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VICTORIA RESOURCES
SOCIETY

ANNUAL REPORT

April 2022 to March 2023

Prepared by:
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the Peers and QomQem Team

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Victoria B.C.



Table of Contents

Peers Victoria and QomQem Directors' Report.....	2
QomQem.....	3
Program Reports.....	5
Core Values.....	20
Our Funders.....	21
Peers' Friends, Collaborators, and Partners.....	22

Peers Victoria Resources Society Peers Victoria Resources Society would like to acknowledge the nations of the Songhees and Esquimalt people in whose unceded territories we carry out our work. As an organization, we are committed to addressing the combined effects of colonialism and stigmatization of people in the sex industry.



Peers Victoria and QomQem Directors' Report

2022-2023 was a year of growth and change for Peers Victoria and QomQem Coastal Connections. We maintained our existing programs and saw QomQem expand programming yet again! We contracted with Island Health to continue delivering the Housing Overdose Prevention and Peer program in three housing and shelter sites, including Capital City Centre and Russell Street Shelter (operated by Our Place Society), and Spaken House (operated by the Aboriginal Coalition). Peers Victoria concluded our fundraising initiative for our new outreach van in January and was able to purchase a Dodge van from Malibu Motors and have it retrofitted for our outreach needs. 2022-2023 was also a year of significant change for Peers Victoria. We launched a new logo and branding. This year also saw the departure of Rachel Phillips in March 2023, who has been serving as Executive Director for the organization since 2014. We thank Rachel for her years of outstanding contributions to the organization and are glad she is working part-time as a consultant in 2023-2024.

QomQem Coastal Connections, which operates in partnership with Peers Victoria but autonomously as a culturally driven Indigenous-led program, expanded their work delivering an Indigenous-led housing support program with funding from Reaching Homes/Victoria Native Friendship Centre and purchased a new van to assist with their outreach activities. In 2022-23, QomQem also worked to expand its cultural programming and, in 2022, offered SENCOTEN language classes at supportive housing sites, led by QomQem's Culture & Wellness Coordinator. QomQem continued to co-host many other culturally based feasts and events with the region's Indigenous Outreach Workers Network (IOW) for folks living unhoused or precariously housed. QomQem has remained a strong connection for many Indigenous folks who are living unhoused, precariously housed, or who may be using substances.

Thank you / Huy'ch'qu



QomQem

History:

QomQem Coastal Connections was developed two years ago from the outreach and cultural support offered from Peers Indigenous Outreach. While providing encampment and basic needs outreach support, the Peers Indigenous Outreach team recognized the need to bring cultural connections and community-building to Indigenous folks living outdoors. We connected with Esquimalt Nation and Nuu-chah-nulth drum groups, who would offer traveling cultural care at each encampment. At times, the Nuu-chah-nulth folks would bring regalia and paddles to offer up to folks living outdoors to dance and put on regalia to gain strength from ancestral songs and dances. We would also bring fry bread and fish soups or chowders, made by a local Songhees family, and share that food with everyone in the park.

QomQem Coastal Connections is grateful to have had the Peers Victoria's support to build this program. We continue to share much administrative support as Peers as well as space. QomQem supports all Indigenous folks who are unhoused, precariously housed or may be using substances. While we operate within Peers, we do recognize ourselves as our own entity.



QomQem cont.

Program description

QomQem is a grassroots Indigenous-led outreach program that offers harm reduction and health care services to Indigenous peoples who are unhoused, precariously housed, and who may be using substances and/or alcohol. We welcome our relatives and allies from diverse backgrounds, sexualities, genders, abilities, beliefs, and identities. We offer Indigenous harm reduction, health and wellness, housing and food security, cultural support, and outreach. We work in collaboration with Peers' Sacred program. Currently, we are a team of nearly 25 people. 11 peer responders, 9 coordinators, 2 elders, and 4 drummers that we call on for sharing medicine and cultural care.

Program highlights:

QomQem currently serves 200 people every week— 120 at the tents on Pandora and 80 weekly with outreach services. We work to bring culture to the streets as we understand the power of connecting back to ancestors and embedding our teachings into our lives everyday. In many Coast Salish dialects, QomQem translates to “strong.” QomQem is the SENCOTEN spelling for this word. So, our work is meant to build strong coastal connections with all of our relatives that we support.

