

Even during this pandemic, ACT thinks about the women, making sure we stay connected.

Being able to connect with someone was very helpful, since my feelings of loneliness and isolation at the time continued to escalate.

Living with HIV is not the end, but a bright new beginning.

Knowledge is power!

I can sit down with my sisters, and we all share something wonderful together.

EVOLVE

These groups are our home, our family; they are everything to us.

It's a place where I feel like I belong, and these are my own people who I can have open dialogue with.

I thought if there is a role for me to play in giving back, let me find an organization that creates that space for people to come together.



act

**Annual Report
2020-2021**

🔗🔗🔗 It was a year of isolation for so many in our community. Loneliness and anxiety were prominent among those who sought support from ACT. And perhaps even greater was the isolation for those who, for whatever reason, were not comfortable or ready to seek out supports virtually or over the phone.

With the support of the community, ACT was empowered to evolve; to meet people where they were at; to connect, while being forced to remain physically apart.

While the majority of the past year we were unable to see faces or offer support in-person, it's important that our community of volunteers, funders, donors and supporters know that connections were made possible by your support.

Whether one-on-one counselling, group-based programs, social supports, online education and outreach, women and youth programming – our community made possible the support provided to people living with HIV and those at increased risk at ACT. Thank you for being there to provide support to those we serve.

491

of ACT service users identified as **HIV-positive**.
An additional 170 identified as at-risk of HIV.

32%

of service users were new
in 2020-21.

58%

of people served identify as being among a **racialized community**, including Black, Indigenous, Middle Eastern, South Asian and Latin American.

35%

of people served last year have
been receiving support from ACT
for 10 years or more.

70

volunteers at ACT contributed 1,789
hours to support the community.

42%

of people served last year were
under the age of 40.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

4

The Buddy Program

6

Harm Reduction

8

Women's Programming

11

Q&A About HIV Testing

14

Donor Profile

16

Volunteer Profile

18

SNAP@Home

20

Donor Listing & Financial Chart

24

Q&A With Staff

26

Letter from Executive Director & Board Chair



THE BUDDY PROGRAM

PROVIDING SUPPORT AND **CONNECTION** TO BATTLE ISOLATION

▶▶▶ **The *Buddy* program is a six-month long program matching a person living with HIV with a trained volunteer to receive confidential, friendly support. While Oliver* is thankful he's been able to create a personal connection with his buddy, he misses the face-to-face interaction, wishing they had been able to meet in-person.**

Oliver began accessing in-person counselling at ACT in March 2020 but was soon forced to switch to virtual counselling support when the ACT offices closed to the public due to COVID-19. During that time, he was living on his own and had heard about the *Buddy* program from his ACT counsellor. Like many others this past year, 51-year-old Oliver's connections to his friends diminished during the pandemic.

"I pursued the *Buddy* program because I wanted a connection with somebody," said Oliver. "Being able to connect with someone was very helpful, since my feelings of loneliness and isolation at the time continued to escalate."

Further sharing his appreciation for ACT, Oliver added, "There are programs available for everyone, from counselling to programs for people living with HIV; people need to take advantage of them because they can make a huge difference in your life."

An ACT service user nearly a decade ago, Fabian remembers requesting information about sexual health and received the support and supplies he needed from a kind volunteer at the Access Centre. He has since become a volunteer himself, offering support to people like Oliver through the *Buddy* program.

"I used to take service users to Allan Gardens Conservatory," said Fabian, who has been a *Buddy* program volunteer for the last 10 years. "It gives us something to do and allows us to be comfortable with each other, and really connect without the extra noise that comes when meeting at a coffee shop; I miss those sorts of outings."

Like Oliver, Fabian enjoys the one-on-one engagement that the *Buddy* program offers and found this past year particularly interesting as the pandemic brought out something unique – he realized he and the service user were supporting each other through the fear and anxiety present from living through the pandemic.

"It's one of those times that the service user also understands that their buddy is in a very similar situation," said Fabian. "It was a learning process for my buddy and I; we were both there for each other in a sense. Our meetings became a place where we were able to empty out our anxieties and our fears and talk openly with one another."

With increased levels of isolation, Fabian is happy he was able to make a difference in his community.

"I think a lot of people don't understand just how severe isolation is and just how severe it is when you feel like your community has left you behind." He adds, "I really enjoy the *Buddy* program because it really takes into consideration the issues older community members living with HIV are facing and ensures they aren't abandoned. "It creates a safe space for someone to gain a connection so they can feel less isolated and alone."

For Fabian, it's important for his community to have as many allies and friends as possible, stressing the importance of giving back to one's community.

"ACT is one of those organizations where you always feel welcome," he said. "The *Buddy* program creates a community that ensures that everyone is looked after and supported."

Thanks to your support, people like Oliver can access services to help combat the feelings of isolation, and Fabian is able to make a difference and give back in his community, in the same way an ACT volunteer did for him.

.....
*To maintain anonymity, Oliver's real name has been changed for this story.

“

I really enjoy the *Buddy* program because it really takes into consideration the issues older community members living with HIV are facing and ensures they aren't abandoned.

”



HARM REDUCTION

FROM ADDICTION TO FACILITATING GROUPS ON HARM REDUCTION

▶▶▶ Like many newcomers who leave their home countries, Adrian* moved to Canada in 2008 in search of better opportunities. However, his journey was one filled with challenges he eventually overcame.

In 2014, following a sexual assault that involved drugs, Adrian was diagnosed with HIV. Becoming HIV-positive deteriorated his marriage but also his self confidence.

"I no longer saw myself as a valuable human being," said Adrian. "This led to me leaving my marriage, and I became homeless for almost four years."

Having accessed many different organizations for services – from food to shelter – Adrian was able to create a weekly routine, even more so when he came across ACT and started counselling services.

"I recall coming to ACT, using the public washroom and washing myself," Adrian reminisced. "It was degrading and demoralizing, but living on the streets, you have to get by hour by hour and do what you have to do."

What Adrian didn't realize at the time was this would be the start of his journey to recovery and served to create a strong relationship with ACT. Adrian would soon access the Meth & Sex program to help manage his substance use, Body Image program to reinforce a more positive self-image, and he volunteered for the Condom Stuffing Parties. He also completed three shifts as an Access Centre volunteer. "That was wonderful. I just overcame homelessness and wanted to get to know people more and was becoming a lot more social, and then lockdown began."

As someone who didn't have family or know many people in Toronto (he also wasn't working or attending school) Adrian found it difficult to create community. ACT ultimately became just that for Adrian – a place where he was building community and connections with other people. Having joined the Meth & Sex program, Adrian learned about the Safer PnP: A Virtual Chat, providing a space for cis and trans gay, bi and queer guys to connect about PnP (party and play), drugs, chemsex, community and harm reduction strategies. It was a group he would eventually come to co-facilitate.

Now, Adrian is no longer using meth, he's housed, and is pursuing education full-time. He wants to continue giving back to his community through ACT.

"I enjoy working with an agency that has helped me so much. I've given a lot of my time to ACT because it has been instrumental in effectively helping me overcome the many challenges I had, and the culture and environment is welcoming. ACT will continue to engage with you and the work they do is holistic."

Shafik is an ACT service user, accessing the Meth & Sex program. He shares some of the same experiences as Adrian.

In April 2017, when Shafik hit rock bottom with his addiction, he did a Google search for "meth addict" and the Meth & Sex program was the first thing that popped up. He signed up to start his journey towards recovery.

"I remember saying to myself that I can't be here anymore. I need to make a change," recalls Shafik. "I knew I needed to make a change regarding my substance use."

