



The Connection

The Newsletter of Regional HIV/AIDS Connection

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

February 2014

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HIV Risk for Gay Guys – Not as Simple as ABC

Wes Heney began his work with Regional HIV/AIDS Connection in May 2010. He is proud to boast the longest job title at the agency: GBMSMT2S and HIV Community Development Coordinator (GBMSMT2S = Gay men, Bisexual men, men who have sex with men, Trans guys, and 2-Spirit men)!

The GBMSMT2S and HIV Community Development Coordinator position builds upon past programs connected to the health and wellbeing of gay guys and MSM. Historically, the majority of HIV-prevention initiatives have targeted gay men in particular. As a result, they have not necessarily met the unique and specific needs of other at-risk individuals who do not self-identify as gay. This role recognizes not only the diverse and complex identities of men who have sex with men, but also acknowledges the types of resources and supports that these individuals need from their sexual, physical, and mental health care providers.

The GBMSMT2S program has a community development focus which educates and provides resources to those who serve gay, bi, trans, and 2-spirit, men who have sex with men. Further, the role is grounded in a harm-reduction framework. As a result, the GBMSMT2S curriculum places a strong emphasis on the importance of meeting service users where they are at and on holistic care. More specifically, the idea that person's sexual health cannot be adequately addressed without also discussing physical and mental health is foundational to the curriculum. Therefore, the program includes these three core pillars of health.

Members of marginalized communities, including GBMSMT2S guys, are less likely than members of non-marginalized communities to proactively seek out services due to stigma. In this climate, community development is about building a strong network of health care providers that can respond to the ever-changing needs of

men who have sex with men. The majority of doctors, nurses, social workers, and other care providers, enter the workforce with little-to-no education about the unique health care needs of queer communities. Therefore, it is essential that we do our part to ensure service providers feel both confident and comfortable when it comes to discussing sexual health so that they can effectively meet the needs of GBMSMT2S community members.

The GBMSMT2S program has enjoyed an ongoing partnership with the Gay Men's Sexual Health Alliance (GMSH), which has afforded access to the provincial Our Agenda campaign. Our Agenda addresses a) the connection between mind, body, and spirit and b) how all of these factors influence how GBMSMT2S approach sex and sexuality. The campaign allows service providers to walk clients through a wellness wheel that supports individuals to identify areas of strength and resiliency in their lives; it also allows individuals to identify areas in their lives that might benefit from extra support. In addition, Our Agenda provides a number of tools for service providers that can either be distributed electronically, or delivered in a series of workshops and tailored to the needs of the audience.

Together, the www.ouragenda.ca campaign and the GBMSMT2S and HIV Community Development Coordinator curriculum seek to improve overall health – physical, emotional, spiritual, sexual - in men who have sex with men. By starting important conversations about stigma, risk, mental health, and sex, these projects are helping to build stronger communities that better meet the needs of those who need them most.



Wes Heney

Community Inspired. Courage Driven.

Reports from the Field

Greetings from the Six Counties



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

The winter weather is fully upon us and the polar vortex seemed to have tried to keep us out of the 6 counties of Perth, Huron, Lambton, Elgin, Middlesex and Oxford but we still made our way on through!

Our major regional event since the last update was the 5th annual World AIDS Day Vigil in Stratford. This event, held at Community of Christ Church in Stratford, is an important part of the agency's AIDS Awareness Week activities. On November 30th approximately 30 people, including members of the community, RHAC staff, volunteers, special guest speakers and performers, gathered to remember, honour and celebrate those who have lost their lives to or currently live with HIV/AIDS. It was a memorable experience and we look forward to sharing our stories with you again next year.

AIDS Awareness Week also saw the advent of our inaugural Red Scarf Project that was held in Stratford, London and Woodstock for the first time! Volunteers from each area helped us knit over 600 red scarves that were installed throughout the cities. People were encouraged to take the scarves and wear them as a visible symbol of the red ribbon for AIDS recognition. The event was a great success, we have many new community partners throughout the 6 counties and we are already planning and looking for volunteers to help us knit more for 2014! Please connect with RHAC to see how you can get started early and join us in the project.

