



## Welcome to our Expanded Newsletter

This issue marks a greatly expanded AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT) Newsletter; expanded not only in size, but in its distribution. In the past ACT circulated Newsletters to members, donors and other supporters of our work. At the same time our Volunteer program developed and distributed a separate publication for volunteers.

Earlier this year, as we were discussing our communication plans, we decided that it made sense to send a common Newsletter to everyone who supports the work of ACT; whether that support takes the form of a donation of time, a donation of money or a donation of other resources. In this way everyone connected with ACT has the opportunity to find out about the work of the agency: work that simply could not happen without you.

We hope that you enjoy this Newsletter. We hope that you learn more about ACT's programs and services for people living with, and at risk for HIV/AIDS. And, we hope that you learn more about the ways that you can help us to help others.

## We're Xtra! Best

Thanks so much to everyone who voted for us in the Xtra! Best of Toronto survey. ACT was proudly awarded Best Community Group/Organization, and AIDS Walk and Fashion Cares were awarded Best Community Fundraiser, and Runner-Up, Best Community Fundraiser, respectively. Fashion Cares was also named Runner-Up in the Best Live Entertainment Event category. We couldn't do it without our staff, volunteers and attendees, who continue to make ACT and its events such great successes!



## AIDS is as Much of a Threat as it Ever Was

Much has changed in the past 20 years of our existence. We've provided HIV prevention, education and support services to people living with HIV/AIDS and to those at risk. We've worked to combat stigma and discrimination surrounding AIDS: dispelling the myths about who gets HIV/AIDS, providing accurate information so that people can reduce their risk, and helping people with HIV/AIDS to live their lives with dignity and meaning.

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### FACT:

It is estimated that over 900 Torontonians are newly infected with HIV each year.

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Despite this crucial work, some things haven't changed: men, women and youth continue to be infected with HIV/AIDS in Toronto. People living with HIV/AIDS still face discrimination, isolation and less than optimal health conditions.

Until AIDS is no longer a threat, ACT's work must continue. And we can't do that work without you. Find out more about the ways you can help us achieve our goal of a world without HIV/AIDS.

Visit ACT on-line at [www.actoronto.org](http://www.actoronto.org) or call 416.340.2437 to find out how you can act.

### Five New Board Members Elected at Annual General Meeting (AGM)

At ACT's AGM, held Tuesday, November 4, 2003, our membership elected five new members to ACT's Board of Directors. The evening saw the election of Karim Karsan, Danielle Layman-Pleet, Tulio Neves, Camille Orridge, and Shannon Ryan who join existing Board members Ali Ahmad, Michael Christian, Evan Collins, Susan Feldman, Trevor Gray, Sean Hosein, and John Lavis.

Departing Board members Greg Garrison, Kate Hilton, Rick Kennedy (former Board Chair), Stephen McDonnell and Alice Tseng were all thanked for their contributions to the organization.

# New Look for ACT's Website

If you've logged on to ACT's website since June 2003, you will have noticed a brand new look to the site. As a result of months of work, ACT launched our "new look" website to coincide with the 20th anniversary of service to the community. "The new design was based on feedback we had received from staff, volunteers and people who used the site," says Ned Lyttelton, Systems Administrator at ACT. "While people said that our website contained lots of useful information, many commented that it was hard to find information, and that the old site lacked a cohesive design."

The new website has a menu of options on the left side. In the centre are squares that highlight upcoming events or programs. The site is constantly changing with new additions.



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## FACT:

In November 2003, over 15,000 people visited ACT's website. For the same month last year, the number of visitors was slightly over 11,000.

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Visit [www.actontario.org](http://www.actontario.org) often to find out about programs, services and upcoming events.

## Sharing our Knowledge with Others

ACT staff and Board members made a significant contribution to the 4th Canadian HIV/AIDS Skills Building Symposium, held in Calgary from November 20 – 23. This conference was established so that those working in HIV/AIDS services could improve their ability to provide effective and responsive services. ACT's contributions included workshops on: building effective partnerships, steps for recruiting an Executive Director, a case study of our

successful 'twinning' project with Brazilian AIDS organization ABIA, and the process of designing, implementing and evaluating a return-to-work program.

