

Still a need for action.



act

AIDS Committee of Toronto

Annual Report 2007-2008



# act25

AIDS Committee of Toronto Annual Report 2007-2008

The AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT) delivers responsive, effective, and valued community-based HIV support services and education, prevention, outreach and fundraising programs that promote the health, well-being, worth and rights of individuals and communities living with, affected by and at risk for HIV/AIDS, and increase awareness of HIV/AIDS.

For the past twenty-five years ACT has been a leader in developing and delivering programs and services that contribute to achieving a world without HIV/AIDS.



# A message to ACT Members and Supporters:

As the AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT) enters its 25th year of service in 2008, it's an important opportunity to reflect on our history as we continue to move forward in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

ACT was formed in 1983 by concerned members of Toronto's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered/transsexual (LGBT) communities in response to a strange new disease primarily affecting gay men. Over the years, ACT's programs and services have evolved to respond to the changing needs of those living with, affected by and at risk for HIV/AIDS. But they have always been rooted in the needs of the communities we serve.

Today, more people in Toronto are living with HIV/AIDS than ever before. Due to advances in HIV treatment, deaths from HIV/AIDS have declined dramatically in the past decade. However, we still continue to lose our best and brightest. As people live longer with HIV/AIDS, their needs often become more complex.

That's where ACT has continued to respond.

People with HIV/AIDS (PHAs) may have different needs at different times in their lives, so we've developed a uniquely broad approach to service delivery that includes a wide range of practical, emotional, social and vocational supports – from food programs and counselling, to support groups and employment services. Over the past year we've continued to augment these services as we respond to evolving needs – our new HIV and Dementia Day program is a prime example.

As there still is no cure for HIV/AIDS, prevention, education and outreach remains a priority at ACT. Being a responsive, community-based organization, ACT strives to reduce the spread of HIV in a number of communities. Often we take the lead with that work. In other cases we work

in partnership with other organizations. During this past year, we have dramatically increased the presence of our HIV prevention and sexual health promotion services – over the web, in community venues and through workshops and discussions.

Everything we do at ACT is based on helping people make connections: to services, to information, to other people, and to the community, in order to improve the physical, emotional and social well-being of people living with HIV/AIDS, to empower people to lead productive, healthy lives, and to reduce new HIV infections.

We simply could not carry out our important work without the generosity and commitment of our members, donors and volunteers. With your ongoing support, ACT will continue to help people as we face the epidemic together.

**Lori Lucier**  
Executive Director

# A message from the ACT Board of Directors



We are proud to report on behalf of the Board of Directors that the AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT) had another successful year in 2007-08.

This was the second year of implementing our three-year strategic plan, and we continue to make progress toward achieving our long-term organizational goals.

Key strategic directions include investing in leadership and collaboration, and stepping up advocacy on behalf of people living with and at risk for HIV/AIDS. Efforts to strengthen and diversify the agency's fundraising strategies have been fruitful and are ongoing. This work has become even more critical as federal government funding for community-based HIV/AIDS organizations becomes more uncertain.

We know that the agency's work will only become more necessary as global economic conditions hit hardest on those who depend on us the most. With more people than ever living with HIV/AIDS in Toronto, and HIV infections continuing, our work is cut out for us.

Thankfully, ACT has spent the last 25 years stepping up to challenges, and that hasn't changed. We will continue to speak out in the fight against AIDS and build strong programs to respond to the needs of people living with, affected by and at risk for HIV/AIDS.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, we would like to thank the staff, volunteers, donors and supporters of ACT for making this past year a success. With our continued collaboration, we won't stop until there's a cure.

**Karim Karsan & Camille Orridge**  
Co-Chairs, ACT Board of Directors

Gay and bisexual men continue to make up the largest number of new HIV infections in Toronto. During this past year, our Gay Men's Outreach program, which includes bathhouse, bar and special event outreach, reached more men than ever. This work was largely achieved with the support of many volunteers who not only helped to package resource materials, but delivered outreach in community venues. Through our community condom dispensers, our sexual health postings in community venues, and InterACTion, our on-line community forum hosted in partnership with Gay Guide Toronto (which received over 60,000 visits this past year), our program expanded its reach, providing men with information about HIV/AIDS and sexual health.

## Community Outreach and Education:

**Gay Men's Community Education** programs were also adapted and expanded this past year. A record 31 community workshops were offered on a variety of topics related to safer sex and sexual health, and we continued to do this work in collaboration with other community organizations. ACT was at the forefront of HIV prevention messaging, spearheading the development of Canada's first comprehensive educational campaign about the risks associated with oral sex, and renewing our syphilis awareness campaign in collaboration with Toronto Public Health (launched in January 2008).