As a final Anonymous Testing Clinic for this fiscal year, we recently hosted at The Next Wave Youth Centre in Strathroy. We had 7 at risk youth get tested and they look forward to hosting us again in the summer of 2014. These clinics continue to offer a specialized and important service that may not otherwise be readily available to people living further from London. Please stay connected to us on our website's events calendar, via twitter @_RHAC or on Facebook for more updates on when the new round of Anonymous Testing clinics will be hosted throughout our communities.

Presentations, network meetings and planning for spring and summer events will keep me busy throughout the region for the rest of the winter. If you have any ideas for regional work or if you live outside London and are interested in becoming a regional volunteer, please don't hesitate to contact me at ccosta@hivaidsconnection.ca or call me at 1-866-920-1601.

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

Open Closet – London Diversity, Race Relations & Inclusivity Award

We are both pleased and privileged to announce that Regional HIV/AIDS Connection's Open Closet program was recently recognized for its efforts to promote the benefits of diversity and support inclusion by the City of London. More specifically, Open Closet was selected as a recipient of the London Diversity, Race Relations & Inclusivity Award in the Youth/Young Adult Groups or Organizations Category.

The London Diversity, Race Relations & Inclusivity Award was established with the goal of recognizing the achievements of organizations, businesses, groups that seek to increase public awareness about the importance of diversity, anti-racism, inclusivity and human rights on an ongoing basis.

Meredith Fraser, Director of Education at RHAC and Coordinator of Open Closet, accepted the award from the Mayor on behalf of the agency at a ceremony held at City Hall on December 3, 2013. In addition, several members of the Open Closet facilitation team attended the award ceremony and reception.

We would like to thank the City of London for this award – we are truly humbled by this honour. Additionally, we would like to thank the members of the Open Closet facilitation team for their ongoing dedication and commitment to supporting LGBT2Q youth. Finally, we would like to acknowledge the resilient and inspiring youth who attend Open Closet each week and commend them for modeling both inclusion and acceptance at every opportunity.



LtoR: Pat Shanahan, Meredith Fraser and Mayor Joe Fontana

Volunteers in Action

Saluting the 150+ Strong 'Red Scarf Project' Volunteer Team!

With the help of a truly dedicated volunteer team, we managed to collect and distribute just over 500 handmade Red Scarves in London and Stratford during AIDS Awareness Week - Raising HIV/AIDS awareness and supporting the UN mission of "Getting to Zero"! This marked an impressive three-fold increase over the year before, with an additional 2500 awareness raising red ribbons also being distributed concurrently. Great Job!

Thanks By The Numbers :

- A collective contribution of over 3500 hours
- 97 - Individual knitters/crocheters
- 11 - Community knitting groups
- 16 - Downtown distribution team members
- 5 - Weekly volunteer 'Couch Crew' shifts - 'Tag and Bag' team

Special notes of thanks to:

- Danielle Cressman: Contributing a stunning 60 scarves
- The Knitwits of First-St. Andrew's Church: Creators of the 15 foot long 'tribute' scarf
- The Kremptian Crew: Spearheading the Stratford drive
- UWO PR Program students

This year we are aiming to grow this initiative once again to further help support our mission. Please contact us for more information on getting started even earlier!



The Red Scarf Project 2013

513
Total No. of Scarves knitted

115
No. of scarves at Lighting of the Red Tree

85
No. of Scarves for clients of partner agencies

100
No. of scarves installed along streets of London

100
No. of scarves distributed at Covent Garden Market

88
No. installed and/or distributed in Stratford

London CANADA

Remember Honour Celebrate

Getting To Zero
AIDS Awareness Week
Nov 25-30
World AIDS Day
December 1

Volunteer Training and Orientation

RHAC is always looking for new volunteers to help us in delivering on our mission.

