

# THE CONNECTION

THE NEWSLETTER OF REGIONAL HIV/AIDS CONNECTION

## The Meaning of Meaningful Engagement

On July 9<sup>th</sup>, RHAC staff and Board held our annual GIPA/MIPA Commitment Ceremony. As an annual marker, we recommit to this inclusive empowerment philosophy which has influenced the work of the HIV sector for close to 40 years...

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## One Year Later: Oxford County Mobile Outreach Services

On July 4, 2018, RHAC, Southwestern Public Health and Addiction Services Thames Valley launched Oxford County Mobile Outreach Services.

One year later, the Mobile Outreach team continues to make inroads in Oxford County as a collaborative response to the Opioid Crisis. Distance, transportation, and limited healthcare access are just some of the unique barriers that clients can face in rural communities. It is

incredibly important that our harm reduction services can go the distance to meet their needs.

Thanks to the Mobile Outreach program, our team has succeeded in providing harm reduction equipment, life-saving information, and regular naloxone trainings to communities throughout Oxford County.

We are thankful to our partners, community, and clients for making this service a success.

ISSUE 2



Regional  
HIV/AIDS  
Connection

SUMMER 2019

SERVING PERTH, HURON, LAMBTON, ELGIN, MIDDLESEX AND OXFORD COUNTIES

# The Meaning of Meaningful Engagement

**CONTINUED** The greater involvement and meaningful engagement of people living with HIV/AIDS must be at the centre of our work if we are to effectively deliver on our mission of addressing the challenges associated with HIV/AIDS. GIPA is about human rights, inclusion, self-determination and dignity of the full human being. RHAC deeply embraces these concepts as we strive to deliver on our mission.

People living with HIV or HCV and people who use substances are all part of the “lived experience” extended family at RHAC and play a crucial role in authentic service delivery. The powerful impact of connection with someone who has “been there” can never be underestimated: whether it is about sharing a story of being newly diagnosed with HIV or the challenges with HIV/HCV disclosure or connecting with someone on the other side of a

battle with addiction.

I am pleased to note that in 2019, RHAC currently employs more HIV/HCV-positive individuals and/or persons who have lived experience with substance use than at any other time in our organization's history. A job with RHAC is not the only way for someone to meaningfully engage with us, yet it is undeniable that employment can offer a transformative experience for an individual. We are committed to creating these transformative possibilities wherever possible!

Thanks for your continued support of our mission!



**Brian Lester**, Executive Director

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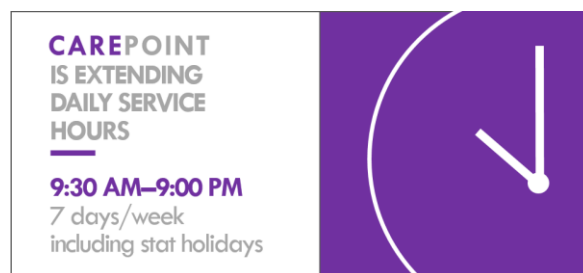
## Carepoint: Reducing Opioid-Related Harms and Deaths

RHAC is pleased to announced that, as of August 5<sup>th</sup>, the newly-named Carepoint Consumption and Treatment Service at Regional HIV/AIDS Connection began operating daily from 9:30am to 9:00pm – including all statutory holidays.

The opioid crisis continues to devastate communities across the country, affecting the health and lives of people from all walks of life, all age groups, and all socio-economic backgrounds. The more we can be there to provide service to those in need, the greater the reduction of opioid-related harms and deaths in our community.

Since opening as a Temporary Overdose Prevention Site in February 2018, we have

supported over 20,000 visits, reversed over 125 overdoses and provided hundreds of client referrals to a variety of local health and social services.



We would like to extend our profound appreciation for all of the community support. To learn more about the Carepoint Consumption & Treatment Service at RHAC please visit: [hivaidsconnection.ca/carepoint](http://hivaidsconnection.ca/carepoint)

## Setting Residents Up for Success at JGH

30 years ago, at the height of the AIDS epidemic, John Gordon Home (JGH) opened its doors to provide a loving home for many of our community members who were in need of dignified end-of-life care. Today, JGH continues the legacy of being *the Home with a Heart* by providing a stabilizing foundation for clients living with HIV/AIDS/HCV.

“Thanks to modern treatments, the majority of our residents are going on to lead long and healthy lives outside of John Gordon Home,” says Senior Director Bruce Rankin.

JGH currently provides wrap-around health and practical living supports to residents living in semi-independent apartments in the heart of the north central Piccadilly community. Each year, we support between 9 to 12 residents as they make the transition back into the community with the help of the Resident Transition Fund.

Originally started in 2015, the Resident Transition Fund was dedicated to providing residents with small care packages of everyday items, from kitchenware and bedding to small household appliances, that would help make life a little more comfortable as they set up their new homes. Over the past 8 years, it has grown to

provide additional transitional supports tailored to the unique needs and realities of each resident.

