



Regional  
HIV/AIDS  
Connection



# **The Courage To Do What Is Right**


**Annual Report** \_\_\_\_\_ **2017.18**

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

**WHAT  
MATTERS  
IS WHAT'S  
INSIDE.**

# CONTENTS

**Welcome to our Annual General Report** for fiscal 2017/18 [April 1, 2017– March 31, 2018]. We are proud to share with you highlights from another colourful year of courage, care, and change in our community.

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*With great respect, we acknowledge the regions we serve as the traditional territories of the Algonquin, Anishinaabe, Attawandaron (Neutral), Haudenosaunee, and Leni-Lunaape Peoples. We are grateful to collaborate with Indigenous communities and Indigenous knowledge as we foster healing, together.*

# THE COURAGE TO

*The courage to do what is right.* Regional HIV/AIDS Connection (RHAC) began 2017 deeply cognizant of our value statement and we finished the year immersed in activities that embody its meaning. At the core of this “courage” is the act of standing up alongside the most marginalized individuals in our community. We continue our work with those who are living with, at risk for, and affected by HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C (HCV). In this work, we support members of our community struggling with homelessness, addiction, mental health and poverty. These social issues, and their intersecting complexities, require fierce dedication to collaboration in order to deliver positive change.

This year, RHAC was proud to collaborate with community partners to lead important changes during the Opioid Crisis. With Middlesex-London Health Unit, we opened Ontario’s first government-sanctioned Temporary Overdose Prevention Site (TOPS). Within a few short weeks, its use increased to an average of 35-40 visits per day. With every visit, this vital service provides opportunities to prevent new infections of HIV and HCV, reverse opioid overdoses, and ultimately save lives. This foundational work sets the stage for current efforts to bring much-needed permanent supervised consumption services to our community.

RHAC also celebrated significant changes in the landscape of HIV prevention. This year our Board of Directors officially endorsed the Undetectable=Untransmittable (U=U) campaign, joining an international coalition of HIV advocates, activists and researchers. The campaign is based on scientific evidence that people living with HIV who have an undetectable

# DO WHAT IS RIGHT.

viral load cannot sexually transmit HIV. This holds the power to reduce the stigma experienced by people living with HIV and prevent new infections. This past year, we also collaborated with partners and community members to broaden our outreach and services related to Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP): a daily pill that can prevent HIV. While RHAC is encouraged by these developments, we recognize an ongoing need to increase awareness and access around these important prevention strategies.

The mission of RHAC cannot effectively be served without dedicated staff, committed Board Members, engaged volunteers, and community allies. Partnerships strengthen our efforts and this year we were privileged to strengthen existing ones and build new relationships. People living with, at-risk for, and affected by HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C are the sole reason for our mission. We continue to honour our commitment to the greater and meaningful involvement of people living with HIV/AIDS each year. To the people we serve, thank you for trusting us with your care and support and for the contributions you make to this agency at every level.

Thank you for joining us in having the courage to do what is right.



David Smith  
BOARD PRESIDENT



Brian Lester  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**“WHERE  
THERE IS A  
HEARTBEAT  
THERE IS  
HOPE.”**

**– Karen L.**

*A former client of our Harm Reduction Services and guest speaker  
at RHAC’s 2017 Annual General Meeting.*

## Our Mission

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

## What We Do

We work with the communities we serve to deliver the best possible care and support, and reduce stigma, for people living with and at-risk for HIV/AIDS and HCV. We contribute to improving health outcomes for marginalized populations with community partners through Education, Harm Reduction, HIV/HCV Support Services, Community Relations, and the John Gordon Home.



