

THE CONNECTION

THE NEWSLETTER OF REGIONAL HIV/AIDS CONNECTION

Celebrating 35 Years of Community and Connection

2020 marks the 35th Anniversary of Regional HIV/AIDS Connection (RHAC)—formerly the AIDS Committee of London. Milestones certainly inspire moments of thoughtful reflection and we will spend this milestone year reflecting on our “Community Inspired” organization. It is our hope that you will join us in remembering, honouring and celebrating the impact RHAC has made over three and a half decades...

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Brian Lester,
Executive Director

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The Ontario Trillium Foundation: Overcoming Stigma

RHAC is the proud recipient of a one-year seed grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation aimed at building inclusive and engaged communities by reducing the social isolation and continued stigma affecting people living with HIV.

There is an old saying: “Nothing changes if nothing changes”, said Director of Community Relations Martin McIntosh. “That’s why we are

launching this unique initiative in our local community aimed at empowering people living with HIV to take a front seat in tackling stigma through a series of vital conversations and storytelling initiatives over the next six months.”

If you are living with HIV and would like to be part of the conversation, please contact our Peer Support Worker Rob Newman at rnewman@hivaidsconnection.ca

ISSUE 3

35
YEARS



Regional
HIV/AIDS
Connection

WINTER 2020

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

Celebrating 35 Years | Continued...

Throughout my tenure, I have had the privilege of celebrating our legacy at the 25th and 30th milestones and I feel fortunate to be around to mark our 35th. When I look back on my entry point (2006), the agency had just completed a community planning process which challenged RHAC to strengthen our impact across the 6 counties we serve. It was also at this time that the Counterpoint Needle Syringe Program continued to respond to growing demand for harm reduction services, clearly foreshadowing the growing prevalence of addiction in our community.

It was in 2010 that RHAC went through our rebranding process where, at our 25th celebration event, we launched our new name and logo. It was in our 30th year, in 2015, that we legally amalgamated with the John Gordon Home (JGH). Here, on our 35th anniversary, with key partners like Middlesex London Health Unit and London Intercommunity Health Centre, we are operating London's Carepoint program, which functions as an overdose prevention

response and an HIV/HCV prevention strategy.

All of these remarkable milestones would not be possible were it not for the many courageous people that came before us. Folks like Betty Anne Thomas, Dr. Ian Mackie, Clarence Crossman, John Gordon, Sam Conti, David Brownstone, Johnathan Bancroft-Snell and many others were part of London's early response to the emerging AIDS Crisis. They were fearless and un-thwarted in creating a response to HIV/AIDS that ensured dignity, compassion, and the provision of evidence-based information—all while addressing HIV/AIDS stigma at every turn.

Thank you so much for your continued support of our mission and the people we serve. Please watch for future updates on how you can participate in celebrating the 35th anniversary of RHAC!



Brian Lester, Executive Director



A 'Hearty' New Cookbook

Mary Mann-McCavitt has supported the nutritional needs of John Gordon Home residents for more than a decade and, this year, she's turning her experience into a special cookbook.

"My hope is that this little book will provide some helpful information, tips and ideas to make it easier for the individuals we support to eat regular, healthy, energy sustaining meals," says Mary.

The recipes focus on using accessible and affordable ingredients in times of growing food insecurity. With the help of volunteers, like Ginny, the cookbook is a labour of love and promises to be a helpful resource from *The Home with A Heart*.

Carepoint: MLHU and RHAC Unveil New CTS Brand

The overdose crisis continues to impact communities across Canada. In 2018, Public Health Ontario documented 1,474 opioid-related deaths in Ontario, with Middlesex-London accounting for 62 overdose-related deaths.

While moving through the process to establish a permanent location for London's Consumption and Treatment Service, RHAC and Middlesex London Health Unit (MLHU) have been working together to identify a name worthy of the program's remarkable impact. Since opening in February of 2018, the site at 186 King has supported more than 30,000 visits, reversed over 209 opioid poisonings, and facilitated hundreds of referrals to a range of services including: addictions treatment and counselling, primary care, HIV/HCV testing and related clinical care, system navigation, detox services, housing and other vital social services.

On January 14th, we were pleased to share with the community that this program now officially operates under the brand name of Carepoint. In a statement, RHAC's Executive Director Brian Lester said:

“By bringing this service to our community’s most marginalized, we are demonstrating that we care about those who continue to struggle with addiction and the point of the program is to provide life-saving services while ensuring other support needs are met – hence Carepoint.”

