



Extreme Reality

Spring 2010

A WORD FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Hello and welcome to the Spring Edition of **Extreme Reality** – the Northern AIDS Connection Society Newsletter. So what's been up?

Our 5 year strategic planning process has been concluded, the next step is the final report and adoption by NACS Board of Directors. Thank you to community partners that had such valuable input into the process. NACS Board members also committed a great deal of time and effort in our future visioning and direction of the organization. Many Thanks!

As you may be aware, NACS is not operationally funded and our fund raising activities are essential to our ongoing work. We are now gearing up for one our major fund development activities. Our 9th Annual Art for Life is a great opportunity for a fun evening out with friends. We have had some amazing artwork donated by local, national and international artists such as Bruce Wood, Guenter Burr and Michelle Brake. In addition there is a wide variety of silent auction donations ranging from honey & beeswax candles to plants to self-care and pampering items. Special thanks to our sponsors: The Glengarry Hotel, Fraser's Bakery, Headly Wilson Auctioneering and U-Need a Hobby. At \$10/ticket it is a great deal and will be An Evening to Remember. For tickets contact nacs@eastlink.ca or 895-0931.

We have just completed our consultation with Person's Having AIDS (PHA's) in Northern Nova Scotia. This process provides us with signposts to programming development, assessment of support and service needs and has provided us with input into the future directions of NACS. Thank you to all who provided such valuable input.

We are collaborating with Rainbow Proud and the Central Nova Women's Resource Centre in the development and implementation of a survey for the LGBTQ community to determine activities and events that the community would like to see develop or continue in the Truro area. The survey will be conducted through the summer both in person and distributed through Survey Monkey. If you are a member of the LGBTQ community **WE NEED TO HEAR FROM YOU** to guide our work and activities– look for the survey at events over the summer, via email or contact us for more information.

NACS was awarded with an additional round of funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada to continue to build on creating awareness, promotion and education of Hepatitis C in Northern NS. As part of the project in year 1, intensive surveying and data collection occurred with community partners and service providers as well as Persons Living with Hepatitis C (PLWHC) and PLWHC involved in Injection Drug Use, all of whom had an opportunity for input. Resoundingly we were told about stigma and discrimination, needs and services beneficial to Northern NS. In the upcoming year we are going to

initialize peer to peer support groups, partners with tattoo parlors and continue outreach to the Intravenous Drug Use Community.

June 23, 2010 is the upcoming Annual General Meeting. A full slate of Directors for the Organization has been achieved. I would like to extend an invitation to you to join us. The AGM will be held at St. Andrews United Church, Truro at the corner of Duke and King Streets, beginning at 6:30 pm. Refreshments will be served.

I value the time you take to review ***Extreme Reality*** and keeping abreast of the activities within the NACS office. You have an open invitation to stop by our location at 33 Pleasant Street in Truro, call us at 895-0931 or email me at nacsed@eastlink.ca.

Regards, *Karen*

Karen Kittilsen, Executive Director

Condom Co-op

One key fundraiser for NACS will be coming up in September and this is the Scotiabank AIDS Walk for Life. Each year we always try and up the anti with expectations of goals we set for fundraising events. This is a fundraiser that really takes a team effort, both in planning and running the event. This means that in order to be successful we must start early with the whole process of forming teams to enter in the walk. NACS is also starting a condom co-op initiative. The idea has been in the works for some time and now through interest from community partners has become a reality. Many community organizations have requested condoms, we are responding to the need enabling our community partners to purchase condoms for their organizations to distribute. An innovative way to cover the cost of the condoms is for community partners to put a team in the **Scotiabank AIDS Walk for Life** and receive 50% of the money raised. Each team must raise \$100 before they will receive 50%. The purchase of condoms will assist in promotion of safer sex practices and help reduce the spread of HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI's). For more information please contact our office at (902) 895-0931.

WRAP THAT GATOR !



No regrets later!

Art For Life Auction 2010

The Northern AIDS Connection Society

Is proud to host this very

Special Evening



Monday June 14, 2010

Viewing at 6pm/Auction at 7pm

Best Western Glengarry Hotel

Willow St., Truro, N.S.

