



Living in
Community

Living in Community: 2020-2021 Annual Report

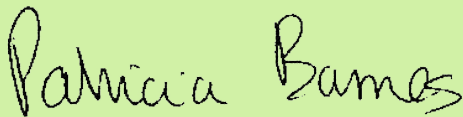
www.livingincommunity.ca

Messages from our Co-Chairs

As one of the founding members of Living in Community (LIC), I've watched and been part of the evolution of LIC over the past sixteen years. LIC started with a small group of neighbourhood, business, and community policing organizations, along with sex workers and sex worker-serving organizations, many located in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. LIC began simply to convene conversations with diverse communities to build trust, identify shared concerns, and work together to improve sex workers' safety.

I have learned so much and am honoured to have been part of a group that has brought together a wide array of community partners to promote a deeper understanding of how street-based sex workers are an important part of our communities. Often, community members like business owners and residents may be worried if they see street-based sex workers and may unconsciously assign stigma or concern. The LIC model of understanding each other's perspectives and unpacking stigma has brought in many new allies and changed many minds over the years.

My hope for the future of LIC is that it continues to engage diverse stakeholders to build understanding and respect for all, and that the work continues despite the hurdles to have sex work recognized as legitimate work at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels.



Patricia Barnes, Co-Chair

Executive Director of Hastings North
Business Improvement Association

WISH knows, first-hand, the impacts that street-based sex workers in the Downtown Eastside experience. But while LIC started in our community, it soon branched out to reach more communities across Vancouver and then beyond, engaging in provincial-level advocacy work and educating stakeholders from across the country.

By expanding further and wider, the LIC model is able to bring together the voices of diverse sex workers, sex worker-serving organizations, and community stakeholders to deepen all of our understandings of the needs of sex workers. While WISH works with street-based sex workers, other members of LIC's committees and projects work with all sectors of sex workers in many different communities. Each of us can speak to what we see from the our own peers and communities we work with, and the LIC model helps us feed into a larger, unified voice fighting for sex workers' rights.

It has been an absolute pleasure to serve as Co-Chair for the last five and a half years and I am excited to see the potential of LIC in its latest incarnation. As its own non-profit organization, I look forward to LIC having more stability and more ability to truly focus on, and action, goals identified by the community. I see exciting potential to further ground the work in the experiences of a diversity of sex workers. I look forward to deepening existing partnerships, forging new partnerships, and exploring new opportunities.



Mebrat Beyene, Co-Chair

Executive Director of WISH
Drop-In Centre Society

Message from our Executive Director

Everything we do at Living in Community (LIC) is based in relationships. As members of a shared community – whether a neighbourhood, a city, a province, or beyond – we are always in relationship with each other. While we may disagree from time to time, the people around us form our community. This foundation informs everything we do as we seek understanding, collaboration, and shared action on the issues we want addressed.

From this strong foundation, though, we are always growing and evolving, and 2020-2021 has been a year of significant growth and evolution for LIC. In a strategic planning process held with our Steering Committee in 2019, LIC set big goals for the following year: increase our staff time and capacity, incorporate as a non-profit society, bring on a Board of Directors, and scale up to do more provincial-level education and advocacy work that better centers the voices and needs of diverse sex workers. It has been a slow process, and we still have much to do and to learn, but we have come a long way down that path this past year. Our ability to do this work is reliant upon the commitment, passion, and guidance of everyone who has been part of LIC since it first started as a series of tentative conversations in 2003.

And when it comes to governance, our ability to grow in this past year has been thanks in large part to Collingwood Neighbourhood House (CNH), our administrative and financial home since 2006. With CNH's stewardship and support, we were able to incorporate as our own provincial non-profit society, inform our funders, and transition into operating as an independent organization. We are deeply grateful for the stability, safety, and runway that CNH has graciously provided us with.

The 2020-2021 year was a year of massive change, but it also provided us with more clarity about the direction we want to move in. It is humbling and exciting to be on this journey for the next phase of Living in Community.



Helena Seiferling, Executive Director

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info@livingincommunity.ca

www.livingincommunity.ca

Our Vision:

We envision a future where sex workers' rights are respected and where sex workers are free from stigma, violence, discrimination, and criminalization. We envision a world where diverse stakeholders can come together to share, learn from each other, and work through different sex work perspectives in order to achieve our common goals of health, safety, and well-being for all community members.

Our Mission:

Centering sex workers' rights, Living in Community convenes diverse stakeholders in order to: understand a range of experiences and perspectives; inform sex work-related policies and practices of governments, service providers, and community organizations; and provide education to support these goals.

Our Values:

- We ensure that the diversity of sex workers' experiences and perspectives are at the centre of our work and inform every aspect of what we do.
- We believe that everyone has the right to health and safety, regardless of their social location and lived experience. However, we recognize that, due to differing levels of power and privilege in society, individuals experience inequitable access to health, safety, justice, and other services and supports. We address the systemic root causes which include colonization, criminalization, racism, discrimination, capitalism, and more.
- We are committed to engaging in ongoing learning about how to truly practice decolonization in our work.
- We use an evidence-based, harm reduction lens on sex work to address the impacts of stigmatization and criminalization of sex workers.
- The foundation of our work is being open to listening and seeking understanding of different perspectives in order to find common ground. We value understanding the perspectives of residents, businesses, and other community stakeholders in regard to the challenges they may have in addressing sex work-related issues.

