



# THE CONNECTION

The Newsletter of Regional HIV/AIDS Connection

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

Winter 2016/17

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## WELCOME TO 2017!



It is an exciting time, both at Regional HIV/AIDS Connection and in the HIV/AIDS sector. In this issue we will reflect on the past year, and share with you some exciting new developments for the year ahead - locally, nationally and beyond. For example, see CATIE's Blog – "Undetectable is Uninfectious" on page 7!

In the fall we hosted our first major fundraiser-concert! We could not have been more proud when Canadian Juno Award Winner, Jully Black took to the stage and shared her love with over 500 people. Jully is an ardent supporter of HIV/AIDS. In addition to her amazing music, she shared messages of remembrance, celebration and advocacy. Through song and dance, both on stage and in the audience, Jully motivated all concert goers to buy red scarves.

The sea of scarves was the culmination of Regional HIV/AIDS best Red Scarf Project ever! From its humble beginnings, the Red Scarf Project has grown to become a major branding and awareness builder for HIV/

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Community Inspired. Courage Driven.



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AIDS. Grown from an idea at RHAC, the Red Scarf Project reached a national level when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau donned a red scarf on World AIDS Day, December 1st.

Congratulations and thank you to everyone who contributed to the fall fundraisers and especially to our community knitters who this year knit over 1700 scarves. RHAC continues to grow from its roots in advocacy and volunteerism. Thank you!

## HIV/AIDS - A CHANGING LANDSCAPE



*In January we welcomed back Executive Director, Brian Lester, who was on leave while leading our sister agency, London Cares through a transition period. During his absence, we were fortunate to have Bruce Rankin, Senior Director, John Gordon Home, take the helm at RHAC as Acting, Executive Director. The following were Bruce's remarks during AIDS Awareness Week:*

It's hard to believe we are now into our fourth decade of living with HIV, and the landscape has changed considerably over time.

I started volunteering with my local AIDS service Organization 27 years ago, and the landscape at that time was bleak. Otherwise healthy young men were being diagnosed with a terminal disease with little hope. I had a number of peers who tested positive for HIV and were told to get their affairs in order and prepare for the worst. It was during this time that AIDS Service organizations sprang up all over the country, including here in Stratford and in London, to try and meet the needs of people who were impacted by this new epidemic.

The landscape shifted tremendously in the late 90's with the arrival of antiretroviral medication. Many people who had been told to prepare for the worst, actually got well.

Whereas HIV was once characterized as a catastrophic illness afflicting gay men, it is now considered to be a chronic, treatable condition disproportionately affecting a range of disadvantaged communities vulnerable to HIV:

- *gay, bisexual,*
- *two-spirit, queer, and other men who have sex with men,*
- *people who inject drugs,*
- *youth at risk,*
- *sex workers,*
- *Aboriginal peoples,*
- *women,*
- *people in prison,*
- *transgender people*
- *and people from African, Caribbean and Black communities.*

AIDS Service organizations like Regional HIV/AIDS Connection and The John Gordon Home have evolved and adapted their services as this landscape continues to change.

On December 1st, people around the globe gather at events like this, to remember, honour, and celebrate the lives of people we have lost to HIV. Its always a challenging day for me, having lost a number of friends and acquaintances who died of AIDS related illnesses. Sometimes it feels like it all happened so long ago, but on days like this, I feel the ways that it shaped my life and my perspective.

But its 2016 and there is much to be hopeful for:

This past summer at the 2016 AIDS Summit in Durban South Africa, researches with the Partner study introduced evidence that a person with HIV who is taking Anti-retroviral Therapy and has achieved an undetectable viral load, cannot transmit the virus at all. Hence the line 'Undetectable is Uninfectious' is gaining traction in our sector. This development should have a tremendous impact on reducing transmission, and improving the quality of lives of people living with HIV. Imagine how that feels for a person living with HIV: achieving an undetectable viral load!

Other things to be hopeful about:

- The number of new HIV diagnoses has been declining over the past decade
- In Ontario, we have virtually eliminated mother-to-child HIV transmission, with approximately 97% of pregnant women receiving an HIV test.
- From 1987 to 2011, Community based HIV prevention programs prevented approximately 17,000 infections, saving the health care system 6.5 billion dollars
- Approximately 80% of people diagnosed with HIV in Ontario are linked to treatment within 3 months of diagnosis.

Still there is no cure and there is no vaccination, and sadly for many people in disadvantaged communities, there are many barriers to getting and staying on treatment. 2-3 people in Ontario are infected with HIV every day, and there are over 30,000 Ontarians living with HIV

This past summer, the Middlesex London Health Unit declared an outbreak of HIV among people who inject drugs. It's complicated: we have the means to prevent an outbreak, but people struggling with addiction and mental health issues face many obstacles in accessing prevention and treatment. We need to continue to evolve, problem solve and find ways to reach every vulnerable person in our community.