## Our Vision Statements

Voice

Knowledge

Hope

Home

# AT-A-GLANCE



**22,390**

**CONDOMS DISTRIBUTED THROUGH  
COMMUNITY OUTREACH.**



**467**

**NALOXONE  
TRAININGS**

**94**

**LIVES REPORTED SAVED  
WITH NALOXONE.**



**498**

**GAY/BI/TRANS/2S/QUEER+ MEN  
ENGAGED IN COMMUNITY  
PROGRAMMING.**



**2,819,730**

**STERILE SYRINGES PROVIDED TO REDUCE  
RISK OF HIV/HCV TRANSMISSION.**





**34**

**LGBT2Q+ YOUTH  
SUPPORTED BY OUR  
OPEN CLOSET PROGRAM.**



**13,242**

**VOLUNTEER HOURS DEVOTED  
TO OUR CAUSE.**



**21**

**PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS (PHAs)  
ENGAGED AS STAFF, VOLUNTEERS, OR  
PEER STAFF.**



**53**

**EDUCATIONAL PRESENTATIONS  
DELIVERED TO PRIORITY POPULATIONS.**

# COURAGE

## It Takes Courage

In September, we celebrated the launch of ACCHO's provincial strategy: *It Takes Courage*. This strategy aims to reduce HIV stigma in African, Caribbean and Black faith communities through the engagement of faith leaders, church elders, and community partners. During the year, we incorporated *It Takes Courage* into our activities at Sunfest, on World AIDS Day, and during Black History Month.



### Saving Lives

Throughout the year, RHAC provided Naloxone kits and training to support people at-risk of opioid overdose. We also integrated our Naloxone program into John Gordon Home as a first-aid response.

**94**

lives reported saved with Naloxone

### The Courage of our Clients

We recognize the courage it takes for our clients to seek support and manage many of the challenges they face on a daily basis. We are grateful to them for trusting us to meet their needs and provide the best service and support.

**18,782**

Harm Reduction client visits

**1,308**

new Harm Reduction clients







# TOPS

## TEMPORARY OVERDOSE PREVENTION SITE

An estimated 4,000 Canadians were lost to opioid-related deaths in 2017. As a crucial response to the rising Opioid Crisis, RHAC and Middlesex-London Health Unit opened Ontario's first government-sanctioned Temporary Overdose Prevention Site (TOPS) on February 12, 2018.

TOPS is a safe and supervised space for people who use drugs. This facility helps to prevent opioid-related deaths and overdoses, while reducing the risks of HIV and HCV transmission. TOPS also provides opportunities to connect people who use drugs with treatment and wrap-around supports, such as addictions treatment, mental health counselling, and housing assistance.

Since opening its doors, no overdose deaths or crime-related incidents were reported at the site.

Thank you to everyone who supported the successful launch of this much-needed health service in our community, including our partners: Addiction Services Thames Valley (ADSTV), London Intercommunity Health Centre (LIHC), London Cares Homeless Response Services (LCHRS), Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre (SOAHAC), and the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA).



# 402

clients supported\*



# 1,182

visits to TOPS\*

# CARE

## Ending Isolation

People living with HIV/AIDS (PHAs) can experience feelings of loneliness and isolation. Many of our clients enjoyed the opportunity to connect through group activities, such as: bowling, hiking, art classes, a summer retreat, and social groups. “I enjoyed coming to group because it gets me out of the house,” says one client. “I like the comradery of the group.”

# 2,904

PHA client service interactions

# 49%

of PHA clients aged 46+

# 3 in 4

PHA clients retained in treatment cascade

**“Your continuous understanding and generosity are appreciated more than you can ever know.”**

– Resident of John Gordon Home

## Feeding the Need in Our Community

Our foodbank and nutrition programs improved client access to food, delivered an info session with a Registered Dietitian, and included healthy-eating and cooking workshops. Our Healthy Harvest program, funded in part by ViiV Healthcare, provided clients with new kitchen tools, safer food-handling skills, and tips to create healthy meals on a budget.

# 9,000+

healthy meals provided to people living with HIV/AIDS/HCV through our nutrition and John Gordon Home programs.

## Providing Care and Support

Our HIV Support Services team continued to provide pre- and post-HIV test counselling, transfers to community partners, and assistance navigating social services. Our Hepatitis C support team collaborated with 10 local service agencies to provide community members with: physician referrals, testing and treatment options, education sessions, and referrals to housing, healthcare, mental health and addiction supports.

