



**Regional
HIV/AIDS
Connection**

Community Inspired. Courage Driven.

Regional HIV/AIDS Connection

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Our Mandate is to serve the 5 counties surrounding London and to:

- Improve quality of life for those living with & affected by HIV/AIDS
- Reduce the number of new HIV infections
- Increase community awareness about HIV/AIDS

Our service users include thousands of people: those living with HIV/AIDS, their partners, friends and family, and those who are concerned about HIV/AIDS—anyone at risk for HIV, and anyone who provides services to people with, or at risk for, HIV. All of our services are free and confidential.

We are a registered charitable corporation, #11877 9008 RR0001.

Contact Us:

Executive Director- Brian Lester ext. 243

Client Services:

- Director of Client Services- Shannon Dougherty ext. 237
- Case Manager- Miriam Rivera ext. 235
- Case Manager- Richard MacDonagh ext. 228
- Peer Support Worker- Rob Newman ext. 253

Communications and Partnerships:

Coordinator of Volunteer Services- Natalie Hebert ext. 257

This newsletter is made possible by ...



Community Inspired. Courage Driven.

SPEAK OUT
A Newsletter For and By PLWHA

Summer/Fall Edition

August 2012

Women with substance use and HIV

by Karen Burton

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Women who are substance users have a very difficult time. Injection drug use among women is at an all time high. A lot of women do not know how to inject themselves, they are introduced to the needle usually by a male who is helping her out, to get a better high. She then relies on that male (and others) to be the person who injects her. This causes a power and control situation where the female is reliant on the male for her injection. He may use this as a way to get her to supply him with drugs. She is usually 2nd on the barrel, which means that he will inject himself first and she will get what is left over in the cooker (usually watered down further). She is put at risk of HIV and of HEP C in these situations. Women are seen as the caretakers and they may find themselves in some precarious situations and doing things that they never imagined to get a drug for themselves and their partner, survival sex work is a very popular and dangerous

way to make money for drugs. If a client does not want to use a condom, the woman's desperation and fear may make her agree to this, again this is a risk for HIV transmission



Social service agencies are in place for women. Unfortunately there is little housing or help with mental health issues, doctors are hard to come by and to get to a psychiatrist you need a doctor referral. Many women have come from abusive families and find themselves connecting with the same type of people when they are older, there are sometimes children involved, CAS is usually heavily involved in these

situations. Most times when there is drug use going on the child or children will be removed from the mother, just putting her esteem lower than it already was. Housing then becomes an issue, if she does not have children then how will she qualify for social housing? She won't, she will end up in the shelter system. Low self esteem causes women to feel that they should do as they are told by their abusive partner and if that involves unsafe sex, then that is a small price to pay for the beating that may follow if she refuses; therefore she has no choice than to put herself at risk.

Please contact Karen at **RHAC for more information at 519 434 1601 Ext. 224**

Speak Out has a New Editor!



Andy MacLean
Speak Out Editor

“...Nothing changes if nothing changes...”

Andy MacLean.

Welcome to a new design, new layout, and new Speak Out editor **Andy MacLean**. Andy comes to the **Regional HIV/AIDS Connection** with very little experience in editing a quarterly newsletter but with great passion for the work we do here at RHAC; our missions, values and goals.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank **Billy Irwin** our most recent editor for his contribution of time to this valuable newsletter that the agency puts out 4 times a year.

A newsletter for and by people living with HIV/AIDS is a rarity in today's AIDS Service Organizations and we are truly thankful to Billy, Andy,

and those who have contributed to this publication now entering its 4th year.

For more information to get involved in programming work within Client Services for RHAC please contact a member of the Client Services department .

Rob Newman
Peer Support Worker

A FEW THOUGHTS ...

I would like to take a few moments of your time to express my heartfelt gratitude for the opportunity that lies before me. To be honest I am amazed to be in this position. It was just a few months past that I was still stuck in that revolving door of despair that forever bound me to always fail. What brought about such a change in my life to lead me here? People, Places and Things. By this I mean the people in this agency that have inspired me to reach beyond the blackness of my existence and dare to believe there is a goodness that lies within my grasp. To forsake the places that perpetuate the cycle of despair and involve myself in ways that better

my life and those around me. I spend a fair amount of time here at the agency listening, opening up to select people, (for I have found this is a safe environment) and just helping out as I can. To simply put it, change the things I have always done because “NOTHING CHANGES IF NOTHING CHANGES” A lot of small steps have got me further today than I have ever gotten before in my life. Today I have some pride in myself which is such a gift. Some days are better than others but I wake up now with the tools of hope to be free of who I was. For isn't that what it is all about FREEDOM from all the things

that brought me to my knees. FREEDOM to be comfortable in my own skin. FREEDOM just to be a better man. Again thank-you for being there for me when I didn't have it in me to be there for myself and giving me opportunities to grow beyond my self-set boundaries. You gave me a hand up NOT a handout. If anyone finds themselves in where I was come talk to those here at the agency and be open to the miracle. It is not the easiest journey to embark on but once the ball starts rolling it is a beautiful thing. They care, I care. I gained a new start at life after 54 years of messing up, you deserve nothing less and only the best.

