



AVI Prepares for the 21st Century

By David Swan, Chair

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

AVI Prepares for 21st Century

Page 1

Got Questions? Get Answers

Page 2

Looking for a Few Good Women; Men's Wellness

Page 3

A Busy Year in Nanaimo; Strategic Planning

Page 4

Challenges Ahead

Page 5

What's New with Volunteer Services; Letter from the Chair

Page 6

On the Front Lines

Page 7

Beyond Harm Reduction 101

Page 8

Welcome to the new millenium. It has always been my hope that AVI would not need to exist in the 21st century, that HIV/AIDS would be a historical fact of the 1900s and no longer be a social and health issue. But here we are and AIDS is still with us.

At a development retreat in October, the current board renewed its focus on AVI's mandate "to confront Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), prevent its spread through education, support all those affected by the disease, and advocate on their behalf". We also recognized the changing needs in HIV/AIDS community work. Current treatments and their inherent difficulties have shifted the progression of this epidemic. Also, at AVI's inception AIDS was considered a gay issue; this is no longer true. The rate of infection in the heterosexual community in Victoria is alarming. AIDS is of particular concern to a number of marginalized communities in our region. AVI must be able to change to meet new demands and needs. Services and programs must be accessible and sensitive to the diversity of those who are infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.

To this end, AVI's board voted at its December meeting to adopt a new board committee structure. Board committees, which are chaired by board members, help guide and create AVI's policies with community input and involvement. It is a way for the governing body of the agency to be visible and responsive to staff, members and clients of AVI. Traditionally, the agency has had a committee for each of AVI's departments in addition to a Board Executive Committee, which carried out the administrative functions of the board.

In consultation with the staff, we found that existing committees duplicated many staff functions. Given the new dynamics we are facing, the board decided to redesign its committee structure in order to be more involved in the policies that drive larger functions of the agency. The new committee structure includes the Executive Committee; Fund Development Committee; Regional and Remote Services Committee (which will address issues in regards to AVI's mandate to provide services throughout parts of Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands); Services Committee (an amalgamation of the previous Client, Education and SOS Committees); Strategic Planning Committee (which will engage in a community consultation process to examine the current issues that AVI faces and create a three-to-five year plan for our organization); AVI Site/Location Committee (which will investigate the needs of AVI now and in the future regarding space and the location of our agency); and Evaluation Committee (which will consider our tools and methods to ensure we are providing the best service delivery we can).

Board committees are open to any members who wish to participate. It is our intention that these be working committees that assess and direct AVI. I encourage anyone who is interested to contact me, David Swan (889-5204) or Ruthann Tucker (384-2366). Your energy, ideas and problem-solving skills would be greatly appreciated. We are committed to AVI's role as a community-based agency. This means, to me, that AVI belongs to all of us.

Got Questions? Get Answers!

By Yasmin Rampuri

Education Services is a busy, busy area at AIDS Vancouver Island! We help clients in several different ways, but our overall goal is to provide the most current and wide-ranging information we can find about HIV/AIDS to anyone seeking it. We do this in several different ways; our services include the AIDS Infoline, the Resource Centre, and a Speakers Bureau.

Infoline operates from 9am to 5pm Monday through Friday. In a given year we may log as many as 600 calls from people having all types of questions about HIV/AIDS and other community resources, both here and elsewhere in BC. Anyone can call in, locally at 384-2366, or from out of town at 1-800-665-AIDS (2437). We do our best to answer any questions that you might have and provide training and information to the volunteers and staff taking the calls.

In addition, we have a fabulous, new and improved Resource Centre (thanks to a generous grant from the Victoria Foundation), open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. In our collection, we have everything from media clippings and videos to magazines, journals, journal articles and piles and piles of books on every topic related to HIV/AIDS. These include such categories as legal issues, AIDS in the world, healthy living, sexuality, HIV and families, and information for and about groups like youth, women, aboriginal people, incarcerated populations, IV drug users and lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered people. To borrow books or other materials from the Resource Centre please see a staff member or volunteer in the centre and obtain a free membership card, and then you can sign out whatever you'd like for up to two weeks. The centre is available for anyone to use, and we encourage you to come and check us out.