ACT staff also presented workshops at the symposium's Youth Institute, with presentations on community-based research about HIV vulnerability of youth who move to Toronto, and a workshop focused on providing HIV/AIDS treatment information for youth.



## Understanding your Income Tax and Insurance Benefits

Filling out your income tax forms. Understanding benefits related to short or long-term disability. Deciphering your life insurance coverage. These can be confusing subjects for anyone. Living with HIV/AIDS can add even more stress. That's where ACT can help: we offer free, confidential Income Tax and Insurance Benefits Clinics for people

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### FACT:

Last year our Income Tax and Insurance Benefits Clinics helped 394 people living with HIV/AIDS.

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living with HIV/AIDS. Our Income Tax Clinic is staffed by knowledgeable volunteers who can assist you in filling out your tax forms and reporting tax forms for estates. During the busy tax season we offer both day and evening appointments.

Our Insurance Benefits Clinic is staffed by professionals from the insurance industry who donate their time and expertise to help people with HIV/AIDS understand their insurance entitlements.

**To find out more about these services, or to book an appointment, just call us at 416.340.2437.**

## ACT Counsellors are Here for You

Imagine you've just found out you have HIV. How many different things would be running through your head? How did this happen; what am I going to do; who can I tell; what will people think; am I going to get sick?

Imagine you are a gay man who's been HIV-positive for five years. Negotiating safer sex, trusting someone new, or disclosing your HIV status are just some of the issues you might be facing at the start of a new relationship.

That's where ACT counsellors can help. They can speak with you – either in person at our offices, over the phone, or somewhere outside our office. Our 'counsellor-on-call' program means that you can come into our offices or call us and speak to a professional counsellor within 30 minutes. You don't need an appointment and you don't need to be referred to a counsellor. ACT counselling is free, and it's available Monday through Friday.

**ACT counsellors: someone who will listen, encourage and help you find answers.**

# Improving Access to Services

In response to increased numbers of people coming to ACT (often with complex service needs) Heather Jessome, Service Access Coordinator, and David Potter, a student intern at ACT, have been working with ACT counsellors to develop a more formal intake procedure for clients to ACT. "We want to see whether this approach offers people a more consistent and comprehensive assessment of their needs and referral to services either here at ACT or at other organizations" says Heather. "Ultimately, we want to make sure that when someone comes into

ACT they get what they need". When a person enters the ACT offices' 4th floor Access Centre they will be given the option of meeting with the Intake Worker in a private and confidential setting. As new clients can often feel overwhelmed and unsure of the services available to them, the Intake Worker will work with them to assess their particular needs, let them know about available services and begin the process of getting them linked to these services. At the end of the pilot project ACT will evaluate whether this new intake process has made a positive impact on access to service.



## Building Friendships, Reducing Isolation: The ACT Social Support Network

One side-effect of HIV infection isn't physical in nature but it can be just as debilitating: isolation from other people. "Isolation happens for many reasons. Friends or family might become distant. People who are living with HIV/AIDS may find it difficult to make ends meet, yet alone afford such 'luxuries' as a trip to see a movie, or a lunch in a restaurant" says Peter Stephenson, Practical Assistance Coordinator at ACT. "That's why the Social Support Network is so important. It helps break down isolation".

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### FACT:

Almost 14,000 people are living with HIV/AIDS in the City of Toronto.

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Each month, an excursion is planned somewhere in the Toronto area. The cost is minimal (often only a few dollars to help cover admission) and many times transportation is provided. "Trips allow people living with HIV/AIDS to get out of their homes, to meet other people living with HIV/AIDS and to experience new things in the city" says Peter. "Whether it's a trip to the Ontario Science Centre, a visit to the art gallery or an outing to see a movie – it's great that ACT can offer this service". The ACT Social Support Network: improving the quality of life for people living with HIV/AIDS.