We currently have two dates scheduled for Volunteer Orientation & HIV Basics:

Wednesday, April 9th from 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Wednesday, June 25th from 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

For more information on the orientation session or to sign up, contact our Community Relations Coordinator, Martin McIntosh at mmcintosh@hiv aidsconnection.ca or call 1-866-920-1601.

Guided By Our Beliefs

As an organization that is self-defined as “community inspired” and “courage driven” I would like to offer that the mission of Regional HIV/AIDS Connection (RHAC) is profoundly influenced by our ten Guiding Principles. They are an integral part of our organizational history and can be found on our website at www.hivaidconnection.ca/what-we-believe. These long-standing guiding principles effectively articulate things we deeply value and integrate as we strive to serve our mission. This mission proudly states that “we are a community-inspired organization dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for individuals and diverse communities living with, at-risk for or affected by the challenges associated with HIV/AIDS”. As RHAC moves closer toward its thirty year legacy of social justice work, the beliefs we uphold continue to inform and shape our approach to our work. The staff, board and volunteers I am privileged to work with are committed to serving people, developing programs and strengthening partnerships in a manner that honours our guiding principles. Treating people with Dignity, ensuring Greater Involvement of Persons Living with HIV/AIDS (GIPA) and Honouring our History with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community are just three of the guiding principles we uphold within our organization and throughout the community as we raise awareness about the complex issues associated with HIV/AIDS and HCV. I invite you to check out the other seven and perhaps reflect on your experiences with RHAC. As always, I welcome stakeholders to let us know how we are doing in all aspects of our service delivery. When you experience RHAC staff, volunteers, board members, agency programs and services I encourage you to let our 10 guiding principles serve as the benchmark. Are we hitting the mark?

Thank you for continued support!



Brian



Upcoming Events

Opening Doors

The annual South West Ontario Opening Doors HIV Counseling Initiative Conference will be held on **March 6 & 7** in London at the Hilton Hotel at 300 King Street. This conference brings together PHAs, their affected family and friends, and service providers to provide them with an opportunity to learn, socialize, reflect and connect. The event is free for PHAs, affected family and friends and only \$25 for service providers to attend. This year's conference, titled **Opening Doors to Positive Change** will focus on the power and capacity that individuals have to create positive change in their own lives. There are important and useful plenaries surrounding self-care, building resilience, and advocating for change. Keynote speaker, **David Hoe**, President of the Ontario HIV Treatment Network will be present, along with this year's panel themed **Harm Reduction for Positive Change**.

For more information on the conference, or to register, contact Carlen Costa at RHAC by email: ccosta@hivaidconnection.ca or call: 1-866-920-1601

Empty Bowls London

Empty Bowls London, organized by the London Potters Guild, has chosen RHAC as the recipients for the proceeds and have set a goal of \$10,000. They are hoping to sell out all 3 seatings this year. With your help we can fully fund all food related programming for a year.

Empty Bowls fundraising events have been held in North America for over 20 years with millions of dollars going to end hunger every year. Potters make bowls, chefs make soups, and guests receive a "poverty meal" of soup and bread, in a handmade bowl of their choice to take home. This is to serve as a reminder of all the empty bowls in the world.

Save the Date! March 7, 2014

Lunch first seating – 11:30am

Lunch second seating – 1pm

Evening seating – 5 pm

Location: Goodwill Centre

255 Horton St., London

Free parking

Tickets are \$25



Tickets are available online at www.londonpottersguild.org or in person at the London Clay Art Centre, the Goodwill Centre and Regional HIV/AIDS Connection.

We hope to see you there!



Go to our website at www.hivaidconnection.ca and click on 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.



A Taste For Life, it's hope made delicious!

You may have heard about Regional HIV/AIDS Connection's signature fundraising event, **A Taste For Life**. It's a great night of friends, food and fundraising all for a great cause. This year we will be striving to fill 29 London restaurants, Eddington's of Exeter and 6 Stratford restaurants. There are 3 easy ways for you to help:

- Be one of 70 volunteer greeters the night of the event, a great public facing role that is crucial to our fundraising success. Contact Martin McIntosh, Community Engagement Coordinator for details.
- Be one of 36 hosts, people who endeavor to bring friends and family to their restaurant of choice. A great way to network and show your leadership skills! Contact Natalie Hébert, Fund Development Coordinator.
- Be one of over 3,000 people who dine out and make a donation the night of **A Taste For Life**. Call your favourite participating restaurant today and book your table!