For Shafik, Meth & Sex was a safe space, with people who are living through similar experiences.

"It's a place where I felt like I belong, and these are my people who I can have open dialogue with," he said. "What I liked about the Meth & Sex group was it was an instant brotherhood that happened. We bonded right away, and no one felt judged."

It wasn't until last year that Shafik got more involved with ACT, presenting a program through Community ACTivators called "Stretching out the Tweaks", an 8-week yoga program that uses Ecstatic Yoga (a combination of dance and Hatha yoga) to inspire gay, bi and queer guys who PnP (Party and Play) to focus on dynamic movement, powerful breath-work and dance therapy as an alternative for them to feel good. Wanting to use his arts background and his perspective from being a former substance user, he set out to find a way to give back to his community.

"ACTivators was my connection to ACT that led to other things," said Shafik. "For someone like me, it has been full circle with Meth & Sex. I never thought I would be back facilitating and helping other people who are going through what I was going through. It blows my mind and teaches me the value of my lived experience and tells people that it is going to be okay."

Shafik was a natural fit to become co-facilitator of both the SPUNK (a support group for gay, bi and queer men who want to make a change in their substance use) and Safer PnP programs. For Shafik, having these programs and spaces are important because they allow people to heal and recover from trauma they might be dealing with.

"For anyone who is interested in ACT's Harm Reduction programs, I would encourage you to do it," said Shafik. "As a queer South Asian Muslim guy from Kenya, who is HIV-positive and had a meth addiction, I want my story to reach other people."

"It's important to share my story for my own personal growth, healing and recovery," he continued. "There is still a lot of stigma when it comes to HIV, drug-use and addiction, and it's important for me to let people know that it is nothing to be ashamed about."

With the support of community and donors like you, Adrian and Shafik were able to make the changes they needed in their respective journeys with substance use and create a community where they can give back and share their knowledge and experiences.

.....
**To maintain anonymity, Adrian's real name have been changed for this story.*

A woman with long black braids and glasses is sitting in a black office chair, working on a silver laptop. She is wearing a blue and white patterned top. The background is a bright window with a view of a city. The text "WOMEN'S PROGRAMMING" is in a red box on the left side of the image.

WOMEN'S PROGRAMMING

WELCOMING CHANGE AND FEELING CONNECTED DURING A PANDEMIC

▶▶▶▶ **During a time when isolation is at an all-time high, Shona* and Aliza* are two women who are thankful that they have a community through ACT's women's support programming.**

Shona first became an ACT service user in 2013. Since Shona shared her story for our 2018/19 Annual Report, she has welcomed two more grandchildren (becoming a grandmother of five). She moved to Canada from Zimbabwe with her two children in 2008, seven years after she and her husband were diagnosed with HIV. Shortly after being diagnosed as HIV-positive, her husband passed away.

"Not being around my family this past year has not been easy," said Shona. "At the start of the pandemic, I was feeling really down and did not want to do anything; not being able to attend women's programming was hard because that's my second family."

On top of feeling isolated from her family and the loneliness of not being around her friends she's made at ACT, it was also a financially challenging year. While she accesses Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), it was not enough to cover her bills.

When women's support programs at ACT started again virtually, Shona said it "took the loneliness away from my life."

Shona recalls how happy she was when Savannah, one of ACT's Women's Support Coordinators, started programming online. She looked forward to seeing the other women and to feeling connected again. Catching up and sharing laughs with one another, even though they were not physically in the same space, was a welcomed change from the forced isolation caused by COVID-19.

"Some of the women are very lonely because they are living alone and don't have family to lean on during this time," explained Shona. "These groups are our home, our family; they are everything to us. We can share, teach and learn from each other and support one another."

Having been an ACT service user for years, Shona has accessed the Income Tax Clinic, women's support programming and most recently, Employment ACTION, working with Employment Consultant Jason to improve her resume and interview skills.

"Accessing Employment ACTION virtually was difficult because I am used to doing things in-person," said Shona. "But when COVID-19 started, I got on the phone

with Jason, and he was very helpful and worked with me to improve my resume so I can apply for jobs."

Virtual programming overall started as a challenge for Shona, as she initially did not have access to a computer for the Zoom meetings and had to learn how to be more knowledgeable with technology. Luckily, "Savannah was very patient with me and with everyone else."

"I remember when programs started online, Savannah sent everyone gift cards to get groceries," exclaimed Shona. "We all appreciated it because it has been so hard for everyone! Even during this pandemic, ACT thinks about the women, making sure we stay connected. I am so thankful of the work that ACT is doing, and it truly is my second home. When I attend programming at ACT, I know I am protected, I am safe, and I am free."

These words are echoed by Aliza*, who signed up with women's support programming three years ago. However, it wasn't until this year that she was able to truly get involved in the program.

"I was unable to attend programming before because I live far away and I have to take care of my three children; it's sometimes difficult finding someone to take care of my kids," said Aliza. "But since the pandemic began, my involvement with ACT has increased and I can access programming from the comfort of my own home and attend the meetings. It has been wonderful, and I am able to benefit from the support of the other women."

Having moved from Nigeria with her husband and children in 2014, Aliza has struggled being herself because of her HIV status. She attributes that to the stigma that still exists both back home in Nigeria and here in Canada.

Fortunately, she was able to access the support she needed immediately after being diagnosed with HIV. In 2008, when she was eight weeks pregnant with her firstborn, she went for a check up and her doctor informed her she was HIV-positive. She was able to get the support she needed from her physician and was immediately linked to a social worker and access to HIV medication.

"There is still a lot of stigma outside of the HIV community. It's hard for me to be public about my status," said Aliza. "I remember when I was applying for my permanent residency and the receptionist disclosed my status to everyone in the waiting room and everyone started looking and treating me differently. It was awful!"

When Aliza started accessing programming, she registered when the ACT office was still located at the corner of Church and Carlton streets. After registration, she did not come back to ACT for programming. It just happened to coincide with her going back to school, coupled with it being a long commute for her.

But Aliza recalled meeting Grace (who has now stepped into her new role as Women's Support Coordinator, working alongside Savannah) during her intake process at ACT. Aliza formed an immediate connection with Grace, who made her feel comfortable from the start. She said that Grace made her "feel welcome, respected and she made me feel like I am someone important."

"I got a care package delivered to me by Savannah and Grace which made me so happy," exclaimed Aliza.

"The care packages were a big help to me and had products like masks, hygiene products and hand sanitizer; it was good to see them, even physically distanced, and to know that they want to make sure I am okay."

Adding to her appreciation, Aliza said, "When I attend ACT's women's programming, it makes me happy and lifts my spirit. I can sit down with my sisters, and we all share something wonderful together. We share a space that is calming and encouraging and brings smiles and happiness to our lives; the sisterhood and the community is important, especially during this time."

.....
**To maintain anonymity, both Shona and Aliza's real names have been changed for this story.*





Q&A ABOUT HIV TESTING

PREPARED AND EMPOWERED: A CONVERSATION ABOUT HIV & STI TESTING, TRANS HEALTH AND RESOURCES

“

**No matter your health status, be proactive with your health.
ACT can help you learn, plan, and help you make the best decisions for yourself.
I'm proud to be part of this team and the work we are offering to our community.**

”

▶▶▶ **The experience of getting tested for HIV can be stressful for many people. There can be lots of emotions that come up, including anxiety about hearing the result that follows. Sometimes, it is best to verbalize this and get connected to the proper support immediately, instead of waiting for a referral.**

Because of this, ACT established a very open dialogue during the HIV testing experience for those who came to ACT for a test. Mental health counselling was available to anyone during their test experience, regardless of the test result.