Another service is our Speakers' Bureau. We will tailor a presentation to meet your needs with one or more of our excellent speakers, who will share up-to-date information about HIV/AIDS, and their own stories if that is applicable. A display unit is also available for information fairs, shows and other bookings. We do about 120 speaks per month to schools and universities, church groups, workplaces and so on. On the third Wednesday of every month, we host an evening workshop entitled AIDS 101 in the Resource Centre for anyone who would like to drop by.

The Resource Centre is located in Victoria at 304-733 Johnson Street. To find out what resources and services are available at the Regional & Remote office in Nanaimo, call (250) 753-2437.

Speaking Out

Each Year, AVI's Speakers' Bureau volunteers give close to 250 presentations to 15,000 people across Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands.

Speakers' Bureau volunteers have a wide range of personal experiences based on gender, sexual orientation, history of drug use, sero-status and ethnicity. All have undergone extensive training in both theory and practice.

Community agencies, civic groups, schools, religious organizations, businesses, governments and others have requested presentations on a variety of topics:

- AIDS 101
- Living With HIV/AIDS
- Women and HIV/AIDS
- AIDS in the Workplace
- Talking to Kids about HIV/AIDS
- Other topics are available upon request

Want to book a speak? In Victoria, call Yasmin Rampuri, Erica Williamson or Katrina Jensen at (250) 384-2366. For presentations outside Greater Victoria please call Guy Tohana at (250) 753-2437.

*"New & Interesting Facts
about HIV and AIDS"
an inservice for clients and staff
Thursday, January 27th
3pm
in the Resource Centre*

VOX - The Voice of the Victoria HIV/AIDS Centre

VOX is published bi-monthly by AIDS Vancouver Island (AVI). Typed submissions and letters to the editor are welcome c/o The Victoria HIV/AIDS Centre Attn: VOX #304 - 733 Johnson St., Victoria, BC, V8W 3C7, or via email at smotz@avi.org. Letters to the editor should not exceed 200 words and must include name, address, telephone number. Your name can be withheld by request. VOX will print no sexist, racist or homophobic copy and will cover issues and events pertaining to the lives of those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. The appearance of any advertisements, treatment information or letters to the editor does not imply endorsement by AVI.

Submissions may be edited for concision and grammatical correctness.

AVI will not be responsible for errors or omissions.

Editorial Committee

Walter Quan, Shelley M. Motz - Editor

WHIP is Looking for a Few Good Women

By Erica Williamson

It's nearing the new millenium and the Women's Health Information Project (WHIP), desperately needs some revitalising. The WHIPs (as its volunteers refer to themselves) have put forward some exciting new ideas for how this can be done.

It has been decided that a newsletter is necessary; it would be an excellent way to educate the community, and offer updated information about WHIP activities. As well it would give women the opportunity to be creative while demonstrating their talents as writers, poets and artists.

Activities that will spark the interest of all women are a must. We have an erotic idea for Valentines Day—a sexual fantasy costume party. The venue would be the G-Spot—could you get more appropriate than that? We will request that you dress as your sexual fantasy or someone else's and be prepared for some very stimulating conversation. The Spot will be licensed so this particular event will be for those over 19 only.

Forums that will address specific issues relevant to women's health are our main focus. The collation of our survey gave us some excellent ideas for provocative forums for the New Year. Topics such as body image, relationship retrieval, and fun with sex toys, will be the focus. We will keep you updated with dates and locations.

As you can see WHIP is full of ideas but is short of the volunteers who can make them a reality. Join our amazingly dynamic collective of four, simply by calling Erica Williamson in the Resource Centre, 384-2366. We want to enter the New Year revived with energy!

Men's Wellness is an Ongoing Priority

By Marc Mertens

The Men's Wellness Program (MWP), formerly known as the Men's Outreach Project, has been operating since 1996, providing harm reduction and prevention education to gay and bisexual men on Vancouver Island. MWP supplies basic latex and safer sex materials, then works to address the psycho-social barriers to safer sex like drug & alcohol use/misuse/abuse, "coming out" issues, self-worth and self-esteem, and relationship skills. We believe that by tackling these challenges we are able to support sero-positive men, while preventing new HIV-infections.

