

# Positive Vibes



AIDS PEI COMMUNITY SUPPORT GROUP INC.

September, 2017

## LGBTQ+ Youth Group Program Expanding!

We are thrilled to announce that our LGBTQ+ Youth Group is expanding! YAY, YAY, YAY! The LGBTQ+ Youth Group program, which is open to everyone under the age of 19, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, will now **meet on the second and last Tuesday of each month at Murphy's Community Centre from 6 to 8pm.**

This exciting expansion simply would not have happened without the support of PEI's Queer community! Duncan McIntosh rallied the troops and hosted his own fundraiser in support of the program and, if that wasn't enough, the super Cool Cats from *Just The Way It Is* generously donated proceeds from the Island Fringe Festival. Plus members of the queer community continue to donate their time to help deliver the program. And, most importantly, LGBTQ+ identified youth show-up to every session to make this program what it is...the highlight of my month! Just kidding, well not really, but also a safe and inclusive space where all identities

are affirmed, diversity is celebrated, and everyone can have fun while being themselves. No assumptions, no boxes! The Department of Health



and Wellness also provided a Wellness Grant to support the expansion of this awesome program. These funds will help support the added session in Charlottetown, but will also be used to fund development activities that need to happen before the program can be launched in other communities. With youth traveling from all over PEI - Tignish, Kensington, Morell - we know interest extends well beyond Charlottetown's city limits. So what exactly is the LGBTQ+ Youth Group pro-

gram, and what makes it so awesome? Well, each session includes activities, discussion, and a healthy snack. Meetings are facilitated by staff and volunteers who have completed the required training and background assessments, but what makes it so awesome is that everything is youth led. Youth choose the discussion topics and run the conversation, and everyone is encouraged to share ideas for activities and snacks. There is no cost associated with participating and youth can join at anytime. In fact, we meet someone new at almost every session! If you would like more information about this program, or would like to get involved, don't hesitate to get in touch with the AIDS PEI office. You should also know that the **PEI Transgender Network** often holds parallel meetings! This grass-roots group offers support and resources to Trans Islanders and to the caregivers of Trans and gender creative kids - which is amazing! You can email [peitn@outlook.com](mailto:peitn@outlook.com) for more information about the Transgender Network.

### Suggestions Wanted

Do you have ideas for the content of this newsletter?

Do you know of an upcoming community event that you would like to see highlighted here?

Do you have questions that you would like answered in this format?

Send your ideas to: [outreach@aidspei.com](mailto:outreach@aidspei.com)

Or give us a call at: 1-902-566-2437

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### P.E.E.P Participation Opportunity

Share Your...



VOICE!

“...You want understanding. You want to be understood and [to] feel like yes, I can make changes, and feel better about how I'm living...”

PEEP Participant,  
age 32

If you've been following this newsletter for any length of time you've probably noticed our growing focus on harm reduction in the context of drug use. People who use drugs are at a higher risk for contracting sexually-transmitted and blood-borne infections for a variety of reasons - the way drugs are consumed, the way intoxication can impact decision-making about sexual activity, not to mention the way social systems criminalize and other wise marginalize people who use drugs. A focus on disease prevention is one part of harm reduction, but not the only part. A comprehensive harm reduction perspective recognizes that the harms caused by substance use in one area of life can cause harms in other areas as well. Service providers

working in various sectors - health, justice, non-profit - engage with people who use drugs and work to reduce the negative impacts caused by substance use. In order to get a better picture of this landscape in PEI, our office launched P.E.E.P (Peer Engagement and Evaluation Project) - a series of focus groups intended to engage people early in recovery or active in use in conversations about the resources (places, people, and things) they've accessed. To date, AIDS PEI has hosted three P.E.E.P sessions - one in Summerside and two in Charlottetown. Over the three sessions, 21 people have engaged with the project by participating in a facilitated group discussion. Our office rec-

ognizes that everyone is the expert of their own experience, and we've been learning a lot!

