



## Spring/Summer 2016 WHAT'S INSIDE

2

Thirty Strong

3

Red Scarf Project

4

Around the Corner,  
Around the Globe

5

News from the  
Homefront

6

Reaching Regional  
An "Open" Story

7

Celebrating Volunteers

8

A Taste for Life

10

Love and Gratitude

11

Tachycardia

12

Staff Changes

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# THE CONNECTION

## The Newsletter of Regional HIV/AIDS Connection

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

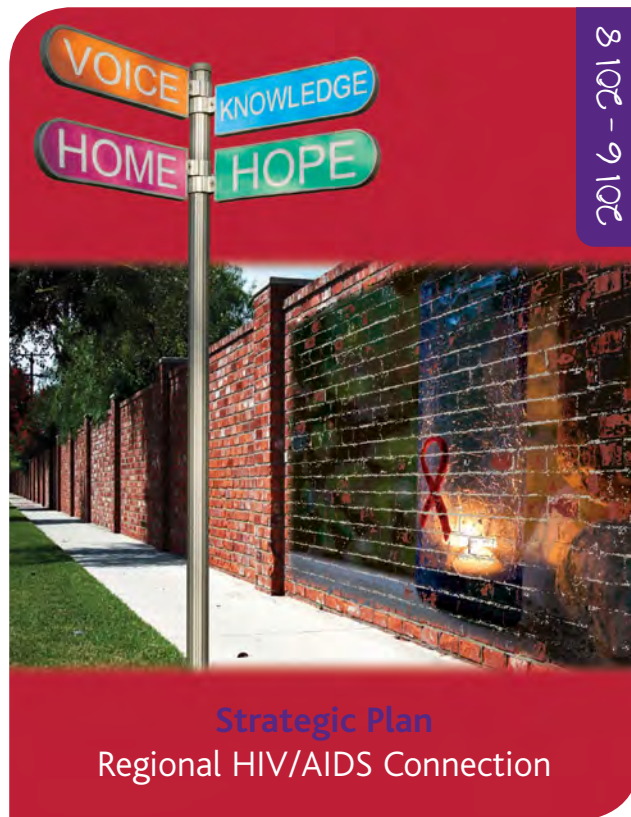
### MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

On behalf of The Board of Directors, I am pleased to release Regional HIV/AIDS Connection's (RHAC) new Strategic Plan - 2016 to 2018.

This forward-thinking Plan truly reflects the culmination of our legal amalgamation with John Gordon Home. It builds on our remarkable history of success and serves to ensure we remain, not only relevant, but vital to the people we serve. Developed during the year of our thirtieth anniversary, we have committed to a Plan that will strengthen our capacity to serve, continue our legacy of advocacy and move us in directions that leverage our expertise as a *community inspired organization dedicated to positively impacting the lives of individuals and diverse communities living with, at risk for, or affected by HIV and Hepatitis C.*

Simply stated, our organization is about people. It's about vulnerable people! Often when individuals come to RHAC they are seeking information and resources or looking for ongoing support. They frequently speak about feeling isolated. Most people who seek out RHAC are profoundly impacted by HIV and related stigmas. It is HIV stigma that contributes to new infections and prevents people from accessing services. It is societal stigma related to addiction and mental health that diminishes the lives of those who struggle in the day to day. In 2016 stigma infused homophobia continues to play a role in new HIV infections within the gay/bi/trans communities. The priorities outlined in our strategic plan will strengthen our capacity to address HIV stigma, it will enhance our accountability and outcomes reporting and it will ensure the people we serve remain in the centre of all governance and operational decisions.

The RHAC Board would like to acknowledge the talented staff and volunteers, committed community partners and supporters for all they bring to enrich our community inspired mission. The people we serve are at the heart of our work and their voices are vital. The social justice work of HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C remains urgent because the epidemic is not over. It's about making a difference in people's lives. Together through a vision of **Voice, Knowledge, Home and Hope** we touch lives, we transform lives and we save lives.



Strategic Plan  
Regional HIV/AIDS Connection

2016 - 2018

Community Inspired. Courage Driven.



We are proud of our Strategic Plan and committed to its full execution!  
Thank you for your continued support!