The program offers a number of different programs and services:

Community Forums bring together groups of 70 to 130 men to discuss issues important to individuals and the community. Join us January 26 & 27 for "Friends & Lovers: a forum for all gay & bisexual men on creating relationships". This event will be hosted by former AVI Chair Bryan Teixeira, PhD and Robert Osborne. Space is limited and tickets are available by calling 384-2366, ext. 110.

Youth Programs are a new addition to MWP. After the great success of last year's "Check Your Booty" conference, we are again working with organizers to produce "Check Your Booty 2" in May 2000.

Group Works allow smaller groups of men to gather in a safe environment to meet,

discuss and support one another. Gay Men Read Books, the MWP reading group, is starting its sixth book in February, *The End of Gay* by Bert Archer. The Gay Men's Discussion Group meets bimonthly starting in February, and will be inviting more special guests in 2000. Regretfully, due to a seeming lack of interest, Hominum, our group for men coming out after marriage, may be cancelled in the new year.

The MWP **Website** continues to be a local favourite for men interested in local activities and events. Our monthly focus has recently discussed issues such as "barebacking" and testicular self-examination. We also host the site for "Check Your Booty". Expect a new look for the site in 2000. Education and support for gay & bisexual men in relation to

HIV-disease has shifted gears in recent years. More and more research and experience suggests that these groups are reached more successfully by placing AIDS in a broader context of gay men's health. In the new year, MWP will be working with Gay Health Canada, a coalition of MSM educators and researchers, to further investigate this framework.

One thing is for certain. We know that gay men are healthier the more "out" they are, the more support they sense from family, friends and peers, and the better they can address problems relating to their overall holistic health. It is for this reason that the Men's Wellness Program will continue to help build a community stronger than HIV.

A Busy Year in Nanaimo

By Guy Tohana

Looking back at 1999. That seems to be what a lot of us are doing these days. For the Regional & Remote department in Nanaimo, this was a year of consistency. We had no staff changes, and started regular formal communication with the Victoria office through monthly representation at the staff meetings. Opportunities for positive changes have come in the absence of feeling like we are "trying to hold our heads above water". As a result of this consistency, our programs (Support, Education and Fund Development) have grown.

Some clients have been members of the Support Group since before the Regional & Remote office was opened four years ago on December 1. The group for people living with HIV was started through our predecessor, the Nanaimo & District AIDS Collective, and the Island Outreach Worker for AIDS Vancouver Island some seven years ago. The group continues to be strong and is moving more towards self-facilitation. There were two retreats for support group members this year, one to Tofino on the West Coast, and one on Mayne Island. These retreats are designed to expand participants' awareness. Medical treatments have helped some people living with HIV enjoy better general health. This well being has brought with it the opportunity for them to make some new choices. Back to school? Employment retraining? Volunteer opportunities? We continue to support people through these changes as for many this can be a stressful time.

The Education department has also seen changes this year. Numerous homophobia presentations have been delivered to high school students in Nanaimo. Regional & Remote has worked very hard to advocate for these presentations, and will continue working to increase awareness of the affects of homophobia, especially in rural centres. Longstanding volunteers have significantly helped the department realize many of its goals. With their assistance we have been able to provide regular and frequent HIV-information sessions to local detox centres and schools. Our relationship with the community, and the community itself, is stronger due to our work to enhance health in the region. Throughout the year we have fought complacency and the stigmatization and marginalization of intravenous drug users, gay men, and people with HIV disease.

Our fourth annual AIDS Walk was another great success. This event involves and includes over 200 community members; from the planning committee made up of volunteers, to the "day of", the AIDS Walk brings us all together to focus on some common attainable goals. Once a year, we are able to see the work we do accomplish a lot. We hear HIV+ people speak publicly about their own lives and meet their families; we offer businesses an opportunity and a public venue to support our work; and then, we walk together.

The seventh annual AIDS Benefit, which was organised a bit differently this year, provided another opportunity to include the community in our work and raise money. It was great fun.

All and all it was a good year, and we already have some great ideas for the new one. As always, including people living with HIV in our planning, remains our priority here at AIDS Vancouver Island's Regional & Remote office in Nanaimo.

