



ANNUAL REPORT

2016.17



Regional
HIV/AIDS
Connection

Community Inspired. Courage Driven.

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

PICTURED ON COVER:
A relative of the Bray family wearing a red
ribbon in loving memory of Daryl Bray.

**Regional HIV/AIDS Connection (RHAC)
is community-inspired and dedicated to
positively impacting the lives of individuals
and diverse communities living with, at-risk
for, or affected by HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C.**

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Leading the Way



Dear Valued RHAC Supporter,

Regional HIV/AIDS Connection (RHAC) remains committed to ensuring a dynamic response to HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C.

As a leader in harm reduction, RHAC hosted a Phase One feasibility study to determine the need and support for supervised injection services (SIS) in our community. The research illustrated compelling evidence of need, alongside strong evidence indicating willingness of individuals to access SIS. Our Board of Directors followed the release of research and issued a position

statement endorsing the need for SIS in London. This need is underscored by the reality that in June 2016, the **Middlesex London Health Unit (MLHU)** declared an HIV outbreak (and identified other health issues) among people who inject drugs (PWID). Throughout these emerging issues, the Counterpoint Harm Reduction Team effectively responded to increased demands for information, research participation, and direct service delivery. Throughout the years Counterpoint has been recognized as a best

practice across the province, and we are confident that increased community harm reduction services will change the trajectory of the HIV outbreak.

RHAC leadership has worked diligently to respond to the evolving federal funding landscape. In these efforts we secured federal funding for five years, from 2017 to 2022. This success will strengthen our mission response as we increase education and outreach work with at-risk LGBT youth, men who have sex with men (MSM), and PWID. Further, this funding will facilitate the opportunity to provide HIV/AIDS and STBBI (sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections) testing awareness to migrant workers across the six counties we serve.

This year, we supported the provincial launch of the *It Takes Courage* campaign designed to bring African, Caribbean and Black faith leaders into the HIV discussion. RHAC also participated in the launch of the progressive *The Sex You Want* campaign. This campaign, specific to gay/bi/trans/MSM, is designed to increase access to sexual health information in a fun, sex-positive way.

John Gordon Home and its dedicated team successfully supported many individuals with complex care needs. These individuals frequently express appreciation for the quality of care received from that staff at 'the Home with a Heart.' RHAC also supported the Community Collective Impact process

associated with the provincial initiative related to Women and HIV/AIDS.

The ever-growing *Red Scarf Project* continues to inspire community engagement with RHAC and increase HIV awareness in a scope we never imagined. Given the brand originated with RHAC, but is utilized across Ontario, we felt great pride to see the Honourable Prime Minister Justin Trudeau wearing a red scarf on World AIDS Day.

It is important to acknowledge that from July 2016 to January 2017 Bruce Rankin stepped into the role of Acting Executive Director while Brian was seconded to support the transitional leadership needs of **London CAREs**. Thank you to Bruce for brilliantly stepping into this role.

The mission of RHAC cannot effectively be served without dedicated staff, committed board members and engaged volunteers. This past year reflected the best effort in each of these domains. Finally, people living with, at risk for, or affected by HIV/AIDS/HCV are the sole reason for our mission. Thank you for trusting us with your care and support.

Nancy Griffiths



BOARD PRESIDENT

Brian Lester



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

John Gordon Home



12

new residents



21

residents in total



722

volunteer
hours logged

2017 marks the John Gordon Home's 25th anniversary, making this a year of reflection. For over two decades, JGH has worked with the community to provide care and support as a response to the evolving challenges of HIV/AIDS/HCV. In celebrating 25 years, we not only look back on our historic achievements. We also look to the future, and towards a continued commitment: to strengthen the care and treatment delivered to our residents.

April of 2017 will also mark our second anniversary of the amalgamation with RHAC. After two short years, the level of service JGH is able to offer its residents has only increased. The integration of RHAC's Case Management system is helping to ensure those who come to us for transitional care receive coordinated supports from a variety of community partners.

Since opening its doors 25 years ago, 'the Home with a Heart' has continued improving itself as the place where people can enjoy an enhanced quality of life. We are pleased to report that more residents are achieving an undetectable viral load as a result of increased adherence to HIV treatment. In response to new HCV treatments, many residents also experience better results under shorter treatment times. These advances in care were only a dream 25 years ago.

