



The Connection

The Newsletter of Regional HIV/AIDS Connection

Serving Perth, Huron, Lambton, Elgin, Middlesex, and Oxford Counties

June 2012

WHAT'S INSIDE

Reports from the Field
2, 3

ACB Men's Group
3

Celebrating Volunteers
3, 4

Other News
4

Past & Upcoming
Events
5, 6

PHA News &
Social Support Groups
6, 7

Staff Announcements
7

Staff Listing &
Donation Form
8

HIV Stigma The Fight Continues

When we are in our community raising awareness, we often receive the message that people think HIV is over! The myths and misconceptions people hold illustrate the central challenge of addressing HIV/AIDS in 2012.

Some people believe:

- HIV doesn't exist locally, that it is only an issue in other parts of the world.
- there is a vaccine or a cure for HIV/AIDS.
- no one dies from HIV/AIDS anymore.
- HIV has nothing to do with them.
- individuals living with HIV can simply take a pill and be fine.

While it is true that many living with HIV benefit from life-saving medications, it is also true that living with HIV presents many difficulties and, without treatment, can result in death.

Each year in Ontario approximately 1,600 people become HIV positive. Additionally, around 25-30% of people living with HIV don't know their positive status. Not knowing one's status is one of the biggest risk factors for transmission to others.

There is a body of evidence which shows people are most infectious in the first few months after becoming HIV positive. Depending on the kind of activity one engages in, this is when the risk is highest of passing HIV to others. When people know their HIV status they can take necessary precautions to prevent transmission to others.

Early diagnosis and treatment is the best plan of action if we want to significantly reduce the number of new infections in Ontario each year. The solution seems easy – provide access to testing and treatment.

So, why do we continue to see approximately 1,600 new HIV diagnoses each year? HIV stigma. Still in 2012, stigma is pervasive and undermines the work of HIV prevention, testing and

treatment. Stigma-driven barriers persist while the loss of valuable life continues.

As I write this article, someone in southwestern Ontario is currently dying of HIV-related illness. It is tragic and unnecessary, and I would suggest it is happening largely because of HIV stigma. HIV stigma and the cruel consequence of internalized shame is often a significant barrier to accessing life sustaining treatment.

It is for these reasons and many more the HIV/AIDS movement continues. AIDS-related deaths may not occur in the same numbers as the early days of the epidemic, but the losses we feel in this "new era" of HIV serve as a sobering reminder that HIV is far from over and there is still no cure.

Stand up with RHAC against HIV stigma. The lives of people we care about depend upon it!

Thank you for your continuing support.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



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Community Inspired. Courage Driven.

Reports from the Field

Greetings from the Six Counties!

Carlen Costa, *Regional Coordinator of HIV/AIDS Services*



Firstly, you may or may not have noticed that this position title has changed to Regional Coordinator of HIV/AIDS Services. This is because part of our regional work is supported through a new federal funding package from AIDS Community Action Program (ACAP).

Our regional presence continues to grow, and we are connecting with many communities within the six counties we serve. Since the last update in January, we have been working to create new relationships with secondary service providers and their clients. Our goal is to be accessible within the areas we serve as a helpful, supportive and safe provider of HIV services for diverse populations.

This year is all about testing - when to be tested, where to be tested and how to be tested. Being tested regularly when you are sexually active or engaging in higher risk activities is an important part of your health regimen.

30% of people living with HIV don't know it. Getting tested is the only way to be sure of your HIV status so you can take care of yourself and others.

If you are interested in getting tested for HIV, there are many people who can support you. We work closely with Options Anonymous HIV Testing Clinic to provide testing opportunities throughout the six counties we serve. This testing method is also known as *point of care* or *rapid testing*, since it takes about 20 minutes. It is another way RHAC strives to connect with people regionally!

So far this year, we have had the pleasure of being in St. Thomas (Elgin County) and Sarnia (Lambton County). See the box on this page for a listing of upcoming anonymous testing opportunities close to you.

Did you know you can access testing at any health unit during their regular hours of operation? And, the health unit you choose doesn't have to be in the county in which you live.

