

**Peer Health Navigator
AGM report 2019/2020**
Amber Streukens June 15, 2020

Over the last year, I have had the excellent opportunity to settle into and expand my role as Peer Health Navigator in the West Kootenays. In addition to supporting folks with a variety of needs (including but not limited to: appointment accompaniment, prescriber advocacy, accessing detox and treatment, harm reduction education), some of the highlights of the past year include supporting folks to participate and personally participating in the July REDUN campout, the Nelson Fentanyl Task Force conference, a wellness retreat for women living with HIV/AIDS, the PAN Human Rights Education Project, and a Hepatitis C testing event.

Over the past year, REDUN has experienced significant growth and development. Attendance at meetings has grown substantially and we have increased the frequency of meetings to support this expansion. We have additionally begun to expand into Trail to provide peer support, education, and advocacy for PWUD. To meet gaps in food and shelter services in Nelson over the winter months, and to provide opportunity for social connection, REDUN hosted a series of Movie Nights at the Salvation Army. REDUN also expanded the scope of our Outreach team to include more referral and information sharing. Almost a dozen peers were supported this winter to attend a full-day first aid training. In February, REDUN elected a Steering Committee, which has been empowered to make certain decisions informed by the larger membership. This smaller group has been showing great leadership, engaging in capacity-building activities, and taking on greater responsibilities in community.

The COVID-19 Pandemic significantly shifted the way Peer Health Navigation operates. While still able to support the health navigation needs of our folks, some creativity has been needed to ensure people are able to access information and services. REDUN has been unable to meet as a large group and, as such, have been working on enhancing our use of technology and small group conversations. During the early days of the pandemic, REDUN worked closely with the Nelson City Police to negotiate supported encampment for unsheltered homeless people to reduce the risk of COVID-19. Our peer leaders have been providing peer support throughout the crisis, with some having received Peer Outreach Training through Interior Health. Following the publication of BCCSU's *Risk Mitigation* guidelines, many of our members have been supported to access safer supply. Overall, this pandemic has revealed what we already know about ourselves – PWUD are resilient and creative and adaptable and supportive. Even in these challenging times, we have found great innovation and collaboration and I am excited to see what the next year may hold.



From left to right: Alex and the structure built at REDUN campout workshop; sometimes removing barriers to detox involves borrowing a cute puppy; the view from the women's wellness retreat; paint night at women's wellness retreat)