While HIV testing at ACT could not be available due to COVID-19, the team, in partnership with Hassle Free Clinic, launched a highly successful model of anonymous, rapid and supportive HIV testing that links people to care and treatment – a model that will now transition to the soon to open HQ Toronto, a new sexual and mental health centre for all gay, bi, queer guys and trans people in the community.

ACT's Gay Men's Health Systems Coordinator Mike Smith (they/them) and Roberto Gerrard-Martinez (he/him) discuss ACT resources available to the community, and where people can get an HIV test during this time, in advance of the opening of HQ Toronto in early 2022.

Question: For those who don't know, we have a website called www.HIVTestingToronto.com. What was the catalyst to create this resource for the community?

Mike: Knowledge is power! This website delivers key information related to HIV, prevention strategies, treatment, testing technology, testing services, and operating hours. It also touches on the importance of ACT's integrated mental health counselling

services – all in one easy-to-navigate website. We wanted to make it easier for individuals to find all this information and empower people to choose the type of test and location that is best for them.

Question: Pre-pandemic, ACT offered HIV testing for trans and non-binary people in our community. What is different about testing here at ACT?

Roberto: The difference is we want trans people to come to us. Through community consultation, program evaluation and advisory committees, we are learning how to create a service that is centred around the specific needs and wants of gender-diverse people.

“

The arrival of HQ Toronto in the fall will certainly be a game-changer, as people will be able to drop-in, no questions asked. Also, ACT is one of the HIV self-test kit distribution sites for the I'm Ready campaign, connecting people to care and prevention.

”

Question: Are there any sexual health resources/information available for trans men?

Mike: Trans-masculine people who have sex with men and masculine people can check out ACT's Empower campaign! It features sexual health information that pertains to you and your body and was created for and by trans and non-binary people. For instance, we want trans people to know that HRT (Hormone Replacement Therapy) and PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) are safe to take together. This campaign celebrates trans lives and equips people to advocate for themselves when faced with trans erasure, cisnormativity and other forms of oppression in medical spaces.

Question: With HIV testing at ACT being halted in March 2020, and then suspended due to our office closure resulting from COVID-19, where can people get tested today?

Roberto: Toronto Sexual Health Clinics including Hassle Free Clinic and Crossways are still providing HIV and STI testing and treatment services, but at a reduced capacity and only by appointment. Unfortunately, people may have to wait two or three weeks to get an appointment. My recommendation is if you don't have a family doctor or prefer not to access sexual health services from them, then get connected with your nearest community health centre. The arrival of *HQ Toronto* in the fall will certainly be a game-changer, as people will be able to drop-in, no questions asked. Also, ACT is one of the HIV self-test kit distribution sites for the *I'm Ready* campaign, connecting people to care and prevention. You can get more information by visiting www.actontario.org/imready

Question: Speaking of recommendations, what would you recommend to someone who is anxious about getting an HIV test?

Mike: First, I would recommend that they go and do it. Whether it's a first time getting an HIV test, or it's been a while since you got one, make sure you book an appointment and get tested! Like I said earlier, knowledge is power! An HIV diagnosis will change how you experience life, but it doesn't have to be a negative change. If you have a reactive (positive) test, remember that HIV is a manageable condition, and with regular treatment and care (often one pill a day), you can live a happy, healthy, fulfilling, and long life.

Question: Another campaign that you worked on during the pandemic was the *Prepared for Positive* campaign. Can you please talk about that and how that came about?

Roberto: The Gay Men's Health Programs department works together to identify emerging and urgent needs in the community. After launching our integrated HIV testing and mental health counselling services in September 2018, our

community counsellors noticed an increase in the number of people who experienced significant HIV-related anxiety. For many, this distress is so unbearable that it is easier to avoid knowing their HIV status than to get tested. We wanted to develop a campaign that would address this specific barrier to routine HIV and STI testing and reach out to those who need additional support.

Question: Why is this campaign important?

Mike: It delivers a clear message that when you are informed, you are empowered, regardless of your test results. With the right information and support, you can move forward with confidence and optimism. Living with HIV is not the end, but a bright new beginning. The campaign showcases that you can live your best life regardless of your HIV status.

“

**Living with HIV is not the end,
but a bright new beginning.**

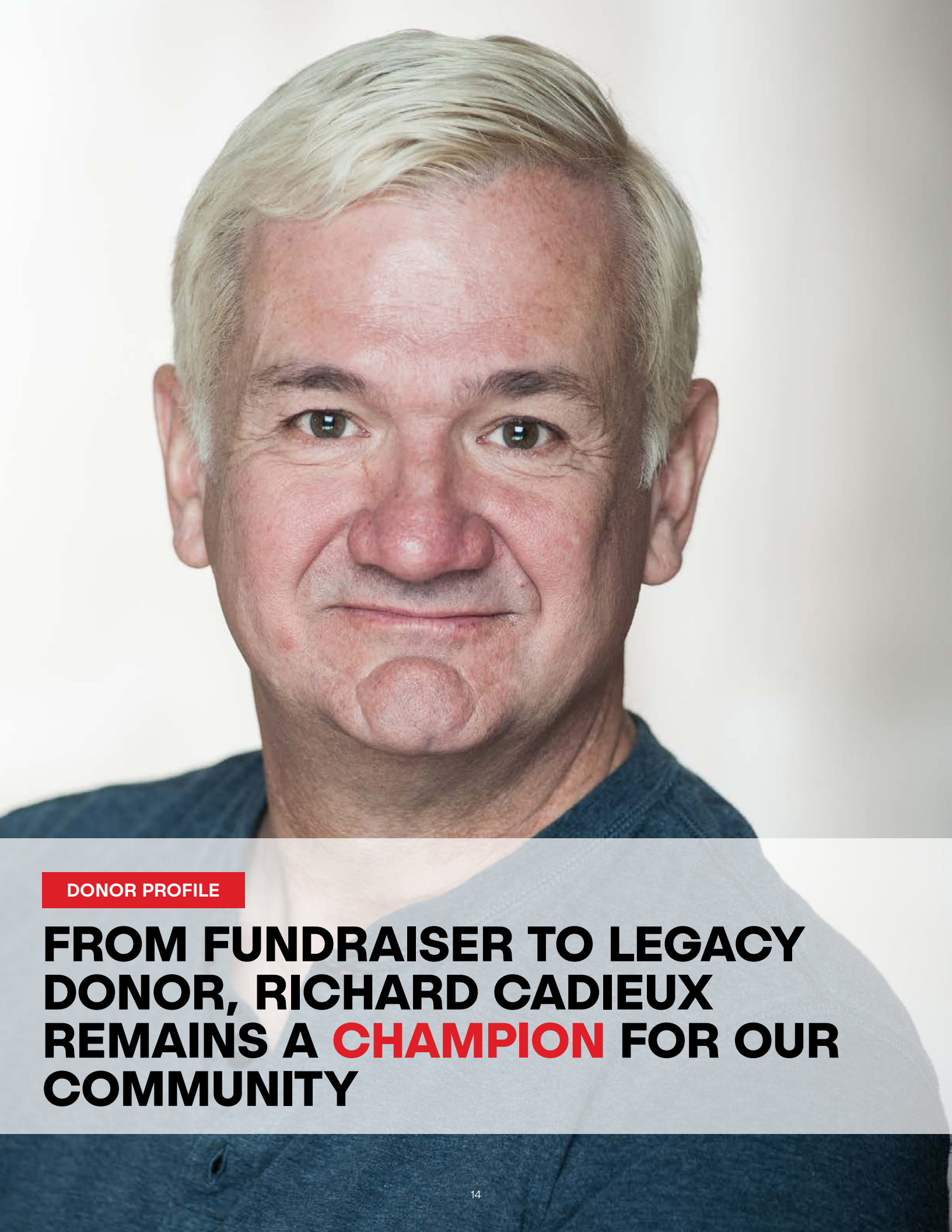
”

Question: That's a great message for our community. ACT is all about offering holistic services. Can you share why mental health counselling is an important aspect of HIV-testing services?