ACT continues to advocate strongly for the maintenance of **Harm Reduction and Youth Education**. During this past year, 14,600 contacts were made through these programs, and 21 sexual health, harm reduction, and professional development workshops were delivered.

As part of ACT's collaboration with VIVER (Portuguese-speaking HIV/AIDS Coalition), the **Portuguese-speaking Men's Outreach** program increased the number of venues where outreach took place. In partnership with the **Portuguese-speaking Community Education** program, we were able to increase outreach through community media substantially, with advertisements, interviews, coverage of ACT events, and articles written for the community. We revamped the Portuguese-language sections of the ACT website and developed an HIV/AIDS educational DVD called, "Faces of AIDS" for use during workshops and training sessions in Portuguese-speaking communities.

## Some facts from this past year:

**325,417** free condoms were distributed at ACT and in the community

**276,539** visits were made to the ACT website

**247,242** water-based lube packages were distributed at ACT and in the community

**36,722** hours were contributed to ACT by our wonderful volunteers

**35,360** pieces of literature were distributed in community venues.

**22,296** pieces of ACT information were distributed at our offices

**32,277** people came into ACT's offices seeking services, information, resources or referrals.

**19,036** people were reached during **553** HIV/AIDS community outreach events

**8,589** people attended **169** HIV/AIDS-related workshops and presentations

**2,083** hot lunches served through the "Meet and Eat" program

**1,489** books and **314** CDs were distributed to **265** PHAs through the BookAIDS program

**1,414** counselling sessions and **859** case management sessions were offered

**1,187** registered clients accessed services

**798** in-depth "Info-to-go" packages on a wide range of HIV-related topics were taken from our Access Centre.

**421** attended our Community Health Forums for PHAs

**317** PHAs were helped through our Income Tax Clinic

**139** PHAs were enrolled in the Employment Action program. **46** were placed in paid employment.



As always, in the past year the ACT Access Centre remained the hub of action. As the first point of contact for those calling or coming in to ACT, either for information or to access programs and services, it remained a busy place with over 32,000 people visiting the Access Centre this year.

## Supporting people living with HIV/AIDS

This past year, ACT launched a new service, the **HIV Dementia Day program**, established in partnership with Mid-Toronto Community Services. This innovative program, two years in development, is the first of its kind anywhere in the world, offering individualized therapeutic programming for persons living with HIV and dementia.

ACT offered **Wellness Retreat Weekends** for men and women living with HIV/AIDS. These events provided an opportunity for 43 women and 24 men to escape the city, meet their peers, and learn about activities to enhance their health and wellness.

Our very successful **Community Health Forums**, now in their 8th year, were offered six times this past year and were attended by 525 people. Topics included: loss and stress; youth, sexuality and HIV; and sexual and reproductive health for persons living with HIV. The forums continue to be an important place for PHAs to gain information about how to manage their lives.

ACT's **Furniture Exchange Program** offered service to 487 PHAs, providing good, used household items to those in need. As a result of our collaboration with In Kind Canada, we have been able to meet the increased number of requests for mattresses.

The **Income Tax Clinic** marked another record year. Thanks to the help of our amazing volunteers, ACT was able to file tax returns for 538 clients with HIV/AIDS.

We also expanded hours for our **BookAIDS** program (free books and CDs for clients) which is held four times a year. The new hours (Wednesday evenings and all day Thursday) have increased the number of PHAs accessing this service.

**Support Groups** continued to provide an opportunity for PHAs to share time together, to find mutual support, and to learn from each other. In addition to the eight short-term groups, two ongoing groups for long-term survivors were held. In total 80 clients attended groups.

Our monthly **Women's Coffee Night** continued to attract a large number of women with HIV/AIDS. This regular social support initiative offers social networking evenings, movie nights, Mendhi (henna tattooing) parties, crafts, healthy sexuality workshops, and other health-enhancing activities.

The **Positive Youth Outreach (PYO)** annual retreat weekend allowed 11 young people with HIV to meet their peers, get out of the city and relax, as well as participate in workshops and discussions on issues related to HIV treatment and disclosing their HIV status to others. PYO's weekly drop-in sessions attracted 408 participants over 51 sessions. The drop-in provides a confidential environment where young people with HIV/AIDS can talk about their concerns and offer support and encouragement to others. In addition to the weekly drop-in program, we provided regular peer support on a wide range of issues related to health, relationships, and finances.