Yours Truly,

Andy

Continue...

I know I quickly became addicted to the money it produces on top of everything else. The amount staggers me when I stop to look at the daily costs but being pill sick is unbelievably painful. I myself became addicted to crack and the lifestyle drugs bring with them.

Upon receiving my first real charge which left me sitting in jail for about a month I also ended up very sick with endocarditic. I was hospitalized in Stratford with this but this was not the worst of my problems. My dedicated fiancée Andy who spent every available minute by my side was with me when the doctors came in wanting a few moments alone with me to talk about something important. I replied no it is ok he can stay. That's when they told me that they were sorry to tell me but “you have HIV”.

Wow did I hear that right or am I in a nightmare? Nope he said that. The year before I was told I had Hep. C now this!!! The most surprising thing happened after when Andy and I were talking about it and I was telling him how sorry I was that this was happening to him. And he replied with words I will never forget,

“it's a small price to pay to be with you” I couldn't believe his reaction, no freaking out, no anger just those words. Wow. While feeling like the world was crashing down on me he gave me the strength to keep it together.

My mother cried when I told her and so did I. I don't think even to this day it has hit me really, or has it? My mother played it off to get sympathy at work. She also called Andy's son which was with who we were going to be staying with. It resulted in us arguing with them and us having to find another place to live quickly. Everyone treated us like we were contagious. We didn't have time to sort out how we felt. After I was released from the hospital I went on a bender leaving Andy on his own again.

Of course I ended up in the iron hotel yet again!!! It is almost

funny, listening to other people talk about who has what and how skanky they are because they have HIV. Especially when they didn't think I had that particular disease, they sure back peddle when you stand up and do the right thing and tell them you have

it. People's true colours sure come out in all their glory when you are faced with such adversity. It hurts even today but I know who my friends are and who just care about tits and ass or can they rip me for another pill.

I have learned a lot about HIV, people and myself on this journey. and I am sure I have lots more to learn. Life is only what you make out of what lies before you. You can be bitter or you can be better. I still presently work in the sex trade and I have made a few enemies along the way but I have found people who respect me for my honesty even though it costs me work that I badly need to support my habit. I know my journey is far from over and I learn more as I live each day. Life marches on regardless, and shit is going to hit the fan ready or not. Just remember who you are and where you are trying to get to. The best advice I can give myself and share with others with HIV. is be honest, keep your doctors apts. And don't let others racist ignorance by way of cruel remarks take you off course. HIV Isn't the end of your life its the start of a new chapter. BELIEVE in yourself and don't stop trying. Just because one train has left the station doesn't mean another won't be along shortly to help you get to where you need to be. Thanks for letting me in your world to spend some time with you.

Rachael Williams

Remember Honour Celebrate

AIDS Awareness Week: November 24 – November 30, 2012

World AIDS Day: December 1, 2012

Mark your calendars and check ours for events throughout the week and our annual vigil on World AIDS Day



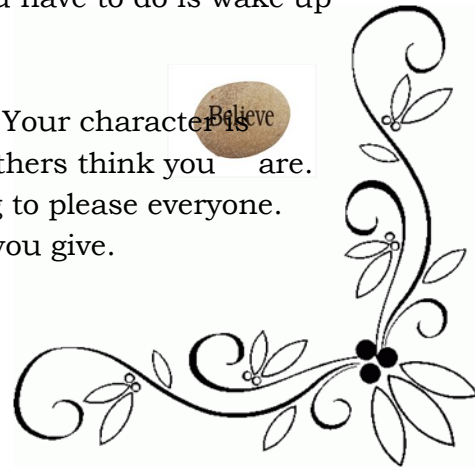
Things that make you go hmmm ...

