

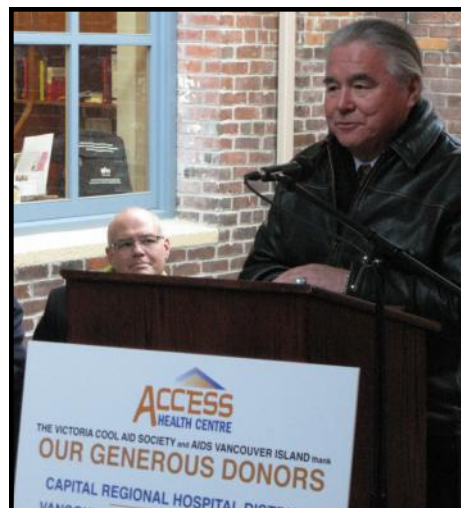
## Celebrating the Grand Opening of the Access Health Centre

On World AIDS Day, December 1, 2009, the Victoria Cool Aid Society and AIDS Vancouver Island, along with their partners and funders, celebrated the official opening of Access Health Centre – a community centre that offers integrated health and support services to people in Victoria's who struggle with homelessness, problematic substance use, HIV/AIDS, and/or mental health issues and other health challenges.

AVI and Cool Aid took the opportunity to thank those who made the creation of the Access Health Centre possible. The campaign to raise funds has been successful and our two agencies are close to meeting our mortgage free goal –\$4.3 million has been raised through government funding and community support towards the \$5.3 million project, which leaves \$1 million dollars left to be raised.

Major funders for the Access Health Centre include the Capital Regional Hospital District (CRHD), the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA), Province of British Columbia, Mr. & Mrs. P.A. Woodward's Foundation, the United Way of Greater Victoria, the Victoria Foundation, Coast Capital Savings, TELUS, and the City of Victoria. A full list of donors is available at [AccessHealthCentre.ca](http://AccessHealthCentre.ca).

The grand opening was held in the back courtyard and Butch Dick opened the event with a welcome from the Songhees and spoke about the importance of services for the many Aboriginal people affected by homelessness and HIV. Several supporters lent their voices to celebrating the achievement, including Graham Hill, Chair of the CRHD, Howard Waldner, CEO of VIHA, Ida Chong, Minister of Healthy Living and Sport and MLA for Oak Bay-Gordon Head, Victoria Mayor Dean Fortin, Chris Poirier-Skelton of the United Way of Greater Victoria, and Sandra Richardson of the Victoria Foundation.



David Mitchell, a former client of the Cool Aid Community Health Center and Dental Clinic, who is now an addictions counsellor, shared his story about how Cool Aid services helped him when his health was at a low and when he struggled with addiction.

Bruce Parisian, executive director of the Victoria Native Friendship Centre.  
Photo courtesy of Gary Green Communications.  
[garygreencommunications.com](http://garygreencommunications.com)

AVI and Cool Aid were joined by partner

agencies the Victoria Native Friendship Centre (VNFC) and VIHA, who will soon be moving services into the second floor. The VNFC will have addictions, health and housing staff working on site, joined across the hall by VIHA's Victoria Integrated Community Outreach Team. The addition of these partner agencies to the Centre will round out the services available.






## Gay Men's Wellness Program Peer Training

This fall the Gay Men's Wellness program trained six HIV+ men as peer counsellors. In partnership with the BC Centre for Disease Control and the Canadian Institute for Health Research, AVI had the opportunity to work with Bill Coleman, long-time counsellor in the field of HIV/AIDS. Bill Coleman and Captain Snowdon provided two weekends of in-depth training and skills building.

"The group really gelled and supported each other to look at difficult and important issues like HIV disclosure legalities, how to work from a harm reduction non-judgemental framework and to negotiate boundaries and multiple relationships in peer counselling," said Snowdon.

"The training pushed us all to look at our own issues, we practiced and practiced, learned to not give advice, that it is not about us, and that people mostly just want to be listened too," said one participant.



AVI has offices in Victoria, Nanaimo, Courtenay, Campbell River, and the Port Hardy/Port MacNeil areas. Contact information can be found at [www.avi.org](http://www.avi.org)

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The peer counsellors are from both small and large communities on the island. The group meets every three months to touch base, practice, debrief and receive further training. The peer counsellors are now volunteering in a number of capacities with AVI, including by co-facilitating groups, helping organizing events, writing articles, and offering a ready ear. Referrals are being taken for the peer team through the Gay Men's Wellness Program.

For more information contact Captain Snowdon, Coordinator Gay Men's Community Development at [Captain.Snowdon@avi.org](mailto:Captain.Snowdon@avi.org) or 250-384-2366, extension 2273.

## Cold & Wet Weather Outreach in the Comox Valley

November marked the start of another outreach season for AVI Courtenay. This program is a joint effort with the Wachiay Friendship Centre and runs from November through March. The outreach team is comprised of a worker from each agency and a volunteer driver.

On Tuesday and Thursday evenings and Sunday afternoons a truck is loaded with tents, tarps, sleeping bags, and winter coats, as well as sandwiches, coffee and warm cups of soup. The route travelled by the team includes regular stops at campsites and dumpsters where the outreach workers connect with homeless individuals to provide items that can help them make it through the cold, wet weather as safely as possible, and to offer referrals to community and health services, including housing advocacy.