Roberto: ACT's approach to HIV prevention is improving health of the whole body and mind. Our mental health has a strong influence on other facets of health and well-being: physical, health, emotional health, and social well-being. There is nothing wrong with accessing mental health counselling, group therapy, or substance use support. Needing the support of the mental health professional is normal. The counsellors at ACT are highly trained, professional, and FREE!

Mike: No matter your health status, be proactive with your health. ACT can help you learn, plan, and help you make the best decisions for yourself. I'm proud to be part of this team and the work we are offering to our community.

.....
For more information about *Prepared for Positive*, *Empower*, or resources about HIV and STI testing, and sexual and mental health, please visit www.HIVTestingToronto.com



DONOR PROFILE

**FROM FUNDRAISER TO LEGACY
DONOR, RICHARD CADIEUX
REMAINS A **CHAMPION** FOR OUR
COMMUNITY**

▶▶▶ You could say that Richard Cadieux represents the passion and drive to help build his community. Having worked at ACT in the Fundraising and Development department in 1991, he has seen a lot of change when it comes to HIV advocacy and how the community has come together to fight HIV stigma.

It's one of the reasons the Philanthropy & Stewardship Committee of ACT chose to honour Richard with the annual Together Towards Zero Award. As a 30-year supporter, Richard has been a true champion of our community's collective effort to support those in need and to work towards zero new HIV-infections.

"I'm always looking at where I can make a difference and how I can help out," recalls Richard of his time at ACT. "Back then, we did not have the same HIV treatments that we have for people now. What drew me to ACT was community and I wanted to support the community and give back."

Richard remembers a time when he truly wanted to be part of creating change. "People were dying every day. Every week. We needed to do something about it," Richard said.

During his time at ACT, Richard saw a high response rate for the agency's direct mail campaigns, something that Richard said was unheard of.

"With a typical direct mail, if you get 2-3 per cent response rates, that was great," said Richard. "We were getting about 50 percent response rates. We were going for sponsors and people really wanted to help make a difference. They were giving so generously during that time."

Aside from the direct mail, Richard was also responsible for and excelled at getting in-kind donations from other organizations and securing food for events and groups.

I'm always looking at where I can make a difference and how I can help out.

“

I've seen the benefits a legacy gift can have on an organization and how it can help further its goals.

”

One thing he really pushed for was to have the ACT logo and address on the direct mail envelopes. They traditionally were sent out plain to prevent any reference that people were receiving mail from an AIDS service organization. For Richard, ending this practice was the only way to effect change.

"Stigma was huge and way more pronounced back then," said Richard, "The word AIDS was so loaded that people did not want it written on the envelopes we were sending out. It needed to be done to normalize our work and the need to support it."

While his time as ACT staff has long since passed, Richard continued his relations as a donor to this day. He donates to participants in the annual AIDS Walk Toronto (which ends in 2021), brings friends and purchases artwork from SNAP, allowing Richard to support ACT while satisfying his love for photography. And let's not forget – Richard is also a monthly donor.

Richard's deep connection to ACT led him to make the ultimate gift. Richard has informed staff that he's included a gift for ACT in his will and estate plans – a decision that he said was easy for him to make.

"I've seen the benefits a legacy gift can have on an organization and how it can help further its goals. That was part of my motivation – to leave behind something substantial so ACT can put it to good use and continue to empower people living with HIV and AIDS, and those at increased risk with the ability to lead a good quality of life."

We are so grateful to Richard for his years of service on staff working to grow community support for those in need, and the varying ways he is lending his financial support today – and for tomorrow. It's because of donors like Richard that ACT is able to continue to evolve its programs and services to meet community need.



VOLUNTEER PROFILE

GIVING BACK AND CONNECTING WITH COMMUNITY

“

**It's also imperative that you open up to the service user as well.
It allows for neutral learning and growth.
That is what makes the Buddy program so unique.**

”

▶▶▶ **As a member of the 2SLGBTQ+ community with a long history of volunteering for several different organizations, it was only natural for Ylber to want to give back to his community last year and get involved with ACT's Buddy program, matching people living with HIV with a trained volunteer who can provide confidential emotional support to combat loneliness and isolation.**

"Loneliness is a huge issue in our community. People are dealing with abandonment, losing touch, and being ostracized from family members and friends," said Ylber. "I thought that if there is a role for me to play in giving back, let me find an organization that creates that space for people to come together, and that's where ACT came into the picture."

After accessing its HIV Testing clinic pre-pandemic, Ylber was able to interact with ACT staff and wanted an opportunity to get more involved. Ylber connected with Melanie, ACT's Volunteer Resources Coordinator, and was given the overview of the all the programs and services offered. Ylber immediately was drawn to the Buddy program and liked the one-on-one interaction that the program provides.

"As a 'Buddy,' I'm a confidant and a friend. I offer emotional and social support without the pressure of prescribing solutions because we are not therapists. Instead, it creates a space for us to listen, to learn. A space where people feel less alone, especially during a pandemic," Ylber explained.

Ylber added, "If I could be that person for a service user in 60 minutes and make the world a little less lonely and cruel because I am on the other end of the screen, lending them my attention and standing in solidarity with them, then I've done something good."

Prior to becoming an ACT volunteer, Ylber tutored and mentored youth, gearing them towards building life skills and supporting academic success. Being a "Buddy" to someone with more life experience than him (which the case with the service user he was paired up with), he had to learn how to be empathetic. His job is "not to 'fix' anyone, but to enter their world, have two-way communication and to build trust; it's about letting them know that you are here for them."

Ylber added on his reflections, "It's also imperative that you open up to the service user as well. It allows for neutral learning and growth. That is what makes the Buddy program so unique."

Volunteering during the pandemic posed its own challenges for new volunteers like Ylber. He felt that he had to try twice as hard to be present when in front of a computer screen. When you initially meet someone, you can read body language, look for cues if someone is comfortable with you, and make eye contact while engaging in conversation.

"With the service user I was paired up with, there were times when they would share something with me and in the moment of vulnerability, they would say, 'I wish we were having this conversation face-to-face right now, instead of virtually, because this does not feel like it's real,'" said Ylber. "We established early on that this was the only way for us to stay connected. Because we are both looking at a screen, we acknowledged that our eyes may wander from our image to their image, but we have to consciously be present and let each other know that you are listening and here for one another."

While ACT has given Ylber the ability to give back to his community, he reflects on the past year and what his hopes are for the volunteer and Buddy programs at ACT.

"As someone who did not have pre-pandemic experience with ACT, I know the work that the organization has been doing is even more important this past year, especially as we emerge out of this pandemic. It is critical that the Buddy program not only remain available, but that it becomes more enhanced for people who are living with HIV," said Ylber.

Further sharing his appreciation of ACT, Ylber added, "I would wholeheartedly encourage someone who wants to volunteer for a community-based organization that is working with people living with HIV and the 2SLGBTQ+ community. I think the breadth and depth of services at ACT really allows for various entry points for volunteers to come in and find their niche – whether it is one-on-one facilitation, outreach work, group facilitation – there is something for everyone."