*“Thanks to modern treatments, the majority of our residents are going on to lead long and healthy lives outside of John Gordon Home.”*

Supports include financial assistance with initial rent payments, phone plans to connect with wellness supports, bicycles to support active-living and transit to and from appointments—all thanks to the Resident Transition Fund, which today is entirely dependent on fundraised dollars.

This Spring, RHAC hosted its 8th annual A Heartfelt Evening: a silent auction and fundraising dinner at Winks Eatery. The event raised \$6,582 in support of the Transition Fund! Support from the community, through events like A Heartfelt Evening, A Taste for Life, and our monthly giving program help contribute to the ongoing success of other free programs and services we provide to our clients. We are so grateful for your ongoing support!

## Awarding Excellence, Inspiring Community

In June, RHAC’s Director of Harm Reduction Services, Sonja Burke, was recognized by Addiction Services Thames Valley (ADSTV) as their 2019 recipient for the Community Inspiration Award.

Additionally, five of our dedicated volunteers have been recognized by the Ontario Volunteer Service Awards. Please join us in congratulating this year’s recipients:

- **Lilka Young (10 years)**
- **Bruce Hofstetter (10 years)**
- **David Smith (5 years)**
- **Kelley Casella (5 years)**
- **Michelle McKay (5 years)**





# RHAC Launches New HIV Testing Campaign

In 2017, RHAC received funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) to develop a campaign aimed at increasing HIV testing uptake among communities of guys who have sex with guys and people involved in seasonal agricultural work within our agency's six-county catchment.

We are thrilled to share that the first phase of the campaign is now live. To learn more, please visit the links below and feel free to share them with your networks.

For guys who have sex with guys: [findyourreason.ca](http://findyourreason.ca)

For seasonal workers: [everybodysdoingit.ca](http://everybodysdoingit.ca)

It has taken a lot of time, skill, and dedication to develop this campaign. Therefore, it's an absolute pleasure and privilege to take up the opportunity to both acknowledge and celebrate Meredith, Martin, Branden, Kyle and Sean's efforts in making this compelling and engaging campaign a reality! In addition, Sagecomm (our partner in campaign design/implementation/promotion) and Kovacs Group (our partner in campaign evaluation) have been phenomenal collaborators in this work. Above all, it is the direct engagement of community members with lived experience that has given the campaign its relevance, life, and heart. We honour the vital contributions of at least twenty people with lived experience in the campaign development process. Without these individuals' time, insights, perspectives and willingness to share of their expertise and experience, the campaign would not be the exciting change-maker that it has become.



## Summer of Courage: Pride and Sunfest 2019

This summer, RHAC invited communities to celebrate courage with us at TD Sunfest and Pride London Festival. The theme of courage is continuously inspired by our clients, recognizing that it takes courage and trust to reach out for support.

Sunfest remains one of RHAC's most significant summer outreach experiences, with four fun-filled days of engagement and education activities. For Mercy Nleya, our Multicultural HIV Prevention Coordinator, Sunfest is an important opportunity to connect diverse communities with education and resources related to HIV/AIDS and HCV. Many community members stopped by our booth to ask questions, learn more about our services, and share their stories.



RHAC carried the theme of courage into Pride, marching in the 25th Annual London Pride Festival Parade. The turn-out of 40+ community members joining us at the Pride parade was one of the largest yet! Our Pride booth run by staff and volunteers succeeded in engaging and educating our community with information about HIV, Hepatitis C, harm reduction, PrEP, and U=U.

We are so thankful to everyone who visited us at Sunfest and Pride, and to our many volunteers and the RHAC Education team for making our summer festival season a success!

## Nurses Making a Difference

For over 30 years, RHAC has worked with nurses to make a positive impact in the lives of people living with HIV/AIDS/HCV. We employ nurses through our Carepoint Consumption and Treatment Service and the John Gordon Home program. Through partnerships with Middlesex-London Health Unit (MLHU), London Intercommunity Health Centre (LIHC) and St. Joseph's Infectious Diseases Care Program (IDCP), we are able to provide thoughtful and high-quality care to our clients.

Ahead of International Nurses Day, London welcomed the annual Canadian Association of Nurses in HIV/AIDS Care (CANAC) conference. We would like to thank CANAC for its generous donation in support of residents of our John Gordon Home program.

RHAC is proud to work with compassionate and dedicated nurses who we celebrate as leaders in healthcare and the community.

## Loss & Transition: Care for the Caregivers

Since our earliest days as a volunteer-led AIDS Service Organization, we have had to face, acknowledge, and build our resilience to grief and loss as a central part of the work we do. Through our unwavering dedication to harm reduction service delivery, RHAC staff has increasingly faced anticipated and cumulative losses related to the opioid crisis in our community. In the last year, a record number of 58 people have died from opioid overdoses in London-Middlesex.

