



ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023





ABOUT PEERS ALLIANCE

PEERS Alliance supports those living with and at risk for HIV, Hep C, and all sexually transmitted infections in PEI by offering a variety of programs and services targeted to diverse communities.

Our organization strives to address the underlying issues affecting the health and welfare of our communities by countering stigma and creating environments where all are welcome. PEERS Alliance serves people of all genders and sexual orientations in the promotion of sexual health well-being. We support and promote harm reduction strategies to people who use drugs so they can work to reduce their risk of negative health outcomes. We are here to work with you!

OUR MISSION

To educate, engage, and support Island residents to build healthier, inclusive communities and to end stigma surrounding sexual health and drug use using a trauma-informed approach.

OUR VISION

A stigma-free, sex positive, inclusive Island, free from drug-related harm.



PEERS[™]
ALLIANCE 

PREVENT. EDUCATE. EMPOWER. RESPECT. SUPPORT.



DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Josie Baker

The 2022-23 fiscal year has brought with it a number of successes relating to PEERS Alliance's mission. We have increased our capacity to provide education, engagement, and support for the communities we serve. While our province is facing many challenges of wealth inequity, shortage and affordability of housing, and rising addictions and a toxic drug supply, PEERS Alliance has increased our work to support some of the most vulnerable PEI residents to build healthier, inclusive communities and to end stigma surrounding sexual health and drug use using a trauma-informed approach.



photo from The Buzz

We have been able to increase our supports to Island residents outside of Charlottetown! A new satellite office in Summerside has a focus on 2SLGBTQ+ youth programming. The Youth Program Coordinator team has grown to three staff, and we have seen a significant increase in the number of youth attending our programming. With the help of dedicated volunteers, we have been able to resume 2SLGBTQ+ youth programming in Montague. The Rural Outreach Project also kicked off and continues to provide harm reduction supplies and education to and through peer leads in all three counties.

The Charlottetown Street Outreach project hired a second Street Outreach Worker. This project provides harm reduction initiatives out of the Community Outreach Centre including the satellite expansion of the provincial needle exchange program. We also engaged a staff role of Men's Sexual Health Coordinator. In the final months of the 2022-23 fiscal year, we signed an agreement with the province to operate the first provincial Overdose Prevention Site and started work on a five year project to support trans youth, adults, and their families.

The effectiveness of PEERS Alliance's work this year has benefited enormously from the high esteem of the community and provincial employees and policy makers. We anticipate the next fiscal year will include additional growth for the organization.

Respectfully submitted,
Josie Baker, Executive Director



CHAIR OF THE BOARD'S REPORT

Becky Mullen

The last year has seen our community coping with the ongoing effects of the COVID 19 pandemic, the consequences of Hurricane Fiona, and increasingly bold and public anti-trans rhetoric and vitriol against our community members. Our communities emotional, financial, and practical support requirements have only increased with these challenges. PEERS Alliance has, under the steady and capable leadership of our Executive Director, Josie Baker, not only managed to stay afloat to continue serving our community and partners, but to grow and expand in meaningful ways to better serve and support our community.

PEERS Alliance has continued to run our existing programming for queer and trans children, youth, families, and adults; as well as expanding into new programs and locations to serve more demographics and more geographic locations. We also continue to advocate for and help create increased access to and education about harm reduction services.

It has been my privilege to serve alongside all the other directors of the Board as the Chairperson over the last year and to work with the staff of PEERS Alliance. I would like to thank those who have volunteered with the organization in various capacities over the last year for their time and energy. I would also like to applaud the dedication and integrity displayed by the staff of PEERS Alliance, and the competent leadership of our Executive Director, Josie Baker . It is their work out in the community that makes a difference in the lives of those we serve and partner with; and upon which our positive reputation is built and maintained.

I look forward to continuing to serve on the Board and also to working with the new Directors who join the Board at our Annual General Meeting.

Becky Mullen, Board Chair





PROGRAM DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Angele DesRoches

With strong stakeholder support and engagement, PEERS Alliance continued to grow and develop much needed health promotion and harm reduction programming developed with, by, and for the communities we served in PEI over the 2022 – 2023 fiscal year.