SNAP@HOME

HOW THE PANDEMIC **TRANSFORMED** SNAP@HOME INTO A VIRTUAL LIVE AUCTION SUCCESS

▶▶▶ It was March 6, 2020. ACT fundraising staff walked a few short blocks to Arcadian Court at the corner of Queen and Bay Streets, the venue for SNAP in just 20 days time.

The team was riding high. In the days prior, several donors had graciously hosted salon events in their homes to engage donors and buyers in the SNAP 2020 collection. A full preview event for supporters was forthcoming.

On that Friday, staff was at Arcadian Court to try tasty selections under consideration for SNAP 2020. Delicious fish and vegan tacos; delectable mushroom risotto; a series of beef sliders with various toppings; and traditional Austrian strudel for dessert.

Staff could not have imagined that they would be the only ones to have a taste of this menu.

We all know what happened next. Five days later, multiple conversations were initiated with sponsors, curatorial committee volunteers, supporters, and an emergency meeting of the ACT Board of Directors. By 3 pm on that Wednesday, March 11, 2020, a call was placed to the event manager with Arcadian Court to inform them ACT was cancelling SNAP.

"I could hear her jaw hit the floor over the phone," said Jason Patterson, Director of Development of the event manager's reaction to the cancelling. Two days later, everything in the city would be shut down, including ACT's in-person services.



◆◆◆ **Sonja Scharf has been on the SNAP Curatorial Committee for over 10 years, and its chair for the last three. As a supporter as well through her business Akasha Art Projects, Sonja was jazzed to bring SNAP@Home to the masses after the event cancellation in 2020.**

"It was hard to know how the event would come together. We were just so excited to be with a very small group in our gallery space to help raise money for ACT," Sonja shared.

That small group: former ACT Executive Director Hazelle Palmer, former ACT Board Chair Richard Willett and Sonja's partner (in business and in life) Kelly Kyle, also former Chair of the Silent Auction Committee. Over Zoom was former SNAP event chair Jim Turner and his partner and 2Gallery co-owner Craig Daniel joining from Prince Edward County. They had three artists from their gallery in the collection. This is the reality of enjoying an event during the pandemic.

What were donors, supporters, and art buyers in store for with SNAP@Home? With the support of the TD The Ready Commitment, ACT used the One Cause virtual event centre to host what would be the first virtual live charity art auction during the pandemic. Registered guests logged into the One Cause platform, which used Zoom to share pre-recorded content interspersed with the SNAP Live Auction.

An ACT staff member, a videographer and auctioneer Perry Tung were hosted at Cowley Abbott Fine Art to run the Live Auction. One by one, the 43 artworks, generously donated by the artists, went up for auction on over 500 computer screens in Toronto

and beyond. Guests clicked a button on screen to register their bid, with the bidder's name popping up for virtual guests, and Perry as auctioneer to call out.

When all was said and done, SNAP@Home would become a huge success, and a model soon to be replicated by other charities. Raising \$360,000, it was one of the most successful SNAP events ever, made possible by artists, sponsors, generous donors, and bidding by SNAP patrons.

Guests were invited to make an evening of their experience at home through "celebration packages" prepared by Oliver & Bonacini, featuring assorted charcuterie and a bottle of bubbly courtesy of Trius Wines.

In addition to the live art auction, a partnership with Waddington's enabled online bidding for an additional 43 artworks in the SNAP Photo Competition.

For Richard Willett, who ended the evening with three live auction works, the event was a celebration of ACT.

"It was truly special to get together, distanced with a group of four, and two in Prince Edward County, to just feel normal again – to celebrate the generosity of the artist community, and support those in need through the work of ACT," Richard said.

We look forward with optimism towards hopefully welcoming back generous artists, donors, art buyers and sponsors in-person for the 20th Anniversary of SNAP in March 2022.

THANK YOU TO ACT'S COMMUNITY OF GENEROUS DONORS AND SUPPORTERS.

WE'RE ESPECIALLY GRATEFUL DURING THIS UNIQUE AND CHALLENGING TIME OF COVID-19.

GOVERNMENT

Federal

Community Action Fund (CAF), Public Health Agency of Canada

Provincial

Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services

Ministry of Health – AIDS Bureau

Municipal

City of Toronto Community Service Partnerships (CSP)

Toronto Urban Health Fund (TUHF) and Purchase of Service Agreement (PSA)

CORPORATIONS & FOUNDATIONS

\$100,000 +

TD Bank Group

\$50,000–\$99,999

Gilead Sciences Canada, Inc.

\$20,000–\$49,999

M·A·C Cosmetics

\$15,000–\$19,999

ViiV Healthcare ULC

\$10,000–\$14,999

La Fondation Emmanuelle Gattuso

Merck Canada Inc.

\$5,000–\$9,999

Accenture Inc.

