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THE CONNECTION

The Newsletter of Regional HIV/AIDS Connection

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



TIME FOR A CHANGE

Earlier in May an article in the London Free Press postulated possible reasons for higher rates of HIV and HCV in London, Ontario. As an organization that advocates with and for people who inject drugs (PWID) it is important to note that, while unsafe injection practices may be a potential driver of these increased rates, it is probably not the only influence. There are multiple social and systemic influences which may not only contribute to the increase of

disease, but also contribute to the overall diminished health of people who inject drugs. Canada—like most countries—criminalizes substance users, thus continuing a cyclical and punitive system for this vulnerable segment of our population. Drug addiction is first and foremost a healthcare issue, but our long-standing criminal response creates insurmountable barriers for PWID to access services.

From an anecdotal perspective, RHAC is witnessing a concerning trend that may be contributing to the recent outbreak. Across our community, social and health services staff are reporting a growing and serious concern related to the volume of crystal methamphetamine use among PWID. At the front line we are witnessing the often irreversible damage this illicit substance is causing. When individuals are experiencing the effects of meth, their ability to adhere to safe injection practices is seriously compromised. Compound all these barriers with pervasive stigma associated with HIV and addiction and we create a perfect storm for the issues presenting in London.

There is increasing global discourse which acknowledges that current global drug policy is not working. In 2011, Regional HIV/AIDS Connection signed on to the Vienna Declaration which calls for a full policy reorientation on global drug policy stating: "The criminalization of illicit drug users is fueling the HIV epidemic and has resulted in overwhelmingly negative health and social consequences." Unfortunately, we have not seen significant policy change either globally or in Canada as we continue to see increasing health concerns for PWID. Overdose, HIV, HCV, endocarditis, and I-GAS present significant risks to individuals and contribute to increasing costs within the health care system. There are emerging global drug response models that demonstrate remarkable results by abandoning traditional drug policy approaches in favour of pragmatic and progressive policy that links individuals to healthcare, harm reduction, and addiction services. Fourteen years ago, Portugal shifted its drug policy to a healthcare, treatment and harm reduction focus from the typical criminalization approach. This resulted in a decrease in HIV infections within PWID, and a 60% increase in access to treatment services. Within the context of the current emergence of fentanyl overdose deaths sweeping across our country it is interesting to note that Portugal reports the second lowest overdose deaths worldwide. Clearly there is something valuable to learn from their progressive drug policy.