On **September 28th** we will host our last focus group in the P.E.E.P series at **St. Paul's Church** (Charlottetown) from **6 to 7: 30pm**. If you - or someone you know - has experience with substance use and would like to participate in this group discussion please call AIDS PEI to register. Project promotional materials are also available through AIDS PEI. All participants will receive a ten-dollar honorarium and care package for their contribution. Pizza and other foodstuffs will be available during the session. Space is limited, so register today to save your spot!

### First Pop-up Hepatitis C Testing Event a Success



Vanessa Arseneau, Chief Technologist, Health PEI

Know your status? Get tested - Learn your options! That was the slogan accompanying World Hepatitis Day 2017. In recognition, AIDS PEI (in coordination with Health PEI) was thrilled to offer its first ever pop-up testing event outside of the Boardwalk Professional Centre (July 28, 2017).

Viral hepatitis affects more than half a million Canadians. In fact, Hepatitis C is the most common chronic blood-borne virus in North America and the primary reason for liver transplants in Canada. Unfortunately, over the last number of years, PEI experienced a rise in confirmed cases of Hepatitis

C. Fortunately, we also boast one of the best CURE programs around (Yes, Hepatitis C can be cured!). Here's the catch though - it is estimated that about 40% of people living with the virus have no idea. That's why encouraging testing, and addressing barriers to testing, is so important. If folks don't know they're living with the virus, then they can't be linked to care and cured! Many of the populations identified as being at risk for Hepatitis C infection, including people who use drugs, experience signifi-

cant barriers to testing - lack of engagement with health care providers, transportation issues, unstable living situations, misperceptions regarding risk, shame and stigma, and the list goes on. Pop-up testing helps remove barriers by providing rapid testing in non-clinical settings (like needle exchange sites). During our 3-hour event, which was provided in collaboration with Dr. Lisa Barrett and Dr. Greg German, 30 people were tested for Hep C, and about 40 people accessed information about viral hepatitis. Success? I think so!

## Charlottetown's Scotiabank AIDS Walk

Small but mighty - that's the only way to describe the group that gathered at Victoria Park On September 10th for the 2017 Scotiabank Charlottetown AIDS Walk. We had a core group of fundraisers engage the Island community throughout August and into September, and about thirty-five people attended the WALK event itself. We made our way up the boardwalk to Queen Street, and back down Euston - getting a few high fives along the way - until we landed back at the Park for a fantastic BBQ. In Canada, AIDS Walk initiatives are supported by a National hub created and maintained by the Canadian AIDS



Society, but it's not a National Campaign per se. Local organizers depend on grass-roots labour (also known as community volunteers), and all of the funds raised in a locality will remain in that area to support those living with, and impacted by, HIV. Our fundraising goal was \$3, 000. We didn't quite make it, but we were so close! The grand total; which includes cash collected the day of the Walk, online donations collected throughout the campaign, and funds raised through associated activities (like our Walk raffle), currently sits at

**\$2,314.25.** If you want to help push us over the edge consider making a last minute contribution by visiting [www.scotiabankaidswalk.ca/charlottetown](http://www.scotiabankaidswalk.ca/charlottetown), which will be live until the end of the month.

We would like to thank everyone who supported the Charlottetown AIDS Walk by participating, fundraising, donating, volunteering, and sponsoring. Our top earning team - Keep On Walking - was awarded a group tour and tasting thanks to UPSTREET Craft Brewing. Our top earning individual walker - Kandace Hagan - was awarded a gift card courtesy of the Confederation Court Mall. We would also like to thank Sean and Kathleen Casey for their support, PRIDE PEI for running sound, Vance and Jeff for delivering an awesome BBQ, and our event sponsors; Scotiabank, Maritime Electric, and the Confederation Court Mall. We would also like to thank the Canadian AIDS Society for all of their hard work.