**To find out more about upcoming Social Support Network events, and to register, call 416.340.8484 ext. 230.**

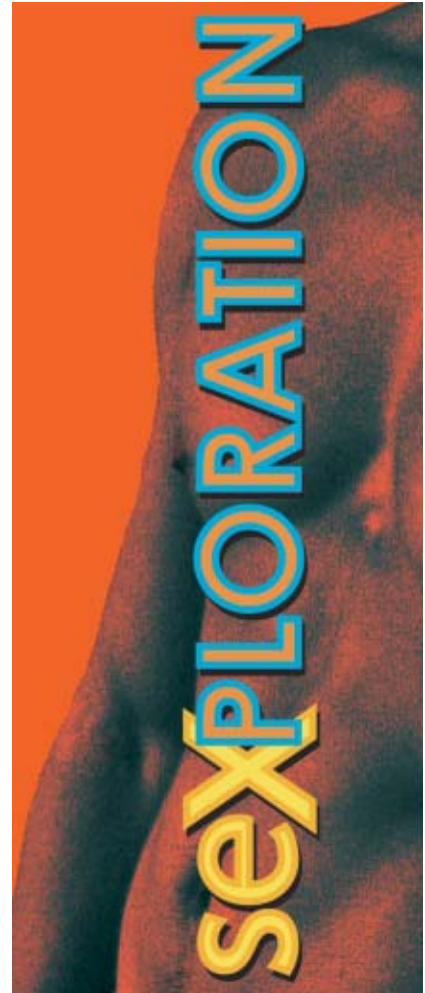
# Exploring our Sexual Horizons

ACT hosted a series of workshops, discussions and interactive forums for gay and bisexual men during the last week of November (AIDS Awareness Week). These events, under the title "Sexploration" grew out of an awareness campaign for gay and bisexual men launched earlier this summer.

"Encouraging men to reflect on their sexuality, their sexual relationships and their sex practices invariably leads to discussions of health and safety issues - such as safer sex and condoms" says Chris Lau, ACT's Gay Men's Community Development Coordinator. "By enabling more

open dialogue on the various contexts in which sex occurs, we are opening the discussion to HIV/AIDS, STIs (sexually transmitted infections), relationship issues, condom use, and a host of other health-related issues".

Events focused on sex since HIV risk occurs within the context of sexual relationships for most gay and bisexual men. Some men also continue to feel shame about their sexuality or the type of sex in which they engage. "By bringing sex to the forefront, we aim to de-stigmatize it and to instill the message that sex can be a healthy, enjoyable part of our lives."



## Research and Program Evaluation: Ensuring Services Remain Responsive

Two major research-related projects have been completed this past year at ACT. One was an assessment of Employment Action, ACT's return-to-work program for people living with HIV/AIDS. Don Phaneuf, Employment Consultant says "the assessment helped us to understand how clients benefited from the Employment Action program, as well as challenges they experience when re-entering the workforce. As a result of the research we've made some important changes to the program."

The other major project completed during the year examined issues related to unprotected sex among gay and bisexual men in Toronto. This project was a partnership between researchers from ACT and the University of Windsor. The research report was released in November 2003, and findings were presented at a community forum held the last week of the month. Over the next few months, ACT staff will use the research results to renew the organization's HIV prevention and community development programs for gay and bisexual men. Community-based research and evaluation of programs and services ensure that ACT provides services that are relevant and responsive to changing community needs.

**Visit the 'Research' section of ACT's website for news, descriptions and reports about these and other projects.**

# Toronto-New Delhi HIV/AIDS Project



ACT was proud once again to support the Toronto-New Delhi HIV/AIDS Project, a partnership between Canada World Youth and the Society for the Promotion of Youth and Masses (SPYM), by providing work placements for two project interns. The project, now in its third year, is designed to strengthen the ability of SPYM to respond to HIV/AIDS in India.

The internship team is composed of sixteen young professionals, eight from India and eight from different regions across Canada. Interns are placed with various AIDS organizations in the Toronto area. Dr. Shweta Agrawal, a psychologist based in New Delhi, India, and Jonathan Elston, an activist for queer youth in rural Ontario, have both been working closely with ACT's Youth and Women's Community

Development Coordinators. Their work included research designed to increase collaboration and partnership building, and to decrease gaps in service provision and access for women and youth.

"Our time with ACT has been completely enriching both in a personal and professional sense. The staff and volunteers at ACT have been extremely welcoming and supportive of our goals," says Shweta. "This experience has both motivated us and increased our knowledge and understanding of working with marginalized populations living with and at risk for HIV/AIDS," Jonathan added.

