



MEDIA RELEASE

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HIV Super Heroes Honoured at 7th Annual AccolAIDS Gala

Vancouver BC –It was a gathering of heroes at the Fairmont Hotel Vancouver on the evening of Sunday, April 13th 2008. Nominees, community leaders and people living with HIV gathered to celebrate the 7th Annual AccolAIDS Awards at the British Columbia Persons With AIDS Society (BCPWA) fundraising gala.

This year's 31 nominees demonstrate that AIDS heroes truly come in all shapes and sizes. Nominated heroes include a dog who has served on the Downtown Eastside for 12 years, Vancouver's own street nurses and a grandmother who delivers flowers weekly to dozens of AIDS patients. However a number of 'super heroes' stood out as winners in their categories, including a woman who offers a mobile needle exchange out of her car, the innovative programs of the Community Based Research Center, and a number of remarkable activists.

"The AccolAIDS Gala is an opportunity to celebrate the advances dedicated individuals and organizations have made in the fight against AIDS," says Glyn Townson, Chair of the BC Persons With AIDS Society. "AccolAIDS nominees are waging war on HIV/AIDS through innovative programs, generosity and community spirit. The winners tonight are true HIV super heroes."

A record 250 people attended the gala, which is one of BCPWA's largest fundraising events. Over \$970,000 was raised to benefit the vital programs and services provided by BCPWA, such as treatment information and support services for people living with HIV/AIDS. The evening included gourmet cuisine, live entertainment and, silent and live auctions.

Approximately 15,000 British Columbians are living with HIV, and there are about 400 new infections each year. At least a quarter of those infected are unaware of their status, creating an urgent need for HIV awareness and programs. The BCPWA Society provides mutual support and collective action for people living with HIV and AIDS.

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The British Columbia Persons With AIDS Society (BCPWA Society), a non-profit, consumer-driven organization is in its 21st year of operation, is dedicated to empowering persons living with HIV disease and AIDS through mutual support and collective action. As western Canada's largest AIDS organization, with a membership of more than 4,400 HIV+ individuals, the Society provides support and advocacy services, treatment information, and volunteer opportunities to its diverse membership.

AccolAIDS 2008 Winners

Gary Dalton – Social/Political/Community Action

Gary began working for ANKORS East Kootenay in 1999 and celebrates every day. Last year, Gary spoke to over 2,600 people over a region covering 28,000 kilometers. ANKORS has given Gary the opportunity to participate in many changes that come with addressing the issues HIV and AIDS in rural BC—from helping the Golden Women's Centre expand ANKORS' efforts to raise awareness of Sexually Exploited Youth, to seeing Family Centres throughout the region address needle disposal and sexual orientation issues. He has helped local Options clinics explore HIV testing and East Kootenay Addiction Services extend their youth outreach program and pilot needle exchange. And Gary collaborates with Healing Our Spirit, Pacific AIDS Network, BC Persons with AIDS, YouthCo, CATIE and others who come to the region. Gary says "It is sadly recognized that many of our community are forced from our valley, into larger centres. We strive to make the East Kootenays a safe place for all."

Doreen Littlejohn – Above and Beyond

Doreen Littlejohn, RN has been the Nurse Coordinator of the Positive Outlook Program at the Vancouver Native Health Society since 1997, and has a private Nurse Counselling Practice with Chaldecott Medical Clinic. Doreen is passionate about making a difference in the lives of those who have no voice. Her dream of nursing in developing countries was unexpectedly realized in her own backyard. Vancouver, one of the richest cities in the world, is also home to one of the most marginalized populations in Canada. People of the Downtown Eastside are very often homeless, poor, infected with HIV/HEP C, drug addicted, mentally ill, and far too often die on the streets. Health authorities fund direct services adequately but ignore those most in need; the urban aboriginal population which continues to sero-convert to HIV at rates far greater than non-aboriginal people.

Doreen has been given the greatest honor from her staff, an Ojibway name "kanatamgate", meaning one who fights for the rights of others.

Ken Coolen – Philanthropy

From a very early age, Ken Coolen's natural tendency for philanthropy was evident. At age 6, "Kenny" put on his first fund-raiser for a local camp for underprivileged children. In school and university, Ken fundraised and did outreach work for Unicef, in senior's homes, and with Alateen.

Ken moved to Vancouver 20 years ago and in that time has been involved in many organizations – from the Dogwood Monarchist Society, Vancouver Pride Society and of course BCPWA, to name a few. He credits his success to being someone who can bring people together to accomplish a task. He is blessed with loving, supportive parents as well as a collection of amazing individuals he is lucky to call friends. They say, "It takes a village to raise a child". Ken is grateful to have his own "village" of talented and caring friends and family who are always there to help pick up the cause.

