

Creating positive spaces

The future looks rosy for three new PWA resource lounges in the Fraser Health Region

by Edoye Porbeni

As the BCPWA lounge has demonstrated, drop-in lounges are a great way to provide safe environments for PWAs, where they can access peer support and connect to community services. The problem was, there were no lounges outside of downtown Vancouver. Until now.

Through funding by the Public Health Agency of Canada for an initiative entitled "Positive Spaces: Peers Creating Supportive Environments in the Fraser Health Region," the Fraser Health Region piloted three new resource lounges—places where PWAs living in the region can access services without having to travel downtown.

The lounges, located in Abbotsford, North Surrey, and New Westminister, were established through a collaborative effort of about a dozen stakeholders across the Lower Mainland—including community-based groups, public health agencies, and BCPWA—with the Lower Mainland Purpose Society for Youth and Families taking the lead.

In Abbotsford and Surrey, the agencies responsible for the lounges are the Positive Living Fraser Valley Society and the Surrey HIV/AIDS Centre Society, respectively. In New Westminister, the Lower Mainland Purpose Society runs the lounge.

Based on the model of BCPWA's lounge, the Fraser Region lounges offer services such as access to food, banking, volunteer opportunities, support groups, access to alternative therapies, social activities, and informational resources. Services differ from lounge to lounge.

The Positive Spaces project featured a marketing plan to spread the word about the new lounges, culminating in grand opening events on December 1 last year—World AIDS Day—for all three locations. Community and media involvement was strong and very encouraging, especially in Abbotsford.

The goal of the pilot project was to create sustainable lounges, and although funding for the project ended in March

2007, all three lounges are still operational. Each lounge was created in donated space and designed to be volunteer-run. While the lounges are only a few months old, current attendance is meeting projections, in accordance with the PWA statistics for the area.

According to the BC Centre for Disease Control, between

1997 and 2004, 916 people tested HIV-positive in the Fraser Health Region. Fraser North sub-region—which includes Burnaby, New Westminister, Tri-cities, Anmore, Belcarra, Pitt Meadows, and Maple Ridge—accounted for approximately 50 percent of reported cases in the entire region. The Fraser South sub-region (Surrey, Tsawwassen, Delta, White Rock, Cloverdale, Langley, and Aldergrove) accounted for approximately 36 percent of reported cases, while the Fraser East sub-region (Abbotsford, Mission, Chilliwack, Hope, Harrison Hot Springs, Agassiz, and Boston Bar) accounted for 14 percent of reported cases.

Attendance statistics are expected to rise over time, as PWAs in the region learn about the lounges and feel comfortable accessing services in their communities.

The future of all lounges is bright, as all three hosting agencies are dedicated to continuing to provide this service to PWAs in the Fraser Health Region. ☺

Positive Spaces

Positive Haven
(Surrey)
t 604.588.9004
e hivaidscentre@surreyhealth.bc.ca
www.surreyhealth.bc.ca

The Comfort Zone
(New Westminister)
t 604.526.2522
e purposeaids@pacificcoast.net
www.purposesociety.org

The Lighthouse Centre
(Abbotsford)
t 604.556.6228
e hivaidsmccbc.com

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