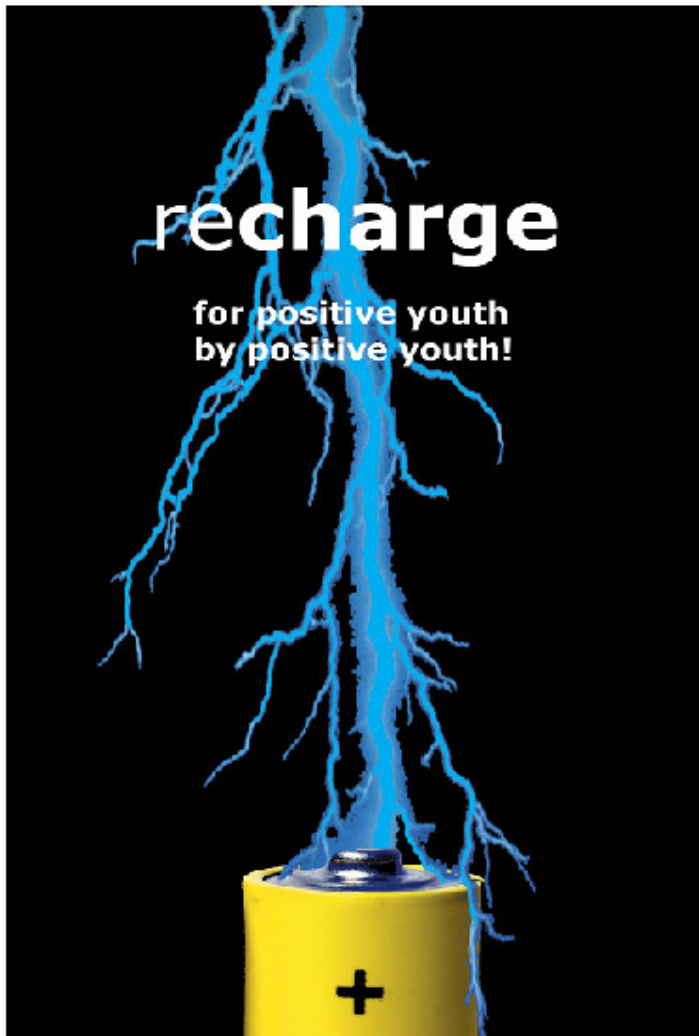


recharge

for positive youth
by positive youth!



Mission and Goals of

Positive Youth Outreach (PYO) is a Toronto based, peer-driven program of the [AIDS Committee of Toronto](#) (ACT). PYO's mission is to empower, support, and affirm the lives of young people under 30 living with HIV.

PYO's programming aims to address all aspects of young people's lives, in order to reduce isolation, self-destructive behaviours, and the cycle of oppression. We advocate for ourselves to ensure that as young people living with HIV/AIDS we can live happier, healthier lives as engaged active citizens. We support the leadership and personal development of our fellow HIV-positive peers through education, skills development and support by providing new opportunities.

While our primary focus is local, we collaborate provincially, nationally and globally in the form of community outreach and educational activities to promote compassion and understanding for young people living with HIV/AIDS.

Values and Principles of

- PYO values the unique life experiences of young people living with HIV/AIDS.
- PYO values the emotional and practical support that we as young people with and affected by HIV/AIDS give to each other.
- PYO values the individual needs of our members, and addresses those needs through non-judgmental services that respect and promote individual decision-making and personal development with a harm reduction approach.
- PYO values and embraces the diversity of our members, staff, and volunteers and respectfully upholds the principles of equality and access.
- PYO values the right to informed individual choices about health care and reproduction for youth living with HIV/AIDS. We support each other in advocating for ourselves in complicated HIV/AIDS care systems.
- PYO recognizes the invaluable commitment, support, skills and contributions of volunteers.
- PYO values the collaboration of other agencies and groups in the care and support of young people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.

Howdy Folks,

It's now summer time of 2008 and I am really excited to send out another edition of 'recharge', PYO's zine. In this issue we are again focusing on individual HIV positive youths personal stories and a couple updates from me on some of the exciting work I've been doing.

Since the last edition of 'recharge' I received some very exciting news. In early January 2008 I accepted the position (and responsibility that will come with it) of the National Women's Representative with Canadian Treatment Action Council (CTAC). CTAC is a National organization that advocates on a Provincial and National level on access to treatment issues. Check out their website at www.ctac.ca. CTAC produces a newsletter four times a year. I am also a Co-Chair on their Youth Committee. To become a member of CTAC to receive their excellent newsletters simply check out their website and download the membership application. Membership is free!