Brian Lester  
Executive Director

*To see a copy of our full Strategic Plan visit  
[www.hivaidconnection.ca](http://www.hivaidconnection.ca)*

## THIRTY AND STRONG

Mana Khami  
Board Chair



Congratulations and thank you to our guests, staff and volunteers who celebrated Regional HIV/AIDS Connection, John Gordon Home and Camp Wendake at the Evening of the Red in November 2015. This special evening was a celebration and commemoration of our history and our hope for the future.

Marking the 30th Anniversary of RHAC, the program was emceed by Bell Media (CTV's) Mandi Fields; included music by Canadian performer Justin Hines; video reflection through the people who have contributed to our organizations; and memories - including a poem read by the Bray family, written by their beloved Daryl before he died of AIDS.



With approximately 250 people in attendance, community members, such as John and Nancy Fyfe-Millar, said "it was the best RHAC event they have ever been to". Our featured entertainer, Justin Hines has travelled all of North America, doing a 72 city charity-tour; he said it was "one of the most moving events I've been a part of..." (Justin and his wife Savannah stayed after the event to learn more about RHAC)!

Following a celebratory opening song, by Rick Kish and the Dean Harrison Trio, Justin's music set the tempo for the evening – allowing us to both celebrate and commemorate the people and events who have contributed to RHAC, our predecessor – The AIDS Committee of London, and The John Gordon Home and Camp Wendake.

Powerful messages of reflection, the state of things today, and the face of HIV tomorrow – were told through video segments by Bruce Rankin, Gloria Ackroyd, Tracey Jones, and others; all of which we are now using on YouTube, our website, social media, and in our presentations. RHAC Executive Director, Brian Lester delivered the evening's only speech – a powerful reflection, a realistic overview of HIV/Hep C today, and personal thanks to the thousands of people who have contributed to RHAC.

The Evening of the Red Scarf was both a friend-raiser and a fundraiser with support from Union Gas, Libro, Rainbow Cinemas, Costco, Brescia Social Club, London Intercommunity Health Centre, Western University, and others. The Memory Walkers (Brays and friends) and other



individuals made large, personal donations. We were thrilled that many people in the community who could not attend - sponsored proxy tickets, thus allowing us to send some RHAC clients, partners, or others who deserved our thanks!

As with all our community events, we could not have delivered without the assistance of volunteers including two Camp Wendake volunteers, and twelve volunteers of RHAC. In order to ensure our regular, on-going volunteers were able to attend as guests, we called out to others with an affinity for RHAC and in particular, our Red Scarf Project volunteers. Poignantly, two of our community volunteers that evening were women who lost their sons to AIDS. Other families who have lost loved ones to AIDS were also in attendance; as mentioned - the Bray family including sisters Donna and Deb, along with their mother, Dorothy and other family and friends.

Evening of the Red Scarf was exceptional for our anniversary year, but the theme and name will now be used to mount our fall event each year during AIDS Awareness Week.

Please visit our website for our exciting announcement of our fall 2016 event!



The Evening of the Red Scarf also marked the official launch of the annual Red Scarf Project during AIDS Awareness Week. We are very proud to have had over 1200 scarves knitted by volunteers and distributed in our communities during the week.

If you or someone you know would like to knit red scarves for our 2016 awareness campaign please get in touch with a member of the Community Relations team at RHAC. Knitting has become a year-round project for dozens of volunteers, allowing us to make our Red Scarf Project better and better each year.



## A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY

This April marked the one year anniversary of our amalgamation with Canada's first official AIDS Hospice; The John Gordon Home; now a home that provides both transitional and palliative care.

In early 2011, we changed our name to Regional HIV/AIDS Connection to reflect expanded services in Elgin, Huron, Lambton, Middlesex, Oxford and Perth counties, a region we continue to serve today. Our predecessor, ACOL – The AIDS Committee of London, began in 1985 when several members of the gay and lesbian community mobilized to provide support to people living with HIV/AIDS. In the past 30 years we have worked hard to 'have the courage to do what is right' for our clients - including providing support, education, and harm reduction - in partnership with other health and human service providers.

We have never forgotten our roots and today we are proud to be a community-inspired organization with programs and services for people living with, at-risk-for, or affected by HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C.