JGH has partnered with **Fanshawe College** and **Western University** to provide placements for Nursing, Occupational Therapy, and PSW students. Their time and talent has played an important role in growing and diversifying the supports we are able to provide. Finally, in an effort to enhance the safety of the home itself, we also installed an interior sprinkler system with help from the **Ministry of Health and Long Term Care**.

At the heart of all our success is the support of partners and volunteers, the commitment of our board and staff, and the involvement of our residents. Since transitioning from JGH, several former residents return on a weekly basis as volunteers to assist with grocery

shopping and nutrition services. We are very fortunate to have help from outstanding volunteers, like Ontario Service Volunteer Award recipients Katrina and Zoltan.

In 2016, *A Heartfelt Evening* raised over \$6,000 in support of John Gordon Home. The 5th annual dinner and silent auction was hosted at **Winks Eatery**, and proved to be a great success thanks to our dear friends and supporters.

At JGH, we are humbled by the courage and support of our community. Thank you for 25 years.

"For once I met a team that understood me. I was lost and I wanted to get my life together and your programs/services and staff have done that for me. You guys saved my life. Thanks so much for what you did for me."

FORMER RESIDENT

HIV Support Services

Honour

We light this candle to HONOUR the lives of those we know who are living with HIV/AIDS and to those who continue to contribute to the work of HIV/AIDS

opening doors **66**

PHA clients at Opening Doors 2017



24

PHA co-facilitated social events



95

guests at annual holiday dinner

Remembrance

We light this candle to REMEMBER the lives of thousands of people who have died from HIV/AIDS. Many lives have been lost since the epidemic began to spread in our community.

Cure

This year we introduce a 4th candle which we will light each year at our AGM. It is offered as a symbol of hope and determination that on the horizon millions around the world, living with HIV/AIDS will be blessed with a CURE for the virus that has taken millions of lives.

This was an important and progressive year for HIV Support Services. We continued to increase the level of service provided to clients, and also the level of PHA leadership involved in shaping our services. In line with our new strategic aims, we also focused on nurturing collaborative partnerships to reflect the changing needs of our clients.

This year RHAC joined the **AIDS Committee of Windsor (ACW)** as co-chair of the annual *South Western Opening Doors Conference; New Frontiers: Health, Wealth & Self-Support*. The conference brought over 66 HIV positive clients and 42 service providers together to explore the latest developments in the sector.

As part of expanding our case management system to John Gordon Home, our HIV services team underwent extensive training in the **City of London's Housing First Model**. This model is designed to bring service providers together to better meet the needs of shared clients. London CARES continues to be a strong partner in helping us to connect clients in-need to our transitional residential services.

Another vital community collaboration was made in 2016 with **MyCare**, an Integrated Community HIV Treatment team made up of specialized outreach workers and primary health care providers from **London InterCommunity Health Centre (LIHC)** and **St. Joseph's Infectious Diseases Care Program**. In partnership, we continue to look at ways to engage the most vulnerable members of our community living with HIV (particularly the PWID population who continue to face ever increasing health challenges) and connect them to care.

In terms of empowering our clients, this year we had four clients participate in the Positive Leadership training program offered by the **Ontario AIDS Network (OAN)**. We also launched our first *Turning to One Another (TTOA)* working group. This PHA-centered

initiative provides ongoing opportunities for leadership training and experience in the framework of our agency's services. We saw this training successfully translated into action throughout the year with the ongoing delivery of our monthly *Country Cupboard* program, and the planning and execution of our annual GIPA/MIPA ceremony. This was also the first full year of having PHAs co-facilitate both The PHA Café and the women's social groups. The department was also able to offer a two-day retreat in Bayfield for women living with HIV. With *Healthy Harvest*, we introduced a new and exciting food program to answer the identified need for training, tools and resources on the road to healthier living through nutrition.

Maintaining our commitment to having PHA voices heard in the shaping of our services, we hosted four focus groups to support the development of agency policy and procedures specific to PHA issues and emerging needs. We also continued to support community based research initiatives by actively keeping clients informed about opportunities to participate in projects on topics ranging from vulnerability and resilience factors to future fertility desires and goals.

"I am taking hope with me. I know many others that need the information we have (received)."

