

ACT

AIDS Committee of Toronto



newsletter

winter 2000/2001

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ACT's New Direction Research and Program Development

In line with its growing commitment to community-based research, ACT has hired a talented team of staff with a unique combination of community experience and academic research training to meet the needs of Research and Program Development. They will be working with other ACT staff to design new ways of thinking about research and program evaluation.

The decision to move in this direction is based on ACT's recognition of the growing importance of community-based research, and the need to ensure that our programs and services remain relevant to the many communities affected by HIV/AIDS.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH?

While HIV research conducted in academic institutions has greatly benefited our understanding of HIV/AIDS issues, ensuring that research is relevant to community needs remains an ongoing challenge.

Community-based research is positioned in the community. Community members are actively involved in determining what will be researched, how it will be researched, and how the information will be used to benefit the community.

OUR VISION

Our desire is to develop a model of community-based research that encourages equal partnerships — where the diverse skills of front-line staff, community members, and academic researchers are valued.

Ultimately, the development of community-based research at ACT will enhance quality of life of the communities we serve.

SOME CURRENT RESEARCH PROJECTS

GAY CLUB SCENE AND DRUG USE PROJECT | Community members, club promoters and owners, researchers, and "scene goers"

have come together to do a community-based research project that will help ACT to be more effective in doing HIV prevention education with gay and bisexual men in the club 'scene'.

YOUTH MIGRATION TO TORONTO PROJECT | Central Toronto Youth Services, Positive Youth Outreach, and Ryerson Polytechnic University School of Social Work are partnering with ACT to research the unique ways in which lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender/transsexual youth who migrate to Toronto may be vulnerable to HIV infection. This research will be used to improve our HIV prevention programming and support services to these youth.

Research and Program Development initiatives at ACT are breaking new ground. Through research that is community-based we are ensuring our communities have a greater voice in shaping future HIV/AIDS research priorities in Toronto.

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Strategic Planning at ACT

ACT's current Strategic Plan, which has guided the work of the agency since 1998, will end in March 2001. We have embarked on a process to develop a new Strategic Plan that will guide the agency through to 2004. To assist us in this work, we have established a Strategic Planning Steering Committee — a sub-committee of ACT's Board of Directors — comprised of representatives from ACT's Board, Management, Staff and Volunteers. The committee also has membership from service users and community agencies with whom ACT works.

One of the first tasks of this committee, which met for the first time in early October, was to design a request for proposals for consultants who would help to design and facilitate a strategic planning process. After a thorough evaluation of proposals and in-depth interviews, the consultant team of Glen Brown, Alan Li and Wendy Pinder was selected.

This team offers ACT their valuable experience in strategic planning, organizational development, and the community-based HIV/AIDS movement. The consultants, working closely with our Strategic Planning Steering Committee, are now designing a consultation process that will seek feedback on identified strategic priorities for the agency from ACT's various stakeholders — including service users and our partner agencies. This consultation period will unfold over the next few months.

As ACT engages in strategic planning, we do so at a time when the HIV/AIDS epidemic is changing in significant ways. Demographic shifts in the epidemic, trends in new HIV infections, the long-term effects of HIV treatments, new developments in government policies, and changes in the broader health care sector, will all need to be considered as ACT develops a new plan to guide the work of the agency.

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**FASHION
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**AIDSwalk
toronto**

September 23, 2001



**DANCERS
FOR LIFE**

Fall 2001

ACT's Community Partners Fund Grants \$220,900 to local AIDS Organizations

Funds from the AIDS Committee of Toronto - Community Partners Fund will go out to 28 agencies and community groups working to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS or providing services to people living with HIV/AIDS. About half of the grants will help organizations with their overall services; the rest will help fund specific projects.

The funds for the Community Partners grants come from ACT's three major fundraising events: Fashion Cares, AIDSwalk Toronto, and Dancers For Life. Each year ACT encourages agencies and groups to apply for funds. Applicants must show that they are registered charities that do work in HIV prevention or support for people living with HIV/AIDS in Toronto, and that their work is consistent with ACT's mission of "support, education and advocacy for people living with HIV/AIDS and those affected by HIV/AIDS".

Grants were made in two categories. The first went to assist organizations in providing their regular services. Each grant in this category was for \$11,045. Grants in the second category will help finance specific projects — these grants ranged from \$1,500 to \$5,000. Some of the projects that received funding included an undertaking to develop HIV testing information for women in a variety of languages, and a project that would enable the development of a peer support group for transsexual/transgendered people living with HIV/AIDS.

The committee that determined allocations was comprised of ACT staff and Board members, as well as representatives from community organizations ineligible for funding. The committee's decisions were made in September, and cheques were issued in October.

ACTalk

OUR ONLINE SELF-HELP FORUM

The AIDS Committee of Toronto is pleased to announce that ACTalk, our on-line self-help forum for people living with HIV/AIDS, their friends, family members, partners and caregivers, is now better than ever. It's been redesigned to be more user friendly. On ACTalk you can:

- post questions to be answered by an ACT volunteer.
- talk anonymously with other people living with HIV/AIDS
- talk together about supporting loved ones living with HIV/AIDS
- post questions about safer sex or HIV testing.

Check out ACTalk. You can access this on-line forum through the ACT website at www.actoronto.org — just click on the link to ACTalk.

Winter Support Groups at ACT

ACT provides a variety of support groups to meet the needs of men and women both infected, and affected, by HIV/AIDS. Support group members can share life experiences, create mutual support, exchange information, and explore choices about life, health and well-being. Groups meet for two hours once a week, and usually have eight to ten members, plus two volunteer group facilitators. Support group members can join any short-term group more than once.

TO JOIN ONE OF OUR GROUPS | Unless otherwise indicated, call ACT's Hotline at 416-340-8844 and say you'd like to make an appointment to see a counsellor about joining a support group. Or, you can walk into our offices and ask to speak with the counsellor-on-call about joining a group. Groups are scheduled to begin in mid-January 2001.

POSITIVE RESULTS | Have you recently found out you have HIV? Need a place to discuss how this news has affected your life? Would you like to talk and share your feelings with others who have recently been diagnosed HIV-positive? This 10-week group will provide a safe and confidential opportunity to discuss a range of issues determined by group members.

LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS | Have you been living with HIV/AIDS for some time? This 10-week support group is for people who are looking to have a more thorough discussion on ways to integrate living with HIV/AIDS into their lives. The group offers a chance to meet and learn from other people who share similar experiences and concerns. The group also provides opportunities to exchange information, explore feelings, find support, and renew hope.

REINVENTING YOURSELF AS A PERSON LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS | How do I enrich my daily life and create a sense of purpose? Where do I want to be? Are there possibilities for change in my life? This 10-week support group is for people interested in exploring positive ways to recreate their lives while living with HIV/AIDS.

THE GAP (GAY AND POSITIVE) | This is a confidential support group for HIV-positive gay and bisexual men under age 25. Call Dino at

Central Toronto Youth Services for more information, and to register at 416-924-2100 ext. 243.

WOMEN GATHERING | A group offered in partnership between ACT, The Teresa group, Planned Parenthood — The House, and Women's Health in Women's Hands. This group is for women who have recently found out they are HIV-positive. The group is open to women from all communities. For more information, and to register, call Bridget at Planned Parenthood at 416-927-7171 ext. 233.

LONG-TERM SURVIVORS | This is an ongoing group that meets every Monday evening. The group focuses on the ways that group members can cope with the many challenges of being an HIV-positive long-term survivor.

HIV-NEGATIVE GAY MEN'S GROUP | Are you an HIV-negative gay man who would like to explore the impact that HIV/AIDS has had on your life? Would you like to share your thoughts with other HIV-negative gay men? This 10-week group will provide you with a safe and confidential opportunity to discuss a range of issues determined by group members.

FRIENDS AND FAMILY AFFECTED BY HIV/AIDS | Does someone you care about live with HIV/AIDS? Would you like an opportunity to discuss your concerns with others facing a similar situation? This 10-week group is open to all friends and families affected by HIV/AIDS (mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, other relatives and friends).

CARING FOR SOMEONE IN THE CHANGING FACE OF HIV/AIDS | This is an ongoing group that focuses on the ways that people who provide care to someone living with HIV/AIDS cope in ways that work, who acknowledge the struggles they are facing, and who allow those challenges to enhance their lives. This group meets each Monday evening.