Last approved by our Steering Committee, May 2021.

Our Work in 2020-2021

SAFE in Cedar Cottage

SAFE in Cedar Cottage is a network of community members and neighbourhood stakeholders who meet regularly to discuss and address sex work concerns along the Kingsway stroll in the Cedar Cottage area of Vancouver. This project was created in 2014 to help address the lack of service providers around the Kingsway stroll, and robust community engagement was done at that time through interviews, group meetings, surveys, and conversations at community events. This work brought to life the dynamics between businesses, service providers, sex workers, and other residents. Since then, Living in Community has been convening regular meetings with SAFE in Cedar Cottage members to discuss ongoing community needs.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the Kingsway stroll and the Cedar Cottage community. Many street-based sex workers experienced a drastic loss of income, loss of support services, and inability to receive government benefits that other workers have been eligible for, like Employment Insurance or the Canada Emergency Response Benefit. In April 2020, SAFE in Cedar Cottage meetings switched to being held monthly and online, rather than in person every two months, to provide more opportunity for safe connection and action throughout the pandemic.

In June 2020 as COVID-19 made pre-existing needs even more urgent, the City of Vancouver installed a temporary hygiene trailer on the Kingsway stroll. The Kingsway Community Station (KCS), managed by RainCity Housing, enabled trans and cis women and gender diverse folks to access washrooms, harm reduction supplies, and peer support. However, as a small and temporary trailer, the Kingsway Community Station faced a challenge as winter and colder weather approached. The KCS had also outgrown their space and was ready for a more permanent place to call “home.” In late 2020, the KCS moved into the John Howard Society Pacific Community Service Office, located on Fraser Street near Kingsway, and quickly got to work on art projects and other community-building activities to make the space welcoming and comfortable for those along the stroll.



Photo courtesy of the Kingsway Community Station.

By the Numbers:

- **165:** individuals who attended a Living in Community training, in person or virtually, in 2020-2021.
- **1,243:** individuals across BC who received support through emergency COVID-19 funding in summer and fall 2020.
- **11:** number of SAFE in Cedar Cottage meetings held.
- **4:** number of BC Sex Work Support Service Network meetings held.

BC Sex Work Support Service Network

After Living in Community's May 2019 provincial conference, "A Safer Province for Everyone: Responding to Violence Against Sex Workers," sex workers and sex worker-serving organizations from across BC wanted to continue regularly connecting and learning from each other. The BC Sex Work Support Service Network (the BC Network) was created.

By the Numbers:

- **18:** number of meetings LIC attended with community groups, coalitions, unions, and other allied stakeholders on shared advocacy objectives.
- **8:** number of municipal, provincial, and federal government consultations and topics for which LIC provided written and verbal submissions.
- **5:** number of provincial and federal elected officials whom LIC met with to advocate for sex workers' rights, health, and safety.

The BC Network is a group of more than twenty organizations that provide frontline services, supports, and advocacy to sex workers in their communities. Network members are located across nearly every region of British Columbia, and includes one organization in the Yukon. Living in Community facilitates quarterly virtual meetings and trainings for members to share updates on their work, identify shared concerns and best practices, and build a unified voice for sex workers' rights in BC. The connections made through the Network have been especially beneficial in better connecting organizations and individuals from urban and rural areas, helping us all better understand how sex work happens differently in different places.

LIC received emergency COVID-19 funding in summer 2020 from Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE) and the Canadian Women's Foundation to distribute to BC Network members. This funding was used to support and hire peer workers and expand emergency programming and services in communities across BC. In total, \$23,000 was distributed to ten organizations that provided services in nine communities; 1,243 staff and peers were hired, provided honoraria, or received programming from this funding. The most common uses of this funding were distributing safer sex supplies, PPE, and harm reduction supplies to local sex workers, as well as connecting sex workers to existing community services and supports which they may have lost touch with during COVID-19.

In late 2020, LIC conducted a survey with BC Network members to identify key priorities for the future of the Network. As a result, in 2021 LIC began offering more training for members – including trainings offered by both LIC staff and by other Network members – and bringing more provincial and federal advocacy opportunities to the Network for their participation.



BC Bad Date and Aggressor Reporting

At LIC's May 2019 conference, another major need identified by attendees from across BC was a provincially-integrated Bad Date and Aggressor Reporting (BDAR) system. In BDAR systems, sex workers report violent incidents or safety concerns to peers or outreach workers, or track them in online databases, to help keep each other safe. Local and regional BDAR systems exist in some BC communities and for different demographics of sex workers; however, BDAR systems are not available in most of the province, with a notable gap in rural and remote areas. The reports also have limited distribution and are not connected with each other.