This past year the **Employment Action program** continued to grow. This program works with PHAs to help them re-enter the workforce after periods of long-term disability. Thanks to a generous donation of \$20,000 from IBM, ACT was able to revitalize our on-site computer lab. This resource is used extensively for employment training. IBM's donation of new technology equipment – including new state-of-the-art desktop computers, LCD monitors, and Thinkpads™ – provided important tools for Employment Action's team of volunteer instructors. Every year these volunteers contribute over 600 hours to train ACT clients in Excel, Microsoft Word, English-as-a-Second-Language software, PowerPoint, security and networking, and more.

Many PHAs face long-term health issues and social isolation caused by the stigma still associated with HIV/AIDS. Returning to work can be an important first step towards re-establishing a sense of stability in their lives. This past year, Employment Action graduated 30 clients from our Advanced Computer Skills class and placed a total of 46 in paid employment.

With more and more clients employed, we've seen an increasing need to focus on job retention. Other employment programs that work with people with disabilities have learned to address this issue, so we worked with members of JOIN (Job Opportunity Information Network for persons with disabilities) to seek funding for a project that will address retention issues for all people with disabilities. We are happy to report that funding has been secured and that ACT's Employment Action program will be taking the lead on this exciting new project over the next fiscal year.

ACT's **Counselling and Case Management** services work collaboratively to meet the practical and emotional support needs of our diverse clients, and provide an important link to services at ACT

and other services in the broader community. ACT's counselling services help both PHAs and those affected by HIV/AIDS (such as friends, family and partners). Case management services are focussed exclusively towards PHAs.

Counselling services continued to be highly utilized. We've been able to provide counselling services on a drop-in, first-come-first-served basis, as well as by scheduled appointments. Mental health concerns, addiction issues, and ways of coping with an HIV-positive diagnosis continued to be very important matters for those accessing this service.

Case Management provides services for PHAs who have increasingly complex needs and often require assistance navigating the social, legal, and health systems. This past year we saw an increase in men who are in abusive relationships and are seeking housing where they can enjoy safer and healthier lives. We're continuing to see more newcomers to Canada who are seeking access to affordable housing, social support, government income support, and assistance with settlement issues.



## Information and Knowledge Development:

### **ASO411 – an on-line mapping tool for HIV/AIDS services in Ontario**

ACT has been actively involved in the Information and Access Working Group of the Toronto HIV/AIDS Community Planning Initiative (TCPI) to develop an accessible, coordinated HIV/AIDS service information system. We collaborated with the Ontario HIV Treatment Network (OHTN) to expand the scope of their proposed “ASO411” tool (a name that combines the acronym for “AIDS service organization” and “411,” a number commonly associated with information assistance).

This new on-line tool ([www.aso411.ca](http://www.aso411.ca)) allows individuals to search for up-to-date information about HIV/AIDS-related services in Toronto and throughout Ontario. ASO411 replaced ACT’s Living Guide Online as of April 1, 2008.

### **MaBwana Black Men’s Study**

MaBwana Black Men’s Study is an ongoing research project in partnership with the African Caribbean Council on HIV/AIDS in Ontario (ACCHO), which examines the vulnerability to HIV among Black, African and Caribbean gay and bisexual men and other men who have sex with men (MSM) in Toronto. The purpose of the study is to enable HIV prevention programming that is supported by research evidence. Over this past year we recruited study participants. In total, 168 men completed a survey questionnaire and 24 men participated in one-on-one interviews. We are continuing to analyze data from the survey and interviews. We expect to release the final report early in 2009.

**The Lambda/M-TRACK Study: Understanding the HIV prevention and sexual health needs of gay and bisexual men.**

Gay, bisexual men and other men who have sex with men continue to be the largest group affected by HIV/AIDS nationally, provincially, and locally. Despite this, there haven't been any ongoing research studies that examine factors associated with HIV risk taking among these men across the country. This recently changed with a series of studies (called M-TRACK) in cities across Canada. Funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), the studies are meant to be repeated every few years. ACT was the lead organization coordinating the implementation of the study in Toronto and Ottawa (where it was called Lambda). The study seeks to better understand issues such as substance use, sexual behaviour, and ideas about HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) so that programs and services can be developed to reduce the spread of HIV and STIs. Here in Toronto, 2000 men participated in the anonymous survey and the optional blood sample, which was taken and tested for HIV, hepatitis C and syphilis. We anticipate receiving a report on the national findings shortly from PHAC and are currently working with the University of Toronto to analyze our local data and disseminate this to the community and service providers that work with gay and bisexual men.