Brian Lester
Executive Director

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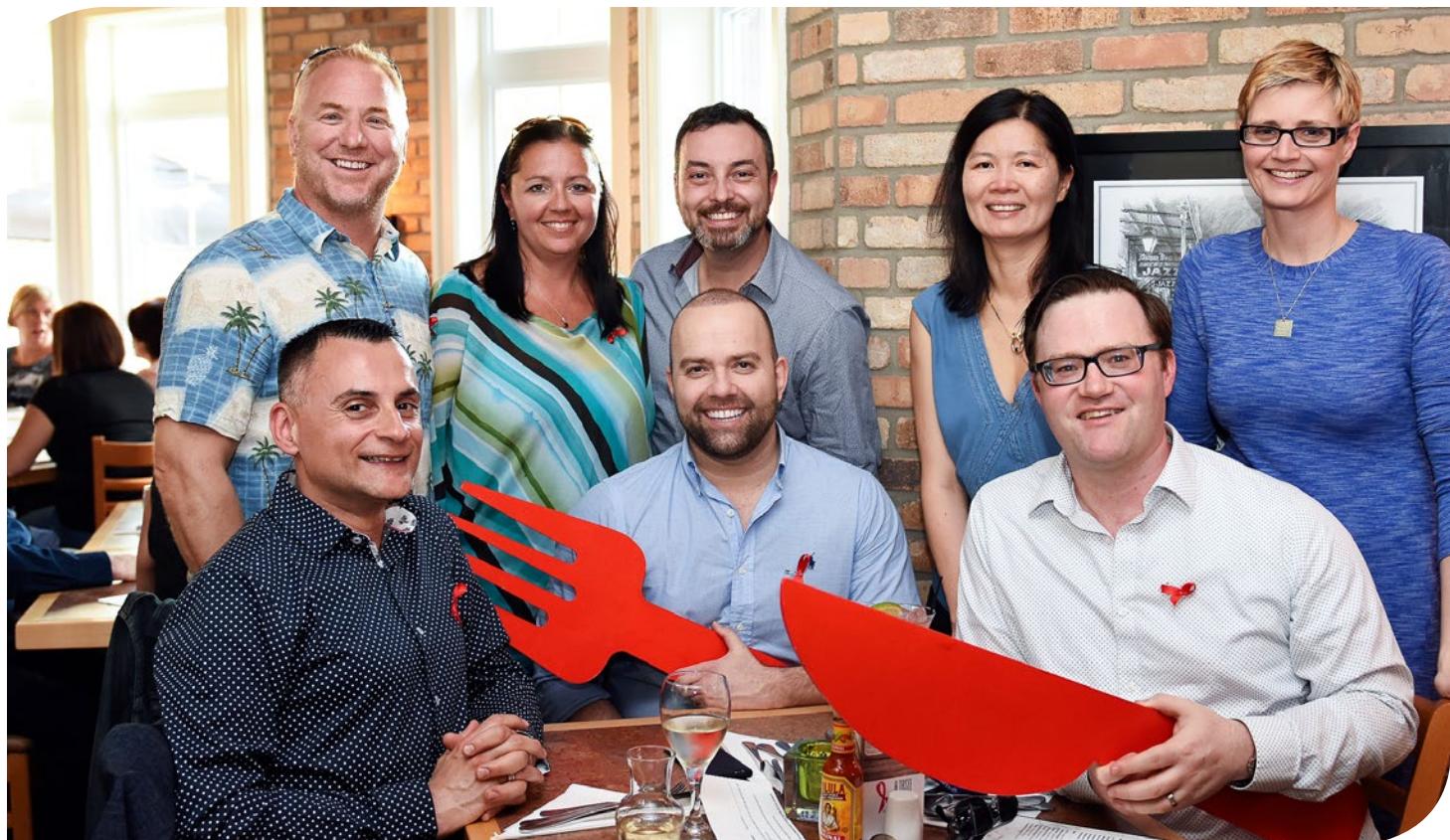
A TASTE FOR LIFE 2017

We are thrilled to announce that A Taste for Life 2017 was a splendid spring evening, with 22 degrees of sun coaxing many of our guests out to a delightful patio dinner. We were joined by old friends and new faces at 30 locations across London, Stratford, and Exeter. With final donations still coming in, we have already received 93% of our fundraising goal. That's \$48,000 and counting!

A Taste for Life is made possible by the incredible support of community partners, participants, volunteers, staff and the Board. This year, we put extra effort into recruiting additional volunteers. A major source of volunteer engagement came from our title sponsor, TD. It is estimated that over 200 TD employees were in attendance, either as diners or volunteers.

In addition to TD, we were very fortunate to have the support of sponsors: The London Free Press, Bell Media, Cohen Highley, London Business Forms Media Group, Imagine Cinemas, and EatDrink Magazine. Furthermore, prizes were donated from Downtown London and World Class Carpets & Flooring.

We were also supported by a growing list of wonderful community partners, including: Hemophilia Ontario, Rogers TV, PRIDE London, Addiction Services Thames Valley, Local Stratford Artists, Pillar Non-Profit/Innovation Works, London CAReS, 3M, Libro, the Bray Family, West Elgin Community Health Centre, London Intercommunity Health, London Police Services, London Middlesex Health Unit, Investors Group, Brescia, Western Black Students Association, Western Pride, staff of Irene Mathyssen (MP), Paul Hubert (London City Councilor), former Mayor Joni Baechler, Unity Project, Day to Knight Events/Changemakers London, Learners, Women's Committee of London, Femme Force Fitness, Forest City Men's Group, Moksha Yoga, and the Thames Valley District School Board, to name a few!





Every year we strive to innovate and optimize the ATFL experience. For example, this year we increased the number of street teams (photographers with Community Relations staff) visiting every restaurant; developed a new marketing campaign – including rebranded print materials, a comprehensive digital media strategy which included new videos, newly-designed restaurant memes, Facebook Live sessions, social media contests, and a 15-second commercial that aired at Imagine Cinemas.

The true “stars” of our event proved to be the gigantic knife and fork sets at every restaurant! Guests posted pictures and messages to social media throughout the night and in the days following! Social media presence was further increased with Bell Media by launching a Facebook Live taste-testing video on Virgin Radio’s Jeff & Rachel Aftershow. Our Fund Developer, Melissa Whaling also appeared on Rogers Daytime TV and CJBK’s Ask the Experts and was interviewed for an article appearing in the London Free Press.