1. It wasn't raining when Noah built the Ark.
2. What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny compared to what lies within us
3. You must be the change you want to see in the world
4. Whether you think you can or you think you can't your right
5. If your going thru hell, Keep going the end may just be around the corner.
6. Don't go through life, grow through it.
7. Keep on going and the chances are you will stumble unto something, per haps when you least expect it. I have never heard of someone stumbling unto something while they are sitting down.
8. Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbour. Catch the winds of life in your sails. Explore, Dream and Discover.
9. Defeat is not bitter unless you swallow it.
10. Don't let life discourage you, everyone who got where they are today had to start from where they were.
11. If you want to make your dreams come true, the first thing you have to do is wake up
12. Life is 10 %what happens to us and 90% how we react to it.
13. Which is worse being blind, or having sight but no vision?
14. Be more concerned with your character than your reputation. Your character is what you really are while your reputation is merely what others think you are.
15. I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everyone.
16. You make a living by what you earn; you make a life by what you give.

laugh

Love

Believe



A Mile In My Shoes

By Rachael



My name is Rachael. I grew up in a small town with a population under 50. I have a younger brother and a four year old daughter. Like many I never finished high school. I think my first job was taking care of the elderly in a nursing home and eventually I convinced myself (with the help of my boyfriend at the time) that quitting school to pay for an apartment and other necessities

was what I had to do. My mother drank heavily and well hasn't stopped. I never knew my father.

I eventually owned my own landscaping company and was on my way to a good life. I ended up getting carpal-tunnel and had to have surgery to try to correct them. I also had to have a breast reduction to try to correct a back problem. With these surgeries I was put on Oxy 20s then 40s then 80s.

I was 19 years old and hooked. Had I known the price I would pay later for these pills I would not have touched them with a ten foot pole.

Anyway before my fiancée and I were married he became addicted to crack and ended up breaking my heart. He sold off many of our things including my new truck to pay for his habit and he finally left me for another woman. I walked away from everything with only the clothes on my back.

I am not sure how, when or where I did my first sex trade act to sup-

For Jared...



I am going to tell you about a boy, a young man named Jared. I have the permission to do so by Jared's father Joe. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Joe for his trust, honesty and bravery; but mostly I would like to thank him for Jared.

As a parent it is always nice to hear compliments regarding your children. I take great pride in my children as should they in who they have become; it was a journey we travelled together learning the ins and outs of life. I have shielded, encouraged and protected them while simultaneously letting them fly in hopes that they always remember that their nest is wherever I build it. Parents spend their life ensuring their children have the tools to operate their own lives. There is a point where we have to let go and hope for the best while fearing the worst.

I first met Jared when he was 16. There was this tall lanky kid who chattered endlessly while continuously flipping his baseball cap back and forth. We sat for quite a while and we talked a lot about everything and nothing. He told me of things I will not share, of sadness and pain, joy and hopes, what was, what is, and what can be. He had this wisdom about him that hid behind this mischievous grin that always reminded you that he was 16. His words often belied his age. On this occasion of our first meeting there was this large box of toys in my office that had been donated to the agency and on top of the pile was a yoyo. Jared wanted that yoyo ... he had been eyeing it the whole time. At the end of our visit I obliged, gave him the yoyo and he left with a promise of return. Moments later while having a cigarette out behind the agency I saw Jared stroll by through the adjacent parking lot mastering his new yoyo. That image is forever burned in my memory.

Over the next couple of years Jared became a familiar face around the office; joining groups, volunteering. For staff it was like having our own teenager; we were always wondering where he was, asking each other when we last saw him, telling each other of Jared sightings. Trying to get him to do something, sign something be somewhere; it was like pulling teeth. He was joyously unreliable.

This tall lanky kid grew into a fine young man and at 19 after a very shaky start in life things were finally going his way. Jared was very out about his HIV status; "it is what it is", he would often say. "gotta deal with it". Infinite innocence, wisdom and truth:

Jared popped by about a month ago and I was sitting at the reception desk. We chatted briefly, he was really there just to say hi and show off his new tattoo; the name of his girlfriend on the inside of his wrist. I jokingly admonished him and said that I hoped he realized that now that her name was tattooed on his body he would have to be with her forever. He grinned and said yup!

After work that day I spoke with a colleague and shared with her the most recent Jared sighting and my thoughts on his progress, his nomadic visits and stuff we had been working on that simply required his signature. "I will call him in the morning; I hope I can find him." I said to my co-worker as she exited my car that evening.

Four hours later Jared was fatally stabbed.

I am grief-stricken at the loss of this wondrous young man; the promise his life held and for his family that loved him so. The loss of a child is of insurmountable measure; a brother, a partner, a friend, it's all relative because at the end of the day is this hole in your heart for what was and what would have and should have been in the many roles his life would have played out for him and those he loved.