PHA, OPENING DOORS (2017)



Counterpoint Harm Reduction Services



12

lives
reported saved
with Naloxone



2.9
MILLION

needles
distributed



18,777

client visits



790+

new clients

It has been a year of dynamic engagement and growth within Counterpoint Harm Reduction Services. We added three new staff, increasing the expertise of supports in the Needle Syringe Program (NSP). Most significant is the formal inclusion of two new employees with lived experience. We have formally consulted our clientele through surveys in preparation to expand service offerings, such as extended hours, supervised injection services, peer program evaluation, and the opening of satellite sites. Our clients have contributed to research through questionnaires, as well as bringing in used paraphernalia so that the Hospital/University can test the chemicals and contaminants found in substances and equipment to try to understand the increase in endocarditis among people who inject drugs. The Hepatitis C Team has also increased their peer engagement strategies which include outreach activities, as well as working in the clinics waiting rooms at LIHC.

Emerging partnerships developed over the past year include planning with **Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre (SOAHAC)**, which will result in a pilot needle syringe program opening at their facility in the near future. Counterpoint presented to the **Chippewa Chief and Health Council** on Harm Reduction Services and the Hepatitis C team presented on HCV at the **Oneida Health Centre**. We also continue to work collaboratively with SOAHAC to assist with the implementation of Harm Reduction Services in their Health Centre. Meanwhile, **Mission Services** is working towards offering harm reduction equipment through their Community Mental Health Program.

Due to increasing demand for Naloxone, our training increased significantly. London has reported a significant and simultaneous rise in HIV, HCV, IGAS, endocarditis, and MRSA infections, with Counterpoint staff regularly arranging client visits to hospital or LIHC. Our staff are spending more time with each client

interaction to discuss the risk and prevention of these conditions. We also worked with MLHU to create a number of educational resources about these issues.

In May of 2016, Harm Reduction Case Management was introduced with the appointment of Blair Henry as Harm Reduction Case Manager. Through this dedicated role we are now serving a growing number of individuals who identify interest in making changes to their substance use and practices, or abstaining altogether.

Counterpoint looks forward to continuing its comprehensive response as one of the busiest Needle Syringe Programs in Ontario. Our team is passionate about increasing access to medical assistance available through the NSP in partnership with other organizations, supporting the process for introduction of SIS, and ensuring more NSP satellite sites are available. We are proud to be here for our clients, and working hard to enhance their service experience.

"You've saved my life."

NSP CLIENT

Education



27,000 condoms provided



3,000+ packs of lube distributed



534

theseyouwant.ca website visits from London



12

It Takes Courage intro events/meetings

Education had an exciting year. We implemented many successful programs aimed at raising awareness, while collaborating with other organizations and groups such as the **Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre (EMDC)**, **SafeSpace**, and **My Sisters' Place**. The Education team also began delivering the **Gay Men's Sexual Health Alliance's (GMSHA)** *The Sex You Want* campaign and the **African Caribbean Council on HIV/AIDS in Ontario's (ACCHO)** *It Takes Courage* strategy. Last summer, the Education team coordinated an agency presence at local festivals, including Pride and Sunfest. We also worked collaboratively with community partners to deliver HIV education and testing opportunities at local events, such as the Pow Wow at the London Museum of Archaeology, through our *Are You Doin' It?* HIV testing campaign. Furthermore, RHAC served as a pilot site for the *Gay Poz Sex (GPS)* research project led by Dr. Trevor Hart at Ryerson, completing focus groups to inform the project's next steps.

In response to the community challenges that emerged this year, we worked to ensure that the diverse communities who we have the privilege to work with are aware of pre- and post-exposure HIV prophylaxis (PEP and PrEP). Additionally, we continued to engage community members; support access to accurate and up-to-date resources; and provide opportunities for leadership and feedback. Stigma and discrimination related to HIV, HCV, and substance use continue to present significant challenges in our community. Consequently, we strive to eliminate these barriers through all of our programming, including the delivery of provincial campaigns and strategies.

