



The Connection

The Newsletter of Regional HIV/AIDS Connection

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

June 2011

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Some Women may be at Risk for HIV

Women are increasingly becoming more likely to test positive for HIV. According to Public Health Agency of Canada, in 2008 women represented 26.2% of all positive HIV tests in Canada. In Ontario, it is estimated that 300 new HIV infections occur among women each year.

As a result of the increases in HIV/AIDS among women and in response to community requests for a coordinated, province-wide strategy to address increased transmission in women, The AIDS Bureau of the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care developed the Ontario Women and HIV/AIDS Initiative. This initiative was designed to address the many issues related to women and HIV through community development. It also aims to build the capacity of local community agencies to provide information, support and services to women infected and/or affected by HIV/AIDS in Ontario.

In January 2010, Regional HIV/AIDS Connection (RHAC) hired Bonnie Baynham as the Women's HIV/AIDS Community Development Coordinator. During the first year of this initiative Bonnie has focused on building the capacity of local women's organizations to respond to women and HIV/AIDS through education, prevention strategies, outreach, and participation on local planning committees. RHAC recognizes that local conditions inform the development of this initiative and are excited at the prospect of new ideas for the coming year.

Key goals of the women's initiative are prevention

and community development. RHAC, in partnership with AIDS service organizations in Southwestern Ontario launched a woman specific awareness campaign called "A Woman Like Me". The campaign was launched simultaneously across the southwest region during the week of March 8 in celebration of International Women's Day. The campaign features new resource materials including postcards and posters. Look for the campaign materials in social service agencies, hospitals, universities and anywhere women access health services throughout the region.



As we move into our second year of this initiative, RHAC will reach out to women with HIV/AIDS, service providers and communities within our region including Lambton, Huron, Perth, Elgin, Middlesex, and Oxford counties to provide education and raise awareness of the needs of women with HIV/AIDS. We believe that building the capacity of local organizations, raising awareness about HIV/AIDS and working with staff at community organizations to promote the integration of HIV/AIDS into their current programs, services and policies and procedures will begin to support the diverse and sometimes complex needs of women in our region.

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Community Inspired. Courage Driven.

Reports from the Field

Greetings from the Six Counties!

Jennifer Gritke, *HIV Regional Resource Coordinator*



Since the last update in January the work has taken us to many communities throughout the six counties we serve; West Lorne, Seaforth, St. Thomas, Aylmer, Listowel, Zurich, Stratford, and Sarnia are just some of the communities we have visited recently.

This past winter and spring we participated in several successful outreach opportunities. We continue to hold anonymous HIV testing clinics in regional communities, with St. Thomas being the latest to have a clinic. The Central Community Health Centre, located in downtown St. Thomas, generously provided space for the clinic and we are looking forward to coming back to that community soon. Keep an eye open for more anonymous testing clinics in Grand Bend and Stratford this summer!

We continue to work on increasing our visibility in other communities. Along with our Women's HIV Community Development Coordinator, Bonnie Baynham, we participated in the St. Marys Health and Recreation fair in early April. Having a booth at this event allowed us to meet and connect with many residents of St. Marys.

Presentations at social service agencies and community organizations continue to be one of the most important ways our agency builds relationships within our regional communities. So far in 2011, we have conducted 13 presentations throughout the six counties, and Regional HIV/AIDS Connection continues to reap benefits from these connections through more regional client referrals, more agency partnerships and increased information sharing.

We have some exciting regional initiatives coming up. The Ontario HIV and Substance Use Training Program (OHSUTP) will be hosting two-day workshops in Woodstock and Sarnia to increase service providers' knowledge and understanding about issues related to HIV, Hepatitis C and substance use. Both workshops will take place in early fall. Watch our website for more information or contact www.ohsutp.ca.

We are also pleased to report that the successful "Are You Doing It?" HIV and STI testing campaign that happened the last week of September 2010 will be back again in 2011 and expanding regionally. This campaign encourages everyone to get tested for HIV and other STIs. Keep your eyes open around the six counties for this campaign.

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



Regional
HIV/AIDS
Connection

Community Inspired. Courage Driven.

All Our Sisters National Forum

In May 2011, London hosted the first Canadian forum specifically addressing security of housing, homelessness and safe communities for women living in Canada. Five hundred women from across the country, including many women of experience, attended the **All Our Sisters Conference** at the London Convention Centre. It was a multi-disciplinary conference that addressed the social, economic and practical issues affecting homeless women and women at risk.

All Our Sisters 2011 created unique opportunities for service providers, community members, policy makers, government officials, academics, change agents, and women with lived experience to come together to promote safe, sustainable housing for women. The intent of the conference was to draw from the best of innovative and promising practices, knowledge exchange, creative arts, community development, stories and demonstrations of recovery, resilience, and success to catalyze change.