The cold/wet weather outreach team offers a wide range of support for the homeless community. For example, the AVI outreach worker offers mobile harm reduction services and information about HIV and hepatitis C. Additionally, during the last several years, the team has supported many homeless people in the Comox Valley to secure long term housing. Also, the teams help spread the word if extra shelter beds are available, and on several occasions they have connected with emergency services regarding life threatening medical situations.

## World AIDS Day 2009



Canada World Youth volunteering at AVI teamed up with youth from St John the Divine church to create tape sculptures. The sculptures were placed around Victoria to raise awareness around HIV/AIDS with messages such as "33 million people around the world are living with HIV."

## Street School in its Fourth Semester

Street School (S.S.) in Victoria is currently finishing its fourth semester. The curriculum includes presentations by health and social services professionals presenting on topics ranging from HIV/AIDS to Detox access, to income assistance, tenancy, and human rights.

There were two specific aims of S.S. when we initiated the program. First, we wanted to conduct a program that improved Street Outreach Services (SOS) clients' health knowledge so as to better equip clients to make healthy choices with regards to drug use and harm reduction. Secondly, we wanted to provide clients with a better understanding of existing local social service agencies, as well as clients' rights with regards to housing and welfare.

After a year and a half of hosting weekly health and social educational sessions for SOS clients we conducted a survey to determine both the success of this program

and the possible future direction of take Street School. The survey was conducted during a regularly scheduled Street School session with 20 participants.

Clients are consistently participating in this program, which is a sign of its success. The majority of client respondents (75%) report attending S.S. weekly or every other week, with 80% of respondents reporting the quality of the presentations to be excellent (30%) or good (50%). The majority of the respondents also noted that the educational component of the S.S. sessions was either very good (45%) or good (40%).

The results of this survey illustrate the power of informal education for members of the drug using community. The results are encouraging enough that we are currently in the process of creating a "Street College" for more clients interested in more intensive educational opportunities.



### AVI Central Island Hepatitis C Awareness

In December the health promotion and positive wellness staff from the Nanaimo office teamed up with Fran Falconer, the nurse from AVI's Health Centre, to present a day of hepatitis C (HCV) peer training. We had a great turnout (18 people: some nurses and 11 HCV+ people). The material covered the basics of hepatitis A, B and C, treatment, stigma and discrimination. Our next workshop day on December 17th will continue with HIV (transmission, prevention, treatment) and HIV/HCV co-infection.

At least once a month, AVI's positive wellness program counsellor travels to Port Alberni to provide counselling and support for clients. In November, this included providing an in-service with the public health nurses on HIV/HVC basics and brainstorming around providing services for challenging clients. We will also be bringing HCV peer training to Port Alberni in the New Year.

The goal of these workshops will be to provide people with HCV with more information and treatment options and to provide increased opportunities to become more involved in AVI's programming. Several people have already expressed interest in becoming peer educators and workshop presenters.



AVI's mobile needle exchange team members Minda and Ashley in early December.

Photo credit: Deddeda Stemler [www.deddeda.com](http://www.deddeda.com)



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[Leslie.Robinson@avi.org](mailto:Leslie.Robinson@avi.org) or  
call 250-384-2366.



## Youth Network Project

The Public Health Agency of Canada's AIDS Community Action Program (ACAP) has provided funds to expand AVI's education services for youth. The project aims to reach youth with high risk for exposure to HIV (street involved, aboriginal, queer, IDU, sex workers) and deliver education around HIV, HCV, STI's, safer sex and safer drug use, and healthy relationships.

In Victoria, three facilitators – Sara Gifford, Margo Briere, and Mia, will be hosting a weekly group at the Youth Empowerment Society's Alliance Club, a monthly group on the Songhees reserve, and two monthly groups in Youth Custody Services Centre, including an indigenous specific program and a program for all youth.

As part of the project youth participants will share what they've learned via an arts based change project, website and social networking. Victoria youth have decided to do a `zine for their project, which will include art, writing, photography, resources and health information for youth by youth.

Youth Network projects are also underway in Nanaimo, Courtenay, and Campbell River.



### *A special thanks...*

to Caitlyn Callahan, senior artist with M.A.C Cosmetics. Caitlyn visited AVI in the fall and hosted free makeovers. The M.A.C AIDS Fund provides funding for AVI's nutrition program and matches M.A.C staff pledges at the Nanaimo AIDS Walk. Since 1994, every cent of the selling price of VIVA Glam lipstick has gone to the AIDS Fund, which has totaled over \$135 million to date.

## New Training Opportunities for Clients who Volunteer



This fall, AVI received news that we were successful in our application for nearly \$10,000 from the Victoria Foundation. This year's application process has been extremely informative and enlightening to us – the Victoria Foundation staff members have been engaged with our work and supportive of our goals. We will be using funds to put in place a com-

prehensive training framework specifically designed to meet the needs of clients who wish to volunteer at AVI.

The populations that access services at AVI include those struggling with stigma, poverty, addictions, mental health challenges and HIV or hepatitis C infection. More and more clients are coming forward to volunteer and to "give back" to the agency.

AVI volunteer services and education teams will be working hard together in 2010 to review our current volunteer training practices and develop new ideas and models that will usher in a new era of volunteer training at AVI.

We are very excited to be collaborating with the Victoria Foundation on this piece of work. The sense of partnership is strong and the Foundation has also donated a computer to support the project!

**DONATE TO AVI WITH THE CLICK OF A MOUSE! VISIT [WWW.AVI.ORG](http://WWW.AVI.ORG) TODAY TO MAKE YOUR DONATION.**