Pride and Remembrance Association

\$2,000–\$4,999

The PrEP Clinic

Robert D. Howe Professional Corporation

The Village Pharmacy

\$1,000–\$1,999

CW Health Pharmacy

The Yona and Zev Frishman Endowment

The Philip Smith Foundation

Toronto Gay Hockey Association

\$500–\$999

Alpema Foundation

Freddie

Norma and Larry Bertuzzi Giving Fund

R&M Lang Foundation

\$250–\$499

1629323 Ontario Ltd.

First Insurance Funding of Canada

The Isaac Osipovic Memorial Endowment Fund

The Paul Butler and Chris Black Foundation

ESTATES

Estate of Donald Kenneth McLeish

Estate of Donald Reid

Estate of James Drewry Stewart

INDIVIDUALS

\$10,000 +

Brad E. Berg and Brian Rolfes

Anonymous Donors

\$5,000–\$9,999

Leah Atkinson

Guy M. Beaudin

Aaron Dauphinee

Zale Geller

Jason Grier

Neil Guthrie

Glen R. Johnson

Anthony Lisanti

Marc J. Narayansingh

Don Penfold

Ted Shore

Shawn Soon

Douglas Watters

Richard J. Willett

John Woodward

Douglas Young

\$2,000–\$4,999

George and Gail Anthony

Andrew Bridge

David J. Cameron

David Carter

Kevin Crigger

David E. DesLauriers and Nicolas Diaz

Paul D. Ellis

John Goodhew

Sean Arthur Hillier

Rupert Hon

Robert D. Howe

Joseph Antonio Iannuzzi

Howard Jones

Bruce G. Lawson

Maija C. Martin

Bonte Minnema

Eugene Palermo

Gaelen Patrick

Jason A. Patterson

Don Pfeil

Jonathan Plens

Francisco Remolino

Daniel Rozak

Marvin Singer

Duane Smith

Kyle Spencer

Tomas Tan

Timothy Thompson

Albert Wong

Lee Yaroschak

\$1,000–\$1,999

Jeff Axelrod

Arron Barberian

Craig Binning

C. George Boisvenue

Andrew Butcher

Richard Cadieux

Nancy Evans

Bill Fung

Andrew Gillespie

Stephan P. Gotschel

Bob Hambley

Christian Jasserand

Carl Lavoie

John D. Maxwell

Scott C. Miskie and Carl Bylow

Shane Olson

Ron H. Rosenes

Alan Rowe

Rossif Sutherland

Barry Waite

Frederika Winchell-Jubb

Maritza Yumbala

Sahil Zaman

\$500–\$999

Ronald W. Anthony

Salah J. Bachir

Robert Bartlett

Robert Michael Birch

Philip Boswell

The Late Walter M. and Lisa Balfour Bowen

Peter Brych

Debra Campbell

Dan Caputo

Pegi Cecconi

Terry Christiansen

David Cobb

Mathew Cook

Brenda G. Corrigan

Tony D'Addario

Porfirio De Leon

Allen de Vera

Justin Delwo

Louis Dimitracopoulos

Gary W. Dvorkin	Jennifer Trant	Louis Charpentier	Paul Glean	Sergio Alberto Martinez
Robert Feeney	Daniel J. Turko	Kevin Cherry	Bill C. Graham	Michel J. Mathieu
John-David Fentie	Ian Turner	Matthew Cheung	Carla Granger	Victor Maurice
Lorne Fox	Chad VanDyk	Paul Christie	Dean Gray	Angela Marie Mazza
Larry Hughsam	Brian Wale	Geoff Ciaschini	Tom Green	Michael McGuire
Steven Hutton	Barry Walker	Eugene Cipparone	Christopher D. Grimston	David H. McKay
Anthony Iannuzzi	Peter Eliot Weiss	Gavin Clark	Edward Hayes	Teresa N. McLean
Veneranda Iannuzzi	Ian Woodruff	Simon Clements	Jeff Hayter	Casey McNally
James Ip		John F. Clifford	Mary Hennessy	Mario Medeiros
A. Karim Karsan and John V. Rider	\$250-\$499	Chris Cody	Grace Hildebrand	Dean Miller
Stuart Kent	Ritva Aalto	Cynthia Cooch	Denise Hines	Lily Mills
Matthew Kwasnicki	Barry D. Adam	Paul J. Couillard	Jerry Hogan	Paul Milne
Martin Lanigan	Michael C. Allen	Kim E. Cousins	Peter Hohenadel	Julie Moran-Illes
David Lever	Jamal Amhed	Michael F. Crabb	Bill Hronis	Emily D. Morino
Andrea Longman	Brian Anderson	Richard W. Crosby	Nancy Huang	Kelly Mullan
Edmund G. Maidlow	Ludwik Antoniuk	David Crowell	Barbara Hunnisett	Jennifer Murchie
Sylvie Martel	Doug Arcand	Robert A. Cumming	Matthew Hyams	Wade Murphy
Martha McCain	Rudolfus Arts	Brian J. Davies	Tamryn L. Jacobson	Philip Murray
Marcus McCann	Robert D. Barnard	Jill Davies	David Jubb	Llana Nakonechny
Heather McDougall	Alessandro Barone	Neil T. Davis	Melissa Kennedy	Andy Newell
Steven McLarty Payson	Mario Bartolozzi	Anita Day	Anthony King	Bo-Yee Ngan
Rohan Menon	Fred Bayne	Vicky M. Diano	Patricia Kishino	Mary O'Donoghue
Simon Mhanna	Joan Beecroft	Sam DiCaita	Blair Kissack	Dean O'Dorico
V. Ross Morrison	Kathleen and Paul Beeston	Martin Donais	Larry Klar	Fred Ollson
Sabrina Needer	Shawn Bell	Bradley Douglas	David S. Kurdyla	Prad Paskaran
Naomi Norquay	Jessie Ann Bickerton	Diane E. Dowd	Farah Kurji	Andrew Peregrine
Gary R. Norton	John Bishop	Robert Elgie	Dana G. Lampe	Patrice Pusey
Jeffrey Ostic	David K. Blancher	Glenna Fair	Anita Lapidus	Robert Keith Rae
Maria Racz	David Brandy	Wayne Fairhead	Jim Lawrence	Gina Shochat Rakoff
Peter Redmand	Andrew Brousse	Doug Ferguson	Victoria Lee	Marion Rason
Daniel Ritchie	Stephen Bulger	Adam Ferraro	James Leech	Jessica Rawn
Michel Rondeau	Brian Butler	Dennis Findlay	Audrey M. Lengyel	Linda D. Rayner
Philip Rouse	J. Harold Buttle	Marco Andre Fiola	Greg D. Lichti	Mark Reid
Dorothy Salusbury	Bill Byrd	Rick Fishell	Ryan C. Lisk	Jack N. Reiter
Sandon Schwartzben	Constantine Cabarios	Sandra Fisher	Joanne Lombardo	William Revill
Bernie Silverman	Roy Cain	Wade Allan Fornwald	Simon Maas	Helena Rhebergen
Jamie R. Slater	Blair Caines	Susan J. Fullerton	Cathy Mack	Cliff Rier
Francine Stowell	Donna Campbell	Blaise Gaetz	John David MacLeod	Cindy Roberts
John Strachan	Anthony L. Carella	Greg Garrison	Kim MacNeil	Gary W. Robinson
Eileen Stuebing	Terence Chang	Luigi E. Girolametto	Kathryn Maney	Elizabeth Rodger
		Amanda Glasbeek		

Ashlyn S. Rodrigues	Markus Justin Tyler	John D. Maxwell	Jennifer Trant	Livestream Fundraiser Improv and Chili Livestream Fundraiser Will Webb's Home Party Livestream Fundraiser HurtsWenPvPn's Gaming Fundraiser KittyDragon's Strike Out HIV Livestream Fundraiser Aaron De Sousa's Strike Out HIV Livestream Concert Fundraiser District Comedy's Stand-Up for a Cause Livestream Comedy Fundraiser
John W. Roeleveld	James Vibert	Scott C. Miskie and Carl Bylow	Barry Waite	
Todd Salter	Matthew Visser-Charest	Marc J. Narayansingh	Brian Wale	
Nicholas Sammond	Michael Wall	Shane Olson	Peter Eliot Weiss	
Robert Sheng	John S. Wallace	Ron H. Rosenes		
Carolyn Sibbick	Gord Walsh	Maritza Yumbra	THIRD-PARTY AND COMMUNITY EVENTS	
Hans Siemens	Lenore Walters		Facebook Fundraisers	
David Silver	Barbara D. Wane			
Richard Silver	Germaine Warkentin	543 Yonge Street Circle		
Ian Sinclair	Haley Weber	Robert Bartlett		
Jeff Raymond Slater	Nick Wilson	C. George Boisvenue		
Paul K. Smith	Jon Wollaston	Richard Cadieux		
Harvey D. St. Amant	Andrew Wong	Dan Caputo		
William Staubi	Yvette Wood	Pegi Cecconi		
David M. Steinberg	Paul T. Wraggett	Terry Christiansen		
Jennie Such	Donald Young	David Cobb		
Richard Sutton	Evan Young	Justin Delwo		
Michael J. Sweeney	Daniel Ziemianski	Louis Dimitracopoulos		
Diana Tabak		Robert Feeney		
Lynne Tarala		John-David Fentie		
Jose Tavares		Rupert Hon		
Gregory J. Taylor		Steven Hutton		
Jo-Anne Teal		James Ip		
Finley Thomson		Heather McDougall		
Gordon Timleck	George and Gail Anthony	Jason A. Patterson		
Glen J. Toner	Jeff Axelrod	Michel Rondeau		
Rosanna Torosantucci	Bill Fung	Jamie R. Slater		
Michael D. Trent	John Goodhew	Francine Stowell		
Roxann Tupper	Glen R. Johnson	John Strachan		

SNAP 2021 SPONSORS

Presenting Sponsor

TD Bank Group

Sponsors & Partners

Air Canada
Akasha Art Projects
Blacks
Cowley Abbott Fine Art

Dimensions Custom Framing and Gallery
Goway Travel
Labatt Brewing Company
MuseumPros Art Services Inc.
The Printing House
Toronto Image Works
Tourism Authority of Thailand