# THE HOME WITH A HEART

At John Gordon Home (JGH), residents living with HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C are provided a stable home with access to treatment and healthy-living supports.

Throughout the year, we continued to work with community partners to ensure that residents had the support to reach their wellness goals. Additionally, we took steps to strengthen our transitional care model with the introduction of a Housing First framework. We also continued to provide essential items for residents transitioning out of JGH with our Resident Transition Fund and funds raised at our 6<sup>th</sup> annual dinner and silent auction *A Heartfelt Evening*.

Thank you to our staff, volunteers, and community partners for supporting John Gordon Home. We are especially grateful to former residents who continue to play a vital role at the *Home with a Heart*.



**18**

residents received care from JGH



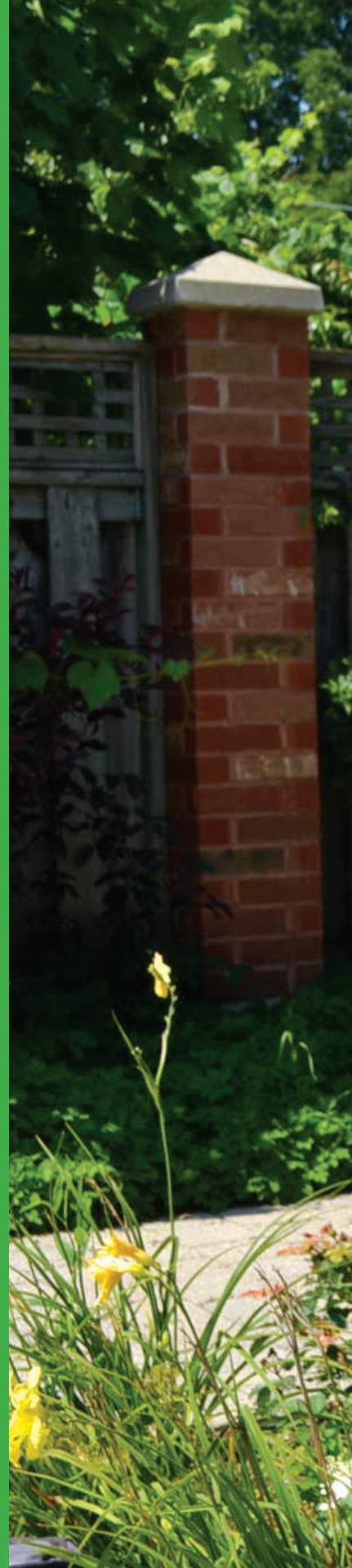
**1,978**

hours volunteered at JGH



**\$8,040**

raised for JGH at *A Heartfelt Evening*







## MEET JERRY.

Jerry is a former resident of John Gordon Home who continues to volunteer his time at *'the Home with a Heart.'* "I liked the people that worked here so much that I started volunteering after I moved out," says Jerry. "Friends are important. I made a lot of friends here."

# COMMUNITY





## World Hepatitis Day

We hosted a special information booth and hand-delivered 200 daisies to Londoners to raise awareness and promote testing across 7 locations for World Hepatitis Day (July 28th).

## Summer Festivals

Thank you to our local community for a fantastic festival season! Our interactive booths at TD Sunfest and Pride London Festival were the perfect spots to connect with members of our community. Thank you to Pride London Festival for recognizing our JGH program with the 2017 Organization Contribution Award!

# 12,000

free condoms provided  
at Sunfest and Pride

## Connecting with Indigenous Communities

This year, RHAC and Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre signed a memorandum of understanding to operate shared services. This important collaboration will enhance our support for Indigenous people with a focus on harm reduction, health promotion, and linkages to culturally-competent care.

## Creating Safer Spaces

Our Open Closet group provided an inclusive social space for 34 LGBT2Q+ youth. The delivery of this program would not have been possible without support from Libro Credit Union, TD Bank Group, and Tachycardia.