The intern team wrapped up the Canadian portion of the project in early December and then travelled to India to continue their work in New Delhi until March, 2004.

## ACT Participating in National HIV Prevention Initiative

Toronto is one of six cities that will be participating in the development of an HIV prevention social marketing campaign for gay and bisexual men. Health Canada is providing funding for this initiative and the campaign is being coordinated through AIDS Vancouver.

### FACT:

Gay and bisexual men are the largest community impacted by HIV/AIDS in Toronto. Gay and bisexual men make up 57% of all new HIV infections in Toronto.

In November, John Maxwell, ACT's Director of Community Development, attended the first meeting in Vancouver. It was an opportunity for representatives from the cities to discuss the state of HIV prevention among gay men in their communities and talk about the upcoming campaign. "What became very clear" says John "was that Toronto was in much better shape in terms of HIV prevention for gay men than most other cities. Many noted ACT's long-standing commitment to gay and bisexual men's health needs." The upcoming campaign will address some of the assumptions that men may make before having unprotected sex. Watch for this new initiative in June 2004.

# Multi-lingual HIV Testing Information for Women



ACT was proud to unveil a series of HIV testing brochures for women at increased risk for HIV infection. The brochures, funded by the City of Toronto and ACT, were developed in ten languages in collaboration with local AIDS groups serving different linguistic and cultural groups.

Tania Smith, ACT's Women's Community Development Coordinator notes that "most HIV testing information geared to women has focused on women who are pregnant. The information is designed to encourage pregnant women to find out if they are infected with HIV so that they can take steps to reduce the chance of HIV being passed on to their baby".

These new brochures consider the needs of women more generally and provide information about the HIV test including the procedure, what the results mean, things to think about before being tested, and the different kinds of HIV testing available in Ontario.

## Providing Volunteers with the Skills They Need

Congratulations to everyone that completed the fall 2003 Volunteer Core Skills Training program. The training, offered in partnership with the Toronto People with AIDS Foundation, featured skills-building workshops on such topics as basic HIV/AIDS information, cultural competency, effective communication skills, assessing needs and making appropriate referrals, teambuilding and

confidentiality. Completion of Volunteer Core Skills is required if you would like to assist in the delivery of ACT's programs and services.

The next training will be offered in February, 2004. For more information contact Sergio Martinez, Program Volunteer Coordinator, at [smartinez@actoronto.org](mailto:smartinez@actoronto.org) or 416.340.8484 ext 224.

# The ACT Library: A Wealth of Information



Did you know that the Library is widely used by researchers, students, staff from service organizations, as well as by people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS? Or, that the Library provides specialized services and resources including books, journals, indexes, directories, and audio-visual materials? Did you know that we are one of the largest HIV/AIDS lending libraries in North America that is open to the public? In keeping with ACT's commitment to provide services that are accessible, relevant and responsive, Library staff and volunteers are constantly working to increase access to HIV/AIDS information. This includes distributing resources to other organizations and providing information and services on-line. The Library catalogue, the Living Guide (a guide to HIV/AIDS related services in Ontario), and the Referral Lists (lists on HIV-related workshops and support groups, locations of anonymous HIV testing sites, and physicians, among others) are all available on-line.

Another priority is to ensure our collections and services reflect the diverse and changing needs of library users. By offering programs such as our Internet Clinic (where people are taught how to search the web for HIV/AIDS-

related information) and providing announcements of new journal articles, we hope to provide relevant information to a wide range of clients.

The Library is hoping to increase access to information further by offering 'remote' or 'virtual' access to our collections. We are actively involved in a national coalition of five Canadian HIV/AIDS libraries and are working to create a comprehensive on-line catalogue to serve Canadians across the country.

**Browse the Library catalogue on the ACT website by simply clicking on the 'Library' link!**

## Survey Says...

In September, ACT program volunteers were mailed a "Volunteer Satisfaction Survey". The survey is a valuable tool to help us track demographic information about our volunteer pool and provide ACT with a measure of our volunteer management efforts. "The information gathered from the survey will also assist in evaluating the training ACT provides and will help us in ensuring that volunteers' experiences at the agency are good ones," says Sergio Martinez, Program Volunteer Coordinator. "Thank you to those volunteers who took the time to complete and return the survey."