Program lead: Lacey (she/her)
director@qomqem.com

Program Reports

Hustle @ Peers

Program Description:

HUSTLE @ Peers is a program for masculine-presenting or identified GBQ (Gay, Bi, Queer), Two-Spirited, Indigiqueer, and gender-diverse sex workers. We provide a weekly support group with a hot meal, access to HIV and STBBI testing, access to harm reduction supplies, and community referrals on Tuesdays from 5:30–7:30 pm at our drop-in space. One-on-one support is available to participants by reaching out to the program lead or HUSTLE @ Peers staff.

Program Highlights:

Continuing from our grand success the previous year, the HUSTLE @ Peers program continues to grow and maintain a steady base of participation supporting 35–45 unique participants. We have deepened programming and worked to create a safer, richer environment of support and growth, as well as diversify the types of discussions and learnings we engage in.

Pr

Program Lead: Remy (they/them)
Email: remy@checkhimout.ca



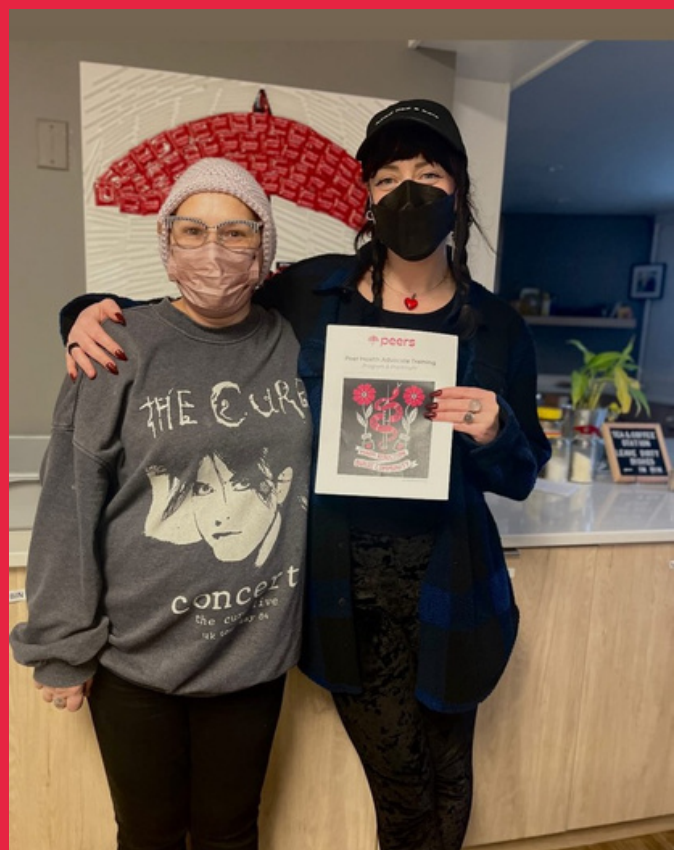
Peer Health Advocate Program (PHAT)

Program Description:

The Peer Health Training Program is a twice-a-year, 8-week training program that explores harm reduction as a lens for understanding both the drug user and sex worker rights movements in Canada. Since 2018, we've been training folks with lived and living experience in their communities as peer health advocates, supporting their ability to decrease stigma among people who use drugs/ work in the sex trade, make informed decisions around health and harm reduction, and increase access to health services and accessible employment options.

Program Highlights:

The total number of unique trainees for April 2022 - March 2023 was 26. Trainees completed nine weeks of in-class training with 18, 3 hour classes, twice a week. We're continuing to build new partnerships with other peer-focused organizations locally. A total of 50 workshops were offered relating to topics of Sex Work & Harm Reduction, Part 1-3, offered at three sites, a total of nine times, Gender & Harm Reduction Part.1-3, offered at four sites, a total of 12 times and Indigenizing Harm Reduction, Pt.1-3, offered at three sites, a total of seven times reaching 238 attendees.



Peer Health Advocate Program (PHAT) cont.

Each term, we're proud to invite graduates back as speakers for the in-class training, whereby their experience and wisdom help inform the basis of our living curriculum. In addition to centering local Indigenous voices and perspectives of wellness, healing and harm reduction throughout our training, an alumna from the previous year will be helping co-facilitate the in-class training for the upcoming Winter cohort. We will continue to foster opportunities for past graduates to hone their leadership skills within the training program, Peers community, and "Victoria" community at large while prioritizing opportunities for Indigenous folks and people of color.