Thanks to committed volunteers, our dedicated and growing staff provided programming with over 80 2SLGBTQ+ youth through the PEI Rainbow Club, Writing Club, and the expansion of the much-loved family focused Roots and Shoots program. PEERS Alliance staff also continued to support equity and inclusion efforts through educational initiatives with the Public Schools Branch and Department of Education, reaching hundreds of students. Additionally, over 250 2SLGBTQ+ adults accessed support via systems navigation services, peer support initiatives, and social event programming such as the Adult Drop-in, the Nutrition Program, Buds, and events delivered over Pride week and throughout the year.



PEERS Alliance experienced increased demand for harm reduction and outreach services. All Island residents are contending with challenges related to inflation, housing costs, and health care accessibility, but community members living on the margins have been the most impacted by these issues. Last year, Charlottetown Street Outreach staff reported 1,981 health promotion and harm reduction interactions with almost 200 unique individuals in need of services and support. Through the peer-lead Rural Outreach Project, our 6 peer leads reached an additional 150 people in need of harm reduction services and support outside of Charlottetown. With an increasingly toxic supply, PEERS Alliance harm reduction staff have worked with the community to distribute and educate consumers on overdose prevention, distributing 850 fentanyl test strips and 500+ naloxone kits.

As we look forward, we have identified opportunities to advance our mission and vision through collaborative efforts with partner agencies and other stakeholders. We are excited to join the Homeless Individual and Families Information System (HIFIS) through work the Department of Housing, Land and Communities; we are thrilled to be increasing access to STBBI testing by introducing Dried Blood Spot Testing through our Men's Sexual Health Coordinator position and their work with the CBRC and the Department of Health and Wellness and Health PEI; and we are very much looking forward to opening PEI's first Overdose Prevention Site with support from a host of folks represented on the Community Harm Reduction Steering Committee!



2022 - 2023 AT A GLANCE

APRIL 2022 - MARCH 2023

HIRED 7 NEW STAFF

This year, we expanded our team and were thrilled to welcome more folks for harm reduction and 2SLGBTQ+ programming, including an additional Street Outreach Worker to meet demand.



CAMP ASPEN - A 2SLGBTQ+ CAMP

We held the first 2SLGBTQ+ youth summer camp on PEI! Camp Aspen had an attendance of 26 youth and will continue in 2023.



SIGNED A CONTRACT TO OPERATE THE OVERDOSE PREVENTION SITE

We offered a response to the Request for Proposals for an operator of a provincial Overdose Prevention Site and ultimately signed a contract to run the OPS.



CELEBRATED WORLD AIDS DAY

We celebrated World Aids Day on December 1, 2022 at City Cinema in partnership with Dave Stewart to show the documentary *POSITIVE: When HIV/AIDS Hit PEI* with a crowd of over 60 people!

HIRED A SOCIAL WORKER

We were able to hire a Social Worker, Henry Luyombya, to be able to directly reach and assist the trans community.





2022 - 2023 AT A GLANCE

APRIL 2022 - MARCH 2023

QUEER MOVEMENT RETREAT

Hosted a community retreat for folks in the 2SLGBTQ+ community with a goal to give space to queer folks in the community to build knowledge about what 2SLGBTQ+ advocacy is needed in PEI, while providing facilitated sessions for in-person community building.



SUPPORTED COMMUNITY THROUGH HURRICANE FIONA AND RELIEF EFFORTS

We were able to support vulnerable community members through FIONA relief efforts, including dedicating staff resources to support the delivery of pop-up shelters, visiting known encampments to provide wellness checks and offer transportation, engaged community members in encampment clean up efforts, and more.

INCREASED ACCESS TO HARM REDUCTION MATERIALS AND INFO IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Thanks to our Peer Lead Coordinator, Lauren Sheidow, we engaged 11 people who use(d) drug in five training and capacity building sessions to deliver peer-led harm reduction outreach within their personal networks.



QUEER YOUTH WRITING CLUB

With a new partnerships with the PEI Writers' Guild, we were able to create a new program: the Queer Youth Writing Club! With a consistent 10 youth attending, this writing club will be publishing an anthology of queer youth writing with Acorn Press.