### FACT:

**Over 40% of ACT survey respondents have volunteered for more than four years. Forty-seven percent of survey respondents work full-time and volunteer at ACT!**

The survey is just one way to provide feedback about your volunteer experience; volunteers are encouraged to speak with their program coordinator if they have any questions or ideas. Sergio Martinez, Program Volunteer Coordinator (smartinez@actoronto.org or 416.340.8484 ext. 224) and Jim Billing, Development (Fundraising) Volunteer Coordinator (jbilling@actoronto.org or 416.340.8484 ext. 255) are always pleased to hear from you.

**Additional findings from the survey will be posted on ACT's website in the 'Volunteer' section.**

## Volunteer Opportunities in Program and Service Delivery:

We are currently recruiting for the following volunteer positions:

### Library User-Support Volunteer:

ACT's Library is introducing a new volunteer position designed to enhance client services. The Library User-Support Volunteer will provide technical assistance and respond to basic inquiries regarding the use of the public access computers. The volunteer will also perform a range of duties from signing out library materials to answering basic library reference questions.

Desired qualifications include: basic technical knowledge of computer maintenance, Internet searching skills, familiarity with basic MS Office programs, excellent customer service and organizational skills and completion of ACT's Volunteer Core Skills Training. For more information, please contact Sergio Martinez, Program Volunteer Coordinator, at [smartinez@actoronto.org](mailto:smartinez@actoronto.org) or at 416.340.8484 ext. 224.

### Buddy Volunteers:

The Practical Assistance Program has immediate openings for Buddy Volunteers. Buddies work with people living with HIV/AIDS, offering emotional and practical support, in order to improve their quality of life. Buddies can assist in problem solving, identifying services or simply being a confidant and a good friend. The commitment required is one full year and five hours contact per week.

Requirements include completion of ACT's Volunteer Core Skills Training and the ability to commit to a full weekend of program-specific training. The next Buddy Training will take place in Spring 2004. For more information, please contact Sergio Martinez, Program Volunteer Coordinator, at [smartinez@actoronto.org](mailto:smartinez@actoronto.org) or 416.340.8484 ext. 224.

**For more information on volunteer opportunities, visit ACT's website at [www.actoronto.org](http://www.actoronto.org), click on the 'Volunteer' link and then on 'Volunteer Roles'.**



## Interested in Becoming an ACT Volunteer? Attend one of our Information Sessions.

To become an ACT volunteer you must first attend one of our monthly Volunteer Information Sessions. The session is an opportunity to learn more about ACT's programs and services, to hear about volunteer opportunities and to find out what is involved in becoming a volunteer.

Volunteer Information Sessions are held the second Wednesday of every month at ACT (399 Church Street) and begin at 6:00pm. Dates for the 2004 Volunteer Information Sessions are:

January 14, February 11, March 10, April 14, May 12, June 9,

July 14, August 11, September 8, October 13, November 10, and December 8.

### FACT:

Last year volunteers contributed over 49,000 hours of their time to ACT.

# Attention Amateur Photographers



**A Photographic Fundraiser  
for the AIDS Committee of Toronto**

It's time to pick up your cameras once again, and SNAP! to it! ACT's 3rd Annual SNAP! photography fundraiser will be held on Thursday, March 4th, 2004. This exciting event continues to grow each year, and the reviews from last year let us know that the evening was enjoyed by all.

The evening consists of a Live Auction of donated works from recognized photographers, and a Silent Auction of entrants from our photo competition. Hors d'oeuvres and a cash bar

round out the evening at the historic Berkeley Church on Queen Street East in Toronto.

Submissions to the SNAP! Photo Competition will be accepted from December 1, 2003 until January 30th, 2004. Tickets to the event will be on sale as of January 15, 2004. Mark the date on your calendar, and join us for what is fast becoming another one of ACT's signature fundraising events!

**For more information visit the SNAP! website at [www.snap-toronto.com](http://www.snap-toronto.com)**

## Planned Giving: Creating a Legacy of Hope

Your will is more than a legal document - it can be one of the most powerful tools you have to help the fight against AIDS. A bequest to ACT is truly a legacy with a huge impact.