From September 24-28 we are coming together in partnership with the six county health units to inform, educate and connect through our annual *Are You Doin' It?* HIV and STI testing week campaign. The health units will provide testing and we will be providing free, anonymous testing sites in several locations. Please visit www.testingweek.ca for more information about testing sites and other *Are You Doin' It?* events.

If you ever have any questions, concerns or just want to find out more, please contact RHAC. There will always be someone with a smile and a friendly voice to answer your questions and support you.

Since this is my last newsletter article, I would like to thank everyone for their support in the past year and wish Jenny Gritke a positive welcome back to her position as Regional Coordinator of HIV/AIDS Services.



London HBT* Work Group Update

***Homophobia, Biphobia, Transphobia**

On May 17, International Day Against Homophobia, HBT announced a new website to help the LGBT2Q community report hate-based crimes. "Essentially, it will be a one-stop shop for all things related to building safer spaces for the LGBT2Q community and for decreasing hate crimes", says Daniel Pugh, co-chair of HBT and former staff member at RHAC.

The main feature of the site is an online reporting tool that will allow users to submit reports directly to police or to the Hate Helpline. It will also be available in a mobile application for use from smart phones.

HBT received a \$47,000 grant in partnership with London Police Service through the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services' Safer and Vital Communities Initiative. Part of the funds have been used to develop the website. The group is also working on education resources around LGBT2Q issues that will be accessible through the website of the HBT Working Group.

The site will go live by the end of July. Visit hbtlondon.ca.

Regional Anonymous HIV Testing Clinics

July 13 from 2-4 p.m.

Grand Bend Community Health Centre
69 Main Street East

September 21 from 2-4 p.m.

Clinton Family Health Team
Clinton Health Centre
105 Shipley Street

October 19 from 2-4 p.m.

Woodstock & Area Community Health Centre
400 Dundas Street

Regional HIV/AIDS Connection serves the counties of Perth, Huron, Lambton, Elgin, Middlesex, and Oxford.

Celebrating International Women's Day March 8, 2012

For 30 years, HIV/AIDS has been a local concern as well as an international epidemic. Since the early years, many women in our community have dedicated their professional lives to working with people living with, affected by and at risk for HIV. On International Women's Day, we took a moment to honour six women who have made significant contributions locally to the HIV movement.

RHAC honoured the contributions of these incredible women with a luncheon on March 8. Please visit our website under *What's New* for biographies of each woman.

Mercy Nleya-Ncube and Bonnie Baynham also collaborated with the Life Resource Centre for a beautiful multicultural celebration. This event featured diverse groups of women from around the world through music, dance and the sharing of food.



Brenda
Done



Gloria
Aykroyd



Jane
Paisley-Canning



Lyn
Pitman



Margaret
Pelz



Shannon
Dougherty

ACB Men's Group Speaking the Language of Care



Most people at RHAC recognize Simon from our new website. His portrait is one of the first images you see when visiting www.hivaidsconnection.ca.

Simon first came to RHAC in the fall of 2011 as a research assistant for *iSpeak: Exploring the HIV-related perspectives, needs and challenges of African, Caribbean and Black (ACB) heterosexual men in Ontario*.

During interviews for the *iSpeak* project, survey participants identified there are many issues around men's health that need to be addressed locally. As a result, the Black Diaspora Men's Group was formed.

Simon facilitates monthly meetings with a focus on health related matters, including, but not limited to HIV and how we can develop a local strategy to address healthcare inequities for

African, Caribbean and Black men. Currently, the Black Diaspora Men's Group is drafting a pamphlet that expresses its mission, vision, and values to help recruit members to the group.

In addition, Simon works freelance as an interpreter and translator in English, French, Sango and Baya. He writes articles in French on HIV related issues for ACFO's (Association canadienne-française de l'Ontario) newsletters and is passionate about empowering people to engage in their healthcare.

RHAC is fortunate to have access to Simon's many talents. Whether in words or in actions, he is adept at speaking the language of care.

Celebrating Volunteers

Volunteer Appreciation Dinner a Great Success!

Over 50 volunteers and staff dined at London Music Club on May 24 for RHAC's annual volunteer appreciation dinner.

In addition to the amazing food, attendees were regaled with the accomplishments of volunteers over the past year. Over the course of the evening a giant cheque was presented to Brian Lester, Executive Director for \$185,335.74. The sum attempts to capture the economic contribution volunteers have made to RHAC over the past year.