We are proud to share this milestone with our community as we continue to save lives, prevent new HIV and HCV transmissions and connect marginalized individuals to the care and support they need across our community!

For more information, visit: www.hivaidconnection.ca/carepoint



The new brand identity for Carepoint integrates the internationally recognized colours for overdose awareness and prevention: purple and silver. Using the interlocked initials CP, the logo marks the new identity of Carepoint, while also nodding to the history of London's overdose prevention site by implying an overlap in the letters 'OP' for overdose prevention.

A PROGRAM OF
Regional HIV/AIDS Connection

A PARTNERSHIP WITH
London InterCommunity Health Centre

FOUNDING PARTNER
ML BUREAU DE SANTE DE MIDDLESEX-LONDON HEALTH UNIT

Red Scarf 2019: Raising Awareness, Ending Stigma

Every year, Red Scarf continues to build real awareness around HIV/AIDS and challenge stigma by connecting with our community.

In 2019, community members crafted a record-breaking total of 2,110 scarves that were distributed across our annual Red Scarf events, including: 22 community pop-ups, our benefit concert (featuring JUNO Award winner *bülow*), and our World AIDS Day vigils in London and Stratford. Each scarf carried a “Know HIV. No Stigma” tag, which help to build awareness around World AIDS Day and the positive advancements in HIV treatment and prevention like PrEP and U=U.

New this year, each and every Red Scarf was dedicated in special memory of someone lost to HIV/AIDS. Inspired by the Bray family’s tradition in past years—of dedicating Red Scarves in the memory of their beloved Daryl—we invited community members to submit the names of loved ones they wished to honour through RedScarf.ca. The dedications served as a powerful reminder of the impact the AIDS crisis has had, and continues to have, on local families and community members.

“When preparing for our Stratford AIDS Vigil at the Community of Christ Church,” says Volunteer Coordinator Fran McKeown, “we placed Red Scarves on the pews. I sat at a random pew at the back of the church, and glanced at the scarf in front of me. It was one dedicated in memory of “Richard R.”

In a special message to this year’s Red Scarf volunteers, Fran shared: “Richard was my cousin and my favourite person in the world. He was a bright, beautiful light that was extinguished at the young age of 32. A brilliant, kind, funny man who loved his family above all else. He was also a teacher, role model and member of a broad community in Toronto. He was so much more than an HIV diagnosis or a death from AIDS. I wasn’t surprised to find Richard’s tag in front of me, he is always looking out for me, guiding me and loving me.”



“Oh behalf of RHAC and the families, like mine, who have lost a loved one to HIV/AIDS, I thank you,” says Fran. “Thank you for giving your time, your talent and a little bit of your community to ours. It truly means the world.” We also wish to extend a thank-you to everyone who supported those in our community living with HIV by participating in Red Scarf 2019.

Outside of the Classroom: Making a Positive Impact with London's Local Campus Communities

RHAC is proud to support a growing number of student volunteers and placements every year. In addition to placements within our core programs, we have grown our capacity to provide future leaders with transformative service learning experiences.

242 STUDENTS MADE 20,000+ HARM REDUCTION KITS LAST YEAR.

As part of Orientation Serves 2019, we welcomed 40 first-year Western University students who assembled approximately 2,500 harm reduction kits in less than 3 hours! Other student groups supporting our mission this year included: Western Future Black Physicians, the Arts & Humanities Students' Council, Brescia's School of Leadership & Social Change, as well as King's Social Justice and Peace programs.



**Student volunteers from
Western Future Black Physicians**



**Brescia's Bridging Classroom
and Communities program**



**The AHSC from Western
University**

This spring, Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry will carry on its 65-year-old tradition of giving back to the community when they stage their annual production of *Tachycardia*. On April 17 and 18, the student-run shows will support RHAC's client programs and services.

We are so grateful to the young leaders and student organizations who work tirelessly to support us and the people we serve. Thank you for making us a meaningful part of your education and student experience.



Finding Success with the *Find Your Reason* Campaign

Find Your Reason is a dynamic, community-grounded campaign that calls on guys who are into guys and people doing seasonal agricultural work to identify their personal motivations to know their HIV status and get tested.

The campaign acknowledges that *everyone* has a reason to know their status—whether someone is motivated by individual, family or community wellness; the desire to live a long and full life on effective HIV treatment; or having a great sex life with the help of U=U or prevention strategies like PrEP!

The *Find Your Reason* campaign includes three distinct phases—each with a different focus, as follows: engagement, education, and action.