The conference fostered the development of new collaborations, networks and plans to coordinate a national, sustainable network to develop strategies for building safe communities that are inclusive of all women in Canada.

Regional HIV/AIDS Connection was proud to be a part of this incredible conference. Bonnie Baynham, Shannon Dougherty and Dr. Margaret Pelz delivered a presentation called "**Women, HIV and Housing**" to approximately 35 listeners. This plenary session focused on women and HIV, mental health and the impact both have on housing security for women.

The conference also provided a forum to profile the new "**A Woman Like Me**" campaign (see front page).

You can follow the progress by visiting the conference website at www.alloursisters.ca or on the Facebook group by searching All Our Sisters National Forum.

International Day Against Homophobia

Regional HIV/AIDS Connection was proud to celebrate May 17 as **International Day Against Homophobia**. Homophobia is an issue that has significant impact on HIV/AIDS work. In Canada, the group most at risk for HIV is still gay and bisexual men. Unfortunately, stigma and discrimination against gay and bisexual people can have a negative impact on their ability to seek out safer sex information and support because of fears of being judged, alienated or harmed. Working to combat homophobia is an important tool in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

On May 17, 2011 the London HBT (homophobia-biphobia-transphobia) Working Group (RHAC member agency) recognized the **International Day Against Homophobia** through a film screening of "**For the Bible Tells Me So**" followed by a community panel. This year, HBT decided to address homophobia via the intersections of sexuality and religion. HBT was very pleased to welcome some 200 community members to the event held at the TVDSB head offices in London, ON. For more details visit: www.hbtlondon.ca.

Are You Doing It Again?

HIV Testing Week
September 26-30, 2011

In conjunction with Options Anonymous Testing Clinic, MLHU, YAC, and IDCP, Regional HIV/AIDS Connection is rolling out another campaign to encourage HIV testing.

Visit www.testingweek.ca for more information

Are You Doin' It?

The highly successful "Are You Doin' It" testing week campaign from 2010 will return this fall, occurring September 26-30, 2011. Again, HIV and STI testing will be promoted through testing sites at MLHU and the Options Anonymous Testing Clinic. Partners of our campaign include: Middlesex London Health Unit, Youth Action Centre, Options and Infectious Diseases Care Program. We would also like to promote the campaign regionally in the six counties we serve. Visit: www.testingweek.ca and look for more information coming soon.

For a comprehensive evaluation report about our 2010 campaign, please contact a member of the Education team (see the staff listing on back of newsletter), or download/order copies from www.catie.ca.

New Website for RHAC

In 2011, the internet has become a major source of information and an important way to link people to an organization. Organizations have now embraced their Websites as a main avenue to get credible information to their audiences. Regional HIV/AIDS Connection is no exception.

We have been working with Lashbrook Marketing and Public Relations and Echidna Solutions to revamp our Website so that it is more appealing, provides better, more timely and up to date information and serves the people we most need to serve.

The new site is tentatively set to launch on July 15. We'll let you know when it is ready for your eyes!

Volunteers in Action

Volunteering Speaks Volumes

Richard has been volunteering for 4 months with couch crew. Being new to London, he enjoys talking with other volunteers and meeting new people. His family often asks him why he would work for free, but Richard finds a lot of value volunteering for Regional HIV/AIDS Connection. As someone who is learning English, Richard finds practicing his conversational English in a casual setting very helpful. He says that the other

volunteers and staff are very welcoming and that it is nice to get out and do something new. Richard has a great sense of humour and has made many friends in a short time. He told me that it can be very stressful to move, not know the local language and have only your family to talk to so he especially values making new connections and working to help other people. Richard also volunteers at his mosque and enjoys spending time at the library and working out. He will soon be entering the job market and looks forward to continuing his volunteering, something that has made his transition to living in London much better.



Volunteer Training Dates

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

Upcoming dates are:

- Saturday, Oct 1/2011 ~ 1:00-3:00 p.m.
- Tuesday, Nov 1/2011 ~ 6:30-8:30 p.m.
- Tuesday, Jan 17/2012 ~ 6:30-8:30 p.m.
- Saturday, Mar TBD/2012 ~ 1:00-3:00 p.m.

We offer **Beyond the Basics** training twice a year on Saturdays. We go into more depth about the types of volunteer positions you could become involved with in each agency team.

The Ambassador Program - Education

Client Services Training - Client Services

Harm Reduction - Counterpoint Harm Reduction Services

Community-Based Fundraising - Community Relations

Upcoming dates are:

- Saturday, Oct 1/2011 ~ 3:00-5:00 p.m.
- Saturday, Mar TBD/2012 ~ 3:00-5:00 p.m.

Added Value

At volunteer appreciation night on June 1, Natalie Hébert, our Coordinator of Volunteer Services presented the dollar value of the past year's volunteer hours at RHAC. It totals a whopping \$147,588.50 – the equivalent of about 5 full-time staff positions! Thanks to you all. We couldn't achieve all the great work we do without your help.