Expressed in another way, our 188 volunteers donated 8,506 hours of time sharing their expertise, passion and caring with clients, staff and other volunteers.

The benefits of RHAC's vibrant volunteer program go beyond delivering on our mission and enhancing our service delivery to clients. Volunteers report a sense of belonging and empowerment as they are performing meaningful work. Other volunteers enjoy opportunities to learn more about HIV, hepatitis C and related issues.

The most important thing volunteers do for RHAC is ensure we continue to provide a welcoming environment to everyone who walks through our door and carries that feeling back out to the community.

Volunteer Service Award Recipients

On April 13, five dedicated RHAC volunteers were honoured by receiving Ontario Volunteer Service Awards. Please join us in celebrating their outstanding contributions to the HIV/AIDS cause.



From left to right:

- Ed Ede, 5 years
- Mel Dupuis, 5 years
- Jason Lee, 5 years
- Sue Parkinson, 10 years
- Fred Lush, 15 years

Volunteer Training Dates

Orientation & HIV Basics
are offered at 186 King Street, London.

Upcoming dates are:

- Tuesday, June 12, 6:30-9:30 p.m.
- Wednesday, September 26, 2:00-4:00 p.m.

Contact Natalie Hébert at nhebert@hivaidsconnection.ca
or 1-866-920-1601

Students from Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry Donate Over \$23,000 from Tachycardia Production!



Tachycardia (or “Tachy” for short) is a 56-year tradition at Western University. It is an annual theatrical production that lets medical students from Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry give back to London and its medical communities.

Regional HIV/AIDS Connection (RHAC) is honoured to continue to be selected as the charitable recipient of the proceeds from this wonderful community event! Thanks to students from Schulich, staff and community members, this year the March production of Tachycardia raised over \$23,000 for RHAC!

Money raised helps RHAC provide programs and services for people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS. It also allows us to continue Open Closet, our weekly social support program for LGBT2Q youth. Last year, RHAC accepted a generous capital donation from the medical students at Schulich, which allowed us to do some painting, buy some new furniture and generally spruce up the community room!

Thank you, Tachycardia and Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry for your ongoing generous contribution to the local HIV/AIDS cause.



BLACKOUT

Black Out, Speak Out

On June 4, 2012, RHAC joined more than 500 organizations and thousands of Canadians who spoke out in defence of nature, human rights and democracy by blacking out our websites and replacing them with this message:

“You are at the right place. We’re still here doing what we do every day. But, today we’re joining hundreds of organizations across the country as a single voice for Canada’s nature, for human rights and for democracy.

While our websites may be dark, our voices together are louder than ever.

We’re fighting for the Canada we love: Our land and water. Our climate. Our communities. Our fundamental rights. Our democracy. Silence is not an option.”

The website www.blackoutspeakout.ca says, “Together we sent a clear message to Canada’s leaders – We will not stay silent while nature and democracy are threatened.

Our voices were heard, but the fight is not over.”



Google Translate Installed on RHAC Website

You can now access HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C information on RHAC’s website in over 68 languages, including: Arabic, Bulgarian, Dutch, French, Greek, Spanish, Polish and Urdu among others. The tool can be found in the lower left hand of our home page. Use the drop down tool to select the desired language. It takes up to 20 seconds, but the page will switch to the language of choice. Each page you navigate to will translate until you change the tool back to English. Try it out at www.hivaidsconnection.ca.



Find us on
Facebook

Go to our website at www.hivaidsconnection.ca and click the Facebook tab in the bottom left corner of the page then click Regional HIV/AIDS Connection on Facebook. Follow the latest news and events on our page.

Past Events

A Taste For Life in London and Stratford!

Two A Taste For Life events happened this year on Wednesday, April 25!



30 restaurants in London and six in Stratford worked hard to raise funds for people living with, affected by and at-risk for HIV/AIDS.

Thank you once again to our Presenting Sponsor TD. The bank encouraged hundreds of its employees to dine out that night in support of RHAC.

Early results indicate another successful event! It will take us some time to gather all the final donations from restaurants, but once we have the final tally, we will share the fundraised total with you.

