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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### *Victoria HIV+ and HCV+ men and women hold Cowichan retreat with help from MAC AIDS Fund*

Victoria – Participants of AIDS Vancouver Island and the Victoria Native Friendship Center's Positive Health Project will be heading to the Cowichan Valley on a retreat this weekend (May 12-13, 2007), thanks to funding from *MAC Cosmetics' AIDS Fund*.

"The majority of the participants are low income and as a result don't get the chance to leave the city limits and to engage in recreational and self care activities; they view them as unattainable luxuries," said Miki Hansen, executive director of AIDS Vancouver Island. "This retreat gives them the opportunity to be social with other people who are living with HIV and hepatitis C."

The Positive Health Project was developed to increase the knowledge and skills of HIV and hepatitis C positive women and men and to increase the public's awareness of what it means to live with HIV and/or hepatitis C. Principal funding for the project comes from the United Way of Victoria and the Vancouver Island Health Authority; additional funds from the MAC AIDS Fund have made it possible for the group to hold the Wellness Retreat.

This peer-driven project addresses unmet needs in the AIDS community and fills a gap in addiction services for HIV and hepatitis positive people that is not met by traditional harm reduction services. Participants learn skills in socializing and trusting their peers as well as how to interact respectfully in group settings.

This is the fourth year that the Positive Health Project has operated. It began as the Women's Wellness Program, a volunteer-run project with no budget. The project has since grown to include the Men's Positive Health Project and has four support employees.

AIDS Vancouver Island has provided community health services focused on the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C in Greater Victoria and in locations across Vancouver Island since 1985.

– 30 –

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