During the week of February 19 to 22, 2008, I hooked up with an organization called "The 411 Initiative for Change." They are based in Toronto and work with various types of artists, like hip hop artist, and create different shows that focus on global issues like women's rights and HIV/AIDS. The organization then takes these shows and tours across Canada. As they do this they try to involve local organizations to attend with them to their show stops and be a part of the show. The performances are about an hour long followed by a half hour question and answer period. I'll be on hand as they tour local Toronto schools to participate in the question and answer period. This is very exciting. Check out their website at www.whatsthe411.ca for more information and to see who the artists are who work with them.

As always, I'm collecting stories, artwork, poetry, photos, or whatever you'd like to publish in the PYO Zine. If you have anything that you would like to share with other poz youth please forward your submissions to pyo@actoronto.org. Submission can be made anonymously!!

Until next time,

Angel Parks

Positive Youth Outreach (PYO) Program Coordinator

aparks@actoronto.org, Phone number: 416-340-8484 x 281

United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) – HIV/AIDS

In early June of this year heads of government and civil society representatives from around the world gather in New York City for a High Level Meeting (HLM) to review each countries progress towards achieving Universal Access to prevention, care, treatment and support by 2010.

What's this about???

Well, in 2000 world leaders got together at the United Nations and wrote out the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's). There are 8 specific MDG's and the timeline for reaching these goals was set for 2015. Following the MDG's it was realized that for the world to achieve the MDG every country must do their part to address HIV/AIDS and that every person in the world must have equal, "Universal Access" to prevention, care, treatment and support in order for the world to even come close to achieving this success.

In 2001 government and civil society representatives got together at the United Nations and wrote a document called the "Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS." This document laid out in very clear means what each country around the world would need to do in order for every person in this world to have the same, equal Universal Access to prevention, care, treatment and support. The goal for achieving Universal Access was set for 2010, only two years away.

In 2006, world leaders and civil society members again met and wrote another document titled "Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS." Again, this document further detailed how each country must make a commitment to address HIV/AIDS in their country.

Well, in June of this year government and civil society representatives met again. This time the purpose was simple. This meeting was to make a final review of every countries progress towards helping the world achieve Universal Access.

I had the very fortunate opportunity to attend this event as a member of the Canadian government's official delegation to the United Nations Headquarters in New York City. Though our federal government has been lagging in their duties to provide sustainable funding to AIDS Service Organizations (ASO) across the country, their commitment to include civil society members, and in particular, people living with HIV/AIDS in their delegation was apparent.

So... How did I get to go???

Very early in the year the United Nations sent an application to all ASO around the globe to apply for "accreditation" to be invited to attend this years UNGASS HLM. One of the volunteers who sits on PYO's Advisory Committee took the time to fill out the application. A few months later I was notified that PYO/ACT had received the invitation to attend. Following this I had to apply for funding. Well to my surprise I was honoured to have been chosen by my peers to attend as the civil society representative openly living with HIV on the Government of Canada's Delegation.

See UNGASS – HIV/AIDS con't

UNGASS – HIV/AIDS con't

My adventure to the UN began on Saturday, June 7, 2008. I arrived a day ahead of the rest of the Canadian Delegation as I had been invited to attend a “Progressive Youth Caucus” meeting, which was held on Sunday. This meeting was mainly organized by the “Youth Coalition on Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights” (YC), which is an international organization based in Ottawa, Canada. The purpose was for youth from around the world who were attending the HLM to get together in advance and development important advocacy points which were to help prepare youth to articulate the needs of youth globally. A few of the main advocacy points that came out of this meeting were: invest in youth leadership; take positive steps to promote and protect young people’s rights and ensure access to comprehensive sexuality education.

First thing Monday morning I met all of the members of the Canadian Delegation and we headed over to the United Nation Headquarters to get our official passes to enter the building. By the time that we did receive our passes me and the other civil society representative on the Canadian Delegation, Debra Jakubec, Executive Director of HIV Edmonton, debra.j@hivedmonton.com, missed the Civil Society Caucus. The purpose of the Civil Society Caucus was similar to the Youth Caucus, but was open to any person from a civil society organization attending. In the afternoon I attended two side events, one on Women and Girls and the second on HIV and IDU (injection drug use). During the HIV and IDU session the main issue was providing harm reduction, such as needle exchange and methadone therapy.