## AROUND THE CORNER, AND AROUND THE

### Increased service from RHAC Counterpoint

We are very pleased to let you know our hours of service for Counterpoint Harm Reduction Services will increase this year thanks to a funding increase from The Middlesex London Health Unit. This has allowed us to increase the staffing level by one full time Harm Reduction Case Manager and additional part time Harm Reduction Support Workers. At the time of print we were still working on operational details but please check our web site for when we are offering Saturday and Sunday service.

### Supervised Injection Site Research Study

In February 2016, the Ontario HIV Treatment Network and the Regional HIV/AIDS Connection began assessing the feasibility of supervised injection services in London. Supervised injection services are health programs where people inject drugs under safe conditions and can gain access to sterile injecting equipment. An extensive Supervised Injection Site Survey was undertaken – engaging stakeholders—

including people who inject drugs, community members, health care providers, law enforcement officials, and representatives from government and the business community—to see whether supervised injection services could play a role in addressing concerns here in London.

The main goal of the study is to determine if there is a role for supervised injection services in London. "We know that there are many concerns related to injection drug use, such as overdose, infectious disease, public injection and drug-related litter," says Ayden Scheim, a study investigator based at Western University. "I have seen too many people die of complications from injection drug use," says Dr. Sharon Koivu, a physician with the London Health Sciences Centre. "So many people do not understand the risks. We need to find ways to stop these tragic deaths and help people wherever they are on their journey to recovery." One way to help people is to consider the introduction of supervised



injection services. Not only have these sites proven effective in reducing overdose deaths and new HIV and hepatitis C infections, they're often described as "win-win solutions" for communities.

Results of the study will be known later this year.

### **Canadian Government says Harm Reduction**

It was a beautiful moment: Canada's statement earlier this year to the plenary assembly of the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) in Vienna, the primary forum in which countries debate global drug policy. The term "harm reduction" is so contentious that it has yet to appear in any CND resolution. And in recent years, Canada has joined the likes of Russia at the Commission in objecting to even mentioning UN agency documents that recommend evidence-based harm reduction services such as needle exchange programs.

But this time was different. Canada explicitly declared its support for "harm reduction," noting that it anticipated more supervised injection services in future, and will also expand access to life-saving naloxone to prevent fatal overdoses. Canada now believes that responses to drugs must be based on evidence and on human rights.



## **NEWS FROM THE HOMEFRONT - JGH**



- Please join us in welcoming Rose Dlamini to the RHAC – JGH Team! Rose is the successful candidate for the Part time RPN position at JGH. Congratulations and welcome Rose.
- Late winter/early spring has been busy for JGH with 100% occupancy much of the time.
- With summer-like weather, Residents and staff are now enjoying the beautiful grounds around the Home. This year, the gardens will once again be tended to by a summer student. Thanks to Mike Joudrey, Bruce Rankin and others, RHAC applied for and received six summer-student positions, one of which will be a horticultural technician for the John Gordon Home.
- The Ministry of Health and Long Term Care recently approved a project plan for the installation of a new sprinkler system at JGH. Installation is currently underway and as a result, some service installations and temporary relocations are taking place. Additional repairs and upgrades to infrastructure will take place this year thanks to one-time funding from the LHIN.
- JGH's spring fundraiser was held on May 30 at Winks. Thank you to everyone who made A Heartfelt Evening a great success!



## REACHING REGIONAL



Opening Doors Co-Chairs, Carlen Costa and Jennifer Sandu are shown with Keynote Speaker Dr. Yong Kang

Now that spring has turned quickly to summer, we are gearing up for the renewed energy of collaboration, and relationship building in the six counties served by Regional HIV/AIDS Connection. For example, our Southwest Networking Committee, comprised of members representing Health Units and other health care partners, met recently at our London, King Street office.

Executive Director of RHAC, Brian Lester led a discussion about HIV rates in the region as well as discussion about referrals between RHAC and the Health Units. Members also shared information and knowledge transfer about harm-reduction practices and services in the regions. Discussion about our growing Red Scarf Project was very encouraging for members, particularly in the regions that would like to be able to resource the project in the coming year. RHAC Regional Co-ordinator of HIV Services, Carlen Costa provided an outline of the framework behind a new project – for youth – by youth, beginning with focus groups in the London area.