\$147,588.50

Dear RHAC Supporter;

In this edition of The Connection I would first like to offer tribute to the many PHAs in our community who face life and the adversity presented by HIV with great strength, dignity and ever present resiliency. While we recognize that, for most, HIV has evolved into a somewhat manageable chronic health issue, it is also important to remember a life living with HIV is often faced with myriad challenges. I have listed them in previous articles, but they warrant reference again. Poverty, isolation, challenges with disclosure, recurring health issues, and stigmatization are just a few of the issues experienced in the day to day. These challenges are the reason individuals seek our services yet we also recognize that some of these same challenges create barriers to access.

It is worthwhile to note that in comparing the six month periods of October 2009-March 2010 and October 2010-March 2011, we have experienced a 23% increase in the number of clients accessing agency support! I would like to thank these individuals for trusting in our organization and taking the step to make contact with us. To individuals who are unsure or fearful of making contact, I would like to reinforce that we operate within a strict code of confidentiality and your privacy will be protected. We know it is not always easy to walk through our front door or even make a call, but I encourage you to contact us if you are struggling. Our services are paid for by your tax dollars and via the generous contributions of donors—we exist for you!

In working toward our mission we strive to support People Living with HIV/AIDS (PHAs) to the best of our ability with available resources and using our collective skills - all guided by the principles and values we uphold. Our services include: financial assistance for wellness, food bank, social groups, advocacy, counselling, case management services, and many others.

As an organization committed to continuous improvement we encourage and welcome PHA feedback, and feedback from others. Depending on your comfort level, you can choose any of the following ways to provide feedback:

- Confidential suggestion box on the main floor of our office.
- Confidential feedback form on our website at www.hivaidsconnection.ca.
- One-on-one meeting with me to respectfully share your thoughts and ideas to help improve the service delivery experience at Regional HIV/AIDS Connection.

Additionally, on a quarterly basis we hold a light lunch for PHAs to meet with myself and the Director of Client Services. All these efforts in soliciting feedback ultimately help us to serve our community better.

As you continue to live with great strength, dignity and ever-present resiliency know that Regional HIV/AIDS Connection is here.

Your voice matters! Let us know how we are doing.

Thanks for your continued support.



EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR



Presenting Sponsor of **A Taste For Life**
and Sustaining Partner for
Regional HIV/AIDS Connection

A Taste For Life



A TASTE
FOR LIFE

Our fundraising goal for this year's *A Taste For Life* was \$75,000. Although we won't have the final number to report for another several weeks as we gather donation cheques from participating restaurants, we do know that diner donations were up from last year! This is a good indicator of where we are headed for the final tally.

Thank you to all of you who volunteered in advance of *Taste*, the day of and the day after the event. We couldn't achieve such great results without the help of the many dedicated volunteers who prepare materials and deliver them to restaurants *Taste* day, act as greeters at restaurants, act as hosts to network and fill restaurants, or come the day after to help us reconcile the diner donations.

To the 31 restaurants who participated this year, we extend a hearty thank you. The event could not be held without your contribution. Our Presenting Sponsor, TD, also provided impressive support by getting over 600 TD employees out to dine the night of *Taste*. We had diners from St. Thomas, Delhi, Port Stanley and Bayfield as well as from London.

This year we were more successful than ever at gaining the support of some key community leaders who networked to fill certain restaurants with their circle of friends, family and colleagues. Thank you for your support. We intend to keep working hard to fill each and every restaurant all night long on Wednesday, April 25, 2012!

DRAW PRIZE WINNERS!

Congratulations to the three draw winners of shopping and dining prizes courtesy of Downtown London and Kingsmill's Department Store. The following people have been notified and given their prizes:

\$500 Grand Prize of \$300 in Kingsmill's Gift Certificates and \$200 in Downtown Dollars:

Kaitlyn Mauthe

\$250 Secondary Prizes of \$100 in Kingsmill's Gift Certificates and \$150 in Downtown Dollars:

**John Seaton
Karen Dixon**



Emma and Jennifer from TD at Mykonos



Volunteers Matt, Jessica, Isaac and Jenna at Ben Thanh



Staff at Katana Kafé



Presentation at JJ's Bistro

PHA News and Events

Medicine Wheel

A Holistic Healing Map – PHA Retreat
February 16, 2011

The PHA retreat was a full day of training (breakfast and lunch provided) using three trained medicine wheel facilitators from the regional PHA community. The medicine wheel training is based on traditional aboriginal healing and self-awareness practices, and also incorporates resiliency map exercises, which were developed by ABRPO (AIDS Bereavement and Resiliency Project of Ontario). The retreat was attended by 8 PHAs and the feedback was fabulous. We look forward to holding a similar PHA retreat in the fall. Please contact Rob Newman, PHA Peer Advocate for more information.