Tuesday and Wednesday were the official meetings. There were two parts that ran simultaneously. One happened in the General Assembly hall, which was where the head of each country’s delegation gave a five minute speech on their countries progress to reaching Universal Access by 2010. During the opening Dr. Piot, the Executive Director of UNAIDS stated that for every 5 people who become infected with HIV, only 3 people receive medication. Clearly the world is not on target to achieving Universal Access. It was great to hear Canada reaffirm their commitment to voluntary testing that includes pre and post test counselling and their commitment to women and girls. The second parts of the official meetings were side events. Each side event had a different topic that included women and girls, providing leadership in countries with concentrated epidemics and opportunities and limitations on resources. Each of these side events were two hours long and for each one three people on a panel would present a few points, then it was open to the floor for as many countries as possible within the time allowing to make a few points in response to what was presented. During one of these side events it was very reaffirming to hear Canada state that all legal and policy responses should be based on best available evidence.

This was an interesting event to attend. It gave me an eye opener and a gentle introduction to the International level of the HIV/AIDS movement. Sadly though, due to my position of attending as a Canadian Delegate it seriously limited my time to network with other from around the world; however, it was quite an honour to sit at the front table of Canada’s seat in the General Assembly Hall in the United Nations Headquarters – an opportunity and experience not to be passed up.

For more information on this topic please see www.unaids.org and www.icaso.org.

Angel Parks, PYO Program Coordinator

More on GIPA...

In the last issue of PYO's Recharge we wrote about GIPA, what it is and what it means.

In the article we wrote that GIPA is the Greater Involvement of People with HIV/AIDS and that every person living with HIV/AIDS has the right and responsibility to participate in all levels of decision making.

The idea about the "right and responsibility" sparked some great questions around exactly what does right and responsibility actually mean.

I looked up the words right and responsibility in the Collins Gage Canadian Dictionary and here's how they define it:

Right: good, lawful, just, proper, favourable, normal, meant to be seen

Responsibility: obliged or expected to account for, deserving credit or blame, trustworthy, reliable

So the way I see it, and others as I have heard from, right and responsibility is twofold. It means that yes, as a person living with HIV, there is a right to be involved, but it also means at the same time that are acceptance of the right to be involved means that we must live up to the responsibilities of our commitments.

Being responsible for our commitments is not always an easy thing to do. There can be many challenges when being responsible, such as conflicting priorities, lack of training or mentoring to learn what your responsibilities might be or even side effects from medications may make it difficult to follow through with commitments.

Despite this it is important to remember there are many ways to become more meaningfully involved within the AIDS movement. Your involvement can be big or it can be small. The choice is yours.

What do you think??? Send your comments or questions to pyo@actoronto.org.

Angel Parks, PYO Program Coordinator

Coming Out

Like every little boy Jt was not! He liked to play with Barbies, dress up in dresses, and all his friends were girls. At the age of 5 this was his main interest, he came from a low class family unable to afford the things one boy would like. Jt played with his sister's toys and looked up to them because they gave him attention.

Jt was born into a family of four children. First an older sister, then an older brother, then came his parents' biggest hand full, Jt, followed by his little sister 11 months later. Jt suffered hearing issues, which came as earaches, since birth, and due to that a year of his life was in the hospital, and difficulties thru the rest of his childhood and cause learning disabilities. As Jt got older and older, then gaining weight, becoming 180 lbs, and 5' nothing and enter high school, in Madoc Centre Hastings Secondary School. Jt's high school was horrible, his little sister Ashley enter high school shortly after him, she felt due to her hurtful self she told students that he played with Barbie's, wore make-up and dressed in dresses! That made Jt the hit of school, everyone called him a fag, fudge packer, etc.

Jt had very few friends, but one best friend, who ended up to be his escape from the horrible taunting that he would receive from his fellow hillbilly classmates, and other students! Jt reached a grade level that he pushed himself to do, to be like everyone else and give them one less thing to tease him about! Jt had taken a lot of abuse and teachers and principles did not help him, but only got him in trouble for other people treating him awfully! Jt became really lost, problems with his younger sister at home caused problems at school. No one could understand this pre-teen boy, which he felt he had no one and always was scolded and in trouble for things he did not do!