Program Lead: Lou
(she/her)
Email: peersatpeers@peers.bc.ca
Work hours: Flexible
weekday hours

Drop-in Program



Program Description:

Peers Drop-in is a service provided to all Peers participants and is open Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 11:30 am to 2:30 pm. Current and former sex workers can access hot meals, bus tickets, the clothing room, harm reduction, and safer sex supplies and connect with other Peers programming. Participants can access the Violence Prevention program to report a bad date or access counseling resources as well as meet with a Housing Worker for support with housing and RTB concerns. Individuals can also have their mail sent to our office, receive appropriate community referrals, and access weekly HIV and STBBI testing on Wednesdays during drop-in hours.

Program Highlights:

Approximately 297 unique participants accessed services through Drop-in. We were able to open up fully in September 2022, where up to 10 participants could come in, stay for a meal and access workshops and programming again. Workshops and discussion groups remained limited until February 2023, when we were able to offer up to four monthly opportunities for individuals to attend, for a maximum honorarium of \$40.00 per month.

We have collaborated with Rainbow Kitchen, which supplies 2-3 frozen meals a week, which we prepare and serve at Drop-in to supplement our volunteer cooks, or portion out to provide warm meals to our participants on the Night Outreach van.

Program Lead: Jen (she/her)

Email: dropin@peers.bc.ca

Work hours: Tuesday – Thursday 11:30–2:30pm, closed the Wednesday of Cheque Week

Transgender, Non-Binary, Two-Spirit Support Group (TN2S)

Program Description: TN2S is a support service for trans, non-binary, two-spirit, agender, and gender non-conforming sex workers. This service connects participants registered with Peers to community and 1:1 support. The program also connects participants to general Peers services and other community resources in an inclusive and gender-affirming manner meeting participant needs through a custom-tailored approach and specialized scan of resources. This includes assistance accessing health care, employment, food resources, and filling out documents, etc. There are two groups: one composed of participants who are currently engaging in sex work, and a second group composed of those who are exiting or recently left sex work. The groups alternate Wednesdays via Zoom. Participants from the groups also book 1:1 support meetings as needed. Registration via email: trans.support@peers.bc.ca.

Program Highlights: Due to high interest in participation, we have split the original group into "current" and "previous" sex work support groups. Participants are invited to join workshops where both groups can meet so that knowledge transfer is possible among those who are newer and those who have experience. Long-term participants have grown over time, and some have chosen to leave sex work for other career paths of their own volition. Those who independently made the choice to do so have been supported in their efforts, including guidance on resume writing, job hunting, and continued support.

Program Lead: Quinn (they/she)
Email: trans.support@peers.bc.ca

Sacred

Program Description: Sacred is an Indigenous-led program for Indigenous sex workers. It is a group that allows for Indigenous sex workers to come together once a month to share food, culture, and cultural healing and supports. The monthly meeting occurs on the second Friday of every month and the Sacred Coordinator is available to offer support and outreach work to Sacred participants during the week. Members of Sacred do street outreach and plan and carry out social activism events.

Program Highlights: Sacred connects with 12-15 Indigenous sex workers. Since COVID, with Sacred returning to meeting in-person, participation has increased and remained fairly consistent. Sacred worked to build up the capacity of Indigenous leadership in order for the group to take more of a self-governed approach to facilitation and leadership. Sacred members have begun to facilitate their own workshops at the meetings which have included topics such as 'Keeping safe on the street', a rock painting craft, and regalia teachings. Another highlight for Sacred this past year has been the opportunity to have a local Elder join our meetings to offer cultural support and care – they have been attending our meetings regularly.

Coordinator: Mary (she/her)
Email: sacred@peers.bc.ca
Outreach Hours: 2 times a week
between 10:30am-2:30pm



Housing Outreach and Support

Program Description: The Peers Victoria Housing Outreach program is a Housing First program for people in or from sex work or trade in the Capital Regional District. The focus of the program is on individuals who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, or moving from shelters to permanent housing. The program's main objective is to implement the principles of Housing First in an outreach support relationship with persons seeking to obtain and maintain housing. Peers participants meeting the federal Reaching Home requirements for chronic or episodic homelessness have access to the program's funding to help with damage deposits, first month's rent, basic needs, supplies to support access to treatment services, and/or expenses related to seeking/participating in employment, etc.