Thank you so much to our staff, volunteers, and clients as we continue raising funds from one of the greatest nights of the year. As donations continue to come in, we look forward to releasing the final numbers very soon.

RHAC AT PRIDE

RHAC will be attending PRIDE London this summer! Catch us at these special Events!

PRIDE in Victoria Park: July 28 - July 30, 2017

PRIDE London Parade: July 30, 2017

You can also join us for a special ***PrEP Information Night on July 24 from 6:00-7:00pm*** at Central Library in the Stevenson & Hunt Room, to learn more about Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis. For more information, contact Christoper Sterling-Murphy at csterling-murphy@hiv aidsconnection.ca

OUR VOLUNTEERS

Diversity remains at the heart of our volunteer program. Each year, contributions are made by a wide range of community members from across the six counties we serve. We are so grateful for the commitments made by clients, Community Service Order programs, corporate volunteers, post-secondary associations and service learners, as well as the Red Scarf Knitters in our communities.



Fred Lush, a volunteer at RHAC, being recognized for 20 years of service.

ONTARIO VOLUNTEER SERVICE AWARDS 2017

Please join us in congratulating the RHAC volunteers who were recognized at this year's Ontario Volunteer Service Awards! We would like to say thank you for their outstanding dedication and service.

RECIPIENT	AWARD
Edward Ede	10 Years
Lynn Humfress-Trute	5 Years
Mana Khami	5 Years
Fred Lush	20 Years
Andy MacLean	5 Years
Samantha Radley	Youth (2 Years)
Toni Taylor	5 Years

VOLUNTEER TRAINING AND ORIENTATION

RHAC is always looking for new volunteers! The next scheduled date for Volunteer Orientation and HIV Basics is **Wednesday, September 13th, 2017 from 6:00-8:00 pm.**

For more information, and to register, contact Martin McIntosh at mmacintosh@hiv aidsconnection.ca.

THE POWER OF A CAMPUS-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

By Dr. Lisa Jakubowski, Associate Professor of Community Development in the School of Leadership and Social Change, Brescia University College

The Community Development Program at Brescia University College is a proud partner of the Regional HIV/AIDS Connection (RHAC). At the heart of our partnership is a particular form of experiential education: service-learning. Service-learning programs offer students the opportunity to connect real life experience to classroom study. Students work collaboratively with partners to address human and community needs. Students also have structured opportunities to reflect on their experiences, and are consistently challenged to become engaged, socially responsible citizens.

I would personally like to thank RHAC for being such an amazing community partner and for offering invaluable, rich learning opportunities to our students year after year. Brescia and RHAC have been community partners for over a decade and we are fortunate to share a wonderfully collaborative relationship. Special mention must be given to Martin McIntosh, RHAC's Community Relations Coordinator, who hosts and facilitates each service-learning experience.

Students consistently comment on how transformative the "RHAC Experience" is. Students are warmly welcomed and are challenged to step outside of their "comfort zones" from the moment their experience begins. This experience has truly transformed how my students view HIV/AIDS, and Harm Reduction. They no longer fear going to RHAC. In fact, it is now the most coveted of all the community experiences.



"The lessons I have learned from the staff at Regional HIV/AIDS Connection are ones that a textbook could never teach me and the relationships I have made with the staff are ones that will last a lifetime."

- Victoria Devet, Graduate of the Community Development Program, Brescia University College

In 2016, RHAC worked with 46 Service Learning Volunteers from the Community Development Program at Brescia University College, the Social Justice Program at King's University College, and Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry.

MEET THE BOARD



In upcoming issues of The Connection, RHAC will feature members of our Board in this special Meet the Board series. In this issue, we are proud to introduce Board President Nancy Griffiths.

Nancy Griffiths serves as President of the Board of Directors at RHAC. As the Team Leader and Employment Advisor for WIL Employment Connections, she has a passion for community development and supporting people through career and life transitions. Nancy has been in London for years and shares her life with John, Jack and Emily, and her grand wee one Lilly Anne. She is also committed to creativity, artsy stuff, and cottage time.