Jt had become alone, and no other to understand his innocence; he started to think of his life to an end, which would be much hurtful and painful! Jt wonder if anyone would care if he were gone!

Jt was losing his bestfriend to an evil group of teenage girls that made Yvonne and themselves to sign a letter telling him to stay away from his best friend. These girls took the only out and numbness from the hurtful words and the open food thrown at him. He had no one! Jt's Heart broke, to the loss of his bestfriend!

Jt tried many ways to hurt him self, but couldn't do it! Would anyone noticed if he threw himself off a set of stairs at his school, and see him lying lifeless at the bottom, would they even notice. Jt went through this from grade 10 to 11. Then one night sick of everything and the unfairness that people and family put upon him, he stood in his families Country house, in the kitchen, with duck borders, blue flooring that spread across the huge kitchen and blue cupboards. Jt stood upset, loss, alone and by the silver wear drawer in front of his Mom (Janette), grab a big knife, with tears of loss in his eyes, and told his mom, why don't you and everyone else like me? I just want to be loved!

Jt held the knife to his neck while saying his hurtful feelings out loud, wanting to end the hate! Then he noticed his mom's tears, which showed she was losing him, and that she felt she couldn't do anything for him! Jt felt for once that someone felt the same as him, that she really does love him! That was the night that Jt never thought about hurting himself! Knowing that he would lose a lot! Now Jt can see his parents love for him, that he could not see before because he was blinded by the hate from students and his little sister!

Jt had decided to loss weight with his mom, and took on 3 paper routes and ate less. Jt became 120 lbs within a year! He felt change, something that gave him the independence to move on! Jt could not watch any longer, his sister ruining his life at home and watching his mom get ill thinking it was all her fault, with the hell his sister caused at his Hillbilly high school. Jt told his mom at the age of 17, and in grade 12, that he needed to move out, so they would know just who his sister was! Jt moved into his first bachelor apartment in Tweed, yet another small town but only 20 minutes away from Madoc.

Jt had his own life, no hurt or pain, but missed his family with all his heart, even though they are not far! Jt had his freedom, but loss his school, because he hated the pain and hateful attention and no awareness he got from school! Jt was asked to leave school and get one credit before he returns. Jt decided to never to return to that hateful school!

Jt found new friends he was finally popular in his own way, free from his little sister at last! A year went by and Jt gained lots of friends and lived in his kingdom, until he let his little sister back in to hang around with him and his friends.

She betrayed him again by opening and reading his diary to his friends while he was out, reading how he liked and wanted to have sex with a crush of his! Jt came home and found out his sister reading it and laughing! Jt freaked and kicked everyone out and then went out on the street and threw his diary in the trash.

Jt in a short time took the idea of liking guys, and explored someone he went to school with. They started dating. Then Jt and a new boyfriend decided to move to Belleville, which is a small city, but gets them away from family and start their own life! Jt and his boyfriend ended up being more like roommates and Jt worked hard and got nothing but a roomy that was never there and billed him for paint and other stupid things like toothpaste for the apartment!

This boyfriend introduced Jt to friend, who had a young son. Jt and this new friend became good friends, and soon realized that her friend treated Jt like crap! Jt worked for his money to pay for the phone and rent, where the boyfriend claimed Ontario Works and still worked at his father's restaurant. Jt's good friend decided to introduce Jt and the boyfriend to her co-worker, who was gay! Well when Jt saw this new boy he was like WOW he is so cute.

Lisa told Jt that Jesse felt the same way and wanted to hang out sometime!

Jt had got a message on his answering machine, it was the old boyfriend's dad, they had borrowed the first and last for this two bedroom apartment that was in an old Victorian house, which looked like a run down scary house from a horror movie. The dad told him he never got the money Jt gave the boyfriend for rent ... Grrr Jt was so pissed, he put the boyfriend in the back burner and started hanging out with the new boy, and the connection he felt with him was this pure whole feeling!

Jt got rid of the old boyfriend and told him off and ended up having to move out, of his own place and in with the new boy and his grandparents! Things were amazing and Jt felt what he was missing, and he knew being with the boy meant that he was gay, and that this was what he was missing! Jt told everyone he was gay, and did not care if they liked it or not!

Jt found this wonderful person that he could just want to scream out to everyone that he is "GAY" and that he is in love, because Jt really was! This new boyfriend was his first real gay relationship and the one he explored gay sex all the way! Jesse was the first!