Program Highlights: We supported approximately 256 participants in 2022-2023, primarily female-identifying individuals and almost exclusively within the 25-64 age range. We were able to support four individuals attain market rent within the Greater Victoria area as well as two individuals were successful in obtaining CRD-subsidized housing. Over the fiscal year, we supported eight individuals with rehousing (moving within the housing spectrum). We averaged two eviction prevention/shelter diversion situations per quarter, which includes financial support, mediation with landlords/management companies, and support through the Residential Tenancy Board processes. In 2022-2023, we provided crisis/emergency rent support to nine participants, averaging two times assistance approximately twice a quarter. We successfully accessed additional Reaching Homes contract funds, for individuals who specifically identify as precariously housed or unhoused.



Housing Outreach and Support cont.

...This allowed the Housing program at Peers to hire an additional Housing Support Worker and expand our scope in the supports we offer, and connect with the folks Peers connected within the HOPPS program. The supports offered in the past fiscal year ranged from helping participants connect to needed community resources, helping with emergent housing support needs (Including but not limited to cleaning, landlord-tenant communication), basic needs requirements, completion of forms required to determine supportive housing eligibility, help with justice system compliance and other concerns which can threaten housing stability.



Program Lead: Jen (she/her)
Email: housing2@peers.bc.ca
Work hours: Monday-Thursday 9am - 5pm

Violence Prevention & Response

Program Description:

The Violence Prevention and Response Team coordinates bad date reporting, supports sex workers who have experienced violence, and provides education for service providers on how to increase safety for sex workers. They facilitate reporting and proceedings with the VicPD Liaison Officer, contribute to the development of the BC Bad Date Reporting System, and provide public education and outreach around violence against oppressed individuals. The team liaises with local and provincial community partners to establish best practices regarding gender-based violence service provision.

Program Highlights:

Between workshops, outreach, and bad date reporting over 200 unique participants were supported through the Violence Prevention and Response Program between April 2022 and March 2023. We continue to circulate and respond to bad date and aggressor reports, and support sex workers from varied social locations with improving safety at work. We continue to participate in the development of the forthcoming BC Bad Date and Aggressor Report, the Victoria Sexual Assault Centre's Indigenous Response Network and advised on sexualized violence training for several frontline organizations. We also maintain a presence in Drop-in, on Night Outreach, and at community events.



Program Lead: Nadia (she/her)
Email: prevention.lead@peers.bc.ca
Work hours:

Health

Program Description:

Providing one-to-one support in the community, this outreach worker supports individuals to optimally access a range of health and allied services through education and development of resources to address health-related needs in the sex work community. In addition to supporting access to medical care, this worker also supports access to critical health-enhancing resources such as housing, food security, income, and social support. This program is primarily aimed at those affected by communicable conditions (HIV/AIDS and HCV) and/or acute health care needs.

Program Highlights:

The Health program began anew and switched its focus in October 2022 with Remy moving role into the role. It saw excellent engagement with 45-70 individuals regularly through several platforms, whether by email, in-person at drop-in or outreach, or through referrals. Multiple referrals and applications to housing, detox, HIV, STBBI, and HCV treatment, Vaccines, flu shots, including COVID, HIB, HPV, MonkeyPox, and more, successfully delivered to a wide array of community members. The development of Harm Reduction Kits has been responded to very positively by community, and especially outreach, where harm reduction supplies are often only offered a la carte (which leaves individuals to have to ask for supplies that should ideally always be used to prevent potential harm associated with substance use or sex). It also provided fantastic opportunities for individuals to give back to Peers through "harm reduction kit packing parties".

Program Lead: Remy (they/them)
Email: health@peers.bc.ca



Indoor Workers’ Group

Program Lead: Sarah and
Jessa (she/her)
Email: [indoorworkers@
peers.bc.ca](mailto:indoorworkers@peers.bc.ca)

Program Description:

Peers’ Indoor Workers Group is a monthly peer-based socio-educational group for sex workers in independent massage parlors and agency-based indoor environments. This group aims to build community with working individuals who do not already access Peers’ internal programming to share safety, advocacy concerns and solutions, and information and resources relevant to current indoor sex work.

Each month, the group meets for dinner, STBBI testing, and a chosen guest speaker(s) attends to provide information and answer questions.

Program Highlights:

Some highlights this year include the boudoir photoshoots, assistance with ads, workshops on boundaries, and sexual health info with a local nurse.