The Legacy of Hope Society honours those who have included ACT in their estate plans. If you have done this, please inform us of your plans so that you can receive appropriate recognition (including the option to remain anonymous). For more information on leaving a Legacy of Hope contact: Michael Anthony, Development Officer, at [manthony@acttoronto.org](mailto:manthony@acttoronto.org) or 416.340.8484 ext. 265.

### FACT:

Since our first deposit of \$35,000, ACT's Legacy of Hope fund has grown to well over \$500,000 and continues to provide a steady stream of funding to ACT programs and services.

## Volunteer and Staff Milestones Acknowledged at Annual General Meeting (AGM)

At this year's AGM we honoured our volunteers' commitment to the agency - particularly the work of those who have been a part of ACT for the past five, ten and fifteen years. ACT also recognized the outstanding contribution of two staff members who have been with the agency for ten and seventeen years respectively. Congratulations to all of you!

17 Years of Service, Staff: Ned Lyttelton	10 Years of Service, Staff: John Gaylord	Jonathan L.C. Michel B. Jack B. Irwin B. Ira C. Bryce Mc. Allan T. Stanley M. Barry B. Anne P. Durelle H.-Mc. George A. Alex L. Harry K.
15 Years of Service, Volunteers: Carole B. Grant W.	5 Years of Service, Volunteers: Leah M. John S. Steve S. Harvey St. A. Cody T. Bob W. Gary F. Michael D.	
10 Years of Service, Volunteers: Paul F. Robert S. J. Ronald R.		

# Meet One of Our 'Partners In Caring'

Fernanda DaSilva, ACT's Portuguese-Speaking Community Development Coordinator, is someone devoted to family and community. Fernanda has been with ACT for almost 3 years, after 19 years as a community worker with the Portuguese Social Service Centre.

give something back to the agency in order to further the excellent and important work we do here. I can easily afford the amount I give each month, and it pleases me to be able to do so. I am always so proud to tell people about ACT's work. I'm proud to be able to contribute to that good



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## FACT:

\$10 every 2 weeks (or \$20 per month) adds up to an astounding \$240 per year. This will provide 60 hot lunches for a person with HIV/AIDS in need, or 127 tokens to get clients to and from medical appointments. YOU can make a huge difference!

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Fernanda was so impressed with ACT's programs and services that she decided to help support the agency financially by becoming a Partner in Caring. "ACT allows me to work with my community, and I am happy to

work both in my job, and in a monthly donation." And Fernanda knows the impact many small gifts can make; "Many people say they haven't much money to give, but even small amounts can have a large impact."

ACT has been working with Portuguese-speaking communities since 1999 and has supported the development of HIV prevention, education, community development and support programs. Fernanda has been an integral part of these efforts in her work at ACT. We applaud her efforts, her commitment to ACT, and her generous monthly gift. Bravo Fernanda, and muito obrigado!

## What Has 20,000 Legs, Tons of Spirit, and Raises \$350,000 for ACT?

It's the 15th Annual AIDS Walk Toronto! Held on Sunday, September 21st at Nathan Phillips Square, AIDS Walk was a huge success. Plenty of sunshine warmed over 10,000 participants and the more than 450 volunteers and staff that it takes to pull off this great community event. Men, women and children - either as individuals or in one of our more than 158 teams - walked the 7k route through downtown Toronto.

One of our most amazing entertainment lineups in recent memory included Brother Love Canal, Nasri, Barlow and In Essence, all lending their support to the day, and pumping up the energy both before and after the Walk. The day was

capped off by a barbecue and beer garden on the square, one of our ways of saying a huge thanks to everyone for all their support and determination to raise funds.

Of course we couldn't bring this all together without the support of our major sponsors, including GlaxoSmithKline in partnership with Shire BioChem, Discount Car & Truck Rentals, Boehringer Ingelheim, Molson, Samuel Son & Co., ALDO, BMS Virology, Abbott Virology, Starbucks, Citytv, 104.5 CHUM FM and Xtra!.

**AIDS is as much of a threat as it ever was, and the AIDS Walk is one more way you are helping us in the fight.**