Michael Yoder – Kevin Brown PWA Hero Award

Michael Yoder started as a Helpline volunteer with AIDS Vancouver Island in 1986 and began a strange journey where talking about sex, all the time, was normal (until he'd go out with friends and realize it was not). Michael worked as the helpline coordinator, volunteer coordinator, a board member of the Victoria Persons With AIDS Society and as the Education Coordinator for Victoria AIDS Resource & Community Service Society (VARCS). After his partner died, Michael took on the role of Executive Director of VARCS. He sat on the Canadian AIDS Society board of directors for 6 years as the HIV+ rep for the Pacific Region.

Michael believes imagination is essential and that playing with what we do, no matter how serious it might seem, is the only way we can move forward and flourish as people living with HIV, (or as people, period).

Samantha Mohan – Health Promotion and Harm Reduction

Samantha Mohan has worked tirelessly for the past 15 years in Chilliwack and the Eastern Fraser Valley to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS, helping some of society's most neglected members, particularly injection drug users and survival sex trade workers. Since 1993, Samantha has operated the only openly-advertised community-based needle exchange program between Surrey and Kamloops. Because of the nature of the locations in which she works, she has faced vehement opposition and open harassment by the community at large. In spite of the significant resistance she has faced, her caring heart and optimistic personality has helped her build a strong network of support for harm reduction services in the Fraser Valley region and beyond. Those who come into contact with her find Samantha's compassion unwavering, her integrity unflinching, and her sense of humanity, profoundly touching.

Community Based Research Centre Society – Science/Research/Technology

The Community Based Research Centre is a non-profit charitable organization using research to guide community action on HIV prevention, treatment and care. The CBRC provides grounded leadership around gay men's health issues in a number of ways. They author and creatively research the sexual health risks and needs of gay men and men who have sex with men, in their annual **Sex Now** survey. Totally Outright is their annual sexual health leadership course for young gay men. And the Summit, BC's annual gay men's health conference, brings together individuals and organizations working in the field of gay men's sexual health and wellness. The Community Based Research Centre provides evidence-based preventive health information in the community, and is a lifeline to many in a context where HIV prevention is critically under-resourced.

First Story on CTV – Media Award

Now in its tenth year of production, First Story is a half-hour current events and information series that discusses BC First Nations arts, culture and social justice issues. All producers that work directly on the show are of First Nations heritage. The series often features HIV/AIDS related content, covering everything from safe injection sites to personal stories of First Nations people living with HIV. First Story is dedicated to campaigning for the rights of HIV positive persons and has provided a tremendous opportunity for creating continued awareness about HIV/AIDS in First Nations communities.

The John Ruedy Immunodeficiency Clinic - Providence Health Care – Innovative Programs and Services (tie)

The John Ruedy Immunodeficiency Clinic (IDC) at St Paul's Hospital opened in the late 1980's, following the onset of the AIDS epidemic. Dr. John Ruedy was instrumental in leading this initiative, and visits to the clinic have grown from 4,000 in 2002 to 12,000 in 2007. Improving access to HIV primary and specialized care, and to enhance competence in HIV care among health care providers in the community are the two main goals of the IDC. Services are comprehensive, interdisciplinary, flexible, and patient-centred.

The Immunodeficiency Clinic (IDC) provides health services that respond to a rapidly growing and diverse population, including the needs of people with multi-drug resistance, intolerance to antiretrovirals, or with multiple diagnoses such as hepatitis, mental health or addictions. Many IDC patients previously lacked access to HIV care.

The MAKa Project – Innovative Programs and Services (tie)

The Maka Project is a community-based HIV partnership between the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS and Women's Information Safe Haven (WISH) Drop-In Centre Society. Through participatory research, the project examines the HIV prevention and treatment needs of women who struggle daily with poverty and addictions and engage in sex work to meet basic needs (ie: survival sex work). Maka began in 2005 as a response to concerns by sex workers, services providers and researchers of the significant health-related harms and under-representation of women accessing health and HIV services. Maka's researchers are current/former survival sex workers, and their research work informs the need for evidence-based policy and interventions that promote the health and safety of street-based sex workers. Maka is also piloting and evaluating peer driven intervention strategies to increase access to HIV care and treatment for women on or eligible for antiretroviral therapy. Weekly peer support workshops, peer-to-peer advocacy, and peer outreach have helped to provide a safe space for HIV+ women to seek treatment and care resources.