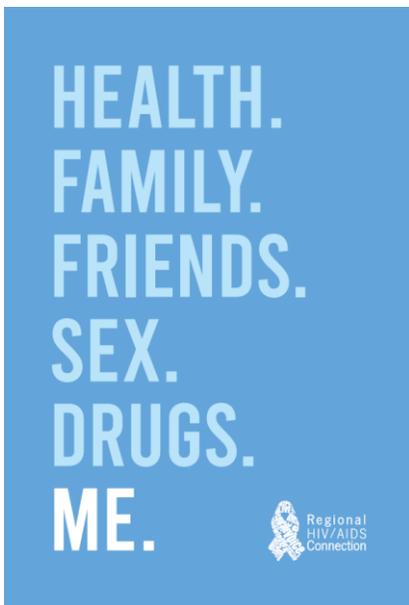
To date, campaign engagement has been extremely positive. Since launching in June 2019, more than 3,000 users have visited TestandPreventHIV.ca. Over that 6-month period, digital media impressions have reached 115,116.

We also caught up with community members, like Darren R., for their feedback. “I like that it was easy to read and in common and conversational language,” said Darren. “It felt totally non-threatening. I really liked the links to various sources of information.”

For the 2019 migrant workers season, Rural & Ethno-cultural Sexual Health Outreach Coordinator Sean Garcia managed to connect with over 150 workers in Huron, Oxford and Elgin counties and engage them with the “Find Your Reason” campaign and health-related resources.

Across our target audiences and, in line with our mission, we are delighted to say that Find Your Reason is finding success in these early stages of the campaign!

Check out Find Your Reason at testandpreventhiv.ca (for guys into guys) and everybodysdoingit.ca (for seasonal workers).



Oxford County seasonal workers engaged with the *Find Your Reason* campaign



Are you a guy who's into guys? We want to hear your thoughts on the Find Your Reason campaign (FindYourReason.ca).

Check out how you can get involved at: HIVAIDSCONNECTION.CA/FINDYOURREASON

#LovePositiveWomen

"You are worthy of love and respect, regardless of status. You are a queen!"

A #LovePositiveWomen submission shared on social media

February 1-14 marks #LovePositiveWomen, when communities commit to acts of love and kindness in support of women living with HIV. We asked our staff and social media followers to share kind and caring messages that we could send to HIV-positive women this Valentine's as a special reminder of how loved and supported they are! We also shared these submissions on our social media.

Black History in Focus

This year, the city of London proclaimed Black History Month, which kicked off with opening ceremonies at Museum London. Councillor Arielle Kayabaga played a significant role in bringing change to a decades long-standing policy prohibiting proclamations. We salute all those who continue to champion on behalf of marginalized populations.

"It's always great to see the African, Caribbean, and Black (ACB) community coming together to learn about our history and the important role it plays in shaping our current realities, both the triumphs and the struggles," said RHAC's Multicultural HIV Prevention Coordinator Mercy Nleya.

With African, Caribbean & Black Canadian HIV/AIDS Awareness Day recognized annually on February 7th, the event was also a great opportunity to promote health and HIV awareness through our "Find Your Reason" campaign.



Left to right: RHAC's Mercy Nleya, Vice Principal of Thames Valley District School Board Liz Akano and MPP Theresa Armstrong at the Black History Month Opening Ceremonies

Save the Dates

Visit our events calendar: hivaidsconnection.ca/events

FEBRUARY

**Black
History
Month**

MARCH 10

**Women and
Girls' HIV/ AIDS
Awareness Day**

MARCH 12-13

**Southwest Opening
Doors Conference**
www.2020openingdoors.eventbrite.ca

APRIL 17-18

Tachycardia
www.tachy.sculichmeds.com

APRIL 18

**Transgender
HIV Testing
Day**



APRIL 22

25% of sales from participating
restaurants will support
Regional HIV/AIDS Connection.

atasteforlife.org

Thank You

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

**Ontario Trillium Foundation
London Lawyers Feed the Hungry
Middlesex-London Health Unit
The Bray Family & Memory Walkers**

**TD Bank Group
Johansen-Larsen Foundation
Sisters of St. Joseph**

Connect with Us

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Phone: **1.866.920.1601**
Email: info@hivaidsconnection.ca
Website: hivaidsconnection.ca
Social media: [@hivaidsconnect](https://twitter.com/hivaidsconnect)

For staff listing: hivaidsconnection.ca/contact/staff-directory



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