After the 2019 conference, five organizations came together as a working group to try to secure funding for the creation of a provincial BDAR system. These organizations are PACE Society in Vancouver, Peers Victoria, SWAN Vancouver, and WISH Drop-In Centre Society in Vancouver, along with Living in Community. In late 2020, this working group was successful in receiving three years of project funding from the Law Foundation of BC, supplemented by a private family foundation in BC, to design and create a provincial BDAR system.



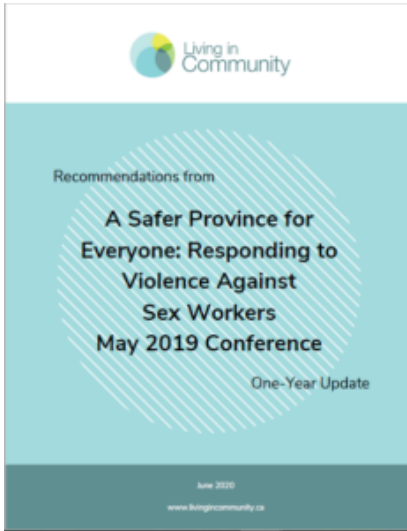
The provincial BDAR system will be the first of its kind in Canada, and one of a select few geographically-linked reporting systems that exist internationally. The project will include extensive, province-wide community consultations with a wide range of sex workers and sex work support organizations. In particular, the BC Sex Work Support Service Network will be a key hub for consultation, input, and design to ensure this system will meet the needs of the diversity of sex workers across rural and urban areas of the province.

In early 2021, LIC and the Working Group focused on hiring a Project Coordinator to begin this exciting and much-needed project.

Living in Community thanks the following funders for their generous support of our work in 2020-2021:

City of Vancouver
Canadian Women's Foundation
Government of British Columbia
Government of Canada
McConnell Foundation – Innoweave
Vancouver Foundation

Internal Development



In June 2020, we published an update about the progress made on our 2019 conference recommendations.

The past year has been a significant one for LIC's internal development. In 2020-2021, we completed the second of a three-year contract with a Developmental Evaluation Coach who works with LIC to become more strategic, to identify key goals and the actions needed to achieve them, and to better track and evaluate our impact. In this second year, our Developmental Evaluation priorities were: creating action plans to achieve key organizational objectives, conducting the evaluation survey with BC Network members as mentioned above, and receiving ongoing strategic support for our non-profit society transition.

Of course, the non-profit transition was another major internal shift. After seventeen years of being guided by a Vancouver-based Steering Committee, LIC incorporated as a provincial non-profit society and began the process of transitioning to a Board of Directors governance model. This work continues as LIC both develops needed policies and practices to meet the provincial legislation for non-profits and also seeks out ways to decolonize our practices, remove hierarchies, and hold onto our key Steering Committee values of seeking understanding and consensus.

In summer 2020, the Steering Committee made a consensus-based decision to remove the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) from the Steering Committee. After sixteen years of trying to build this partnership with the VPD, we decided that many actions of the VPD had not been in accordance with the principles of mutual respect and collaboration that all Steering Committee members were expected to uphold. Given these actions, as well as LIC's repeated attempts to provide training to the VPD and the lack of tangible changes in the VPD's sex work-related policies and practices, LIC recognized that it was impossible to both uphold our community commitments and have the VPD on our Steering Committee.

Read our full statement about removing the VPD from our Steering Committee on our website.

In both our public statement about this decision (which can be found on our website) and the letter we sent to VPD Chief Constable Adam Palmer and Deputy Chief Constable Laurence Rankin, we emphasized the nature of the LIC model: we are all members of this community and therefore are always in relationship. This transition point provided an opportunity to re-evaluate this relationship. In order for any future change to this relationship to occur, LIC reiterated that there must first be a clearly demonstrated commitment from the VPD to protecting and advancing the rights of sex workers.

2020-2021 Financial Statement

Revenue

Municipal	\$42,156
Provincial	\$30,000
Federal	\$15,000
Total Government Revenue	\$87,156

Total Foundations	\$158,000
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2019-2020 Carryover	\$33,541
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Total Revenue	\$278,697
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Note: LIC's fiscal year (April 1 - March 31) does not align with most project timelines. Carryover represents funding dedicated to projects occurring or continuing in the next fiscal year.

Expenses

Staff salaries	\$116,559
Honoraria	\$4,990
Contracted services	\$10,783
Total Personnel Expenses	\$132,332

Program & training supplies	\$578
BC Sex Work Support Service	\$23,000
Network COVID-19 Distribution	
Total Program Expenses	\$23,578

Administrative fees	\$22,751
Administrative expenses	\$1,797
Total Administrative Expenses	\$24,548

Total Expenses	\$180,458
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Steering Committee Members

Our Steering Committee members in 2020-2021 were:

- City of Vancouver
- Collingwood Neighbourhood House
- Current and former sex workers
- Ending Violence Association of BC
- Hastings North Business Improvement Association
- Health Initiative for Men: Hustle Program
- PACE Society
- SWAN Vancouver Society
- Sex Workers United Against Violence (SWUAV)
- Vancouver Aboriginal Community Policing Centre
- WAVAW Rape Crisis Centre
- WISH Drop-In Centre Society

Our Advisory members on the Steering Committee in 2020-2021 were:

- Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General
- Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction



