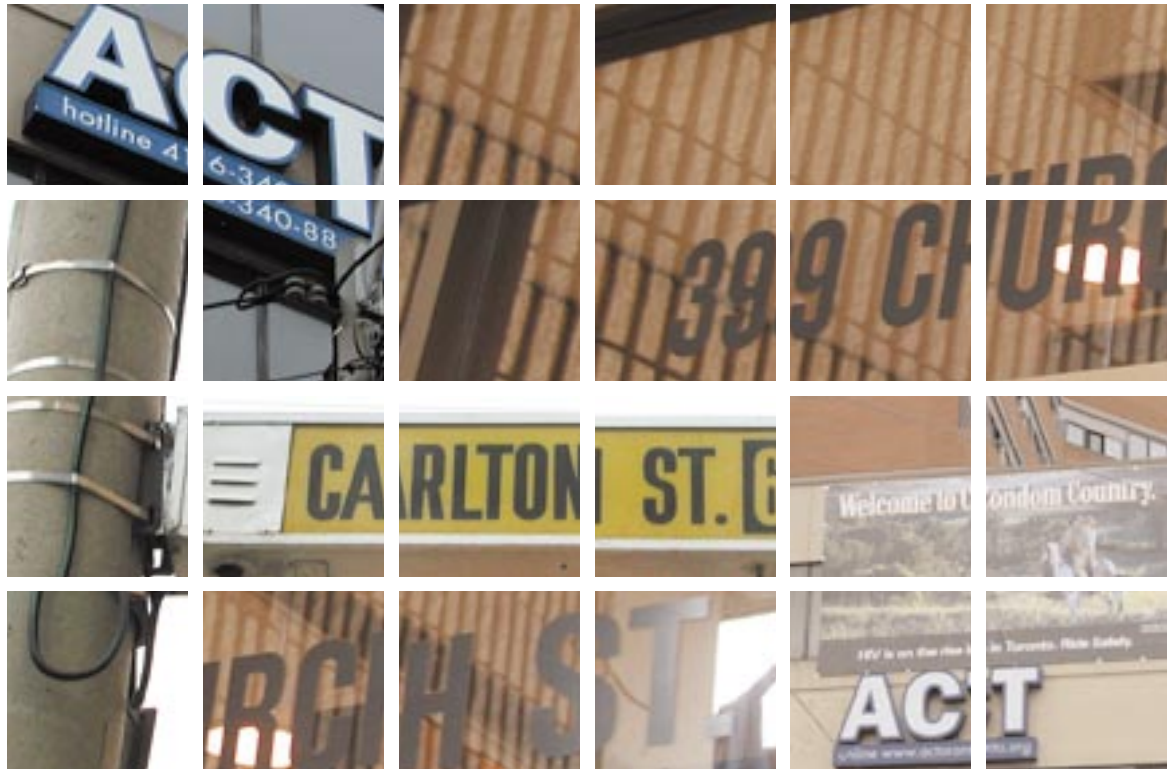


Contributors

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Welcome to the ACT Newsletter!

It was twenty years ago, in February 1982, that the first case of AIDS was reported in Canada. Twenty years later, AIDS is still here. As the HIV/AIDS pandemic has expanded to affect more and more communities, ACT has responded to meet the ever changing needs of the men, women and youth living with HIV/AIDS, and individuals and communities at risk for HIV infection.

While ACT's work focuses primarily on Toronto, we also participate nationally and internationally to respond to the epidemic. Recently, Charles Roy, ACT's Executive Director, was appointed as an alternate Board representative to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. This

fund was established in response to the United Nations (UN) General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS and the UN Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS. We have also undertaken work to "twin" with a community AIDS organization in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. By participating internationally in the fight against AIDS we are able to share our skills and experiences with others and, at the same time, learn from our colleagues.

In this issue of the ACT Newsletter we highlight just a few of the many programs and services that ACT provides to people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS. You can read up on our food programs for people with HIV/AIDS, some of our research-

related initiatives, and our HIV prevention and support work within Portuguese-speaking communities.

Of course, we would not be able to do this work without the dedication of our staff, volunteers, and the individual donors and corporations that support ACT's work. Thanks to your commitment ACT is able to be here to provide much needed support, compassion and understanding.

Sincerely,

Evan Collins, Chair
ACT Board of Directors

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Monday to Thursday
10 am – 9 pm
Friday
10 am – 5 pm

Food Programs at ACT: Promoting the health of people with HIV/AIDS



Volunteers help out with the serving of a well balanced meal at the "Meet & Eat" Hot Lunch program sponsored by ACT and Mid-Toronto Community Services.

Every Friday, people living with HIV/AIDS come together to enjoy a free, nutritious, and delicious hot lunch. The 'Meet & Eat' Hot Lunch Program is offered by ACT in partnership with Mid-Toronto Community Services. "The program offers peer support, information sharing and a venue to simply relax and connect with others," says Robin Rhodes, ACT Practical Assistance Coordinator. "Plus, it provides a nutritious meal". People with HIV/AIDS are often living on restricted incomes – a difficult thing to do in a city as expensive as Toronto. "Sometimes food is one of the things that peo-

ple are forced to cut back on" says Robin. "Yet we know that good nutrition is an important part of staying healthy. This is just one way that ACT can support people with HIV/AIDS".

In addition to the weekly hot lunch program, ACT also offers the 'Good Food Box Program'. This program, which is a partnership with Foodshare, provides people with HIV/AIDS living on a restricted income with the opportunity to purchase – at a greatly reduced cost – a week's supply of fresh fruits and vegetables. It also provides opportunities to learn more about a variety of good foods and how nutrition has a direct impact on health. "People call in to order a Good Food Box and then can either pick it up at ACT on Fridays, or get it when they attend the Meet & Eat lunch," says Robin.

ACT's food programs have faced increased demand over the past year: "The numbers have grown to 34 people attending the hot lunch each week. This last month saw greater diversi-

ty among those attending, and there is an ever-growing feeling of collegiality and fun. We've successfully encouraged lunch participants to assist with the preparation and serving. This is having the effect of greater bonding among members and enhancing the enjoyment of the occasion," states Robin.

Participants have nothing but good things to say about both of these food programs: "I am so grateful for this program, and I find the social aspect has helped me so much"; "staff and volunteers are excellent, super people"; "I am grateful this exists for people like myself"; and "this is one of my only chances to eat well in a comfortable place" are just a few of the things that participants in the Meet & Eat and Good Food Box programs have to say.

To find out more about ACT's food programs for people living with HIV/AIDS, please contact Robin Rhodes at 416.340.8484 ext.231; or email at rrhodes@actoronto.org.

Research in Action: Community research at ACT

All research at ACT fulfills program needs by enhancing the development of more meaningful and effective programs and services, and generating fresh perspectives on community development. ACT's research initiatives focus mainly on program evaluation or other special projects that add value to ACT's work.

Currently, three externally funded projects are underway: two of these projects examine gay and bisexual men's interpretations of "(un)safe sex", and the third is an evaluation of Employment Action (a program to provide job-seeking assistance to people with HIV/AIDS who are considering entering or re-entering the workforce). Some internally funded projects are also underway, such as an evaluation of our Youth Community Development Program's Peer Outreach Program. In addition, a number of other research projects are currently being developed.

ACT's research activities are organized within the framework of community-based research. This implies that research activities should

address issues that affect the communities served by ACT, and communities should benefit from the ACT's research. It also means that communities should be involved in a consultative or collaborative role, and research activities should promote community development through partnerships with other agencies and groups. Knowledge generated from research must be shared with the respective communities and other stakeholders, and researchers must respect participants' confidentiality and privacy, and acknowledge their contributions.

Researchers must respect participants' confidentiality and privacy, and acknowledge their contribution

Our research benefits from the input and expertise of a Research Advisory Committee, which comprises ACT staff and researchers from universities and other research-oriented organizations. The Committee advises and assists ACT with developing its research program. The Committee is providing valuable input on a number of issues, such as research priorities, sources of funding, research ethics, and the development of research partnerships.

Research at ACT – research in action!

Reaching Out and Making a Difference: A Volunteer's Story

My name is Rob and I've been volunteering for ACT over the past 5 years, primarily at fundraising events, and for the past three years at the ACT Information desk in the Access Centre.

I first came to ACT in the early 90s to seek counselling to help me cope with the daily struggle of living with HIV/AIDS and to access support around my decision to leave my employment and go on disability. I can still remember the butterflies in my stomach as I entered the building at 399 Church St. for the first time: I was about to identify myself as someone with HIV, and actually talk candidly about my struggles! How would they react? Needless to say, my worries were quickly allayed as I was first greeted by a friendly face at the Information desk, treated with respect and dignity, introduced to the wealth of HIV/AIDS information and resources in the library and then met with an ACT counsellor. I left after that first appointment

experiencing such a feeling of emotional lightness. Needless to say I quickly became an avid consumer of ACT services.

After gaining a lot of inner strength I took the step to become an ACT volunteer. Part of the reason for volunteering was purely selfish on my part: I needed and wanted to bring myself out of isolation and to re-connect with people. Most of all I wanted to make connections with others dealing with HIV/AIDS. I also wanted the opportunity to express my gratitude by giving back to an organization that helped - and continues to help - my partner and I.

I started my shifts at the Information desk three years ago following completion of ACT's comprehensive volunteer training. I was immediately drawn to the Information desk because of the opportunity to interact with both staff and service users. At the desk, no two shifts are ever the same. A change of seasons brings with it event-related traffic - Fashion Cares boutique items being delivered and picked up, AIDSWalk pledges being dropped off, school students working on projects.

I am able to offer helpful information to people who phone ACT, ease some of their anxiety surrounding HIV/AIDS and have found a venue to share my life

experiences dealing with HIV and AIDS. It's always an unexpected pleasure to hear back from repeat callers thanking you for making them feel better about themselves and their situation.

I can still remember the butterflies in my stomach as I entered the building at 399 Church St. for the first time: I was about to identify myself as someone with HIV, and actually talk candidly about my struggles!

How would they react?

The Information desk volunteer is often the first face that a new visitor or service users experiences, and part of my role is to make sure that people receive a warm and friendly welcome to ACT. One of my favourite things about working my Thursday morning shift is that the PWA Foundation food bank is in operation and the people often come up to our floor to access the free public phone, use the

[Story continues on the back cover page](#)



HOMO HEALTH TIP

Always be safe and use a condom!

Saturday. June 1. 2002
Metro Toronto Convention Centre

GENERAL ADMISSION TICKETS \$100
AFTER PARTY TICKETS \$40

Contact Ticketmaster @ 416.870.8000
WWW.FASHIONCARES.COM



Excellence in Drag

Each year, ACT receives a significant amount of money from individuals and groups who have turned their social gatherings into fundraising events. Actors have put on shows, local bars have staged raffles, and companies have hosted baseball tournaments for their staff. People have found lots of different ways to connect activities that they enjoy with fundraising for an organization and cause that they support.

The Jackie Loren Awards for Excellence in Drag are an example of the kind of tremendous creativity, fun and dedication that are undertaken on ACT's behalf. For the last five years Brian Callaghan, also known by his later ego Krisi Phillipchuk Douglas, has designated the proceeds of his drag awards show to ACT. "It is important for people to take action against HIV/AIDS. The way I can do that is to

raise money through what I love to do, and in the name of someone I admire, former Drag Queen Jackie Loren," Brian says. This year the evening of awards, a raffle, 50/50 draw and a Chinese auction raised over \$1,300, more than ever before!

Brian was connected to ACT as a client in the early days of testing positive for HIV. He has continued to work hard on the show as a means of supporting ACT financially in a way that he could not do from his personal finances. He draws on his passion, his talents and his connections in the drag world to help him make it happen.

There are others who have chosen ACT as the recipient of funds because they value the services that we offer to the community at large. There are as many reasons for hosting a community event, as there are ideas and people who want to try them.

If you would like to look at ways to turn your summer activities (garage sales, BBQ, club nights, bottle drives, casual Fridays) into a benefit for the AIDS Committee of Toronto, please contact Lori Lucier, Director of Development, at 416.340.8484 ext 268 or email her at llucier@actoronto.org



The first annual **SNAP!**, a celebration of photography and photo-based art, was held on Tuesday, March 19 at the Design Exchange. In February and early March, photography enthusiasts and ACT supporters competed in a community-

themed photography competition with prizes awarded in seven categories. At the event, patrons enjoyed a live auction of donated fine art photography; a silent auction of items from the photography competition; and a marketplace of photography equipment and accessories sold at discounted prices.

SNAP! raised \$65,000 for ACT. Many thanks to the generous sponsors who helped achieve this impressive first-year success: Xtra!, Toronto.com, Labatt, Ticketmaster, Abbott Laboratories, Agouron Pharmaceuticals, Bristol-Myers Squibb, GlaxoSmithKline in partnership with Shire BioChem, Marigolds & Onions, Merck Frosst, NOW and NPC.com.

Our congratulations to the winners of the photo competition: Best Interpretation of the Theme: Neil Davis, Millennium Pride - \$500.

Runner Up: Carla Granger, Homeless - \$250; Best Colour Photo: Henrieta Hanyskova, Untitled - \$250; Best Black & White Photo: Vincent Wong, Untitled - \$250; Best Student Photo: Lorrain Chow, Untitled - \$250; Best Technical Photo: Peter Bregg, Rescued From Poverty - \$250; Best Photo-Based Art: Eric Mathew, Status Quo - \$250

Our congratulations to the winners of the photo competition: Neil Davis, Carla Granger, Henrieta Hanyskova, Vincent Wong, Lorrain Chow, Peter Bregg, Eric Mathew.

Many thanks to all the volunteers who made this event possible, especially the SNAP! Steering Committee, which worked extremely hard to bring this new event to life in a short period of time. In particular, we thank event co-chairs Bruce Yungblut and Ron K. Mann for their vision and commitment to ACT.

Start snapping and watch for details about SNAP! 2003. Visit the website at www.snap-toronto.com

This year's AIDS Walk Toronto will take place Sunday, September 22 starting at 2:00 pm at Nathan Philips Square. The Walk is ACT's most community-oriented fundraising event, bringing together nearly 15,000 people from all ages and walks of life for a day filled with fun, festivities, and hope. You can get involved in the Walk in many ways:

- Raise pledges – they go directly to support ACT programs and services. Check out our online pledging feature!
- Form a team! Teams come from all sectors of our community: corporations, small businesses, community organizations, schools, and faith groups have all created AIDS Walk Toronto teams
- Ask your employer about matching funds. Many companies will match all funds raised by your team, dollar-for-dollar or two-to-one; others sponsor each team member with a pre-determined amount; some will give a

AIDSwalk toronto



corporate donation to kick off the team's fundraising efforts

- Join us at community and bar events. Volunteer, register, come and say hi – we're around Toronto all through the summer
- Volunteer – join a committee to help organize the event, help out in the office or at community events through the summer, or join us on Walk day

Join us as we launch AIDSwalk at the Pride parade on Sunday, June 30. Look for our parade float, or visit our booth for information or to register.

Visit the Walk website at www.aidswalk-toronto.org, or call 416-340-8484 ext. 263 for more information.



Walkers enjoying the sunshine at AIDS Walk 2001. This year's AIDS walk will take place Sunday, September 22 starting at 2:00 pm at Nathan Philips Square.

HIV Prevention and Community Development within Toronto's Gay Community

In June 2001, ACT launched its "Welcome to Condom Country" HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention campaign targeting gay and bisexual men and other men who have sex with men (MSM). The campaign – the largest and most visible HIV prevention initiative in ACT's history – was developed in response to a dramatic rise in new HIV infections among Toronto MSM. Campaign materials were distributed within gay community venues and across the city via ads in buses, streetcars and subways and on television.

The "Condom Country" campaign led to the development of closer working relationships between ACT and gay community businesses such as bars and bath houses. For example, all bath houses have agreed to greater access for outreach staff and volunteers and the installation of permanent, wall-mounted display fixtures that can be used by ACT and its partner agencies to display HIV prevention messages. ACT is working hard to foster its relationships with gay community businesses. "We believe that the health of gay and bisexual men and other MSM is a community responsibility; that we all have a role to play in reducing the spread of HIV and supporting men living with HIV/AIDS," says Chris Lau, ACT's Gay Men's Outreach Coordinator. "Most gay community businesses are supportive of the work we currently do and are excited about some of our plans to develop health-related workshops and other events that are fun and informative."

ACT will soon be launching another HIV prevention initiative targeting gay and bisexual men. Watch for the campaign to be launched during Pride Week, June 23 – 30, 2002.



The television version of the "Welcome to Condom Country" Campaign won two competitions at the IBA Awards in Las Vegas. The first award was best in an International category and the second was best International Public Service Announcement, a category that is fiercely competitive. Both Partners Films, the producer of the television commercial, and Naked Creative Consultancy, who developed the campaign, worked for ACT on a pro bono basis.

The Living Guide: A Guide to Services for People Living with HIV/AIDS

The Living Guide is a comprehensive guide to Toronto-based HIV/AIDS services. The Guide is an excellent resource for people with HIV/AIDS, service providers and those concerned about HIV/AIDS. The Living Guide provides detailed information about the kinds of HIV/AIDS services offered by various organizations, as well as information about their location, office hours and languages in which services are provided.



The Living Guide is currently at the printers and we expect delivery in July! Watch for the 2002 Living Guide, available at ACT.

For more information about the Living Guide contact Mary Anne Howse at 416.340.8484 ext.223; mahowse@actontario.org.

Serving Toronto's Portuguese-speaking Communities



Several years ago, a group of Portuguese-speaking service providers approached ACT to discuss the need for HIV prevention education, awareness and support services for Toronto's diverse Portuguese-speaking communities. ACT subsequently entered into a partnership with this coalition of Portuguese-serving agencies (known as VIVER) to sponsor and develop programming for this community. ACT now provides HIV prevention education and outreach to Portuguese-speaking gay and bisexual men, and other men who have sex with men (MSM), and is developing in collaboration with other VIVER member agencies, HIV/AIDS awareness, support and community development initiatives for diverse Portuguese-speaking communities.

ACT's Portuguese-speaking Community Development Program is funded through a three-year grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The program, launched in May 2001, has been focussing on outreach, education and awareness of HIV/AIDS issues in Toronto's Portuguese-speaking communities. According to Fernanda DaSilva, ACT's Portuguese-speaking Community Development Coordinator, "our main objective was to increase awareness of, and to facilitate access to services and programs available to various Portuguese-speaking communities. We've been involved in community activities and events such as participation in the Portugal Day parade, community information tables, and presentations at Portuguese-speaking functions."

The program has also taken on the task of translating existing ACT resources into Portuguese, developing new print resources, and creating a Portuguese-language section for ACT's website. The program is also working to increase ACT's capacity – and the capacity of other VIVER member agencies – to support Portuguese-speaking people living with HIV/AIDS, their partners, families and friends. "Here at ACT we've started to recruit bilingual volunteers. Our goal is to have volunteers who can be integrated into ACT programs such as our various practical support programs for people with HIV/AIDS" states Fernanda. "And," says Rui Rires, Portuguese-speaking Men's Outreach Coordinator "I have started to recruit volunteers to advise me on my programs as well as assist me in doing HIV prevention education and outreach to diverse groups of Portuguese-speaking MSM."

One important task undertaken early in the project was the decision to approach various Portuguese-language newspapers in Toronto to include ads and regular articles on HIV/AIDS. "We've been very pleased to see a substantial increase of awareness of HIV/AIDS on the part of the Portuguese-speaking media," says Rui.

ACT recently received funding for a cooperative exchange program with ABIA (Associação Brasileira Interdisciplinar de AIDS), a community AIDS organization located in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. ACT and ABIA will work together to exchange information, skills, and staff regarding outreach and HIV prevention (with an emphasis on MSM and other marginalized populations at risk for HIV infection); community awareness and development; and organizational capacity building. This 18-month project, funded through the Canadian Society for International Health will end in June 2003. "The exchange with Brazil will be helpful for Portuguese-speaking programming at ACT as we will be able to learn about approaches to HIV prevention education and support that have worked in Brazil. This will help me to better serve Toronto's Brazilian community," states Rui.

We've been very pleased to see a substantial increase of awareness of HIV/AIDS on the part of the Portuguese speaking media

For more information about ACT's Portuguese-speaking programs, please contact either Fernanda DaSilva at 416.340.8484 ext. 290; fdasilva@actoronto.org or Rui Pires at 416.340.8484 ext. 242; rpirez@actoronto.org.

