

GETTING HIP NOT HEP NEAR YOU?

Help us get the word out about Safer Tattooing and Piercing by letting us know about schools and community groups in your area (across Nova Scotia) where we can present the Hip not Hep workshop.

We would also love to hear about any health fairs or events where Hip not Hep can be a presence and share our Safer Tattooing and Piercing message to youth and interested parents and leaders.

Or, if you know of a youth who is interested in helping us spread the word, we want to hear from YOU!

HepNS Board Welcome

HepNS is thrilled to announce the appointment of two long time supporters to the board of directors. Welcome Bette and Alton MacAloney



If you would like to join this dynamic board, come to our Annual General Meeting. See page 2 for details.

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HEPATITIS AND THE N.S. AFRICAN, CARIBBEAN & BLACK COMMUNITIES

Over the last two months, HepNS has conducted an outreach project to organizations currently serving the African Nova Scotian, Caribbean and Black communities and community members, to begin a dialogue about hepatitis and how it's affecting people in these communities.

Current research in Canada and the United States regarding hepatitis and people of African descent indicates that while in Canada there is practically no information (nor even stats on how this virus affects this community), that African Americans are contracting hepatitis C at higher rates than that of the general population. African Americans living with hepatitis experience slower rates to develop cirrhosis but higher rates of death due to hepatitis C. However, even in the United States, African Americans are generally underrepresented in Hepatitis C treatment research studies.

What is evident, is that there is an overwhelming lack of culturally specific and competent resources and support for people of African descent in Canada, and even more so in Nova Scotia. The challenge is to address the current service gaps in the provision of information and support around hepatitis C to the Black community - but provide information and support that is informed by the cultural nuances and needs of the Black community.

Through a consultation process, we looked at how HepNS can facilitate the provision of information and support around Hepatitis to the Black community. As part of this work, HepNS engaged in outreach to many contacts in the community and among those providing various health related services. Through two focus groups and two community consultations, HepNS started a process of engaging the communities and leaders, building trust and exploring what kind of partnerships could happen with existing grass-root associations, organizations and faith groups. We believe that the HepNS has a role to play in the provision of culturally competent hepatitis information and support to members of the African Descendent community.

HepNS will produce and share a report speaking to the results of the work done once the project is complete. If you have input into how this work can happen, we'd love to hear from you.

WORLD HEPATITIS DAY

JULY 28TH APPROACHES

HepNS is planning something fun for this year's World Hepatitis Day. Can't imagine topping last year's successful World Record setting "See, Hear and Speak no Evil".....but we'll try! Look to our Facebook page and follow us on Twitter to find out what we have planned, and how you can get involved.

ONE ON ONE: AN INTERVIEW WITH CO-FACILITATOR GERI

HepNS Workshop Facilitator, Adam Dolliver, sat down with one of our **Spread the Word** co-facilitators Geri Buffett, to discuss her experiences delivering the workshop to former IV drug users.

Adam (AD): What made you want to be a co-facilitator with the Spread the Word project?

Geri (GB): Living with Hep C myself, I had no knowledge of the virus, and I wanted to learn more information about it, and be more knowledgeable about it. Also, being a co-facilitator gives you the chance to help other people. That appealed to me.

AD: What abilities do you feel an effective co-facilitator needs?

GB: I think a good co-facilitator needs to have some background knowledge about Hep C. You also need to be a good listener, it's really important to listen to what people have to say. You need to be non-judgemental, and you need to have interpersonal skills. Living with Hep C helps you know what they're going through, and that makes it easier to relate.

AD: Do you think a co-facilitator would be more effective if they had HCV?

GB: I think it helps, for myself, I am going through a lot of the things they're going through: first finding out, going to the places [service providers] they're going to, and the treatment (I'm starting treatment soon). You can learn a lot about [Hep C] online and reading books, but it's not the same as having that first-hand knowledge.

AD: Did you learn anything new during training, or during workshops?