Where will you dine April 23rd?

Book your reservation today!

A Taste For Life is Wednesday April 23rd 2014.

For a list of participating restaurants go to www.atasteforlife.org

Past Events

AIDS Awareness Week & World AIDS Day 2014

- We exceeded our goal for **The Red Scarf Project** by collecting more than 500 beautiful, handmade scarves created by talented, creative, compassionate community members to distribute with the goal of raising awareness about HIV and its impacts. The generosity of spirit that this figure represents is nothing short of inspirational!
- We added a great new feature to RHAC's website (the AAW/WAD tab) that makes it easier than ever to find and access information about AIDS Awareness Week, World AIDS Day, and The Red Scarf Project.
- We created educational resources, including a Power Point presentation and timeline document, and made these available online for community access and use.



On Saturday January 18 the **8th annual Ludvik Anthony Mitek Chess Tournament** brought together friends and family to raise funds for Counterpoint Needle & Syringe Program. The

competition was tough with organizer Michael Mullins trouncing RHAC's Fund Development Coordinator, Natalie Hébert, in round 1. Nick Scrivo and Marsha Millikan stayed in the fray for round 2 and 3 respectively. In the end it was a showdown between Terry Mullins, last years' winner and newcomer Jake Bedford who took the much coveted trophy home. Thanks to everyone who came out to play, raising \$380 for things like hats, mitts and gloves for people who access Counterpoint.

Annual Client Holiday Dinner

The HIV team held their annual client holiday dinner on December 10th at the Byron Community Church. The church donated their space to us for the 5th year in a row. It was decorated beautifully and provided a perfect backdrop for the event. Over 100 people attended this year's event, including 20 children, and all left with full stomachs and presents from Santa. This event is often the only holiday experience for many of the people we serve, so it becomes extra-special for all who attend.



The event could not have happened without the help of our wonderful volunteers and amazing donors. Volunteers wrapped gifts and filled gift bags, ran errands the day of the dinner, cooked an amazing turkey and ham dinner replete with all the trimmings, entertained the crowd with wonderful songs and music, took commemorative photographs of those in attendance, performed as Santa and his elf in full costume (Andy & Bonnie), and helped clean up and distribute leftovers at the end of a wonderful day.

Thank you again to Pastor John Mackie and his congregation, not only for the church, but for the warm, welcoming and accepting atmosphere provided each year. Thank you to: Starbucks for their donation of coffee and hot chocolate; Michelle Burlock for her delicious homemade chocolates; Berkelman's Greenhouse for their beautiful poinsettias; Dana Nosella Photography; Staples and Tetherwood Spa for door prizes; and the very entertaining RHACettes.

We are eternally grateful to Oliver & Associates for their cash donation of \$750.00, as well as an anonymous donor who contributed \$1,000 specifically for the holiday dinner.

World AIDS Day Vigil - London

World AIDS Day is held on December 1st each year. The day is marked by RHAC with an annual candlelight vigil and program. The London Vigil is an event in which we: **REMEMBER** the hundreds of lives lost within our community; **HONOUR** the many people living with/affected by HIV/AIDS; **CELEBRATE** those who work tirelessly to make a difference in the lives of those with/affected by HIV/AIDS; and to the future with hope that we will soon have a CURE.

The theme for this year's Vigil was Community. The speakers included representatives from RHAC's HIV community partners, including: The Infectious Diseases Care Program, John Gordon Home, Options Anonymous Clinic, Camp Wendake and Hemophilia Ontario. The performers at the Vigil included the very talented Kevin Murphy, Xolotlan Dance Troupe, AIDS Vigil Choir, New Celebration Dancers, Women Spirit Song Choir and Sylvia Brightwell.