BEREAVEMENT GROUP | Have you experienced the loss of someone due to HIV/AIDS? This group offers support from others who are in a similar situation. This group is open to both men and women who have lost someone to HIV/AIDS.





Gay Men's Community Development

PARTNERSHIPS IN ACTION

Much of the work of ACT's Gay Men's Community Development program has been accomplished through community partnerships. When we work with staff and volunteers from other community organizations we gain a wealth of experience, a range of perspectives and strategies, and develop better services for the men we are trying to support.

The HIV Test Community Working Group is a good example of community partnership. The group is comprised of staff from ACT, Asian Community AIDS Services, the Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention, Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples – AIDS Program, and the Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention. In October, we conducted a phone survey of men who have sex with men (MSM) who have not accessed the HIV antibody test. We wanted to know whether these men saw themselves at risk for HIV. We spoke with over forty-five men from a range of ethno-cultural communities, some of whom had a first language other than English. They confirmed the need for basic HIV test information and awareness that is made available through Toronto's health services — especially doctors' offices. They also indicated the need for this information in many languages. The Working Group is now developing this resource.

Our relationship with Toronto's gay leather community continued this past fall. We worked with organizers from Mr. Leatherman Toronto to provide safer sex and safer drug use information at both the Leatherball in August and the Mr. Leatherman Toronto Competition in November. For more information on safer SM workshops and community supports, check out the Safer SM Education Project web site at www.safer-sm.org.

We continue to work with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) in two ways. First, our on-going relationship with the Gay Men's

Recovery Program continues to allow us the opportunity to work with gay and bisexual men in recovery from drug and alcohol use to address their risk for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. And, our developing relationship with the HIV Program at CAMH has resulted in the opportunity to work with at-risk youth in the Day School Program by providing sexual health information and support.

The Gay Men's Community Development program offered a series of 'One Night Stands' this past fall. These are one-time discussion groups, lasting two hours, where gay and bisexual men get together to talk about important issues in their lives. The groups were facilitated by trained ACT volunteers and covered a range of issues including dating

and negotiating safer sex; dealing with body image pressures; being sexual when you are living with HIV; coping with treatment side-effects; and sessions that attempted to de-bunk the myths that HIV-negative men may hold about HIV-positive men (and vice versa). By working with ACT's Access Centre staff, we were able to put these discussion group topics on-line, creating another forum where men can dis-

cuss these important issues. Gay and bisexual men are invited to post their thoughts through ACT's on-line self-help forum (ACTalk) available on ACT's website at www.actoronto.org.

Working in partnership has proven to be an effective way for ACT's Gay Men's Community Development program, and our community partners, to address the diverse and complex needs of gay and bisexual men, and other MSM in Toronto. We have created more and diverse targeted programs by pooling our resources, knowledge and experience to better serve the needs of men from a diverse range of cultures, communities, sexual identities and desires.

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bisexual men

ACT Responds to the Nutritional Needs of People Living With HIV/AIDS

Every Friday, people living with HIV/AIDS (PHAs) come together to enjoy a free, nutritious, and delicious hot meal through ACT's weekly "Meet & Eat" hot lunch program. After coffee and informal introductions, lunch is served "family" style. This program provides PHAs with an opportunity to meet other PHAs in a confidential and supportive environment. The Meet and Eat program also offers peer support, information sharing and a venue to simply relax and connect with others. To register to attend a lunch, please call 416-340-8484 ext. 231.

ACT recently launched our "Good Food Box" program, in partnership with Food Share Toronto. This new service lets PHAs living on a restricted income purchase a week's supply of fresh fruits and vegetables at a greatly reduced cost. The value of the box of fresh produce at a supermarket is approximately \$20 — but as someone registered with the Good Food Box Club, you will pay only \$7. The program also provides PHAs with an opportunity to learn more about a variety of good foods and how nutrition has a direct impact on health. To find out more about the Good Food Box program, or to register, please call 416-340-8484 ext. 231.

New Board Members Elected at Annual General Meeting

ACT held its Annual General Meeting at the 519 Church Street Community Centre on the evening of October 25, 2000. The meeting, which was attended by over sixty people, included elections for ACT's Board of Directors. Six seats were up for election. Both Enrico Mandarino and Susan Feldman were re-elected to the Board for another two-year term. Newly elected to the Board were Ali Ahmad (who had been appointed to fill a board vacancy in September), Ian Grubb, Rick Kennedy and Alice Tseng.