Strategic Planning Leads AVI Into the Millennium

By Ruthann Tucker

The Board of Directors of AIDS Vancouver Island recently made the decision to engage in an open and inclusive process to develop a Strategic Plan to guide the agency over the next two to three years.

Strategic Planning is an important activity for community-based agencies like AVI to engage in. The process will actively seek out the opinions and ideas of our stakeholders, partners, clients, staff and members like you about what direction AVI should be headed in for the future and what programs and services we should be offering in the next two to three years to best meet the needs of the communities and individuals we serve. It is a time for all of us to reflect on the work we have done and to develop a plan to guide our work.

As part of the process to regionalize the provincial HIV/AIDS funding to the various Health Authorities throughout British Columbia, AVI has been working together with our community partners to develop HIV/AIDS service plans for both the Capital Health Region and the Central Vancouver Island Health Region. These plans will set the regional priorities for programs and services in our communities. The plans have identified a number of goals and objectives that we are planning to meet over the next three years. These plans will form the foundation of AVI's new Strategic Plan and it will be up to us to decide what role AVI will take and how we will accomplish the work.

David Swan is chairing the Strategic Planning Committee with June Beattie and Cindy Jamieson as members. In January the Strategic Planning Committee will be developing the terms of reference for the committee and will be seeking membership from the various stakeholders within AVI and the community. If you are interested in becoming a member of this committee please contact David Swan at 250-889-5304 and/or tollfree number or me, Ruthann Tucker, at (250) 384-2355 at 1-800-665-2437.

Challenges Ahead for Communications & Resource Development

By Stacy P. Leblanc

The goals and objectives of Communications & Resource Development are to increase public awareness of AIDS Vancouver Island in the general community, among specific stakeholders and among other AIDS Service Organizations (ASOs), and to develop and implement a comprehensive resource development program to meet annual and longterm funding objectives.

Finding a balance between the needs of both communications and resource development is always a challenge. This past year was no exception. I started my tenure as Coordinator in January of 1999, and with Kelsey Howat providing administrative support, spent January and February processing tax receipts for two large and successful fundraisers from 1998, the AIDS Walk and *Dancers For Life*. February also provided the opportunity to fill the Communications Assistant position with Shelley Motz, who came to us via *Monday Magazine*.

In January I was re-elected to the post of BC/Yukon representative for the National Advisory Committee (NAC) for AIDS Walk Canada. The NAC is an advisory committee that facilitates the creation of an effective AIDS Walk Canada project and acts as a guide and resource for the AIDS Walk Canada Project Manager. AVI has been an integral component of the NAC since its inception in 1995.

Promoting and publicizing the work of AIDS Vancouver Island is a continuous role played by everyone in the agency. Our profile is constantly being reinforced in the community by the ongoing work of the Education department, especially through the work of the Speakers' Bureau and the Men's Wellness Program. Street Outreach Services remains a strong and committed advocate for the injection drug using population, street workers and the street community in general.

The communications department, with the coordination of Volunteer Services, provides logistical and technical support to AVI-sponsored functions, including the Men's Wellness Program's community forums, the AIDS Walk, AIDS Awareness Week and World

AIDS Day. The department is also responsible for ensuring that the agency positions itself firmly in the public eye, through the use of strategically timed advertisements and by being a community leader on HIV/AIDS issues with the local media. This past year the department was fortunate enough to work jointly with the Canadian AIDS Society, and Media Relations Director Lisa McCann, to produce a news conference during the Eighth Annual Canadian Conference on HIV/AIDS Research. AIDS Vancouver Island released the final report of the Men's Attitudes About Relationships and Sexuality (M.A.R.S.) Project, *It's About a Lifetime: Men's Attitudes About Sexuality, Relationships and Safer Sex*, and CAS released *HIV Transmission, Guidelines For Assessing Risk*.

One of AIDS Vancouver Island's strongest communication tools is our bimonthly newsletter, *VOX*. Shelley Motz acts as editor and layout person. Walter Quan, a longtime volunteer, works with Shelley as an editorial advisor. *VOX* uses a theme-based approach that provides an in depth exploration of issues and topics. Past themes have included Aboriginals and HIV/AIDS, Youth and HIV/AIDS, Women and HIV/AIDS, as well as joint collaborations with Street Outreach Services and the Men's Wellness Program.

