

Good evening everyone. Thank you so much for that introduction.

First off I want to acknowledge my fellow nominees many of whom I have had the pleasure to work with at different times. Given the quality of their contributions, it is certainly an honour to be the recipient of this award.

Speaking of privilege, it has been a distinct privilege of mine to be involved in this work and have to been at four outstanding organizations over the past 15 years. First at the **BC Persons with AIDS Society**, where I first ‘cut my teeth’ on this work, fresh out of law school. While there I had the opportunity to contribute to an initiative there called *Schedule C* which in retrospect remains one of the things I am the most proud about – as we were able to realize some really tangible benefits there for people living with HIV/AIDS – and ultimately going on to see some changes in the legislation governing provincial disability benefits. To this day, BCPWA continues to be on the forefront of advocating for the well-being of PHAs in a whole host of ways and I am happy to be a part of their impressive legacy of work and accomplishments.

After that I went on to work at **YouthCO AIDS Society**, another outstanding organization working on these issues as they relate to youth and youth at risk. Next it was on to **Friends For Life**, where it was very exciting to be providing complementary and alternative health services free-of-charge to people living with HIV and other life-threatening conditions such as cancer.

Now, today, I am the Executive Director of the **Pacific AIDS Network**, and I could not be happier about how the network is evolving. One of the main goals of PAN is to provide professional development and targeted workforce training to the staff and volunteers of our 41 member organizations – in other words, providing them the tools so they in turn can do a better job supporting PHAs and people at risk be it in Vancouver, Prince George, Nelson, Chilliwack or Campbell River.

Another thing that I am very jazzed about is our partnership with the Ontario AIDS Network, in bringing a PHA Leadership Program here to BC. PAN is also working in active partnership with the Ontario AIDS Network (OAN) to deliver leadership

development training to PHAs in BC. This is a peer-driven and delivered professional development opportunity whereby PHAs are leading the way and encouraging others to explore and build their own individual leadership potential, in order that they might make a greater contribution in their communities either as volunteers or as members of the work force.

Along the way, I also was working alongside other dedicated, talented and passionate people and I continue to do so in my work today at PAN. So I want to acknowledge those folks, past and present, and how much I have learned from them in my own journey in this work.

In each instance, I was working at community-based organizations that people who came before me - had the vision, commitment and dedication to bring into being and manifest. I can't overstate the **importance of community-based organizations** and the work that is being done at these agencies. The successes that I have been fortunate enough to be a part of at the organizations I have worked for, similar successes are being realized each and every day in every part and corner of BC. In these so called lean economic times, we cannot overlook the work that is being done, day after day, on the front lines and from one end of the spectrum of care, treatment, support and prevention – to the other. In these so called lean economic times, we cannot forget the vision of Canada being a compassionate, caring society. This is a Canada I still believe in.

This event has prompted me to reflect on what keeps me here in this movement, doing this work. What captured my attention from the start and continues to keep me passionate is that HIV/AIDS is such a profound social justice issue. While HIV and AIDS is everyone's business, gay men, men who have sex with men and injection drug users continue to carry a large share of HIV/AIDS cases in BC, while the disease is increasingly affecting individuals outside these groups. Of particular concern, HIV rates continue to grow at an alarming rate among Aboriginal people and among Aboriginal women in particular. So here we see the intersections of race and ethnicity, gender, poverty, homelessness...access to harm reduction services...stigma and discrimination.

HIV/AIDS continues to grow in complexity and continues to represent a profound public health challenge. A social justice challenge. And in turn, for those of us working in the field, all of us, it offers its own particular challenges. We are challenged to be dedicated and to persevere. We are challenged to work with what we have, where we have, and to make the most of what is available to us. To be resourceful and creative. We are challenged to care about our brothers and sisters. We are challenged to be compassionate. We are challenged to see beyond our differences. And perhaps most essential of all, we are challenged to be hopeful. One world, one hope.

That is why events like these, where we celebrate our successes, are so important in helping all of us to keep the faith. So thank you, BCPWA, the organizers, my fellow nominees and to each and every one of you in the room tonight. This evening, I celebrate all of our successes.

Thank you.