NUMBERS!

APRIL 2022 - MARCH 2023

250+ HIV Self Test Kits distributed

178

people supported through the Community Wellness Fund for needs ranging from grocery cards, dental & eye health care, chest binders, and prescriptions.

 **24**

participants living with HIV registered for the Nutrition Program resulting in \$29,900+ in direct support

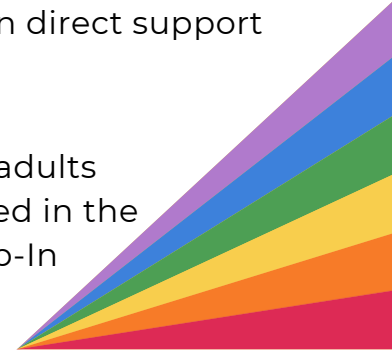
79+

2SLGBTQ+ youth participated in the Queer Youth Collective



50+

2SLGBTQ adults participated in the Adult Drop-In program



40

folks participated in Queer Amblers, an island wide queer hiking group



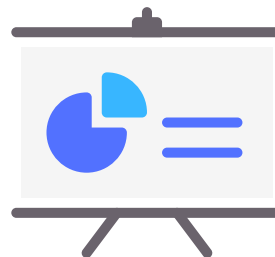
15+

2SLGBTQ+ youth engaged in a community writing club and worked together to publish an anthology of writing



76

76 presentations in PEI classrooms and delivered to school staff



27

27 community workshops delivered in-person and virtually

40

people participated in the second iteration of a new program, Queerdos and Adventurers Role Playing Games Program



NUMBERS!

APRIL 2022 - MARCH 2023

Safer consumption equipment was made available through a partnership with the Community Outreach Center, through staff delivered outreach activities, and through peer distributors.

210,270 sterile syringes distributed

288,500

used syringes collected for disposal

9,069 bubble pipes (with tips) distributed

10+

program participants are engaged for two hours each week in safer use kit packing (i.e., safer injection kits and safer smoking kits).

528 naloxone kits distributed

816

fentanyl test strips distributed

130+ community members trained in Overdose Prevention & Response

10,700

external condoms distributed

1,908 health promotion interactions with 182) individuals experiencing homelessness and/or substance use disorder



FUND DIVERSIFICATION

APRIL 2022 - MARCH 2023

PROVINCIAL FUNDING

The 2022 - 2023 budget year was the second of three years that PEERS Alliance is to receive \$250,000 from the Department of Health and Wellness (DHW). The Department of Social Development and Housing has also offering significant support for an active partnership on street outreach and direct support initiatives. This commitment marks a tremendous moment in time for PEERS Alliance and we are incredibly grateful to the PEI Government for believing in us and the work we do all across Prince Edward Island.

CAPACITY BUILDING

We continued our work on the capacity building project from WAGE and worked on implementing the goals in our strategic plan. This included executing a community forum where board and staff of Pride PEI, PEI Transgender Network, and PEERS Alliance were able to gather and plan together.

Additionally, we have developed internal policies as part of the capacity building project this budget year, which help to streamline internal processes and understanding among employees and contract staff.

We have also explored social enterprise activities, such as community workshops and inclusivity training, which earned PEERS Alliance \$11,000 in offering these workshops for other nonprofits, businesses, and government agencies.



\$29,900+

RAISED FROM
APRIL 2022 - MARCH 2023



WHAT ARE FOLKS SAYING ABOUT US?

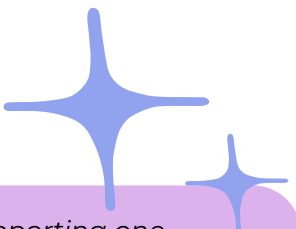


Many thanks for your presentation . I am grateful for the opportunity to learn from you both. Your presentation was challenging and thoughtful and funny and hard and kind. I loved it.

- BRAVE SPACES 201 WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT

Winter is a difficult time for many people due to increased social isolation and increased mental health struggles. This program is an important boost to the wellbeing of its participants, by fostering community and connection, as well as creativity and joy, especially in an otherwise dark time of year. This type of program serves a similar function to other recreational programs like sports leagues and arts and music groups/programs, fostering social connection and creativity. It is set up to be inclusive of many diverse identities and neurodiversity, and this makes it an important social anchor for many people who attend who may not feel as safe and supported in other contexts, and it is a beacon of light to look forward to every week. It made a very significant impact on my wellbeing this winter and I am already greatly looking forward to the next round.

- GAMES PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

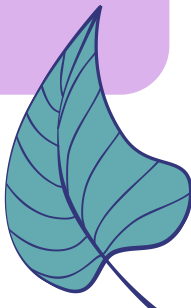


It has been heartwarming to see youth supporting one another to create a much needed peer group that normalizes - and celebrates - queerness! Every QYC night the youth carve out a unique space where it is safe and encouraged to exist authentically, without fear of confrontation by any youth, adults who are less than respectful, understanding, tolerant and accepting of diverse 2SLGBTQIA+ experiences, identities and issues.

Beyond the safe space where youth support and celebrate one another, it has been really amazing to see youth work through tough but important questions and topics together at QYC through the weekly talk it out activity. It's great to see youth bringing up the challenges they face or questions they have in this context with trusted peers and some adult guidance, rather than say by going down lonely, scary and misleading internet rabbit holes. Or rather than harbouring 2SLGBTQIA+ related challenges they've faced and trying to cope and process these experiences on their own, without support.

I wish there was a QYC when I was a teen 10 years ago! I'm so glad PEERS Alliance is able to facilitate this group today.

- QYC VOLUNTEER FACILITATOR





WHAT ARE FOLKS SAYING ABOUT US?



Thank you so much, you've been a great help and you're a awesome person, love your energy and what you do for people.

- STREET OUTREACH PARTICIPANT

Y'all are awesome. I appreciate the work you're doing so very much <3

- STREET OUREACH PARTICIPANT

Tessa is very approachable and matter-of-fact—it's so great to hear someone talk about drug use in such a thoughtful and respectful manner. I would love to see this approach and attitude become more common in our community.

- HARM REDUCTION PARTICIPANT

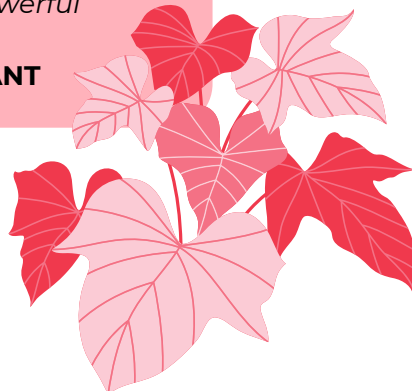
An aspect of [the] seminar that really resonated with me was: Harm Reduction = Self Love. That was a very powerful awareness for me.

- WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT

I am so so thankful and lucky to have been a part of this wonderful project. Through it I've met so many beautiful people that I've always looked forward to seeing again every second Monday.

Reading, signing, conversing, all of the publishing party made me feel over the moon, as well as a little overwhelmed. It all just made me realize more and more just how much I want to do this for a career.

- QUEER YOUTH WRITING CLUB PARTICIPANT





THE PEERS ALLIANCE TEAM

FULL TIME 2022-23 STAFF



Josie Baker
she/her
Executive Director



Angele DesRoches
she/her
Program Director



Vanessa Bradley
she/her
Community Education
& Engagement Manager



Scott Alan
they/them
Men's Sexual Health
Coordinator



Anastasia Preston
she/her
Trans Community
Outreach Coordinator



Henry Luyombya
he/him
Social Worker



Hannah Barton
she/her & they/them
Youth Program
Coordinator



Rachel Bartlett
she/her
Youth Program
Coordinator



Kels Smith
Youth Program
Coordinator



Tessa Rogers
she/her
Street Outreach
Worker



Siddhu Sachidananda
they/them
Street Outreach
Worker



Lauren Sheidow
she/her
Peer Team
Coordinator

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FUNDER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

PEERS Alliance board and staff would like to recognize and thank the following funders for the 2022-23 year who funded a minimum of \$3,500:



Funded by the Government of Canada's Social Development Partnerships Program



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