Earlier this spring RHAC, in collaboration with the AIDS Committee of Windsor, hosted the annual Opening Doors Conference. This year, the conference was held at the DoubleTree Hilton, London and included workshops, networking and updates to the current work being delivered in the HIV/AIDS sector. Our theme, Coming Together: Opening Doors 2016 – A Journey of Healing and Hope, delivered a program that included new, holistic therapies for PHAs, and an historical introspection

of the HIV movement. We were very honoured to have keynote speaker Dr. C. Yong Kang, Department of Microbiology and Immunology at the University of Western Ontario, who provided an overview of his exciting research and human clinical-trials phase, for an HIV Vaccine. We would like to thank everyone who attended Opening Doors, the amazing speakers who delivered memorable seminars, and our friends, The AIDS Committee of Windsor for always being great partners.

RHAC's work in the regions takes many forms - such as networking meetings with community groups by our Regional Co-ordinator to presentations that are conducted by staff in our Education Department and our Counterpoint Services Team. This spring topics ranged from HIV Basics and Harm Reduction, to Trans Identities, MSM & Gay Men's Services, to at-risk women specific information – such as those supported by WHAI, the provincial Women's HIV/AIDS Initiative.

If you would like to have a representative attend a meeting or event in your region, please contact Carlen Costa, Regional Co-ordinator HIV Services, and she will ensure you get connected to the appropriate RHAC team member.

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Serving Perth, Huron, Oxford, Lambeth, Elgin and Middlesex counties.



## AN "OPEN" STORY

*For those of us who work at RHAC, we are grateful when we hear how the work we do impacts the lives of others. In turn, we believe it is the courage and strength of our clients and volunteers that often inspires and enriches the lives of others.*

To whomever it may concern,

My name is Trenton. I am a part-time Financial Services Representative and a full-time student at Huron University College. I love to read, to cook, and to take my dog on incredibly long walks around the city. I am an engaged individual, and dedicate a substantial amount of time to extra-curricular activities and community involvement.

Today, I have the privilege of writing about the ways in which Open Closet has helped create the person

that I am. Open Closet stimulates a sense of creativity, compassion, and community, and does so at very critical stages in a young person's development. My experiences at Open Closet covered three years, from the age of 15 until the age of 18. It was a fixture in my life that helped usher through the different events that presented themselves to me, whether those events were welcomed or unexpected. The discussions that occurred at the weekly group meetings were engaging and dynamic, and provided excellent learning experiences for all that attended. It helped develop the skills that I needed to be successful in my first job (at a toy store), my involvement in the Students' Council at school, and multiple other facets of my life, both professional and interpersonal.

The people that I met through Open Closet were another incredible feature that I cannot give enough credit to. These involve both the facilitators of the weekly discussions, but also the peers that would eventually become some of my closest friends. They helped with my own self-discovery as a person.

# Celebrating the Best of Volunteers!



Brian Lester and Martin McIntosh were on hand in April when several of our outstanding volunteers were recognized at the Ontario Volunteer Service Awards.



Please join us in thanking and congratulating :

Name of Recipient		Award	
Willis Henry		Youth Category - 2 Years	
Shannon Schots		5 Years	
Danielle Moynihan		5 Years	
Katrina Brock		JGH Youth - 2 Years	
Tendayi Gwaradzimba		5 Years	
Phyllis Adams		5 Years	
Zoltan Richter-Bisson		JGH Youth - 2 Years	
Other Recipients (not shown)			
Stratford Recipient			
Laura Davis		5 Years	
London Recipient			
George Aimey		5 Years	







## A TASTE FOR LIFE - *DELICIOUSLY DELIVERED!*

We are very pleased to report A Taste For Life 2016 was a great success. Mother Nature was kind to us with a beautiful spring evening on April 20 in London, Stratford and Exeter when almost all of our 29 restaurants were full or busy on a steady basis. With approximately 25 restaurant donations received at press-time, and personal (envelope) donations up (compared to last year) we are excited to report that we have almost reached our goal of **\$52,000!!!**

We could not have been so successful without the partnership of our restaurant owners and the community support we received from greeters such as Linda Sibley from Addiction Services of Thames Valley and Matthew Maynard of Hemophilia Ontario – as well as the increasing number of RHAC friends/partners who hosted groups in the restaurants. Among others, some notable hosts/diners were Police Chief John Pare, Medical Officer of Health Chris Mackie, Rogers TV and London Pride Committee, Andrew Rosser (who rallied over 40 guests), Pillar's Michelle Baldwin, London Cares, Brandon Agnew, CTV's Mandi Fields, Canadian Aboriginal Artist, Maxine Noel, Thames Valley School Board Principal Liz Gonzer, Former Mayor and City Councillor Joni Baechler, current Councillors, Paul Hebert, Jesse Helmer, and Stephen Turner, many RHAC staff members - as well as guests from places such as LIHC, Brescia, Kings, Western, MLHU, 3M, Pinpoint Publications, SageComm, Investors Group, Libro, Domus Development, and Union Gas in addition to many other organizations.

