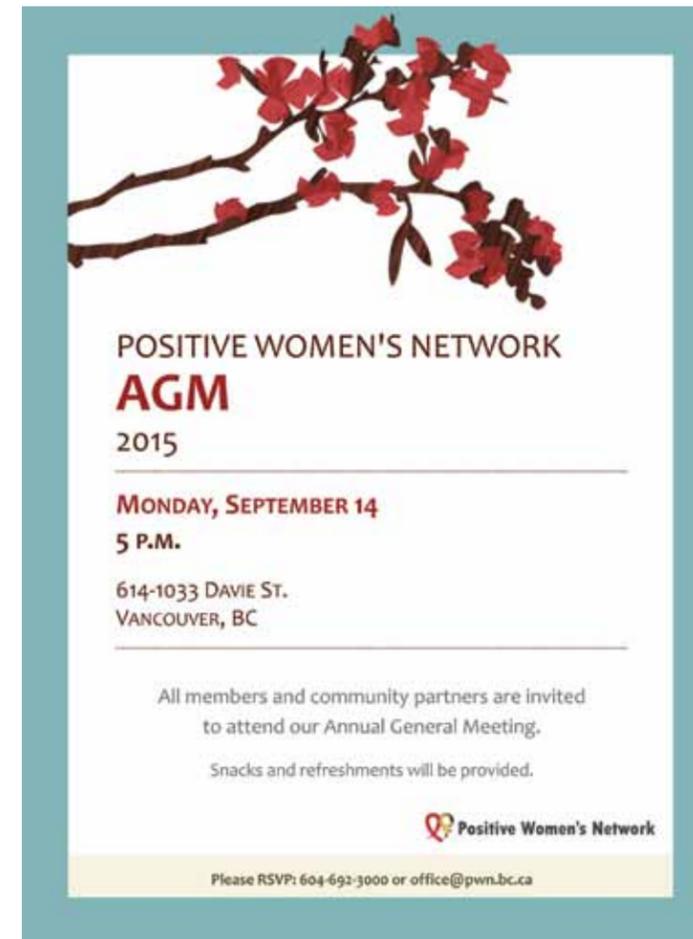
So long, Val!

It was a sad day when Valerie Van Cleef worked her last shift before retirement.

As an outreach support worker, she connected with many women over the years, in crisis and in wonderful moments to celebrate.

Val worked hard (and for a long time) to set up a peer education and support program at the Fraser Valley Institution for Women. She also worked one-on-one with members in need of outreach, support with doctor's visits, housing challenges, and much more.

Her great sense of humour and warm approach are missed around here. We thank Val for her incredible work and hope she's enjoying herself at a slightly slower pace.



Film screening and discussion: Thursday, October 22

In Canada, people living with HIV can be prosecuted for aggravated sexual assault if they do not reveal their HIV+ status to partners before having sex. But HIV non-disclosure is very different from coerced or forced sex, and people are questioning this application of sexual assault law. Join us to discuss this difficult but important issue. The evening will feature a screening of the new film *Consent* by the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network and Goldelox Productions.

PEER SUPPORT GROUP DATES FOR SEPTEMBER

PWN (for Aboriginal women) 11:30 a.m. – 1:30 pm	Vancouver Women's Health Collective 5–7 pm	Oak Tree Clinic 11–1 pm	Positive Haven 1:30–3:30 pm
Sep. 11	Sep. 16	Sep. 18	Sep. 21

All group meetings occur monthly and include lunch or dinner. For child care or more information on upcoming dates, call Jane Cameron at Oak Tree Clinic: 604-875-3755.

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 Positive Women’s Network
You Should Know

 @PWN_BC
@YouShouldKnowCA



Challenging HIV.

Changing women’s lives.

administration

Marcie Summers | Executive Director

Donna Tennant | Director of Development

Nancy Hoo | Bookkeeper

Aretha Munro & Monique Desroches |
Administrative Coordinators

health promotion

Janet Madsen | Communications Coordinator

Erin Seatter | Resource Coordinator

support

Bronwyn Barrett | Support Program Coordinator

Sangam | Support Worker/Educator

Melissa Medjuck | Support Worker/Retreat Coordinator

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Thanks to our supporters!

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 **abbvie** The exclusive pharmaceutical sponsor of SpringBoard.

 **GILEAD** Supports educational workshops

 **janssen** Sponsors lunch learning opportunities.

 **MAC AIDS FUND** Contributes to our support and outreach programs.

 **MERCK** Supports educational opportunities.

 **RBC** Sponsors our Peer Mentorship Training.

 **KINGSLY TRUST FOUNDATION** Contributes to our portable housing subsidies and food program.

 **SHOPPERS DRUG MART** Funds our Empowerment Retreat.

 **vancouver foundation** Supports our Peer Mentorship Program.

 **ViiV Healthcare** Funder for our women’s health carnival.

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