Ali has volunteered his time as a Hotline volunteer at ACT and as a member of our Advocacy Committee. He is also a volunteer at the Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention. Ian brings to ACT a lengthy and diverse history in the HIV/AIDS movement in both Australia and Canada. Rick completed ACT's volunteer core skills training this past spring, and he also volunteers his time with the Toronto Distress Centre. Alice is a founding member of the Ontario HIV Pharmacists Specialty Group and the Canadian HIV Pharmacists Network.

ACT's members expressed the organizations gratitude to all the people who stood for election to the Board at the Annual General Meeting. We congratulate the new Board of Directors, and we look forward to working with them.

AIDSwalk toronto Celebrates Success

What a wonderful day we had! Thank you to all who participated in AIDSwalk toronto, Sunday, September 24. Together we made a difference in the lives of thousands of people in our city. Over 17,000 men, women and children joined together to walk and to raise funds for ACT. And did they ever! If everyone hands in all of the pledges that were made, the Walk will have exceeded its budget and raised well over \$500,000 all going directly to the work of ACT and the agencies that we support through the ACT Community Partners Fund.

IF YOU HAVEN'T HANDED IN YOUR PLEDGES YET, DON'T DELAY! You can send in cheques to the AIDS Committee of Toronto, 399 Church street, 4th floor, Toronto, M5B 2J6, or drop them off between the hours of 10 am and 9 pm, Monday through Thursday.

What was new this year? Many, many things! The Walk's first ever community fair that gave other AIDS service organizations an opportunity to showcase their programs; the Canadian AIDS Memorial Quilt, the creation of an AIDSwalk Quilt that was made up of messages from walkers

about how HIV/AIDS has touched their lives; and a party after the walk that included a BBQ, beer garden and great entertainment.

Our special guest was Kim Stockwood, who has been a supporter of the AIDS Community for many years. Once again, she put on a fabulous show that wowed everyone!

SPiRiT AWARDS | Congratulations to the winners of the spirit awards. Team Spirit Award went to Amex. This team was partying hearty throughout the day. They were a great inspiration!

Congrats also go out to the winner of the individual spirit award, Mike Green. There were many fabulous teams and they will all be recognized at our annual team awards night which will be happening in the new year. Congrats to all, you were really wonderful!

Congrats also go out to our 1999 Top Walkers who received awards this year. Eugene Palermo, Norman Sobel, Dan Flanagan and Gerry Koalhof deserve a round of applause.

We now wait anxiously to find out who this year's top fundraising teams will be and who will top the list of individual walkers. We'll keep you posted!



AIDSwalk toronto 2001, Sunday, September 23

Do you have talents that you would like to lend to the AIDSwalk? Would you like to commit your time and energy to creating a fantastic event and to raising funds for an important cause? We are looking for organizers, marketers, public relations experts, people with corporate contacts, talent agents, etc. We would love to talk to you about how you can help so please call Lori Lucier at 416-340-8484 ext. 268 for more information.

Thank you!

ACT gratefully acknowledges the Canadian Life and Health Insurance Agency (CLHIA) for its grant of \$30,000, which will enable ACT to augment its HIV prevention efforts among people under age 25 through our Youth Community Development programme. CLHIA's assistance will help ACT implement youth-centred prevention efforts and enhance partnerships between youth-serving and AIDS service organizations in order to develop effective prevention strategies.

ACT also acknowledges Charles J. Marino and Scott Pope for their extraordinary donations of goods and services in 1999/2000.

For more information, please contact Anthony S. Tsoumbis, Development Officer at 416-340-8484 ext. 279 or atsoumbis@actontario.org.

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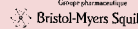
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Thanks to all of the sub committee members

ADDITIONAL THANKS TO Melissa Calder and the U of T papier mâché gang, Betty Ann Rutelidge, George Avena, Dr. Alan Ennis, Jim Billing, Hope Boulay, and all of the volunteers who helped out through out the summer, on Walk day and have been helping out with processing tax receipts.