# ACT Volunteer profile: Ken Tong



Ken Tong has been an ACT volunteer for five years. During this time, he has served the agency in diverse and valuable ways: updating website information, facilitating support groups for people with HIV/AIDS, and most recently, sitting as a member of ACT's Board of Directors.

After graduating from the Core Skills training program – a requirement for all volunteers who wish to work in program or service delivery – Ken completed his training as a support group facilitator and, together with fellow volunteer Bob Wallace, took responsibility for a long-term survivors' group. "I was a bit nervous at first, but Bob was a great mentor, and I soon found my feet," Ken recalls of the experience. Ken helped

introduce new facilitators to the support group program, and subsequently he lent his time and talents as a facilitator to other groups, including the "Positive Results" group for people newly diagnosed with HIV, and the "Living with HIV" group. "All of these experiences really helped me to better understand the broad spectrum of realities faced by people living with HIV," says Ken.

Ken first decided to volunteer for ACT after two people he knew died. Ken says, "It was time that I gave back to the organization which had been there for my friends and me during the dark times in our lives." The moving experiences that Ken has been a part of have plainly made an impact on his life. Through the support groups, he has witnessed "real change in people's individual lives. Some of these changes manifested in people actively participating in their own health care. Others broke out of stifling situations of social isolation, and ventured back into the workforce following long periods of disability."

When asked what he has received from volunteering at ACT, Ken speaks about the ways in which volunteering has provided him with an understanding of the complex issues faced by people with HIV/AIDS. For him, this understanding is rooted in a profound respect for people's diverse lived experiences and individual challenges. As a support group facilitator, Ken confronts and helps group members to cope with challenges he has learned about first-hand: "making meaningful connections in a world where many of their peers are gone, keeping motivated and feeling positive when they may feel broken or unattractive, or the challenge of meeting their day-to-day needs, affording costly treatments, and trying to make ends meet with little income."

Despite how daunting living with HIV/AIDS can be, Ken remarks on how resilient support group members were, even when faced with

terrific challenges. Finding inspiration in the bravery of group members, Ken says, “When you watch people actually make positive changes for themselves, re-think those challenges with new perspectives, or move beyond those obstacles – like when someone finds solace in knowing they are not alone in their fears, or when someone feels comfortable enough to leave their home to meet new friends, or return to work after a long absence, or when someone embarks on a new date that makes them feel like they are on top of the world – these have been such wonderful things to be a part of. For me, this has been the best thing that I have received from volunteering at ACT.”

A year ago, Ken was elected to the ACT Board of Directors. For Ken, this is an extension of his ongoing volunteer work. “I sit on the Board’s Community, Advocacy Programs and Services Committee, the Leadership and Governance Committee, and I participate on the internal Communications and Advocacy Working Group. It’s something which I enjoy doing, the hours never seem to be a burden, and as a Board member I am really able to see the same dedication present at all levels of ACT”.

Volunteering really does make a difference. For Ken, volunteering has made a difference not only in the lives of those who benefit from ACT’s programs and services, but in his life, too.

## Volunteers

Volunteers remain the backbone of ACT. We simply would not be able to deliver our programs and services or be able to run our fundraising events without the dedication and commitment of our hundreds of volunteers.

This past year, we provided comprehensive training to 85 volunteers interested in program and service delivery. To make sure that all of our volunteers are equipped with the skills and knowledge to provide quality service, we offered regular training sessions on a range of topics such as managing anger and hostility, harm reduction, bereavement issues, conflict resolution, and issues facing refugees. We also partnered with Volunteer Toronto to provide professional development training for ACT staff that work with volunteers.

In the past year, volunteers contributed **36,722** hours to ACT. This is the equivalent of 19 full-time staff people!

## Honouring. Remembering. Celebrating.

Every year since 1985 a candlelight vigil has been held on the Thursday evening of Pride Week to commemorate those we have lost to HIV/AIDS. This community event takes place at the AIDS Memorial located in Cawthra Square Park behind the 519 Church Street Community Centre. Each year this special event is organized and sup-

ported financially by a dedicated group of AIDS organizations and community volunteers. ACT continues to support the planning and implementation of this event to honour, remember, and celebrate the lives of those who have died of AIDS and to recognize and honour those affected by and living with HIV/AIDS.