Thank you as well to all who dined out that night, to the many volunteers who helped us collect donations at table and to our other sponsors and restaurants. We couldn't do it without you!

Check out the website for a full restaurant listing in both communities www.atasteforlife.org.



Aroma in London the night of A Taste For Life 2012.



Organizing volunteer, Mel Dupuis & restaurant networker/greeter, James Westman at Bijou in Stratford. James is an acclaimed Canadian opera singer.



A Taste For Life in London is presented by

Upcoming Events

Sunfest 2012



Sunfest is an annual multicultural music festival held in Victoria Park in downtown London. The festival draws tens of thousands of people every year from all over southwestern Ontario.

Each year, Regional HIV/AIDS Connection (RHAC) has a booth in the park where we provide free educational resources about HIV/AIDS, STIs and hepatitis C. There will be educational games tailored toward youth and inspiring stories and art work from people living with HIV/AIDS (PHAs). We also provide free condoms and lubricant.

For more information about our booth contact Mercy, or about volunteering for RHAC and making a difference in our communities, please contact Natalie at 519-434-1601.

RHAC will be at Sunfest in Victoria Park the following times:

- Thurs., July 5 from 4-6 p.m.
- Fri., July 6 from 6-9 p.m.
- Sat., July 7 from 1-9 p.m.
- Sun., July 8 from 1-9 p.m.

For more information about Sunfest visit www.sunfest.on.ca.

Pride London Festival July 22-29, 2012

Pride in London provides an annual opportunity to generate celebratory, cultural, artistic and educational events which affirm the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender and two-spirited people and supporters through activities which promote unity, inclusion and awareness of sexual and gender diversity.

Regional HIV/AIDS Connection attends Pride every year. Our presence affirms RHAC's history as an organization born out of the struggles of the gay community in the early 80s relative to HIV/AIDS.

We set up a booth the final weekend of Pride (July 27-29) where we provide free educational resources about HIV/AIDS, STIs and hepatitis C, as well as free condoms and lubricant. Each year, we partner with Options Anonymous HIV Testing Clinic to provide HIV testing opportunities.

For more information, please contact Kevin Murphy at 519-434-1601. Visit www.pridelondon.ca to find out more about Pride London Festival.

Annual General Meeting

Thursday, September 6 from 6-9 p.m.
Birch Room at Civic Garden Complex
625 Springbank Drive, London



Scotiabank AIDS Walk for Life in the EVENING this year!

2012 is the 22nd year for the AIDS Walk for Life in London! With that milestone in mind, the Walk committee has decided to run the event in the evening this year to create an atmosphere that allows us to refocus our thoughts on the reasons why the Walk came into being over two decades ago, and why we continue to raise funds for the HIV/AIDS cause – because HIV is still relevant for our communities.

Walk with us and gather pledges for Saturday, September 15 at Wonderland Gardens in Springbank Park, off Wonderland Road.

5:30 p.m. - Registration begins
7:00 p.m. - Walk begins
8:00 p.m. - Awards and wrap-up

Get your team organized now and start collecting pledges! The online site is now available at www.aidswalkforlife.ca/London.htm. Or you can get pledge forms soon at either John Gordon Home or Regional HIV/AIDS Connection.

Call JGH at 519-433-3951 or RHAC at 519-434-1601. You can also email Natasha Newby, Walk Coordinator, at nnewby@hivaidconnection.ca for further information.

PHA News PHA Picnic



Regional HIV/AIDS Connection will be hosting a picnic for clients on June 23, 2012 @ Gibbons Park. The picnic will run from 1 – 3 p.m. with prizes and treats and delicious picnic fair.

For more information contact Client Services at 519-434-1601 or 1-866-920-1601. Email rnewman@hivaidconnection.ca.

Hope to see you there!!!



Client Lunch

Executive Director, Brian Lester and Director of Client Services, Shannon Dougherty meet with clients for lunch and information sharing four times per year.

If you missed the last client lunch, make sure to block time in your calendar for July 20 from 12 – 1:30 p.m.

For more information, contact Client Services at 519-434-1601, toll free at 1-866-920-1601 or by emailing Rob Newman at rnewman@hivaidconnection.ca.

Come on out and let us know what's on your mind!!