Trius Wines
Vienna Tourist Board
Waddington's Auctioneers and Appraisers

Adopt-A-Lot Matching Donors

Brad E. Berg and Brian Rolfes

David Deslauriers and Nicolas Diaz

Daniel Holland and Shu Qing Wang

Robert D. Howe

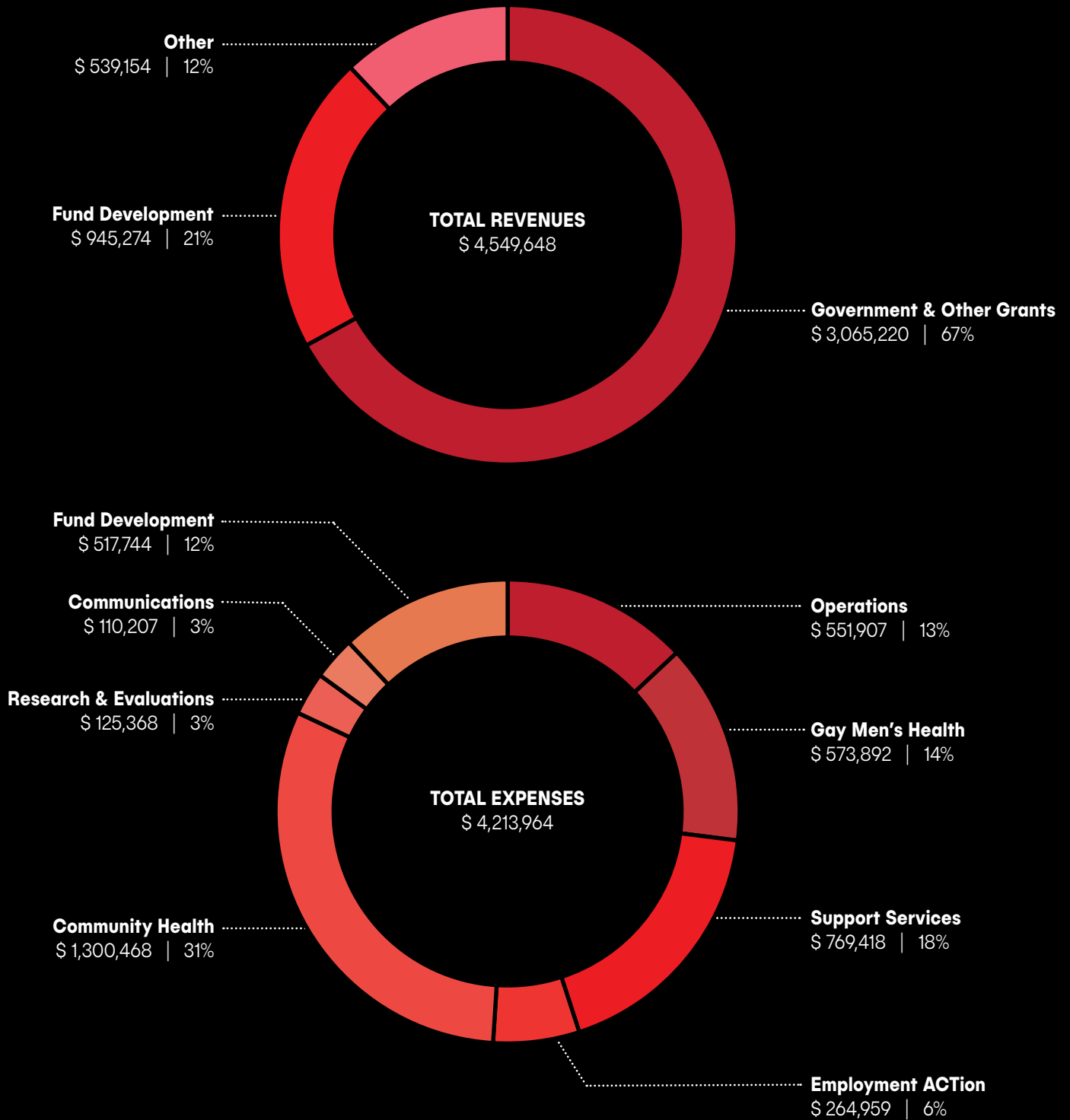
La Fondation Emmanuelle Gattuso

Llana Nakonechny

Timothy Thompson

FINANCIALS

2020 - 2021



EVOLVING WITH THE TIMES OF COVID-19

▶▶▶ So much about how ACT staff worked, and how they supported people they served was forced to evolve as a result of COVID-19. Within just a few short days in March 2020, staff was equipped to work remotely, and would begin in earnest to offer the best support possible to service users via Zoom, over the phone, or even text message.

ACT staff took some time to reflect on how their programming has evolved as a result of the pandemic, and share a moment when they were told the support they provided made a difference.

What practices did you introduce during the pandemic that you would like to keep, even after we reopen for in-person programming?

"Virtual/Zoom programming will continue to allow for women to attend regularly, despite the business of life and raising children."

Savannah, Women's Support Coordinator

"Despite the challenges, there is a definitely a need for virtual program delivery."

Mike, Gay Men's Health Systems Coordinator

"I've started to do online outreach creating an ACT Facebook profile to engage in Brazilian and Portuguese-speaking groups and promoting ACT activities within these communities. As well, we created a support group for Portuguese-speaking folks in partnership with a peer. These strategies might be worth keeping as they promote ACT services and initiatives within Portuguese-speaking communities."

Rafael, Community Counsellor

"During the past year of working remotely, the Employment Action (EA) Program continued to offer one-on-one employment services to service users. Prior to COVID-19, intake appointments were held in person at the office. However, we have found that offering intakes via zoom or over the phone has been an accessible way to engage service users. EA has also implemented an online tool for getting our documents signed virtually which has been very effective. Moving forward with the office re-opening, EA plans to continue to be flexible and open to meeting with folks in what ever way works best for them."

Nicole, Employment Consultant

"Some support groups online could be useful to keep in the future, since it facilitates a lot of people having access to them. Groups online helped with participation and attrition. In the future, I think ACT should offers groups online – maybe a hybrid version for drop-in style events."

Vincent, Gay Men's Group Programs Coordinator

What practices are you looking to reintroduce or introduce as we begin to open up for in-person programming?

"Condom Stuffing Parties will be introduced in a more restricted way (going from 30-person parties to a maximum of 8 people). Further, as restrictions relax and venues can increase their capacity, Condom Distribution Network will adapt, and Condom Stuffing Parties will adapt as well."

**Aaron,
Gay Men's Community Education & Resource Coordinator**

"When it feels safe to do so, I am hoping we can start having groups and drop-in support in-person again. There is something about sharing a space and sharing a meal that is hard to recreate online."

Vincent, Gay Men's Group Programs Coordinator

"Engaging with service providers."

Mike, Gay Men's Health Systems Coordinator

"Reintroduce sessions at partner clinics and introduce in-person support groups."

Rafael, Community Counsellor

"During the past year, EA has been offering workshops and webinars on various employment topics online, however we miss the dialogue and energy of in-person workshops when folks get together to collaborate and share their experiences. This would be something we hope to resume in the future when it is safe to do so."

Nicole, Employment Consultant

"In-person one-on-one drop-in and in-person programming and eating meals together again as a group."

Savannah, Women's Support Coordinator

Can you recall a moment when a service user said you impacted their life this past year?

"The women regularly thank us for staying in touch and engaging with them. It has been natural for people to pull away through the pandemic, but we've been able to stay in touch with nearly all 160 active participants. Our programs grow each month, mainly thanks to word-of-mouth. This speaks to the strength of the program and the joy it brings to the women, and then to their friends."