The Education department celebrated many milestones. We became involved in women-focused health and wellness outreach with the EMDC through our Hepatitis C team and Women and HIV/AIDS Community Development Coordinator, with support from other service providers. We also engaged three local faith community leaders to attend ACCHO's *It Takes Courage* training in Toronto through the Multicultural HIV Prevention Coordinator portfolio. Within the Gay Men's HIV Prevention

portfolio, we successfully expanded community outreach online with the use of *Grindr* and *Tinder*. Finally, we supported capacity building amongst service providers that support and serve men who have sex with men through the delivery of a GBMSM & Substance Use forum.

Education also completed foundational work on the Audio Speakers' Bureau project—the goal of which is to support the engagement of people with lived experience. We hope to strengthen connections with this population, and to move the project towards its second phase by developing audio clips on a variety of themes to support engagement, discussion and learning in the context of education and prevention.

With funding secured from the **Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC)**, Education is set to support new roles in our department. These roles present an exciting opportunity to advance our education and prevention work and include: a Rural & Ethno-cultural Sexual Health Outreach Coordinator; a GBMSM & Youth Sexual Health Educator; and a Communications Coordinator. The aim is that these roles will complement and expand upon our capacity for service delivery, while broadening our reach with particular attention to youth, ethno-cultural, and GBMSM communities.

"[I] gained a lot of information about the LGBTQ2+ community, and I feel that I would be comfortable when working with youth that disclose to me about their identity, because of what I learned today."

AUDIENCE MEMBER
EDUCATIONAL PRESENTATION (2017)

Community Relations



853

volunteer hours
from PHAs



1,730

red scarves made



8,720

Red Scarf
volunteer hours



46

Service Learning
Volunteers

Over the last year, the Community Relations team has focused on growing our community engagement in new and exciting directions. We continue to reach wider audiences than ever before, by continually innovating the ways we start conversations about the work that we do.

A *Taste for Life* and the *Red Scarf* benefit concert were hallmarks in a powerful communications strategy. This year we were able to increase our social media presence by exploring new platforms for the agency, from *LinkedIn* to *Instagram*. We also introduced a Communications Assistant as part of our commitment to developing a broader and increasingly effective branding and communications strategy.

With *A Taste for Life (ATFL)*, we were able to deploy our largest promotional plan yet, garnering a huge popular response on social media. *ATFL 2016* raised over \$52,000 thanks to **TD**, the 29 participating restaurants, and all of the diners who came out in support.

We are especially proud of the evolution of our annual HIV/AIDS awareness campaign, *Red Scarf*. In November, RHAC hosted its first ever *Red Scarf* benefit concert featuring JUNO Award Winner **Jully Black**. The event drew more than 500 supporters to a memorable night of music and celebration, setting a positive new direction for the kick-off of World AIDS Day events. We also saw a record level of 1,730 scarves donated to the project. Altogether, the *Red Scarf* campaign continued to deliver greater awareness for HIV/AIDS in our community, and also helped to raise over \$20,000 in essential funds.

Without fundraised dollars, many of our free client programs could not exist. Looking back on the past year, we wish to thank the many supporters who helped to make our work possible. We were incredibly fortunate to be the recipient of grants from **Libro Credit Union, ViiV Healthcare, and Sisters of Saint Joseph**. Our gratitude is extended to **The Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry,**

for their continued support of our mission through their annual fundraising production, *Tachycardia*. We also continue to benefit from the ongoing generosity of our many valued community friends, such as **the Bray family**.

Alongside our sponsors and community partners, it is the dedication and service of phenomenal volunteers that drives our success. In 2016, the **Ontario Volunteer Service Awards** recognized Zoltan Richter-Bisson, Katrina Brock, Willis Henry, Laura Davis, Phyllis Adams, George Aimey, Danielle Moynihan, Shannon Schots, and Tendayi Gwaradzimba. Our annual Volunteer Appreciation Awards for Voice, Knowledge, and Hope were awarded to Samantha Radley, Ashley Warnock, and Samantha Scott (respectively). Building on a long-standing partnership with Dr. Lisa Jakubowski, our volunteer program introduced transformational service-learning experiences to a record number of 46 students from local post-secondary institutions.

Moving forward, our aim is to continue building a communications strategy and a brand consistency that best delivers measurable change. As always, it is our ultimate goal to positively impact the lives of people living with, affected by, and at greatest risk for HIV/HCV by informing the attitudes and culture surrounding the work that we do. We thank all of our partners and supporters for helping us to make that impact.