PHA Workshops coming soon

Client services is working with PHAs in our community who are planning and will be presenting workshops for clients living with HIV/AIDS.

- **The Medicine Wheel** – a workshop exploring your personal journey – July 7, 2012 (this is an all day event – lunch and refreshments will be provided).

For more information contact Client Services at 519-434-1601, toll free at 1-866-920-1601 or by emailing Rob Newman at rnewman@hivaidconnection.ca.

THE ONTARIO ACCORD A Statement of Solidarity with GIPA/MIPA

"We, people living with HIV/AIDS and allies in the community:

- *Commit to the greater involvement and meaningful engagement of people living with HIV/AIDS (GIPA/MIPA); GIPA/MIPA puts PHAs at the centre and is grounded in human rights and the dignity of the full human being*
- *Aim to transform all who live with, work in, and are affected by, HIV/AIDS in Ontario*
- *Commit to personal and social transformation*
- *Value community expertise in embracing the challenge for the betterment of society*
- *Value inclusion over exclusion, a quest for integrity at all times and the embodiment of self-determination*
- *Promote the evolution of thought, action and collaboration among us and with our allies*

"Because GIPA/MIPA is about human struggles and aspirations, ethics, empowerment and accountability are its foundation."

This accord was created by representatives of Ontario organizations at a Living and Serving 3 consultation meeting in July 2011.

PHA Groups

Women's Group

Social Group for HIV+ Women

Last Thursday of each month from 6-8 p.m.
(see exceptions below)

June 23, 12-4 p.m. (Client picnic instead)

Wednesday, July 11, 6-8 p.m.

September 27

October 25

Contact Miriam Rivera or Keri Wheatley at

1-866-920-1601

mriviera@hivaidsconnection.ca or

kwheatley@hivaidsconnection.ca

Winner's Circle

Social Support Group for Long-Term
HIV/AIDS Survivors

The group started last April and is still growing.
Winner's Circle is a closed group with openings
twice a year to welcome new participants.
We will be inviting new people in September 2012.

For more information about Winner's Circle or the criteria
for becoming a member, please contact Rob Newman
519-434-1601 or email rnewman@hivaidsconnection.ca

PHA Café

Social/Support Group for HIV+ Individuals

2nd Thursday of each month
at RHAC from 6-8:30 p.m.

Meal provided

PHA Café will be taking a hiatus for the month of June
since we have a client picnic scheduled
(see write up on page 6).



July 12

No group in August

September 13

October 11

Contact Richard MacDonagh at 1-866-920-1601 or
rmacdonagh@hivaidsconnection.ca

Staff Announcements

Departures



Bob Martin, MSM HIV Educator

We appreciate Bob Martin's contribution to RHAC's mission during his five month contract as the MSM HIV Educator. Due to funding transition and changes this ACAP funded position came to an end as of March 31, 2012. Bob's roots with RHAC go back 22 years when he was one of the original four people who helped renovate and establish the first John Gordon Home on Dufferin Avenue in London. Best wishes and thanks to Bob for his continued support of RHAC.

Sarah Wood, Hepatitis C Educator



Sarah was with RHAC since the fall of 2009 focusing on hepatitis C work. She has made a significant contribution to the work of the agency, producing several newsletters annually educating and informing about issues related to living with HCV, working with peers and setting up the now highly successful hep C support group. Sarah's dry sense of humour and wit will be missed in the halls of the agency. We wish her the best of luck in future endeavours.

Arrivals



**Wes Heney, GBMSM2S & HIV
Community Development Coordinator**

Wes began working in queer and trans based education about three years ago out of sheer frustration with the lack of discussion happening in the London area surrounding the needs of the LGBTQ community. He began doing outreach and training in his free time in university and high school classrooms about how to better accommodate queer and trans students, and how to create more inclusive environments. He is incredibly excited to be joining the education team and to contribute to the great work that has already been done at RHAC.

Zach Templeman, Hepatitis C Educator



Zach recently graduated from King's University College with an Honours B.A. in Psychology. For almost a year, he has been a facilitator of Open Closet, RHAC's weekly program for LGBT2Q youth aged 14-18. He is excited to join the RHAC team as Hepatitis C Educator.

