

## ANKORS: Men's Health Initiative Program

I joined the team here at ANKORS as a practicum student in the Social Service worker program in January 2020. My practicum mentor at the time, Joe Reiner, was the coordinator of the Men's Health Initiative in conjunction with being the Harm Reduction Educator and Coordinator. During the two months I worked under Joe's guidance, I learned as much as I could about the programs and accompanied him on numerous educational outreach events. By mid to late March, Selkirk College informed its students the remainder of classes would move to an online format, and practicum placements would immediately cease due to safety reasons. It felt defeating at the time.

That summer, Joe informed me that he would be leaving his position with ANKORS to move to Vancouver and that he thought I would be great in the Men's Health Initiative position. Later, I passed David on the street, and he also echoed what Joe had spoken to me about the work, so I passed along my contact information. I had some initial concerns with attending school full time and the time commitments for the job, so we agreed that we would connect again in the new year.

I am grateful that Cheryl and David allowed me time to adjust to the new full-time online schooling practice. It was difficult, but by mid to late January, I felt comfortable and excited to take on the position with ANKORS. I started in February by working from home, but I found it challenging to begin with since I felt uncertain of where to start and where to take the program. After a few weeks, I transitioned to working from the office and began truly absorbing all aspects and concepts of the position.

I attended my first PRICK working group meeting, met other peers that were part of the Health Initiative for Men, and connected with Robin Van Stolk, with whom I would be facilitating our local PRICK! STI clinics. Since the position had been vacant for some time, I collaborated with Robin and set a date for my first STI clinic on April 19th. We prepared, advertised on Facebook, and printed up posters to display on the sandwich board outside ANKORS. In the end, three men showed up to utilize the testing clinic, and given the circumstances with COVID, I chalked this one up to a success.

Due to the challenges presented with the pandemic and how isolated the community is, I began organizing a socially distanced outdoor walking event for GBTQ2S identified men. I set a date for May 1<sup>st</sup> and had six men turn out for the event. We spoke about coping during the pandemic and how fragmented the LGBTQ community feels. In general, mental health was lacking amongst the men. Feelings of isolation and loneliness were exacerbated, and there was a desire to see more social events. Someone relatively new to the area attended this event and expressed difficulty knowing where to go to meet other members of the LGBTQ community and finding events to attend. In the end, this event provided me with some ideas about gathering all resources available for the LGBTQ community locally and making ANKORS a one-stop destination, especially for new folks arriving in the area.

I have numerous ideas floating around for events once pandemic restrictions loosen enough to continue with in-person gatherings. Still, it has been a challenge to figure out what kinds of events can happen during these times. I chose to get creative with the Walk n Talk group, and it was successful.

I have only been in this role for about three months now. Still, I had the opportunity to attend a virtual three-day conference on effectively working with Indigenous populations in education and treatment around HIV and STI's. Additionally, I have taken numerous free training workshops through CATIE on Hepatitis C and HIV information, testing, and treatments. While the pandemic has been a challenge to manoeuvre, I feel as though everything will become much easier for me once the restrictions lift and I can get out into the community more.

I look forward to growing and learning while also educating and supporting others within the GBTQ2S community.

# **PRICK!**

## **KOOTENAYS**

### **STI Testing Event**

For guys who like guys and  
the rainbow community

**April 19th – 5pm to 730pm**  
**ANKORS Nelson – 101 Baker**  
**Street**

**call 1-800-421-2437 or 250-505-5506 to  
book  
an appointment.  
Drop-in's welcome.  
Safe and Confidential.**

# GBTQ2S Walk n Talk

Feeling isolated?

Social restrictions got you down?

Come join our socially distanced outdoor walking/hiking crew.

Let's make this a bi-weekly event and get out for some exercise and talk about the issues important to us as LGBTQ2S men in a rural setting.

Saturday May 1<sup>st</sup>. Meet at the Svoboda Road parking lot at 1 pm. DM the Kootenay MHI facebook page for more details.