For the family, please know that he was a good boy, a good man. He was kind and generous, funny and serious. I have laughed with him and at him, now I only get to remember him ... and I always will.

Jared McKnight
October 12, 1992 – May 31, 2012



What's Happening @ RHAC?

SUPPORT GROUPS @ RHAC

PHA CAFÉ

Is a support group for people living with HIV/AIDS

It runs every **second** Thursday of each month @ 6:00PM

Join us for Discussions, Guest Speakers, Movies And More!

For more info contact Richard at 519 434 1601 Ext. 228 or stop by to say hi @Regional HIV/AIDS Connection @ 186 King Street, Suite 30

PHA Women's Group

Is a Support Group for Women Living with HIV

Every **Last** Thursday of the month @ 6:00PM

Contact Miriam or Keri at 519 434 1601 for more information

Come and join us for great discussions, good company, good laugh and good food.... just between us, girls!

HEP C Peer Social

A chance for people who are either currently living with or have been through hep C treatment to come out, socialize and meet new people. Light snacks and refreshments will be available.

Contact: **Keri Wheatly, Peer Support Worker @**

519-434-1601 x.261

Winners Circle

Is a support group for long term survivors

For more information please contact Rob Newman, Peer Support Worker

519-434-1601 x.253

Have you done

HIMMM

yet?

... is a community-driven survey of the health of gay, bisexual and other men who are into men. To participate you must be age 18+ and live in Middlesex County, Ontario.

For more information: <http://www.himmm.ca>

To participate:

<http://northernoriele.ca/himmm/enter.php>

519-614-5697 (Todd)

••• \$10 gift card in appreciation for your participation •••



When: September 15, 2012
Where: Springbank Gardens

Registration 5:30 PM
Walk Begins 7:00 PM
Wrap-up and awards 8:00 PM

Hep C peer Support

By Keri Death Wheatly



Being a Peer Support worker at RHAC, I see so many examples of courage and perseverance that at times I am overwhelmed with amazement. Many of the clients here are going through the toughest times of their lives. Watching them as they carry on day to day with varying degrees of difficulty I am so uplifted to see the smiles, hear the laughter and witness the triumphs. Being part of such an amazing organization fills me with such gratitude. This is a place where respect and integrity is the code of conduct. People are built up here, there is no shaming, no guilt tripping, just an honest to goodness acceptance that makes one feel like they're worth it. When you feel like someone thinks that you're worth it, you start to believe that maybe you are. It's empowerment of the best kind. It's a hand up not a hand out.

This exactly what helped me to get my life to the place I wanted it to be. Being treated with kindness, respect and like I mattered

made all the difference. My life was such a mess; I hated myself and felt I did not deserve the life I wanted. I had made many mistakes and hurt a lot of people while I was in my active addiction. When I used, I left a path of destruction behind me in my wake. It was my peers who got me out of the quagmire that was my life. As I worked hard at becoming the person I always knew was in there, I knew that I had to give back what was so freely given to me. I went to school for the Addiction Worker Program. I wasn't sure in what way I was going to give back I just knew I wanted to help those still suffering in active addiction. When I was in class one day Nick Scivo, the IDU Outreach Worker for RHAC, came in and presented to our class about harm reduction and the work that is done at RHAC, I knew where I wanted to be. I went to our placement worker at the school and told her I wanted to do my internship at RHAC. I had an interview for the internship at RHAC and felt right at home. It was the best interview I ever had. My experiences, that had once brought me such guilt and shame, were what helped me to gain the internship. Within my first week of being at RHAC, I knew this was where I wanted to be. I com-

pleted my internship then I got hired on as relief staff. When the position for HEP C Peer Support Worker came up I jumped all over it. I had the interview, which was another great interview. I was offered the job. I never felt so good. I was going to be doing something I loved. I was going to be able to use my experiences to help others in the way they wanted to be helped. The most important thing I learned over the years is that helping others is not about what we think they need but to find out what it is they want and help them to get there.

Today, my life has never been so good. I love where I work and the people I work with, both the clients and the staff. I do my best to try and help others every day and I get to do it with a wonderful dedicated staff who care so much about our work. This place is special, I have never seen so many people who care so very much. The passion we all feel about what we do is transferred directly to the clients. Many of the clients at RHAC have said RHAC helped where no-one else could. I am so proud to work at such an amazing place, where even though there is hardship and struggle, there is also laughter, warmth and a commitment to serve in any way that we can.

KNOWING IS POWER

Hepatitis C Screening

Thursdays 1-4PM

Regional HIV/AIDS Connection



London InterCommunity Health Centre

Get Informed!

Get tested!



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