The fundraising arm of the department experienced a year of evaluation and decision making. With a strong foundation built on high-calibre, high-profile, special events we decided to diversify our fundraising portfolio, without surrendering our proven sources of revenue and publicity. The AIDS Walk remains Victoria's most high profile fundraising and public awareness event. The 1999 Victoria AIDS Walk grossed more than \$43,000, and expenses came in at a respectable \$6,300. It was preceded by the hugely successful *Victoria's Dancers For Life*, on December 1, 1998. This first time event raised \$22,000 in net profit. Planning and programming for *Dancers For Life (DFL) 2000* is well underway and the search for corporate sponsorship has also been started. The *DFL*

committee is confident that with the success of one event under its belt support for the second will be strong.

1999 also saw an increase in the dollars raised via foundations and grants. In the last 12 months AVI has received \$3,500 from the Victoria Foundation, \$5,000 from Glaxo Wellcome in partnership with BioChem Pharma, and \$10,000 from MAC AIDS Fund. A more strategic approach will be used in 2000 to solicit project-specific funding from foundations and grants; this will necessitate the cooperation of other agency departments.

Third party fundraising efforts were also presented to the agency, with some of the more successful ones being a function hosted by Angela Clark at the Jet Lounge and the Millennium Nightclub and a musical revue by the cast of *Judy Liza Judy* at BJ's Lounge.

The department is also in the process of upgrading its relational fundraising database, as we have outgrown the system we currently use. After a great deal of research on the part of Administrative Services and Resource Development, it appears that most fundraising database systems are designed for organizations that are considerably larger than AVI. Other important considerations are the cost associated with the software and the technical support needed to launch the program. More research will be needed to determine the best course of action:

More than ever the work of this department adds to the overall mix of AVI, and our commitment to collaboration and cooperation with other departments and community groups remains solid. The department contributes greatly to all areas of the agency. Planning for the year 2000 is well underway and the need for committed and experienced volunteers to fill the important positions on the various fundraising committees is still needed. As ever, the year 2000 promises to be a challenge and a tremendous adventure with hard work and wonderful rewards.

What's New with Volunteer Services

By Audrey Price

I am the acting Volunteer Services Coordinator, from December 2nd until January 28th, when Tathra Street returns from her adventures abroad.

I am grateful for the opportunity to work with the dedicated volunteers who spend so much of their time and energy providing services at AVI. I have met several of the volunteers in the last few weeks and am hoping to meet many more at the Volunteer Appreciation Bowling Night on December 28th. Please come to the Centre and introduce yourselves to me; my door is always open.

In December, I worked with volunteers on the Holiday Dinner and Gift-Sacks for our clients and the Volunteer Appreciation Night. Maintaining reception volunteers has been a real challenge with the holiday season, but we have some very dedicated volunteers who fill vacant shifts with little notice. The other volunteer- managed programs like the Bean Scene, bread and donut deliveries, Infoline, Speakers Bureau, general office assistance, and emotional support to clients would not be possible without the constant hard work of our volunteers.

Upcoming projects utilizing volunteers are the programs listed above, as well as the Men's Forum, volunteer drivers, data entry for the AIDS Walk and other reports, Women's Health Information Project, Information table representatives, Street Outreach, and the Men's Outreach. I am particularly excited about a new volunteer opportunity as a Drop-In Host for the centre. The position is currently under

development and a Pilot-Project of sorts is currently underway. If anyone is interested in volunteering for these programs, please contact me to discuss them.

I am currently creating a Volunteer Survey to be sent out to our registered volunteers in mid- January. This Survey will help me to gauge volunteer satisfaction, ways to improve our current support system of volunteers, and to update our database with current volunteer information. The opinions our volunteers submit in the Survey will help me to more effectively partner volunteer opportunities with our volunteer's skills, interests and abilities. Our volunteers are our greatest resource, so I hope that all the volunteers will take a moment to fill out the Survey and get it back to me. There will be additional copies of the Survey available in the drop-in for any volunteers who are unable to receive one by mail.

The Fall Core Training boasted 27 new Graduates! The Spring Core Training will begin on February 20th, 2000. Please sign up with me as soon as you can. Tathra Street will be back to conduct the training, and it would be wonderful to have another full class of eager volunteers!