This will be Nancy's sixth year on the board. However, her long-time involvement with RHAC began as a volunteer with our annual Taste for Life event. Becoming a part of RHAC showed her the difference that any one of us can make in the lives of people, and in the community. Nancy is constantly inspired by the commitment and courage of the leadership, the Board, and the staff and volunteer teams. She is

also inspired by the people in her life living with and affected by HIV/AIDS and HCV who make RHAC's mission so important to her. "It is an amazing learning opportunity and chance to engage with a constantly evolving organization and sector," says Nancy.

In her view, the Board of Directors is dedicated to bringing diversity, experience, and--most of all--caring enthusiasm to the governance table while striving to ensure that the staff and volunteers at RHAC can do what they do so well. Nancy is looking forward to the ongoing development of programming at RHAC, and watching Supervised Injection Services and the Community Drug Strategy find their place in London. She is also committed to ensuring that the agency's physical space continues meeting the needs of RHAC, its clients, and its growing partnership with the amalgamated John Gordon Home. As President, Nancy looks forward to supporting Brian and the Board in their planned work, and in the new and exciting opportunities that arise.

RHAC AT SUNFEST

As the weather continues warming up, we're getting excited for London's festival season! What better place to kick things off than at Sunfest?

RHAC is at Sunfest from July 6th through 9th

Have a few hours to spare? Soak up sun, music, and fun while sharing information and resources, meeting wonderful folks, and connecting with RHAC staff, volunteers, and friends! If you would like to get involved as a booth volunteer, or if you have any questions, please contact Mercy Nleya at mnleya@hiv aidsconnection.ca. Mark your calendars today—we can't wait to see you there!

A HEARTFELT EVENING



A Heartfelt Evening was hosted in support of John Gordon Home on Tuesday, May 30th. The 6th annual fundraiser proved to be the most successful Heartfelt Evening yet, raising \$8,000! Guests were treated to a wonderful dining experience at Winks Eatery, along with a silent auction featuring several exciting prizes. Funds raised through the silent auction will contribute to providing essential items for residents transitioning out of JGH and back into the community based on need. These items may include linens, beds, small appliances, and other common household items.



A special thank you to the following supporters:

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Wink's Eatery

FUNDRAISING COMMITTEE

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Bruce Rankin
Cheryl Massa
Melissa Whaling
Mike Joudrey

RESTAURANTS INCLUDED IN RAFFLE

Crossings
David's Bistro
Dolcetto
Marienbad
Shawarma Pita Palace
Thaifoon
The Keg
The Poacher's Arms
Wink's Eatery

ADDITIONAL THANKS TO

Bill Lewis
Dennis Winkler
Emily Marcoccia
Mary Mann-McCavitt
Branden Raue
DJ Darin



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STAFF UPDATES

We are very pleased to announce that Victor Feunekes has joined RHAC in the role of GBMSM & Youth Sexual Health Educator. Victor is a former volunteer at RHAC whose experience supporting LGBT2Q+ communities, and familiarity with RHAC's vision and values, is a welcome asset. We are glad to have you, Victor!

The team would also like to welcome our newest Hepatitis C Support Worker, Lisa Bourque. Lisa comes to us with a wealth of experience working with clients at The Unity Project and, prior to that, with the Canadian Mental Health Association. She looks forward to continuing her work with clients in this capacity. Welcome to the team, Lisa!

We are also thrilled to welcome Branden Raue into the position of Communications Coordinator. While studying at Western University, Branden has been working in marketing and public relations for local and international organizations. Last summer, Branden first joined RHAC as our Communications Assistant. Welcome back to a new and exciting role, Branden!

John Gordon Home has bid farewell to Yvonne Rimbault after nine years of dedicated service. Yvonne had been in the position of Resident Care Coordinator from 2009 to 2017 and has played an integral role in development and evolution of services at JGH. She will be greatly missed for her exceptional work ethic and compassionate approach with residents. We wish Yvonne all the best in her future endeavours!

Please join us in congratulating Troy Speechly as the new Resident Care Coordinator at John Gordon Home. Troy has been working at RHAC/JGH as a part-time Nurse since 2015, and we are pleased to welcome him to his new role.

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Director of Counterpoint Harm Reduction Services Sonja Burke, ext. 244	sburke@hiv aidsconnection.ca
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Women's HIV/AIDS Community Development Coordinator Holly Taylor, ext. 249	htaylor@hiv aidsconnection.ca
GBMSM and Youth Sexual Health Educator Victor Feunekes, ext. 231	vfeunekes@hiv aidsconnection.ca

Board of Directors

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