I believe the biggest obstacle we face in the fight against HIV is still HIV stigma. A recent example: the London Free Press ran a story 3 weeks ago with the headline: HIV Infected Spitter draws suspended sentence. We've known for decades that HIV cannot be transmitted in saliva, and yet the police who laid the charge, the prosecuting crown attorney and judge and the journalist reporting on the story all implied this, and reinforced HIV stigma for London Free Press Readers across our region. Fear of HIV, the vilification of people with HIV

and shameless fear-mongering by the media continue in 2016. And while like a nice, polite Canadian, I said “I believe” the biggest obstacle we face is stigma, the fact is I know it to be true and I have evidence to prove it: A study released just this week called Callous, Cold and Deliberately Duplicitous explores Canadian mainstream newspapers’ coverage of the criminalization of HIV. Our work is far from over.

So on World AIDS Day 2016, we remember our loved ones who are no longer with us, and we re-commit ourselves that we will continue the fight; to confront ignorance and stigma when we encounter it, to celebrate our successes and hope for a better future for all people living with HIV.

**Bruce Rankin**

Acting, Executive Director, 2016

## LIBRO GRANT

Thank you Libro Credit Union for your generous gift of \$7,200 to support financial literacy, life skills development and career development programming for LGBTQ2+ youth through Regional HIV/AIDS Connection’s Open Closet Program! We are so grateful that you visited our location, listened to our stories, and showed a keen interest in our day to day operations.

The funds are specifically being used to advanced leadership, career skill development, and financial literacy programing within the Open Closet Program. A combination of formal and informal activities such as games, reflective exercises, role-playing, group discussions, workshops, practical sessions and guided (facilitated) sessions are used to engage youth with the aim of strengthening their capacities to become leaders in their communities, increasing their access and opportunity to engage in meaningful employment opportunities and managing their current and future financial profiles in a way that benefits their future goals and aspirations.

In addition, the Libro funds are used to reduce transportation barriers for youth living in rural areas of RHAC’s catchment area thereby increasing access the Open Closet program by providing the necessary resources to support their participation.

The funds also support the youth to work with Open Closet facilitators to participate in developing the proposed programs and activities themselves. This youth-focused collaborative model provides an opportunity to meet the direct needs of the youth while involving them in key decisions that not only enhance the program, but also allow youth to build their capacities and engage in skill development accordingly.



## REGIONAL UPDATE

On **March 9th & 10th 2017**, the annual Opening Doors Conference, hosted by *Regional HIV/AIDS Connection* and the *AIDS Committee of Windsor*, present: **New Frontiers: Health, Wealth & Self-Support**. We will be delivering an empowering program focusing on positive changes, new developments, and research within the HIV/AIDS community and as a society on the whole. This annual conference helps to enhance the quality of counselling services in mental, emotional & physical health and to better meet the needs of our local community.

Please SIGN-UP for this opportunity via:

1. Eventbrite Link : [openingdoors2017.eventbrite.ca](http://openingdoors2017.eventbrite.ca)
2. The attached Registration Form (faxed to RHAC 519.434.1843 Attn: Opening Doors or scanned and emailed to Carlen Costa at [ccosta@hivaidsconnection.ca](mailto:ccosta@hivaidsconnection.ca), Kelly Wright [kwright@hivaidsconnection.ca](mailto:kwright@hivaidsconnection.ca) or Jennifer Sandu [jsandu@aidswindsor.org](mailto:jsandu@aidswindsor.org) )

This year's conference boasts a powerful program with our keynote address being delivered by Dr. Sharon Walmsley of The University of Toronto.

*Please consider joining us in March, we look forward to seeing you!*

## MARK THE DATES



A Taste for Life 2017  
At multiple restaurants  
Our major Spring  
Fundraiser!



Heartfelt Evening  
at Winks  
In support of JGH.

*See our website for details*



## BE IN THE KNOW

If you have on-line access, be sure to check these out:

[http://blog.catie.ca/2017/01/13/undetecteduntransmittable-catie-signs-on/?utm\\_source=fb&utm\\_campaign=130117&utm\\_medium=socmed&utm\\_content=en](http://blog.catie.ca/2017/01/13/undetecteduntransmittable-catie-signs-on/?utm_source=fb&utm_campaign=130117&utm_medium=socmed&utm_content=en)

<https://nowtoronto.com/news/being-hiv/>

Also, search for the following report!

**"Callous, Cold and Deliberately Duplicitious"**: Racialization, Immigration and the Representation of HIV Criminalization in Canadian Mainstream Newspapers, which explores mainstream Canadian newspaper coverage of HIV non-disclosure criminal cases in Canada, paying particular attention to how defendants' race and immigration status figure into the newspaper representations of such cases.

See our website for results of the recent Ontario Supervised Injection Services Study - [www.hivaidsconnection.ca](http://www.hivaidsconnection.ca)





# Regional HIV/AIDS Connection

Community Inspired. Courage Driven.



Greetings from the team at Regional HIV/AIDS Connection, shown here at their annual staff event last summer!

## GRATEFUL TO GLORIA



Regional HIV/AIDS Connection congratulates and thanks Gloria Aykroyd on the occasion of her retirement from St. Joseph's Health Care. Gloria has been a tireless advocate for people living with HIV/AIDS and has worked with us for over twenty years. We are very grateful for all that you have done, for so many people locally and beyond.

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*Watch for our Readership Survey this spring!*

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