Savannah, Women's Support Coordinator

"I had a lot of great reception in my role as Peer Facilitator in Totally outRIGHT. Participants were young, and most who were HIV-positive were not comfortable disclosing their status to the group. I was able to create a safe enough space and normalize my HIV-status enough that a participant did disclose and told us his story. He told me he would not have been able to do so without seeing how open I am about my own status."

**Aaron,
Gay Men's Community Education & Resource Coordinator**

"Regarding Trans Advisory Committee and Empower Trans Folks campaign, someone said, 'I feel seen and heard like never before.'"

Mike, Gay Men's Health Systems Coordinator

"Back in early April 2020, I piloted my first online group. Every participant in this group was ready to try this out, even if it felt weird at the time. It was a great group, and the participants were really able to bond. It was very useful for all of them to have each other as we were collectively going through this stressful time."

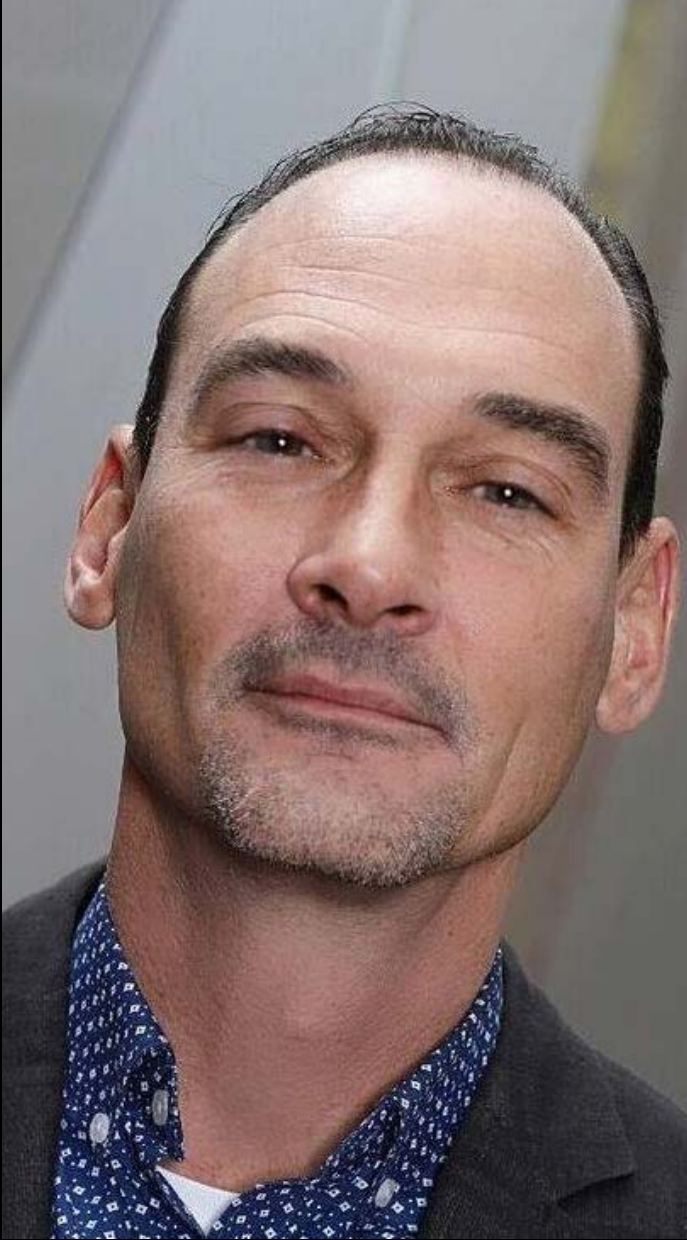
Vincent, Gay Men's Group Programs Coordinator

"Some service users mention at the end of their counselling sessions how the service was important to them. In general, most service users celebrate at least one positive change they made. And I offer follow-up sessions between 3-6 months after the end of service – some service users come back for diverse reasons, while others said they're fine and still use some of the strategies that we've worked on during previous sessions."

Rafael, Community Counsellor

"Recently a service user of EA was able to secure a full-time permanent position in their field of choice because of the assistance of EA staff with sharing the job posting, editing the application, as well as providing some interview prep. The EA Program was able to provide the tools and resources for this service user to find meaningful employment."

Nicole, Employment Consultant



John Maxwell - Executive Director



Enrico Mandarino - Chair, Board of Directors

LETTER FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND BOARD

EVOLVE TO MEET TODAY'S CHALLENGE

“

ACT continues to adapt and evolve with your support. You enable us to make our programs and services available online and provide resources on HIV & STI testing, trans health and other issues that respond to community needs.

.....

ACT will continue to *evolve* with the times to ensure that we can provide the programs and services to those who need; promote health and self-determination, and build strong, interconnected communities.

”

▶▶▶ **It goes without saying, this has been a challenging year for so many in our community. Isolation, depression, loneliness, challenging substance use; issues that disproportionately affect those we serve reached all time highs brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.**

But you, our funders, donors, sponsors and volunteers stuck with us. You rallied with us to get behind those in need. Thanks to you, we were able to Evolve this past year to ensure that we continue to provide free programs and services for people living with HIV and those at increased risk.

As with everything in the era of COVID-19, that meant supporting people virtually or over the phone. Despite being closed for in-person services for all but two months last year, your support enabled us to evolve and meet everyone where we could – distanced, from the confines of the home.

For women like Aliza and Shona, they were able to connect and access women’s programming virtually, helping them feel connected and supported during this pandemic. It allowed them to feel less isolated and brought joy and sisterhood into their lives.

Groups such as Meth & Sex and Safer PnP: A Virtual Chat helped Adrian and Shafik with their substance use and share their experiences with other people who are on the road to recovery. You empowered them to evolve through their full circle journey with substance use, now inspiring others as co-facilitators of harm reduction groups offered at ACT.

Through the Buddy program, guys like Fabian and Oliver were able to support each other and connect virtually to battle isolation and loneliness during a difficult time. Oliver was surprised by how their relationship would evolve. He didn’t

realize the support would be reciprocal. Ylber was also able to give back to his community, offering emotional and social support to help his buddy feel less alone.

ACT continues to adapt and evolve with your support. You enable us to make our programs and services available online and provide resources on HIV & STI testing, trans health and other issues that respond to community needs. Because of you, Mike and Roberto can provide resources to the underserved trans and non-binary communities – all of this is made possible with your ongoing commitment.

Continued and ever-evolving support from people like Richard – a supporter of over 30+ years – ensures that our efforts to make a difference can continue for years to come. ACT’s important work is fostered through fundraising events like SNAP and the work of Sonja and the SNAP volunteer Curatorial Committee. *SNAP@Home* would evolve into a model of virtual fundraising achievement, and a huge highlight and success this past year!

On behalf of all the individuals and communities we serve at ACT, thank you for your unwavering support during these unprecedented times. Through our collective efforts and with you by our side, ACT will continue to evolve with the times to ensure that we can provide the programs and services to those who need; promote health and self-determination, and build strong, interconnected communities.



John Maxwell
Executive Director



Enrico Mandarin
Chair, Board of Directors

THANK YOU



AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT)
543 Yonge Street, 4th Floor
Toronto, ON | M4Y 1Y5
(416) 340-2437
CR Number: 11877 9024 RR0001

Designed & Printed by **C&D Group**

We are here for you. Stay informed and up to date with ACT's online resources and social channels:

 www.actoronto.org

 [@ACToronto](https://www.facebook.com/ACToronto)

 [@ACToronto](https://twitter.com/ACToronto)

 [@aidscommitteetoronto](https://www.instagram.com/aidscommitteetoronto)

 [AIDSCommitteeToronto](https://www.youtube.com/AIDSCommitteeToronto)