It has been a real privilege working with and getting to know the Staff and Volunteers at AVI. When Tathra returns, I will be continuing my participation at the centre as a volunteer; starting with the Core Training, like everybody else. See you there!

Dear Members, Clients, Staff & Volunteers,

As Chair of AIDS Vancouver Island I am writing on behalf of the board and staff. An issue of inclusivity was brought to our attention last December. AVI advertised its December fundraising appeal and PHA dinner in the context of Christmas. It was pointed out to us that this language may exclude individuals who do not feel or choose to be a part of a predominately Christian festival.

AVI is and always has been committed to a principle of inclusivity. As a community-based agency we are very aware that we engage with a diverse range of individuals and communities. It is vital that we remain accessible to everyone and do not commit to any one social practice or belief. I believe that this year's error was a product of exuberance and lack of consciousness in the moment.

I am thankful that our mistake was pointed out to us. Guiding principles are only useful if they are engaged in practice. We have had many discussions at all levels of AVI regarding this issue and will attempt to address it more effectively in the future. I apologize to any individual who may have been offended by our language use or felt isolated or marginalized by our activities. That was not our intention.

I believe that this has been an important remembering lesson for us. It has been a good example of community engagement--a relevant personal concern was brought into the realm of public discussion and ensured that as an agency we stay on track with our fundamental beliefs.



David Swan

Thank You . . .

The board and staff of AVI would like to thank the following organizations, whose support enabled AVI to provide 175 of our low-income, HIV+ clients with fabulous Holiday Gift Sacks. Thanks to their generosity, the holidays were warmer and brighter for many of the folks we care about.

A & T Store

The Bay

Bernard Callebaut (Broughton Street location)

Blenz Coffee (Yates and 1328 Douglas Street locations)

BreadStuffs

Bristol Town Hair Fashions

Flo's Diner (Nanaimo)

GardenWorks (Island Highway location)

John's Military Surplus

Lifestyle Markets

London Drugs (Yates Street location)

Lush

Penderdoodle

Purdy's Chocolates (Eaton Centre location)

Scruples Hair Studio

Silk Road Aromatherapy & Tea Company

Victoria Box & Paper

On the Front Lines

What's Up with Drop-In?

By Jim Oliver and Vince Ruttan,
Client Service Workers

The Client Services Drop-In at AVI is a place of activity, relaxation, mutual support, entertainment and warmth for the many clients who use the space. The Drop-In provides a safe space for clients to meet to socialize, form friendships, to give and receive support and to share humour and information on their mutual journeys with HIV.

Clients come and go throughout the day though Drop-In is busiest at lunch time, when a hot meal is served (often to 30 or more people). Coffee and donuts (courtesy of Robin's Donuts on Craigflower Road) are always available and bread is donated weekly by Bond Bond's Bakery. Hot and hearty soups, courtesy of SoupWorks, are delivered to the Drop-In daily by an AVI client.

Wednesday evenings from 5pm to 8pm, there is a video event, usually drawing 10 or more clients. Once a month the movie is complemented by excellent pizza made by clients and volunteers; when there is pizza, video night swells to over 20!

Impromptu and informal Tuesday meetings are held most weeks at noon. This is an opportunity for clients and Client Services staff to share successes and concerns. These meetings are well attended, with high participation, and help ensure the atmosphere of the Drop-In is positive and supportive for all who use it.

Recently, both Reiki and Healing Touch have been added as Drop-In services for clients. Reiki practitioners come to the Drop-In every second Wednesday evening and provide free sessions to any and all clients who wish to take advantage of its healing

What Can Client Services Do ?

By Garth Greatheart, Coordinator, Client Services

Working as a coordinated team, the Client Services department consists of one coordinator, 1.5 Client Service Workers, and 10 volunteers. Through their efforts, a variety of programs have been established that provide direct services to people who are affected by and infected with HIV/AIDS.

Many people infected with HIV/AIDS are no longer able to work at a full-time job. When this happens, the Client Services Advocacy program assists registered clients in obtaining disability benefits through the Ministry of Social and Economic Development and/or by applying to CPP. This work may include filling out the initial applications and, if necessary, proceeding through the appeals process. Client Service Workers also help clients find a doctor or dentist, assist with writing wills, provide information about healthy living and make referrals to other social service agencies.