For more information call NACS at 895-0931

**Tickets are \$10.00 – this includes price of paddle,
red ribbon, snacks and a ticket for the Door
Prizes.**

All proceeds go to the Northern AIDS Connection

Hep C Personal Story: Upon being diagnosed with a melanoma in 2004, I raced to my computer and looked up every bit of information on the net regarding this cancer. Anyone who has access to a computer is guilty of doing this fact-finding mission if they or a family member is diagnosed with some disease or illness. Unfortunately as a result of this research we can scare ourselves with information overload.

Three years later, when I was diagnosed with hepatitis C, I set out on another internet search and succeeded in dwelling on the worst case scenarios that could happen to me. I became a sponge for information on how to help myself, comparing my symptoms to the published lists of symptoms, and living in dread of what might happen to me. As time went by I realized that I was overloading myself with unnecessary fears. I was suffering from “self-induced cyberchondria”.

I am not implying that educating yourself is a negative thing to do. I went into treatment armed with knowledge and ready for the battle ahead. I had to learn to separate the truth from fiction and I am very sure that I became a challenge for my nurse practitioner as I questioned many aspects of my diagnosis and treatment.

Following 72 weeks of treatment and now in a “detoxing” stage I have realized that may have been looking for answers on the net, but most of all, I was looking for someone like me. I was looking for someone newly diagnosed, someone who was considering treatment, someone going through treatment or someone who had the entire experience. I was looking for a “kindred spirit”, so to speak. None of the websites I was visiting was fulfilling that need until I discovered an online forum for people diagnosed with hepatitis C. I searched for more online HCV forums and was rewarded with many options.

Living in “Smallville, Nova Scotia” I am isolated regarding my diagnosis. Having Hepatitis C is not something I wanted to shout from the rooftops because I became aware, very quickly that most people would not understand and would become fearful of me.

Misinformation, especially from news media, has labeled hepatitis C with a negative fear mongering stigma. Finding internet forums for people diagnosed with HCV was a gift because I found what I was looking for at a time I really needed it.

Choosing the right site for support is an individual journey. I visited several forums and chat rooms, and took part in three during my quest to find a comfortable place. There are many great Hepatitis C forums out there and you do have to read through many of them to find the right forum culture for you. [Yes, there will always be “wing nuts” with personal issues, however, I stayed out of the battles that can occur with the different personalities, but it was great reading entertainment on the long days of treatment.]

Of course, you should practice safety on the internet and keep your personal life private. The main focus is to find a group of people that support you and walk you through your journey no matter what you choose to do regarding your diagnosis. I am very sure I wouldn't have made it through treatment if I hadn't investigated Hepatitis by using the internet. The forum I chose has been a wealth of support to me. It was a long build-up from the diagnosis to the actual treatment and a long 72 weeks to get through by myself. Sure, I had my husband and children, but the forum carried the brunt of my angst.

The forum held me upright until I made it to the very last injection and the very last pill. My journey

was filled with battles and triumphs and forum members were there for me through each and every one of those days.

To quote singer-songwriter James Taylor, "I've seen fire and I've seen rain. I've seen sunny days that I thought would never end. I've seen lonely times when I could not find a friend." However, I did find a friend. I found many who share a common bond: Hepatitis C.

Light House Grant

The Northern AIDS Connection Society (NACS) is extremely pleased to be awarded funding for \$12,000.00 through the Lighthouse Program offered by the Nova Scotia Department of Justice. The presentation was made on February 15, 2010 by Lenore Zann the New Democratic Party MLA for Truro/Bible Hill. Karen Kittilsen the Executive Director and other staff of NACS were on hand for the presentation. The Board of Directors, Staff and Volunteers of NACS are very appreciative for this funding and opportunity provided by the Government of Nova Scotia. Through this project NACS will be taking a highly creative and innovative holistic approach towards involving youth in peer to peer learning a journey of self-discovery culminating in a photography project where youth participants will be provided with cameras to conduct individual PhotoVoice projects of their conflict with the law, personal experiences with risk behaviors and what they have learned during the project to make more informed and healthier voices.

Health quote of the month

"A good friend once told me in times of tribulation and sorrow we need to remember all the positive aspects and accomplishments in our lives. They also told me that when you fall you only fail if you don't get back up and keep trying. It also helps to remember who your real friends are, and to always be true to yourself. A positive attitude and a little love for life can take you a long way."

Anonymous