This year the London Vigil was held at the Palace Theatre at 710 Dundas Street. The venue was an ideal setting for the event, and the staff of the theatre went above and beyond their duties to ensure the evening was seamless.

RHAC extends its sincere appreciation to the volunteers and donors who make this event possible, to the Palace Theatre for the very generous donation of their space, and to the community for its loyalty, its support, and its commitment to who and what came before – to always remember.

Stratford World AIDS Day Vigil

A World AIDS Day Vigil was held in Stratford for the fifth year in a row. This event takes place annually on November 30 and is hosted at Community of Christ Church. Community members came together to honour, celebrate, remember and hope for a cure while featured musical performances, speakers and a presentation of names of people we have lost to HIV/AIDS was carried. We would like to thank the representative from the City of Stratford, Councillor Kerry McManus who spoke kind and powerful words, as well as Mel, a community volunteer who aided in the organization of the evening. Special thanks to all of our participants, volunteers, and the members of the Community of Christ Church who provided delicious baked goods for people to enjoy after the Vigil.

Client News – HIV Team

PHA Café

PHA Café is a social support group held on the **second Thursday of each month**. Groups provide an opportunity to talk, engage in activities, and get to know one another. Past groups have included social outings, movie nights and guest speakers. Funds for transportation and childcare are available. Please contact Richard MacDonagh, Case Manager at 519-434-1601 ext. 228 or by email rmacdonagh@hivaidconnection.ca for more information.



The Winners Circle

The Winners Circle is a closed social support group for long term survivors living with HIV/AIDS. The group meets on the third Thursday of each month at RHAC. Dinner is provided. Funds for transportation and child care are available. For more information please contact Rob Newman, PHA Peer Support Worker at 519-434-1601 ext. 253 or by email rnewman@hivaidconnection.ca.

Women's Group

RHAC provides a place for women living with HIV to come together once a month and share their experiences in a safe and supportive environment. The group meets the last Thursday of every month at RHAC. Meetings include dinner, discussion, and social and educational events. The group is open to all HIV+ women living in RHACs catchment area. Funds for transportation and childcare are available. For more information please contact Miriam Rivera, Case Manager at 519-434-1601 ext. 235 or by email mrivera@hivaidconnection.ca.



Quarterly Feedback Lunches with the Executive Director

Please join us to share your thoughts regarding HIV Client Services. The next lunches will be held Friday March 21st and Friday June 20th from 12:00-1:30 at RHAC. Lunch will be provided. Funds for transportation and childcare are available. For more information or to RSVP for the lunch please contact Shannon Dougherty, Director of Client Services 519-434-1601 or by email at sdougherty@hivaidconnection.ca.

Client News – HCV Team

Hep C Peer Social

Drop in social time for people living with Hepatitis C. The social is held **every Thursday afternoon** from 2:00-4:00 at RHAC. For more information please contact Keri Wheatley, HCV Peer Support Worker at 519-434-1601 ext. 261 or by email kwheatley@hivaidconnection.ca or Zach Templeman, HCV Educator at ext. 226 or by email ztempleman@hivaidconnection.ca.

Hep C Lunch & Learn

The Lunch & Learn is held on the **second Friday of each month** at RHAC. It is an open group for anyone living with Hep C. It's a great opportunity for anyone living with Hep C to come together with their peers for lunch, discussion and education about a wide variety of topics related to Hep C. For more information please contact Keri Wheatley, HCV Peer Support Worker at 519-434-1601 ext. 261 or by email kwheatley@hivaidconnection.ca or Zach Templeman, HCV Educator at ext. 226 or by email ztempleman@hivaidconnection.ca.

Dine and Learn in Motion

This group is for people living with Hep C. It's held the **third Tuesday of every month** from 4:30-7:30 at the Huron location of London InterCommunity Health Centre at 155 Huron Street, Unit 7. The group comes together to prepare, cook and eat a nutritional meal, as well as socialize. Brief educational presentations do occur during the event. Bus tickets are available for those who need them.