GB: Before I was a co-facilitator I didn't know much about [Hep C] whatsoever, and when I became a co-facilitator all my questions were answered, like how you can get Hep C, what the treatment was like, and how HIV complicates things.

AD: Do you believe it is important for HepNS to use community members as co-facilitators?

GB: Definitely. A lot of people feel more open to talking to someone who also has [Hep C]. If you have it, you can understand a little bit more where people are coming from, what their fears and concerns are.

AD: Was there anything about facilitating that surprised you?

GB: I was quite surprised at how open some of the [participants] were. I was also surprised by some triggers that I wouldn't have expected myself; some things that trigger people in the way that they do. I was also surprised at the various ways that the viruses [Hep C and HIV] can be transmitted. That really surprised me.

AD: Have you been able to use the things you've learned in your own life? How?

GB: The information I learned about Hep C, I have passed on to my parents. Everything that I've learned made them more knowledgeable about the virus, and more comfortable. After co-facilitating the workshop, people recognize me on the street, and they will come up to me and ask questions about Hep C. I love helping people, and am happy to give out information. I know so much more now as opposed to a year ago.

AD: What would you say to someone who is thinking of getting involved in co-facilitation?

GB: I would tell them that I love it! I really do. I enjoy working with other people, telling them about the viruses, and giving them the information. I'm a people person. You learn something different every time you do it, from the [participants] who are there. If the opportunity comes up, you should do it; it's fun and informative.



Join us for the

Hepatitis Outreach Society of Nova Scotia's Annual General Meeting

Saturday June 8th, 10:00 am at the HepNS office, 5571 Cunard Street 2nd floor.

If you are interested in joining this dynamic board, call Colin at 902-420-1767 or email Director@HepNS.ca

NEW PROJECT: HEPATITIS & WOMEN

HepNS is very pleased to announce that the IWK has awarded us \$7000 to develop a project to address issues important to women who are living with Hepatitis C. The new project will be called, "Hep C, Women and Healthy Living."

Over the past year several women approached HepNS staff asking for resources and programming to meet their particular needs. Over the next year, this new HepNS project will promote wellness and healthy living among women, improve the capacity of organizations to address issues related to HCV, and to decrease the stigma associated with living with the virus.

HepNS will develop a workshop exploring the differences in the HCV experience for women such as the risk of cirrhosis and liver cancer, the effects of alcohol on HCV-related disease, and response to HCV treatment and how these intersect with life issues such as pregnancy and menopause. Other topics that may be covered include living healthy, the care-giver role during illness, and impact on intimacy.

HepNS is currently recruiting women who are living with Hep C to take part in a focus group that will guide our work. The group will meet once this summer to discuss topics to be addressed and suggestions for the project. HepNS and our project partners The Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland Nova Scotia and Adsum House for Women and Children, will deliver the final Hep C, Women and Healthy Living workshop to interested women in the community. The materials will be made available to community agencies serving women.

For more information, contact Carla Densmore at program@hepns.ca or call 420-1767.

MORE SUPPORT: GROUP AT NECHC

HepNS continues to find new ways of providing support to Nova Scotians living with hepatitis and on treatment. Last fall, to provide peer support to people across the province, we launched the online peer support community. This interactive community provides a forum for people to connect and share ideas, stories, and experiences. Though we are very proud of our online resources, we recognize that internet based support is not a good fit for all.

In January of this year, HepNS partnered with the North End Community Health Centre (NECHC) to explore the possibility of providing an in-person support group for people who are undergoing treatment for HCV. With the roll-out of treatment services being provided at the North End Community Health Centre (NECHC), timing and circumstances are ideal for piloting a support group.

On March 8, HepNS and NECHC staff conducted the first of two focus groups with community members to determine the best model for a peer support group. Also discussed were what resources are required to launch a pilot support group. Initial feedback included the desire to have the group facilitated by a peer, to maintain a casual atmosphere for the group, to maintain confidentiality, and a desire to see the group expand to include welcoming people living with hepatitis who may not regularly access services at the NECHC. As one participant said: "We don't care who the person is, if they have Hep C, they're welcome. The virus doesn't discriminate, why should we?" A second focus group in April will gain more feedback and ideas for a support group.