Living My Life

PHA Women Retreat 2011
March 2 & 3, 2011 - Windsor ON

Living My Life was a retreat for HIV+ women facilitated in partnership with Regional HIV/AIDS Connection and AIDS Committee of Windsor. The retreat was held at the Hilton Hotel in Windsor on March 2-3. A total of 33 women participated in the event, including 12 women from London, 2 from Sarnia and 2 from Woodstock.

Presentations throughout the 2 day retreat included:

- **ECHO Supporting Women's Health** - Shelley Cleverly, Director of ECHO Knowledge Translation. This presentation included an overview of ECHO Supporting Women's Health, its recent 3000 Voices research study on women's health in Ontario, as well as an introduction to sex and gender based analysis and the Women's Health Framework.
- **Positively Woman** - facilitated by Claudia Medina (Toronto) – Poz Prevention presentation geared to HIV+ women
- **Women's Panel** - Panellists: Catherine Beaver, Lisungu Chieza, and Claudia Medina – Three women discussed their experiences living as HIV positive women, their work, their family lives and how their lives have changed since their diagnoses.
- **Breakout Sessions:** True Colours and Scrapbooking.

Stay tuned for more details about this year's Women's Retreat scheduled for the autumn at the Elmhurst Inn in Ingersoll!!

South West Opening Doors Counselling Initiative Annual Conference

March 3 & 4, 2011

The annual SWOD Conference was held at the Hilton Hotel in Windsor this year. The theme of the conference was POZabilities. The conference was attended by 110



individuals, made up of PHAs, friends & families, as well as service providers from the southwest region.

The conference kicked off with the Sue Johannson, the keynote speaker. Other presentations included:

- Poz Prevention by Mikiki from People With AIDS Foundation
- HIV – Head to Toe by Elaine Robinson, Pharmacist, HIV Care Program Windsor
- Criminalization of HIV Non-Disclosure by Ryan Peck, HIV/AIDS Legal Clinic of Ontario

The next conference will be held in London in the early part of March 2012. Stay tuned for more details!

PHA Events



Social/support group for HIV+ individuals
2nd Thursday of each month at RHAC

June 9
July 14
August 11
September TBD

Contact Richard MacDonagh, Case Manager
for more information



Women's Group

Social group for HIV+ women
4th Thursday of each month

June 23
July 28
August 25
September 22

Contact Miriam Rivera, Case Manager
for more information



Staff Announcements

Departure

Michelle McKay's last day at Regional HIV/AIDS Connection was Wednesday, April 27 around 11:30 p.m. – after *A Taste For Life*. It is a testament to Michelle's dedication to the agency and her love of *A Taste For Life* that she negotiated with her new employer to stay on with us at least until the end of *Taste*!

Michelle was with the agency for almost five years. In that time she was instrumental in building a diverse fundraising portfolio for, firstly, AIDS Committee of London and then Regional HIV/AIDS Connection. She helped grow *A Taste For Life* from its original hand full of restaurants to over 30 this past year. With that growth we saw a significant increase in funds raised to support free programs and services for people living with, affected by and at risk for HIV/AIDS. *Taste* has become our signature fundraiser thanks to Michelle's leadership efforts.

As well as *Taste*, Michelle oversaw the development of: a third party event kit, the leadership committee that now organizes and runs our Rocky Horror Picture Show event each October, our Circle of Care monthly giving program launched at this past year's 25th anniversary event, and holiday direct mail campaigns among other things.

Michelle was fearless with respect to approaching people and businesses to encourage them to support the agency with goods, services or cash! It was a marvel to watch her operate at that level. She consistently achieved results with her tremendous enthusiasm for the cause, and other staff gained from her daily high-energy approach to life!



There is no doubt Michelle will be missed at RHAC, but we wish her all the best in her new position as Fund Development Officer at St. John Ambulance.



Coming Events

Sunfest

July 7-10
Victoria Park, London

Pride London Festival

July 22-24
Impark parking lot at Clarence and King Streets, London
Parade is Sunday, July 24 from noon to 1:30
starting at Western Fair Grounds

Afrofest

August 19-21
Victoria Park, London



Scotiabank

AIDS Walk for Life

SATURDAY, September 17
Starting at Springbank Gardens
285 Wonderland Rd. South,
located in Springbank Park

9 a.m. Registration begins

10:30 a.m. Walk begins

11:30 p.m. Lunch and Awards

1:00 p.m. Wrap up

Online registration and donation is open. Register your team today at www.aidswalkforlife.ca!

RHAC Annual General Meeting

Thursday, September 8

Civic Garden Complex, 625 Springbank Drive, London

Refreshments 6 p.m.

Meeting 7-8:30 p.m.