Then as this perfect relationship seemed like nothing could break it, not even the gods themselves, could drop these two lovebirds from heaven! Well two weeks went by and the new boyfriend was feeling smothered by Jt as he lived with him and did not work, because he lost his job due to the ex boyfriend! The new boyfriend started to pull away from Jt. While Jt was in Tweed visiting his parents, because they moved from Madoc to Tweed, while this all happened! The new boyfriend called and seemed like everything was normal, but told Jt that he needed space! Jt said, "Oh, ok, that is understandable".

Jt was torn and lost once again, he had no Love anymore! Jt and the new boyfriend's relationship went from some space to not wanting a relationship!

Why was this happening to Jt. His 18 year old heart broke into a million pieces and now was back living with his parents, back to where he started from! "Now I am Gay and back in Hillbilly town" he said to himself. Now from 18 to 20, Jt lived back in Belleville with roomies. He could not take the life he lived before and move back to Belleville! Jt got a lot of attention from guys all over, and partied a lot, having the independent, and choices he wanted finally!

Jt had got unwanted attention by his brother in-law, saying degrading things in front of his family and from other people as well!

Jt grew somewhat apart from family and loss a few of friends! Thus all of these things Jt moved from Belleville finally to Toronto where he really wanted to be!

Before he moved to Toronto at the age 23 in the year 2006, he found out Jan 06, 2004, the age of 20 that his life once changed.

It was alone in an office with a nurse, who had a new life for It to start! It was told he was tested HIV positive, he could not believe it!

What does this mean, to this 20 year old? It meant that he felt hate towards himself, could not believe that he would let this happen to him! Why him? Why didn't someone tell him that they had this, so he could have the choice? He asks himself! The nurse made sure It had someone that he really didn't have, other than one friend, who came to this crying loss man.

It felt his life will end in a scary illness, fear how he would do this!

It cried for 12 hours straight, another thing to disappoint his family about him and I told you this is what you get when you're gay!

It partied through the night with really good friends and a few other friends that really were not friends, crying in front of these people, not knowing where his life would take him, or if anyone would understand what he will have to face for the rest of his life!

It now started his life for him, and no one else, doing what he needs to do to make him it happen with "No Regrets". With that he moved to Toronto in July 2006, suffering a lot of let down and illness. He managed to go to school and was surrounded by others like him! It felt like the chance to pass his fears and heartiness, now he fights with knowing he will be happy and his life is heading to his dreams and no one could take that from him!

It now knows what he wants by looking only on himself!

THE END
By J.T.

*****Got a story you would like to share?? Please send them to pyo@actoronto.org. All submissions will be confidential.*****

XVII International AIDS Conference

It is that time again! This is the 17th bi-annual International AIDS Conference (IAC) and this year it is taking place in Mexico City.

In 2006 Toronto was the host to the 16th IAC and it appears as if the planners have created an itinerary just as full and exciting as the last conference.

I am very excited to report that more than 140 individuals just from Ontario alone received scholarships funded by the AIDS Bureau, which is a program of the provincial Ministry of Health and Long Term Care.

PYO will be in Mexico City for just over a week participating in pre conference activities and then taking part and attending many presentations on newly published research from around the world.

Just before the official opening of the conference a first ever Global Men Who Have Sex with Men march and rally has been organized. This is going to be a very exciting experience as this is the first of it's kind.

Also, the international women's network has organized another Women and Girls march and rally that will be happening during the conference. I suspect this will be a very large presence and a powerful and exciting one!!

This year the conference organizers will be broadcasting some of the presentations via the internet.

For more information check out www.aids2008.org.

Stayed tuned to "recharge" for thorough updates that we will published after the conference!!

Angel Parks, PYO Program Coordinator

THE BLOG's

Title: Boot Camp

Entry title: My Cherry

I'm a 25 y/o PHA living in Toronto and I'm a blog virgin! This is my first ever blog entry, and I'm glad to be debuting it in PYO's Zine.

Every issue I plan to write about my experiences in community development work, something I am increasingly involved with these days. Here are a few notes about one of my recent activities.

Earlier this month I participated in a 4-day leadership development program facilitated by the Ontario AIDS Network. It was held at YMCA Cedar Glen, the same facility that the 2007 PYO Retreat was held at, however this weekend was definitely no retreat. We were busy most days for about 10 hours with training.