# “It feels like I finally have a family”

– Open Closet member

## Support from our Students

Throughout the year, we engaged over 350 students through placements, experiential learning, and summer employment opportunities. In 2017, the students of *Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry* presented their annual production of *Tachycardia*, raising \$22,686 in support of RHAC! We would like to thank these incredible staff and students for their leadership, support, and generosity.



## **RAISING AWARENESS. ENDING STIGMA.**

In November 2017, The Trews took the stage at London Music Hall for our annual Red Scarf benefit concert presented by London's Best Rock FM96. The concert celebrated our Red Scarf campaign with music, community, and a commitment to ending HIV/AIDS stigma.



# RED SCARF

A powerful sense of community is attached to our Red Scarf campaign. Since 2012, volunteers have donated more than 6,700 handmade scarves in support of The Red Scarf Project. Like the red ribbon, each red scarf serves as a symbol of solidarity in support of people living with HIV/AIDS.

Thousands of community members rallied around Red Scarf to build HIV/AIDS awareness and call for an end to HIV stigma. The love and support of our community carried into AIDS Awareness Week and to our World AIDS Day vigils, where individuals from London and Stratford joined us to honour those whom we have lost and remember.

The growing success of our Red Scarf campaign has been driven by our community from the beginning. Thank you to our sponsors and supporters for another wonderful year. We are so grateful to everyone who handcrafted a red scarf, and to those who wore them with pride.

Together, we raised support, awareness, and essential funds for people living with HIV/AIDS.



**1,827**

scarves hand-made by community members for HIV/AIDS awareness



**1,000+**

attendees at the Red Scarf benefit concert



**\$25,000+**

raised in support of our clients

# CHANGE



## Calling for Change

Our Peer Support Worker, Rob Newman, facilitated a roundtable discussion on HIV criminalization with guests from the Canadian Coalition to Reform HIV Criminalization, HALCO, and PASAN. In December, important legal changes limiting the criminalization of HIV non-disclosure were announced on World AIDS Day.

## Breaking Barriers with Women

RHAC has remained committed to empowering the health and wellbeing of women in our community. At our 'Women's Bodies, Women's Lives' symposium, participants explored themes such as PrEP, HIV disclosure, self-care, infant feeding, safer sex, and harm reduction. In addition, we delivered a wellness series to women at Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre.

45

women at our 'Access for All' PrEP sessions

## Welcoming New Developments in HIV Prevention

PrEP

With GMSH's *The Sex You Want* campaign, RHAC increased awareness and access to information surrounding HIV prevention through PrEP. We also began the exciting process of organizing an on-site PrEP clinic!

U=U

RHAC proudly added its voice to the global consensus around U=U, which is supported by evidence that people living with HIV who are on effective treatment and maintain an undetectable viral load cannot sexually transmit HIV.



Brian Dokis (Chief Executive Officer, SOAHAC) and Brian Lester (Executive Director, RHAC) sign a memorandum of understanding for shared services.







A vertical photograph on the left side of the page shows a person's arm with a tattoo that reads "WHEN YOU WISH". They are holding a red surfboard. The background is a blurred restaurant interior with warm lighting and hanging lamps.

# A TASTE FOR LIFE

*A Taste for Life* returned to communities across London, Stratford, and Exeter as we marked the 11th anniversary of our largest annual fundraiser.

Each year, *A Taste for Life* invites friends in the community to enjoy good food for a great cause. Every meal at a participating restaurant contributes essential funds to our free client programs and services. Without fundraised dollars, many of these client services could not exist.

We are grateful for the ongoing support of our community for helping to bring our fundraisers to life. *A Taste for Life* is made possible through the incredible support of participating restaurants, volunteers, staff and our Board. Our title sponsor, TD, supported the evening with incredible leadership and nearly 200 employees who volunteered and dined with us.

Thank you to everyone who dined in support of *A Taste for Life 2017*. Your dinner plans made all the difference for our clients.



**30**

participating restaurants

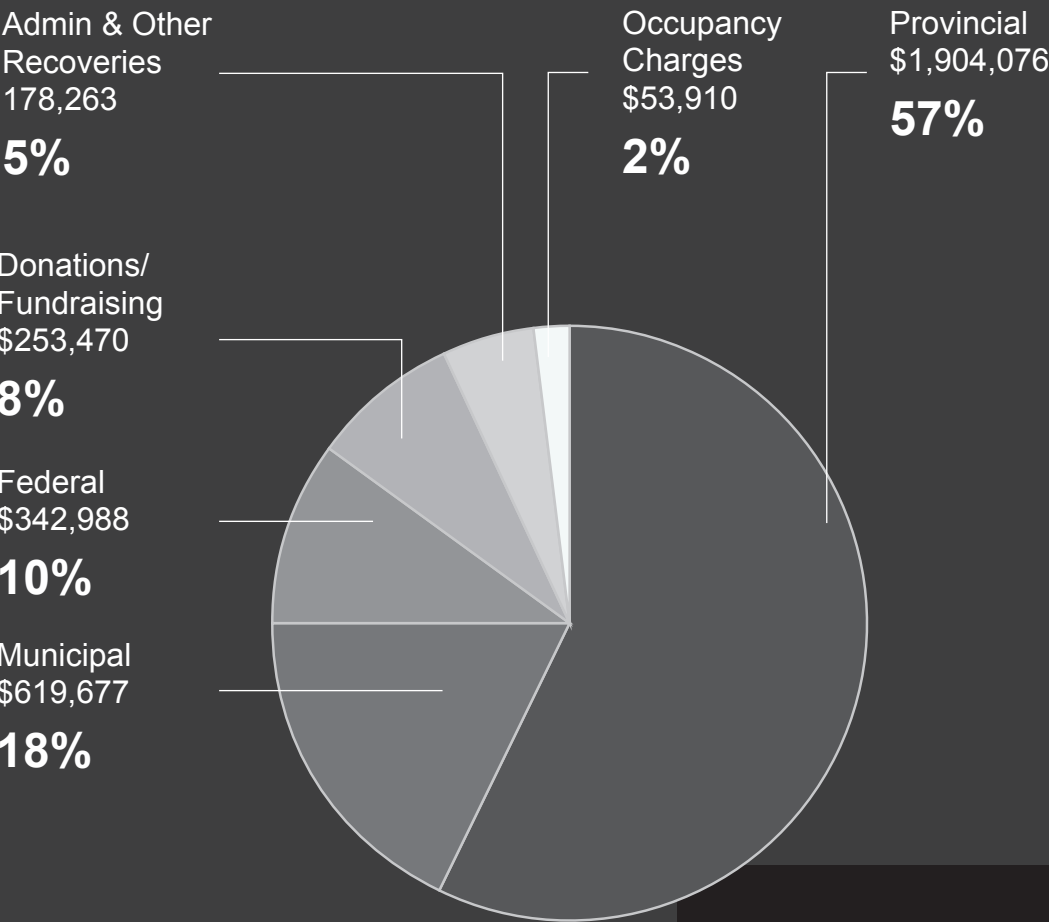


**\$50,168**

raised in support of free client programs and services

# FINANCIALS

FY 2017/18: April 1, 2017—March 31, 2018



REGIONAL HIV/AIDS  
CONNECTION  
**Revenue 2017/18**

**Total**  
**\$3,352,384**

TOTAL \$ DOES NOT INCLUDE IN KIND  
DONATIONS

Fixed Costs  
\$506,242

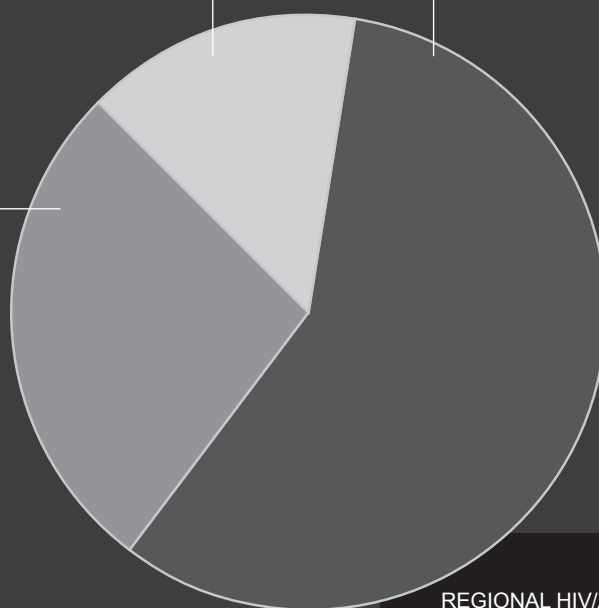
**15%**

Staff Contract  
Costs  
\$1,913,822

**58%**

Program  
Delivery  
\$895,424

**27%**



REGIONAL HIV/AIDS  
CONNECTION

**Expenses 2017/18**

**Total**  
**\$3,315,488**

**IT TAKES A  
COMMUNITY  
TO CREATE  
CHANGE.**

## **Thank you to our funders.**

Public Health Agency of Canada  
AIDS Bureau, Ontario Ministry of  
Health and Long-Term Care  
Housing, Ontario Ministry of Health  
and Long-Term Care  
Southwest Local Health Integration  
Network

Employment and Social  
Development Canada  
City of London  
Middlesex-London Health Unit

## **Thank you to our grantors, supporters, and sponsors.**

Government of Ontario  
TD Bank Group  
Sisters of St. Joseph  
Schulich School of Medicine and  
Dentistry  
The Johansen-Larsen Foundation  
Libro Credit Union  
ViiV Healthcare  
Gilead Sciences Inc.  
Gateway Church  
The Bray Family  
The Law Society Foundation  
London's Best Rock FM96  
London Free Press  
Cohen Highley LLP  
Oliver & Associates

McCormick Canada  
Daniel Kelly Wealth Management –  
RBC  
Best Western Plus –  
Lamplighter Inn London  
Skrypnik Group  