For more information, please contact Adam at trainer@hepns.ca or 420-1767.

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HepNS is a charitable organization that reduces the impact of hepatitis through support, information and education.

Community Connections is a quarterly informative publication of the Hepatitis Outreach Society of Nova Scotia. We welcome your comments and contributions.

If you would like to contribute to the work of HepNS, see the "Sponsors" page on our website.

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HIP NOT HEP SAFER TATTOOING: CELEBRATING TWO YEARS

The Hip not Hep project just completed its successful two year run. Since November of 2011, HepNS staff have delivered 82 workshops to 2408 youth. The project, funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) was created to lower hepatitis infections rates in youth by educating them on the risks associated with tattooing and piercing.

This project is very timely in that more and more youth are interested in getting tattoos and piercings and may be at risk to get serious infections such as hepatitis and HIV if sterile equipment and proper procedures are not followed. When asked if she thinks there is an ongoing need for this project in Nova Scotia one grade 9 teacher said, "Yes. Specifically because I think the students are going to cheap spots. Having anyone use whatever needles and maybe in the past haven't had a chance to think about it. So the information seems to be timely in the sense that students in junior high may be thinking about getting a tattoo. It is a great time for this."

HepNS staff with the help of youth, especially our Youth Rep Amanda Smith and the Youth Working Team at Duncan Mac-Millan High, developed an interactive, fun workshop targeting junior and senior high students and youth in community organizations.

Over the two years HepNS has made every effort to reach youth and make a lasting impact. One of our most successful promotional items is the snazzy black T shirts with the Hip not Hep logo prominently displayed on the front. At each workshop there was a draw with the T shirt given away as a prize. This Junior High teacher said, "T shirts were wonderful. They would have all loved to have one. The students wore their T-shirts happily. Love to send the message. They love to be able to be champions of the message, especially in grade 7... Proud to say that this is not going to happen to me and be able to tell others about it... you know this is what I know. So proud of their knowledge, how to look after themselves, survive and be well and be healthy. They were very appreciative of it..."

HepNS staff agrees that it is great to get information out there to youth about hepatitis prevention, testing and treatment but our real goal is to see youth make safer choices based on the information we share with them. So it was very gratifying to hear these stories from Youth Health Coordinators in the schools.

"There was a student who was in grade 8 last year. She commented that she was allowed to get a tattoo for her birthday and she referenced the presentation, 'but I want to be really careful where I go to get it because of all the dangers of the different viruses that that lady talked to us about'. That's the comment I heard... it's pretty big. I was shocked to be honest with you. Something actually made a difference, wow. But see it's the peripheral effect. So she would definitely have said something to her mother, said something to her sister, friends, whatever. There was actually other people in the Youth Health Centre when she said that. So it's those peripheral values that are really impossible to measure but definitely happen."

Based on the success of the project and the expressed interest among stakeholders for the project to continue HepNS has received approval from PHAC to continue the Hip not Hep project for another year. This one year extension will allow HepNS the funding, time, and opportunity to reach the youth population in new ways and in new locations throughout Nova Scotia. In the coming year Hip not Hep will focus on reaching at risk youth in the southern and more rural areas of the province with valuable information about hepatitis and safer tattooing and piercing.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR DONATION !

NAME : _____

ADDRESS: _____

DONATION: \$10.00 \$25.00 \$50.00 other \$ _____

Please send me further information about HepNS

I would like to make this donation in memory/honor of _____

Your support allows HepNS to provide valuable education, information and support across the province of Nova Scotia. An income tax receipt will be issued for donations of \$10.00 or more. Donations can also be given on our website or through Visa and Mastercard by calling 902-420-1767

Please make cheques payable to Hepatitis Outreach Society of Nova Scotia and mail to:

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