“The lessons I have learned from the staff at [RHAC] are ones that a textbook could never teach me.”

VICTORIA DEVET
BRESCIA COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM STUDENT





Thank you

Regional HIV/AIDS Connection gratefully acknowledges the generous support of individuals in our community who contributed to our work through private donations and contributions.

Regional HIV/AIDS Connection thanks our principal funders and corporate sponsors for their support and commitment throughout the past year:

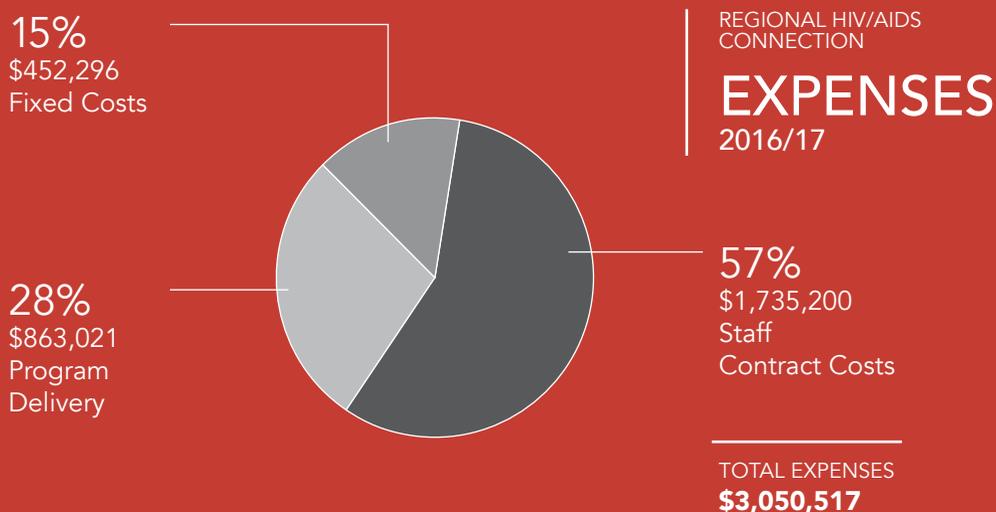
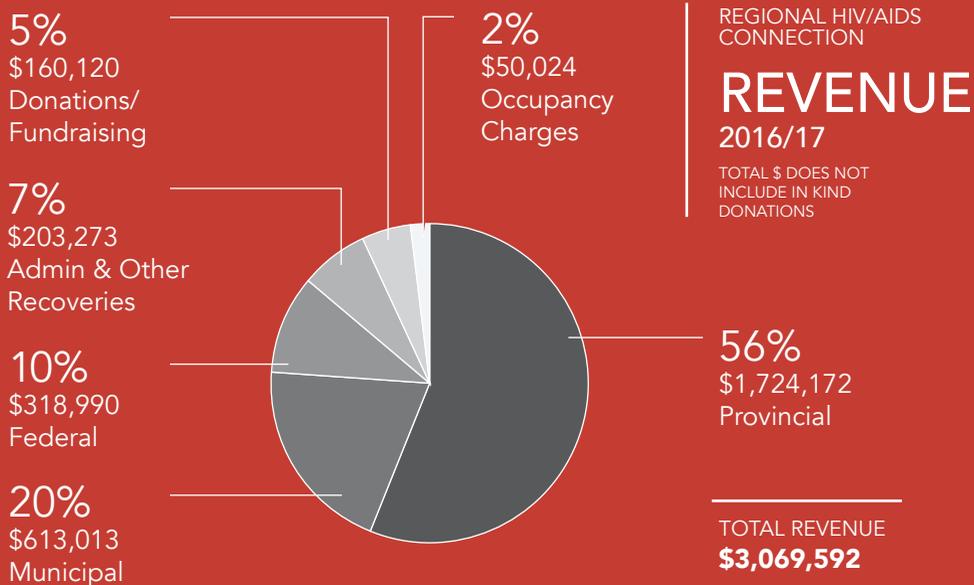
Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
Public Health Agency of Canada
South West Local Health Integration Network (LHIN)
The City of London

—
TD

Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry

Financials

FY 2016/17: April 1, 2016–March 31st, 2017



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Pictured: Canadian artist Jully Black hugs an audience member at the 2016 Red Scarf benefit concert.



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