In June, our staff gathered at the Elsie Perrin Estate for a day-long session focused on self and collective care facilitated by long-term grief, transition and resilience counsellors Yvette Perreault and Chris Leonard. "Together we explored many important realms that contribute to the health and wellness of our organization," said RHAC's Executive Director, Brian Lester. "As part of our day together we were also able to create the opportunity to remember the many losses encountered in the lives of the people we serve."

*"As part of our day together we were also able to create the opportunity to remember the many losses encountered in the lives of the people we serve."*

Our frontline staff work tirelessly to save lives and continue to provide an unparalleled level of compassionate care to all of our clients. It is our hope that by taking care of ourselves, we strengthen our ability to care for the communities around us.



Sammy was just one of the horses clients had the opportunity to bond with at Heartwood.

## Summer Fun with our Clients

Our client programs are important opportunities to build community and break down stigma and isolation for people living with HIV and Hepatitis C. Through our range of client programs, we continue to positively engage clients and create memorable experiences.

This summer, Client Services hosted several events including our annual Friends and Family Picnic at Gibbons park and a Beach Day at Port Stanley.

RHAC also hosted its first equine therapy activity for clients at Heartwood Equine Connections. Over the course of two days, facilitators introduced clients to two horses, Sammy and Sophie. In a group setting, the participants explored their journeys living with HIV, making unique connections with the horses, the facilitators, and one other.



## PEP in Your Pocket

After a successful first year, RHAC's PrEP Clinic has launched its PEP-In-your-Pocket (PIP) program to improve access to post-exposure prophylaxis, or PEP.

In June, RHAC celebrated the 1 year anniversary of our PrEP Clinic. PrEP, or pre-exposure prophylaxis, is a daily pill that can prevent HIV. The PrEP Clinic has served more than 40 clients through its partnership with Specialty Rx Solutions and Nurse Practitioner Mia Biondi. "Not only have we been able to get clients stably on PrEP through the PrEP Clinic," says Director of Education, Meredith Fraser. "We have also been able to provide a full spectrum of care that includes treatment for STIs and other support services."

Now, RHAC's PrEP Clinic has launched the PEP-In-your-Pocket (PIP) service. PEP, or post-exposure prophylaxis, is a way to prevent HIV transmission by taking HIV medications within 72 hours after a potential exposure to HIV.

**Interested in PrEP/PEP?** Contact Kody at [kmuncaster@hivaidsconnection.ca](mailto:kmuncaster@hivaidsconnection.ca) or call 519.434.1601 ext. 250. To learn more about PEP and/or PrEP, visit [hivaidsconnection.ca/prep](http://hivaidsconnection.ca/prep).

Please be aware that the PrEP Clinic does not currently provide emergency PEP, it only provides PIP provided in advance of potential HIV exposure.

## World Hepatitis Day

On July 28th, RHAC recognized World Hepatitis Day to help raise global awareness of viral hepatitis and encourage prevention, diagnosis and treatment.

RHAC teamed up with London Intercommunity Health Center (LIHC) to host events throughout the month of July to increase awareness of hepatitis testing and treatment options.



We handed out nearly 100 goodie bags to community members and engaged over 200 people through our World Hepatitis Day events.

Thank you to our generous sponsors, Gilead and Liver Care Canada, for their support in making this outreach possible.

### Did you know?

- Up to 246,000 Canadians may be living with chronic HCV
- An estimated 44% are unaware of their infection

Source:  
Public Health Agency of Canada, 2011

# Save the Dates

Visit our events calendar: [hivaidconnection.ca/events](http://hivaidconnection.ca/events)

## SEPTEMBER 5

### Annual General Meeting

Civic Gardens Complex  
625 Springbank Dr., London  
5:30—8:00 PM

## SEPTEMBER 12

### Volunteer Orientation

RHAC Boardroom  
186 King St., London  
6:30 PM—8:30 PM

## SEPTEMBER 18

### HIV & Aging Awareness Day



# RED SCARF

Know HIV. No stigma.

Coming soon. Visit [redscarf.ca](http://redscarf.ca)

# Thank You

RHAC would like to thank the following grantors and donors for their support:

**Gilead Sciences, Inc.**

**Heartwood Equine Connections**

**Liver Care Canada**

**Shoppers Drug Mart – Richmond and Carling**

**Johansen-Larsen Foundation**

**TD Bank Group**

**United Way - Greater Toronto**

**Middlesex-London Health Unit**

# Connect with Us

## Regional HIV/AIDS Connection

#30-186 King Street  
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519.434.1601

## John Gordon Home

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London, ON  
N5Y 2Z9  
519.433.3951

Phone: 1.866.920.1601

Email: [info@hivaidconnection.ca](mailto:info@hivaidconnection.ca)

Website: [hivaidconnection.ca](http://hivaidconnection.ca)

Social media: [@hivaidconnect](https://twitter.com/hivaidconnect)

**For staff listing:** [hivaidconnection.ca/contact/staff-directory](http://hivaidconnection.ca/contact/staff-directory)



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