For those people who are on fixed incomes, Client Services provides three income assistance programs: The Emergency Assistance Fund, which provides a maximum of \$100 in Thrifty's vouchers to each registered client in any one year; the Bus Pass Fund which provides a one-year pass to those who receive Disability Benefits Level II through the Ministry of Social and Economic Development and the Complementary Health Fund, which offers a one-time start-up of \$75 to go towards the purchase of

vitamins and bottled water.

The Fit for Life Program provides access to fitness passes through the YM-YWCA. This six-month pass gives registered clients on low and fixed incomes the opportunity to utilize the workout area, sauna, whirlpool and swimming pool facilities. These passes can be renewed indefinitely.

Client Services Food Programs provide nutritious food to HIV+ clients: This includes the Garden of Eat'n Cafe which serves hot lunches to over 500 people per month, and the AVI Food Store which provides clients with healthy food, budgeting tips and personal care items.

Finally, registered clients who are newly diagnosed or need short-term counselling assistance can make an appointment with Jim Oliver or Garth Greatheart through the Client Services Counselling and Support program. Counsellors have been trained in brief solution-focussed counselling and crisis intervention techniques. They can also provide pre- and post-test counselling, interpret test results and assist individuals, couples and families.

energy. A Healing Touch practitioner comes to the Drop-In on Thursdays from 1pm-2pm; she has been well-received by the clients who have spent time with her. We look forward to these services continuing into the future and hope to add to them with other complementary healing services.

Client Service Workers have also been working with other departments on activities that involve and/or affect the Drop-In

clientele, including a benefit at BJ's lounge, and a holiday dinner for clients of AVI. Many individuals from the Drop-In worked with Client Services Workers, staff from other departments and volunteers on an awareness action held December 1 (World AIDS Day); red ribbons and pamphlets dispelling common myths about HIV/AIDS were handed out to passersby during a busy lunch hour in downtown Victoria.

Beyond Harm Reduction 101: A Year at the Noodle

By Kate Thwaites, Street Outreach Worker

It's been a year of tremendous growth at Street Outreach Services (aka "the Noodle"). In this, our 10th year of operation, SOS has undertaken several new and innovative programs which highlight the broad spectrum that harm reduction encompasses. We continue to break monthly records for syringes exchanged, and our tireless efforts to bring the concept and practice of harm reduction to the forefront have started to pay off.

This far, SOS has exchanged 298 000 syringes with an exchange rate of 106%. We have registered 390 new clients. If we continue at this rate, we will exchange more than 400 000 syringes this fiscal year. So what is harm reduction and why needle exchange? Harm reduction is both a philosophy of working with people and a pragmatic approach to service delivery. Viewing behaviours through a harm reduction lens acknowledges that people are going to engage in "risky" behaviours, such as injection drug use, and that traditional approaches such as criminalizing this behaviour and using law enforcement as a "solution" serve only to push people further underground and further at risk. The "War on Drugs" is a war on marginalized peoples: Aboriginal people, people of colour, people living in poverty, the street-involved. People internalize the negative judgements made about their choices and that this translates into deeply ingrained feelings of guilt, shame, worthlessness. When people feel crummy about themselves, they are more likely to engage in risky behaviours such as unprotected sex and drug use, and less likely to use adequate precautions such as latex barriers and sterile syringes.

SOS provides harm reduction tools such as free, confidential needle exchange, condom distribution, access to street-level health care, advocacy, referrals to "friendly" organizations, and a safe place to retreat to. Needle exchange is a crucial part of the strategy to reduce the spread of HIV and Hepatitis in that it provides the necessary equipment and education required to use drugs safely. But it is only one small segment of a successful comprehensive prevention program. Addressing the social determinants of health is key to the prevention of issues such as HIV, addiction and mental illness. Our work is primarily about establishing trust and helping people believe that they are worth staying alive. How do we accomplish this?