HOPPS

Housing Overdose Prevention & Peers Services

Program Description:

The Housing Overdose HOPPS program offers daily harm reduction, health and wellness support, and drug poisoning prevention and education services to over 100 residents daily in collaboration with local supportive housing and shelter sites. Through collaborative relationships with the Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness and Our Place Society, services were provided Monday to Friday 10–5 pm at Capital City Centre, 11–6 pm at Russell Street Shelter and 10–5 pm at Spaken House, with a total resident population of 150. This program has a strong emphasis on engaging residents in mentorship positions, highlighting their experiential wisdom and knowledge and their pivotal roles in responding within their communities. *Spaken House provided three days a week of service, increasing to five in March 2023



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WORK
IS REAL
WORK**

HOPPS cont.

Program Highlights:

We conducted more than 20 training sessions with our community partners for 20+ resident responders. These sessions covered topics such as Indigenous harm reduction, substance testing, peer-to-peer counseling, and conflict resolution. We provided stipend-based work opportunities to resident responders to support their capacity to address and prevent drug poisoning and share harm reduction knowledge within their communities. Additionally, Peers facilitated (30) monthly naloxone training at each location, organized cultural craft and art days to foster community connection among residents, and participated in community-wide education events about peer-based work and responding to the overdose crisis (Project Connect, Intl Overdose Awareness Day). The HOPPS program is a learning, evolving initiative. We worked with Island Health, other housing partners, and peer residents to collect evaluation feedback to continue improving the program.



Program Lead: Megan H (she/they)
Email: Megan@peers.bc.ca
Work hours: Mon-Fri 10 am- 6 pm

Night Outreach

Program description: Night outreach provides access to food, harm reduction supplies, safer sex supplies, clothing donations, and other practical needs through nightly outreach in the RV seven nights a week. Night outreach staff also provide internal referrals to relevant Peers programming, pass on messages to participants from other programs, and provide one-off crisis intervention support. Staff can also assist participants with submitting bad date reports.

Program Highlights: We saw over 500 individuals in April 2022–March 2023. Peers successfully acquired a new van for Night Outreach, and it was on the street, serving our folks by February 2023. This has made a significant difference in the services we can provide for our participants, including access to hot water for drinks, ample room for storing and distribution of supplies, and staff safety in inclement weather. We continue to provide access to a variety of items and resources to Peers participants on the van and support referrals to other Peers programming, including Housing, Violence Prevention, and QomQem.

Program Lead: Jen (she/her)
Email: program.manager@peers.bc.ca





Peers Core Values

The Experiential Voice
Non Judgmental, Client-Centred Service
Harm Reduction
Social Justice



Thank you to our generous donors

(AGM NOTE: MORE MAY BE ADDED BEFORE POSTING)



First Nations Health Authority



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CAI Community
Action
Initiative



Provincial Health
Services Authority



**Victoria Native
Friendship Centre**

Thank you to Peers' friends, collaborators, and partners

(AGM NOTE: MANY MORE TO COME!)



Alison Bigg



Greg Heubner



Marlene Stevens @ FNHA



aceh society



Belinda Daniels, Professor Indigenous Education @ UVic

Nuuchahnulth friends & colleagues Guy & Calvin
Gail Sam, Tsartlip Nation
Helena Sam, Songhees & Ahousaht Nations
BJ Sam, Tsartlip Nation
Pete Charlie, Ahousaht Nation
Annette Dick, Songhees Nations

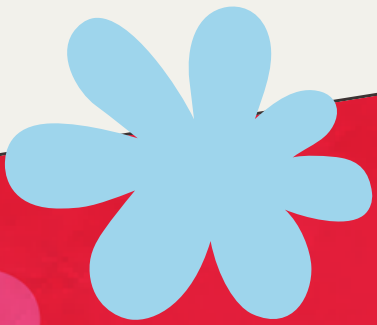


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HUMAN RIGHTS**



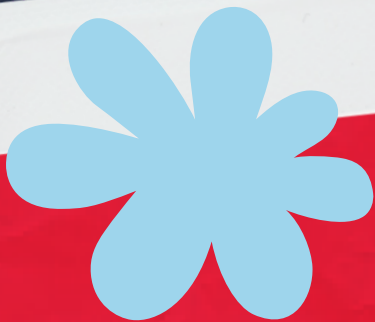


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