



Positive Women's
Network

Wellness Retreats for HIV+ Women: How women-centred support addresses the social determinants of health

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Positive Women's Network**



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History of PWN

- Founded in 1991
- One of three women-specific ASOs in Canada
- Infected and affected ♀ working in partnership
- Membership: 650 women living with HIV in BC
- First retreat in 1993 in partnership with AIDS Vancouver
- ACAP had funded retreat program since 1994

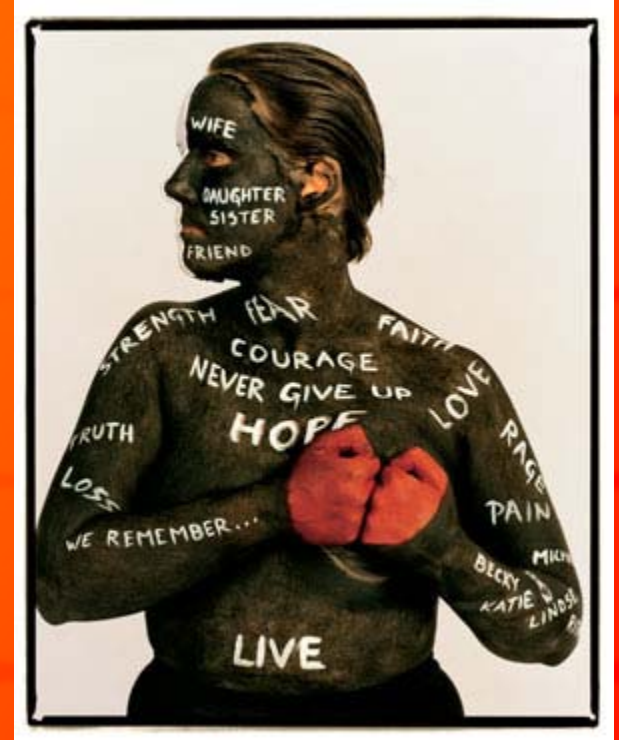




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Why Gender Matters

- Biological and social vulnerabilities
- Women's central role
- Aboriginal women are overrepresented



“To carry all the weight without complaint and with a smile.”

-Vicky, woman living with HIV



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Mission Statement

Positive Women's Network, a partnership of women living with and affected by HIV/AIDS, supports women in making informed choices about HIV/AIDS and health. We provide safe access to support and education/prevention for women in communities throughout British Columbia. The Positive Women's Network provides leadership and advocacy around women's HIV/AIDS health and social issues in the national and local health care communities.





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Highly Affected Communities



- Aboriginal ♀♀♀
- Young ♀♀♀ (aged 15-29)
- ♀♀♀ from endemic countries
- ♀♀♀ using drugs
- ♀♀♀ in the sex trade
- ♀♀♀ in prison
- Transgender ♀♀♀

“Even HIV+ women themselves look around and see HIV is in all walks of life. It can happen to anyone.”
-Sarah, woman affected by HIV



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Vulnerabilities

- Poverty & its products: housing, food security, social support
- Racism and colonialism
- Mental health and addictions
- Stigma and discrimination
- Sexism
- Violence and childhood sexual abuse



*“It’s not us and them. We are all vulnerable and we all need to be in this together.”
-Crystal, woman affected by HIV*



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Social Determinants of Health Addressed through Retreat Program

- Gender
- Social Support Networks
- Education
- Personal Health Practices and Coping Skills
- Culture





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PWPN Retreat Program

- Women-centred
- Safety & confidentiality
- Focus on learning more about HIV
- Teaching both traditional & a variety of complementary therapies
- Connection & peer engagement
- Respite from family responsibilities
- Supportive atmosphere
- Professional support: retreat coordinator, support workers and registered nurse





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Sample Agenda

- Opening Circle
- Informal Q & A with HIV specialist
- Complementary therapies and treatment information workshop
- Yoga
- Sweat lodge teachings
- Body Mapping
- Interactive Painting Workshop
- Massage
- Self care workshops
- Narcotics Anonymous Meeting
- Film making workshop
- Outdoor recreation activities
- Belly dancing
- Performance by Drum Group
- Closing Circle





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Retreat Program Participants

- 28 women attended
- 69% had not attended a retreat before
- 43% were from outside the Lower Mainland
- 35% identified as Aboriginal
- We only have space and funding for 50% of applicants



“Women heal women.”

-Veronica, woman living with HIV



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Barriers

- Doctors not allowing methadone carriers for the weekend
- Fear of disclosure
- Health concerns
- Finding childcare providers
- Anxiety traveling
- Alcohol and drugs are not permitted
- Filling out forms





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Positive Feedback



- *I will take home with me the gift to give myself time and listen to my body.*
- *I loved the openness, the willingness to share experiences.*
- *Now I know there are people just like me.*





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Positive Feedback Continued....

- *I realize just how important it is to be supported by other poz women.*
- *I am definitely going home a happier and better person.*
- *I will take home with me the beautiful changes I see in myself.*





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Positive Feedback Continued...

- *I feel empowered and centred.*
- *I now have more understanding of HIV.*
- *I realized that I don't have to be so closed off and alone about being HIV+.*





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Positive Feedback Continued....

- *I have renewed strength.*
- *There are so many more long-term positive women than previous retreats and this gives more hope to deal with this complex virus.*





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Positive Feedback Continued....

- *Never have I been in such a diverse group of women and there been no arguments.*
- *I'm now more determined than ever to be more open about my illness and to teach other women and children about HIV/AIDS prevention.*





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Thank you!

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