Our lead sponsor, TD had over 200 staff at various restaurants as well as TD Greeters in busy restaurants like Black Friars, David's, and Tamarin. We were grateful for the continued support from donors and partners as well as most of our Board Members, former Board members, current and former staff, current and past volunteers as well as many clients!!

Leading up to ATFL we implemented our largest promotional plan yet, with extensive social media and contemporary media. We developed a social media strategy that spread rapidly when friends like Mayor, Matt Brown, John Pare and Chris Mackie tweeted and posted messages encouraging the community to support RHAC at A Taste for Life. For the first-time ever we used table cards in participating restaurants asking diners to 'Get Social' and tweet, post, or share their real-time experiences. By 8 p.m. in the evening we were trending number three (third highest social media topic) in the City!

*All proceeds from A Taste for Life stay in the community and go directly to client programs and services. Regional HIV/AIDS Connection is profoundly thankful for everyone who contributed to A Taste for Life 2016 – it was Hope Made Delicious!*





Clients and Residents of RHAC are reminded of our summer events including barbeques and other socials. Please check our website for dates and/or check with RHAC/JGH staff for locations and other details.

## **TACHYCARDIA - *"a faster than normal heart rate"* LEADS TO FANTASTIC FUNDRAISING**



Regional HIV/AIDS is profoundly grateful for the continuing support of the students from the Schulich School of Medicine who once again donated the proceeds of their year-end Tachycardia production. Tachycardia is our single largest, third-party fundraiser and without it, RHAC would not be able to offer its current level of client programs and services. This year over \$20,000 has been donated to RHAC.

Tachycardia is four-act stage show and musical showcasing the 'talents' of each year of the four-year medical program. It is hard to imagine how such busy students find the time to rehearse and perform with such humour, energy and often – true musical talent! RHAC, is also grateful to its own dedicated volunteers – without whom we would not be able to support the three shows of Tachycardia!



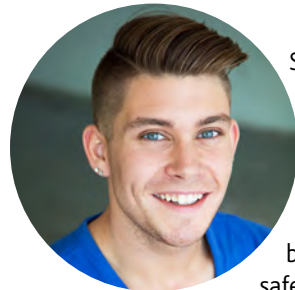


Regional  
HIV/AIDS  
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Community Inspired. Courage Driven.

## STAFF CHANGES

We are very pleased to announce that Blair Henry is the successful candidate for the Harm Reduction Case Manager position within Counterpoint. We were fortunate to have many strong candidates in this process but it was clear that our current team member Blair offers many strengths for this specific role and the larger Counterpoint team. Congratulations to Blair on this great opportunity.



We are also very pleased to welcome Christopher Sterling-Murphy in the role of Gay Men's HIV Prevention Worker. Historically, Christopher was instrumental in starting a GSA at his high school as one of the group's founders. More recently, Christopher completed an honours thesis project that investigated the relationships between sexual health education, frequency of safer sex practices, and participants' comfort levels negotiating safer sex. Christopher has experience working with marginalized populations, diverse communities and people who have experienced crisis/trauma through volunteer roles as a Crisis Responder with Victim Services of Thames Valley and as a Hoarding Support Worker with VHA Home Healthcare. Welcome Christopher!

We are always excited to announce new staff and emotional when it is time to say goodbye. Jesse Huntus with our Hep C Team (officially a staff member of LIHC) has decided it is time to pursue the next chapter of his life. We are very thankful for Jesse's six years of service at RHAC. He will be missed by staff, volunteers, and clients at both our 186 King Street and JGH locations. Jesse has exhibited compassion for his clients in everything he has done. We will miss you Jesse but wish you well as you take the road. May the journey be as kind to you as you have been to us.



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