Lexcor Business Lawyers LLP  
ECS Cares Inc.  
Harrison Pensa  
Union Gas  
McFarlan Rowlands  
Dancor Construction Limited  
General Dynamics Land Systems  
Bell Media  
C & V Income Tax Services

## **Thank you to our community partners.**

Anova  
Addiction Services of Thames Valley  
African and Caribbean Council on  
HIV/AIDS in Ontario  
Canadian Mental Health Association  
Middlesex  
Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre  
Southwestern Public Health  
Fanshawe College  
Gay Men's Sexual Health Alliance  
Hemophilia Ontario  
Huron County Health Unit  
Infectious Diseases Care Program –  
St. Joseph's Health Care  
Lambton County Community Health  
Services

London Cares Homeless Response  
Services  
London Intercommunity Health  
Centre – Options Clinic  
London Police Services  
Perth District Health Unit  
Pride London Festival  
Middlesex-London Health Unit  
Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy  
OPSEU  
Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health  
Access Centre  
WeSpeak  
Western University  
Women & HIV/AIDS Initiative

**THE  
OPPOSITE OF  
~~ADDICTION~~  
~~ISOLATION~~  
~~DISCRIMINATION~~  
IS CONNECTION**

(Johann Hari, 2015)



## **MAKE A CONNECTION**

**visit us at #30 – 186 King Street, London, ON**  
**call us toll-free at 1.866.9201.1601**  
**or call us at 519.434.1601**

**visit us on [www.hivaidsconnection.ca](http://www.hivaidsconnection.ca)**  
**follow us at [@hivaidsconnect](https://twitter.com/hivaidsconnect)**



Regional  
HIV/AIDS  
Connection

## Our Board 2017/18

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