Harm reduction as a philosophy views people as people rather than the behaviours they engage in. Thus, use of language is important: we don't call people "drug addicts" but rather "drug users" or "people who inject drugs" as drug use exists on a continuum and not all drug users view themselves as addicted. As service providers, we do not view ourselves as "experts" but acknowledge the experiences of the people we work with and see them as the experts—this is empowering in itself. We work with people where they are at rather than waiting for them to reach a certain set of predetermined goals. We work to make efforts and programming fit the client rather than requiring the client to fit a mould in order to attain help. We offer unconditional and nonjudgemental support and constantly try to offer people positive options for change if they identify that's what they want. We work from an outreach model of service delivery which means we are accessible, safe and creative in the ways we reach people.

Education is the most basic and important prevention effort we utilize. We educate our clients as to how to use drugs safely so that they do not contract diseases or accidentally overdose. We offer suggestions about how to negotiate safer sex for sex trade workers. We work with new and young users to empower them to be healthy and responsible drug users. We do not use scare tactics to get messages across; rather, we offer nonjudgemental information in the most accessible of ways: personal one-to-one interactions; pamphlets like our Bad Date Sheet and Safer-using Guidelines series; relevant videos in the Drop-In; and programming such as Ho's & Hypes, our quarterly zine. We take our cues from our clients.

SOS also has a commitment to social change and thus has a politicized view of the work. We believe change must occur on many levels, and though much of our work is about individual change and empowerment, we also have a strong commitment to involving students in the delivery of our services in order to influence structural change. We regularly have practica students from the School of Social Work and Schools of Nursing to expose them to the issues and hopefully influence their interactions with our clients in the future. In 1999, we had two third year Social Work students and a Camosun College Nursing student; their work led to a successful overdose prevention/CPR workshop and a Drop-In music night.

SOS staff are frequently involved in harm reduction education workshops in the community. This year, we presented at the Canadian AIDS Society's second National Skills Building Conference in Winnipeg where we received many accolades for the innovative work being done at SOS. Out of this presentation an invitation was extended from Fife House in Toronto for us to present a series of workshops related to the practice of harm reduction for staff. We have participated in the University of Victoria's Anthropology of AIDS in the World course, the UVic School of Social Work's Substance (Mis)use course and the Camosun College School of Nursing's Community Nursing class. We often respond to the requests of students to conduct interviews or research around HIV and injection drug use and other issues that we deal with.

This year saw the strengthening of many of our community partnerships. In conjunction with the CHR Street Nurse program, we undertook a seroprevalence study of 160 registered IDUs in which the preliminary results showed an alarming 22% HIV+ rate. We also began to participate in regular outreach and home visits to clients with the Street Nurses. A Medical Advocacy Committee was formed by nursing students that brings together representatives of AVI, VARCS and SOS to tackle the issues of guaranteeing respectful healthcare to persons living with HIV and those who are street-involved. We have begun to meet regularly with outreach workers from the YM/YWCA to discuss issues of wellness and to promote information sharing.

1999 also found SOS looking at innovative ways of garnering client involvement. Client involvement is crucial to building rapport, establishing trust and credibility with a traditionally suspicious population. We know that a sense of self-esteem and a feeling of belonging to a community are essential components of harm reduction, so all of our programming is client-driven and encompasses these goals. We began to accept clients who wanted a safe and comfortable place to complete their community service hours. As well, HIV+ clients were able to do volunteer hours with us in order to earn credits for the Client Services Food Store program. Ho's & Hypes has taken off and is now almost solely comprised of client submissions. Clients have offered input in the development of a new series of pamphlets on vein maintenance and safer using. A new peer group will be starting in January called "Unity is Recovery" which will focus on peer support, education and community development. Tai Chi lessons have been well attended and the acupuncture clinic held three times a week has proven to be an integral part of SOS. The Connection to Freedom Christian peer support group has been a huge success and livens up a usually quiet Monday night. Also, re-starting in January is our drop-in art group which offers clients an outlet for fun and creativity and allows us to adorn our walls with meaningful images.

As we move into the new millenium, SOS has many wishes: we would like to see an eradication of poverty and adequate resources to address the social determinants of health. We would like to know that attitudes which embrace humanistic values such as harm reduction receive acceptance. And ultimately, we would like to see our work become obsolete as HIV is eradicated. Until then, we will continue to work towards these goals.