For more information or to RSVP for the event please contact Keri Wheatley, HCV Peer Support Worker at 519-434-1601 ext. 261 or by email kwheatley@hivaidconnection.ca.

Staff Announcements

Arrivals



Mercy Nleya-Ncube, Multicultural HIV Prevention Coordinator

We were delighted to welcome Mercy Nleya-Ncube back to RHAC in January 2014 after a year of parental leave. More specifically, Mercy resumed her role within the Education Department as Multicultural HIV Prevention

Coordinator and immediately began to mobilize her depth of knowledge in the field, her community development experience, and her dedication to creating positive change to support the work of the Education Department and advance RHAC's mission. Welcome back, Mercy!

Patricia (Trish) Joris, Director of Operations

RHAC is pleased to welcome Trish Joris as our new Director of Operations. Trish brings considerable experience in finance through her time with Ontario March of Dimes (OMOD). During her time with OMOD Trish assisted with a range of administrative responsibilities including; assisting with preparation and analysis and forecasting of budgets, preparing statements, preparing for annual audits and processing accounts payable and receivable. We look forward to working with Trish as she assumes her new role with the RHAC team.



Departures



Liz Lam

After eight years as a dedicated employee serving the RHAC mission we are very sad to see the departure of Elizabeth Lam, our Director of Operations. During her time with the agency Liz became an integral member of the leadership and broader staff team as she worked hard to strengthen all areas of her portfolio. Among her many fine



Changing Hats ...

To my dear friends and acquaintances who may be clients, staff, volunteers or community partners. I'm sad to say that I am leaving RHAC. I came back to the agency with the highest hopes of success and a desire to contribute once again as a staff member. It became clear to me, as I had the opportunity to actually experience the role, that based on the way it has grown and changed, that it did not allow me to work enough with my best strengths and skill sets and therefore allow me to serve the agency and our wonderful clients in the way that they need or deserve.

RHAC and my career deserve the best moving forward, so

contributions Liz demonstrated an exemplary work ethic and provided RHAC with excellent financial tracking and reporting. The RHAC team (staff, volunteers and clients) expressed a collective sadness with the news of her departure. We all wish her the best of luck as she assumes her new Office Manager position with the Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System.



Marsha Milliken

We are sadly saying goodbye to Marsha Milliken in her role as IDU Peer Engagement Worker with London CAREs. London CAREs was a five year strategy aimed at improving the health and housing outcomes of individuals experiencing homelessness, who live with

the challenges of poverty, addiction and mental illness. The strategy began mid-2008 and ended Dec. 31st 2013. Marsha has been in this role for two and a half years, very successfully leading teams of peers who provided syringe recovery and needle bin collection in the downtown core. Marsha said goodbye to her peer team in December and is currently assisting the London CAREs team as they transition to the London Homeless Prevention System. This transitional role ended Jan. 31st 2014. While we're saying goodbye and thank you to Marsha for this role, we are pleased to announce she is staying on as a relief staff for our Counterpoint program.

Mbaka Wadham, Multicultural HIV Prevention Coordinator

Mbaka joined the Education Department as Multicultural HIV Prevention Worker to cover a parental leave that extended through December 2013. As the old expression goes, Mbaka "hit the ground running" and brought a wealth of experience, dedication, and creativity to her work in this role. She made several key contributions to the ongoing development and success of the program as a result, including her work on a Bar Outreach Survey. We wish Mbaka every success in her future endeavors.



we have decided to part ways and make room for somebody who brings the very best match for the role of Director of Community Relations.

Many of you have reached out to me already by phone or with a lovely visit to my office. I have been able to let those folks know that although I am leaving as a staff person, I am far from gone as a long time and loyal supporter of this incredible agency and the amazing and important work they do. I will remain a donor and you will see me as you always have at events to support our clients. As a matter of fact I've already signed on as a host for "A Taste for Life".

So, folks... take care and see you soon as we join forces to get the work done, just in another way!

Sue