The program's purpose was to enable other PHA's in Ontario to become better leaders in the community. We learned leadership theory, had some chances to practice being leaders and watched some great movies with HIV/AIDS themes. I didn't love all the content of the program, and found some of it a bit too foundational, but I did gain from some lovely experiences.

I met three great women with amazing stories. Two of them were from African countries and the other from a country in the Caribbean. They shared their stories of facing sever adversity and amazingly overcoming it with astonishing results. Such brave, strong and successful women. I'm so glad that they are making Canada their homes. Not only did I learn about their pasts, I also learned about their presents, and their involvement in their respective ASO's - Black C.A.P and Voices of Positive Women. Meeting such amazing role models has inspired me to be an even more determined leader in the community.

Until next time....

Barry Freedman

The New One

And now what?... I guess every one of us asked the same question. When I got diagnosed HIV + I did not know what to do, though I was not upset or sad. I was nervous because I did not know what I was supposed to do, I had so many questions and no answers.

Where should I go? Do I have to tell my family, friends? What if I get sick? Do I need to get meds? What about work? Am I going to die soon?

Somebody finally gave the name of a counsellor at ACT (AIDS Committee of Toronto). Though she did not answer all my questions, she made me see that I was not alone, which I think was my biggest fear: being alone and rejected by every one. I thought I was condemned to live around sick people, hospitals, drugs and death. My case manager told me about PYO (Positive Youth Outreach). She said that this program is for people under the age of 30 in my situation, and basically it's a place where you can meet new people, talk about anything, ask questions, get information, do some activities, or just sit and relax doing nothing; but most important it is a place where you can share your feelings with people who will understand what you are going through, people who will not reject you for being positive.

I remember the first time I went to the group, I was scared I did not know what to expect, especially because I was the new one. It was like the first day at school: What if they don't like me? What if there is someone I know? What if I don't fit in? Luckily it was not like that. I felt welcome, if not by everyone at the beginning, at least I did not feel rejected and after a few sessions I got to know everyone a little bit more and now I feel like I am making new friends, friends who share my feelings and my point of view about life in general. At that time someone from the group had just passed away, which was very difficult for me. I was not ready to deal with death. In fact I do not think I will ever be ready. Once again we fear the unknown. I tried to ignore the situation doing some activities with other guys from the group. I had a lot of questions, but I knew it was not the time to ask; a few sessions later someone told me about this guy who apparently was not doing well lately and he was not taking care of his health properly. I did not get to meet him, but I know that for people living with HIV it is imperative to have a healthy lifestyle.

Time passed by and now after a year of attending PYO I can say that the group has helped me a lot to deal with my new life. I know I am not alone, I know I can get help from different organizations regarding HIV matters, but most importantly, I know there is one place I can always go and feel comfortable, where I can talk fearlessly, where I can express myself and where rejection is out of the question.

It's been almost two years since I got infected and now I can say I am not dying of HIV. I am LIVING with HIV.

Anonymous

Follow the group in, *leave a leader.*

We know that leaders are never born, they are created and this is why the Ontario AIDS Network offers a free Leadership Development Workshop for people living with HIV/AIDS.

We can help you identify and build on your natural leadership strengths and give you the tools you need to put those skills into practice.

To learn more, or to register for our Leadership Development Workshops please visit www.ontarioaidsnetwork.on.ca, call 416-364-4555 (Toronto) or toll free 1-800-839-0369.

The workshops are free, but space is limited.
Please register early to secure your spot as
the next community leader.



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POSITIVE YOUTH OUTREACH

PYO's weekly SOCIAL SUPPORT DROP-IN is for HIV positive youth under 30. We share experiences, information and support each other. There is always a meal and we have weekly activities such as workshops, art or movies.

The DROP IN happens every Thursday from 4pm to 8pm @ PYO.

PYO's Women's Social will continue to be held in partnership with Voices of Positive Women. This is open to all ladies, including Trans-women under the age of 30. It's a place for young HIV positive women to chill out, share experiences and connect with each other. There is always food and fun activities like workshops, art or movies. A childcare subsidy is available.

The YOUNG WOMEN'S SOCIAL happens is held on the second Tuesday of the month from 4pm to 8pm @ PYO.

If groups aren't your thing you can chat PYO offers one on one with an HIV positive peer.

To find out more call 416-340-8484 ext. 281 visit PYO's website at www.positiveyouth.com.

TTC tokens are available for both programs.

Positive Youth Outreach (PYO) is a peer driven program of the AIDS Committee of Toronto.
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