## Canadian Coalition to Reform HIV Criminalization

The Canadian Coalition to Reform HIV Criminalization (CCRHC) is proposing a Community Consensus statement calling for action at all levels of government in order to address the overly broad use of criminal law in cases of alleged HIV non-disclosure. In 1998 the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that a person living with HIV had a legal duty to disclose their HIV status before engaging in sexual activity that posed a significant risk of serious bodily harm. Within this framing, a failure to disclose ones HIV-status invalidates consent - which amounts to sexual assault. In 2012, the Supreme Court amended this ruling clarifying that a signif-

icant risk of serious bodily harm exists when there is a realistic possibility of HIV transmission. The amendment was intended to avoid criminalization in cases where there was a small or speculative possibility of transmission - unfortunately, it did the exact opposite. There is a significant disconnect between the science of HIV transmission and the application of Canadian HIV disclosure laws. As a result, Canadian courts are reaching contradictory conclusions and people living with HIV are being prosecuted for not disclosing their HIV status even in cases where there is no (as in zero) possibility of transmitting the HIV virus. Charges are being brought forward in cases where no transmission occurred - and in cases where, based on scientific evidence, the sexual activity in question effectively poses no risk of transmission at all. HIV is not a crime, and yet in Canada

we have the third-largest number of recorded prosecutions for alleged HIV non-disclosure in the world. In our country, conviction rates for sexual assault involving coercive non-consensual sex are mad-deningly low - they're higher when prosecution is based on HIV non-disclosure (even when the sexual encounter was otherwise consensual). This unfortunate fact exposes the stigma, and institutionally sanctioned discrimination, at play here.

The CCRHC is currently engaged in community consultations on the proposed consensus statement. A draft version of the statement is available for viewing online through the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network. Hard copies can be accessed upon request through the AIDS PEI office.





Prevention — Support — Community

## AIDS PEI COMMUNITY SUPPORT GROUP INC.

### Save the Date: Organizational Re-Launch

We are ready to re-launch, and we hope you'll consider joining us as we start this exciting new adventure at **the Guild on October 24th from 4 to 6pm.**



As you may have heard, AIDS PEI has been engaged in an active process of change –exploring, shifting, and expanding - all with the aim of better meeting the sexual health and harm reduction needs of those who call Prince Edward Island home. Now the time has come to share these

exciting developments with you; our members, professional partners, organizational allies, and community stakeholders! This event is all about getting (re)acquainted so, although we certainly hope to see some familiar faces, anyone and everyone who is interested in learning more about AIDS PEI's new organizational identity is welcomed to attend. Our new name and tagline will (finally) be unveiled with our new logo and mission statement. This is all very exciting, so come out and help us mark this important milestone in AIDS PEI's organizational history!

At this event, we will explore the ins-and-outs of the new organizational identity. We'll also chat about what it all means in relation to the projects and activities AIDS PEI has been, and continues to be, engaged in. Representatives from Fresh Media will be in attendance to discuss their involvement in the re-visioning process, and to explain how they helped

the organization get to where it is right now - participating the present and ready for the future!

As PEI's only community-based resource centre focused on sexual health wellbeing and harm reduction for people who use drugs, we recognize that we have a lot of ground to cover and we want everyone to feel comfortable engaging with our organization. Of course, that said, our organization remains committed to supporting those living with, and most impacted by, HIV/AIDS. This organization was constituted within that struggle twenty-six years ago. Everything the organization is today has grown from those deep roots of community activism, empowerment, and advancement. This rich history, and the lessons learned along the way, has created the foundation we are building on. And so the journey continues... Hope to see you there!

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#### About AIDS PEI

AIDS PEI is a not-for-profit organization that engages, supports, and educates all Islanders on issues related to sexual health and harm reduction in the context of drug use. Through innovative programming and educational workshops, we work to contribute to the prevention of HIV, Hepatitis C, and all sexually transmitted and blood borne infections (STBBI's). AIDS PEI strives to increase positive health outcomes by engaging and supporting those living with, and most impacted by, HIV and Hepatitis C while creating opportunities for partnerships, community engagement, and systems change. AIDS PEI provides a non-judgmental environment free from stigma in which people can access information and support .

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Find us online:

[www.aidspei.com](http://www.aidspei.com)

[Facebook.com/AIDS PEI Community Support Group Inc.](https://www.facebook.com/AIDSPEICommunitySupportGroupInc)

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