

ANKORS Executive Director's

AGM Report

June 29th, 2023



I would like to acknowledge and express my deep gratitude for living and working as an uninvited settler on the unseeded and traditional territory of the Sinixt, Sylx and Ktunaxa people. ANKORS is committed to Truth and Reconciliation and to working in humility, partnership and right relationship with our Indigenous partners, community members, peers and people who utilize our services.

April 2nd, 2023 marked the 30th anniversary of ANKORS, HIV/AIDS Network, Outreach & Support Societies incorporation as a not-for-profit organization in the region. ANKORS began as a small group of people living with HIV, health nurses and social justice advocates who gathered together to respond to the stigma and lack of services for people living with HIV at the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The first ANKORS office was in Castlegar and the service eventually moved to our current location in Nelson. The first ANKORS employee was Karen Muirhead who was ANKORS executive director for 10 years. Dennis Hutchison, joined Karen shortly after as the care team coordinator.

In 2000, the Cranbrook AIDS Society dissolved and ANKORS expanded its services to include the East Kootenay region. ANKORS has grown through the years to offer services for HIV, HCV and Harm Reduction across the region. From 2 employees, there are now upwards of 50

employees including many peers and people with lived expertise. ANKORS is like a ship that has kept afloat and provided refuge for so many people during the significant health emergencies that have included HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis-C, homelessness, COVID and now 7 years of the toxic drug poisonings.

This work requires very dedicated, compassionate and resilient individuals. All of us have faced significant losses and yet we continue to support and hold each other up and carry on providing life-saving support to people in our communities who are dealing with complex health issues, mental health, a toxic drug supply, homelessness, poverty, stigma, racism, homophobia and transphobia. There are days when I recognize that as individuals and as a team it feels like the situations we encounter on a daily basis are too much to bear. The losses too great and yet there is light. The light is different for everyone; it may be seeing that the support someone is receiving is making a small or big difference in their life. It may be a change in policy that we have had influence over; a new program we've been able to develop; a barrier we've overcome as an individual or a team. It may be the small wins and sometimes the big wins that keep us going or the values alignment we feel in the work, the organization and with our team. Whatever that reason is for you, I know that I couldn't experience more inspiration and more pride in the work that all of you do to support folks who rely on our services. The courage that each of you embody every day to stand up against stigma, injustice and barriers to accessing dignified care and services is beyond measure. Thank you for all that you do. I have the deepest respect for this team!! This includes REDUN, peers, staff, board members, volunteers, students and community allies! Thank you!

I also want to acknowledge that we have lost a number members of our ANKORS family and team over this past year. I want to particularly acknowledge Patrick who along with Jess started up EKNPUD and provided so much of his brilliance, energy and hope for change to supporting peers; advocating for harm reduction and safe supply options and contributing to the work at a regional and provincial level. I know we all were deeply impacted by Patrick and by his loss. I also want to remember Connoll who worked with our team in Cranbrook. He was a very kind person and was so dedicated to supporting folks with harm reduction outreach. I would also like to remember Ron Khadikin who was a member of the ANKORS board for many years and who was always a strong voice for advocacy and harm reduction. Ron advocated very hard with Interior Health to support us to provide glass stems and pipes before we had regular access. I know that many of you have had deep and personal losses this past year and I hope that the ANKORS team will continue to support you through those losses and grief. You are an amazing group of people and you deserve to be recognized for the work you do. There was an outpouring of love and support for health care workers during COVID and truly you all deserve that kind of recognition from your community. Instead so many front-line workers and front-line organizations face the same kind of stigma and lateral violence experienced by people who use our services. I hope very much for this to change!

The backlash we have experienced this past year regarding people who use drugs; the response to Drag Story time; homophobia and transphobia has been challenging. We are strong, however, and we will stay the course. We are made for times like this. You are made for times like this. Your ethics, values, wisdom, insights, courage and compassion are needed now more than ever! To that end, I feel that I would be remiss in not mentioning the incredible WINS of this past year. Truly it is in times like this that we need some significant wins. Here are a few I could think of that I consider really significant.

1. The purchase of the Support Recovery House from Nelson CARES with the support of BC Housing. Now ANKORS can provide 24/7 care and services for those working on their substance use goals. Thank you to Nora for all of your support and work pertaining to the house purchase and renovations!!!
2. The Mobile Outreach Van – the purchase of the outreach van was an idea and dream that came to fruition this year. It was not without obstacles including the challenge with the design company, but now we have a local company, Red Fish to build out the van.
3. An OPS service for Cranbrook!!!! What more can we say but how needed this is for Cranbrook and every community. Drug Checking in Cranbrook numbers are second in the Province!
4. The e-OPS Inhalation Outreach – Holly, Tiff and REDUN peers got this off the ground and continue to provide this much needed service while we look for an inhalation site.
5. The achievement of HOPE, EKNPUD and REDUN receiving for the first time 3 years of funding from the province as well as the important and impactful work they have been involved with throughout the year.
6. The ANKORS OPS at the office and the HUB under David's leadership resulted in over 2,000 uses in 2022-2023 and continues to provide optimum care and services 7 days a week.
7. The CAT groups (NFTF, CFWOG and Grand Forks CAT) shepherded by Amanda Erickson's leadership. The amount of educational and community events has helped to raise awareness of the issues surrounding decriminalization, safe supply and many other harm reduction, substance use and mental health issues
8. Trans Connect and all of the great traction Nichola has initiated in the region around gender affirming care.
9. The event that was held in the East Kooteanys to honour lives that we have lost to the toxic drug poisonings.
10. The OAT clinic and safe supply pilots and the advocacy for people in our region to receive client centred care.

These are just a few examples of WINS that are making a difference in people's lives!! Again, thank you to everyone for all of your amazing work during challenging times. You are exactly who is needed right now!!!