## Supporter profile: TD Canada Trust

ACT would not be able to provide its wide range of programs and services without the generosity of its donors and corporate sponsors. Over the years, more and more corporations have supported ACT through sponsorship of our special events or with grants directed to specific ACT programs and services.

In 2001, TD Canada Trust began its ongoing support for ACT by providing \$60,000 over three years for ACT's HIV prevention and education programs for youth. According to Scott Mullin, Vice President, Government and Community Relations at TD Bank Financial Group, "We've continued to support ACT because it provides much needed services and support to people living with HIV/AIDS in Toronto. We believe that we are able to make a real difference in the lives of those living with and affected by HIV/AIDS by supporting ACT's work".

Since 2006, TD Canada Trust has been the Presenting Sponsor for SNAP!, ACT's photography fundraiser, held each year in early spring. Speaking on behalf of TD Canada Trust, Scott Mullin says, "we saw SNAP! as an event that had lots of potential to grow and become both a major fund-raiser for ACT and a celebration of contemporary photography. We liked the focus on photography because it was unique and meant that SNAP! had the potential to add something new; not just to the Toronto scene, but to the arts in Canada."

Mullin describes TD Canada Trust's support for ACT as reflective of the bank's commitment to community involvement and efforts to be a responsible corporate citizen: "We believe that everyone has a role to play in building a healthy and prosperous society, and TD is committed to doing its part and more."

# Our Supporters

With the generosity and patronage of thousands of supporters in the community, ACT is able to provide compassionate, proactive services to people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS. We gratefully acknowledge our government funders, regional and international partners, and the many individuals, corporations, foundations and groups that have supported ACT – with philanthropic commitments, grants and sponsorships – during our 2007-08 fiscal year.

## Government funders

Government of Canada:

Canadian Institutes of Health Research  
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# Our Supporters

Thousands of individual supporters sustain our work, whether through one-time gifts or on a monthly basis through our Partners in Caring monthly giving plan. We particularly thank our Leaders in Caring, individuals who give \$1,200 or more annually, who lead the way in our fight against HIV/AIDS.

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A planned gift, such as a bequest in a will or gift of life insurance, is the ultimate expression of support in our fight against HIV/AIDS. The Legacy of Hope Fund, housed with the Toronto Community Foundation, has grown to more than \$870,000 since its inception in 1999.

We thank the many individuals who have made a planned commitment to ACT, and gratefully acknowledge the legacies left by the following individuals in the last fiscal year

Estate of Edward Kamski  
Estate of J. Spence McIntosh  
Estate of Peter Russell Quaid

Estate of Clifton Roberts, in  
memory of David Burgess

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# Our Supporters

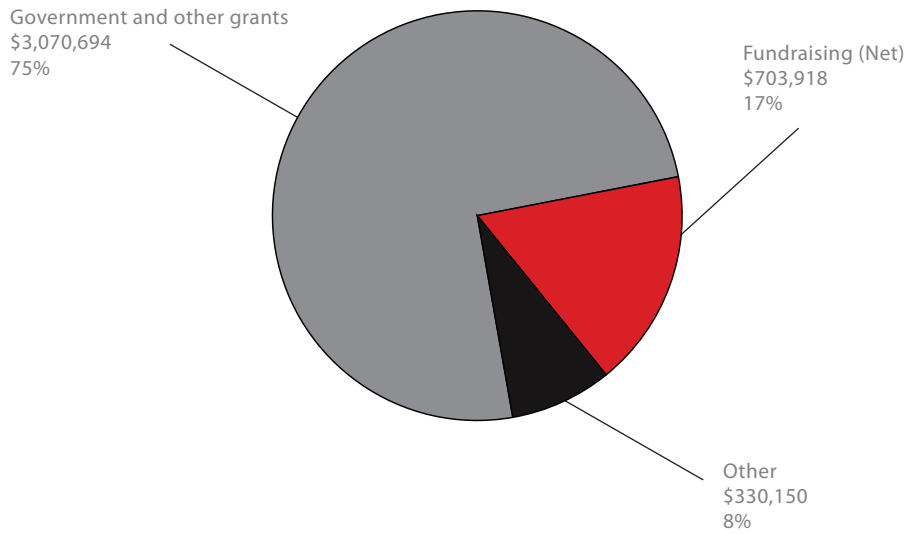
Many members of the community provide invaluable in-kind support, thereby allowing us to reduce administrative costs and allocate more funds to our services and programs. The following have made receiptable in-kind gifts to ACT in the last fiscal year:

## IN-KIND SUPPORTERS

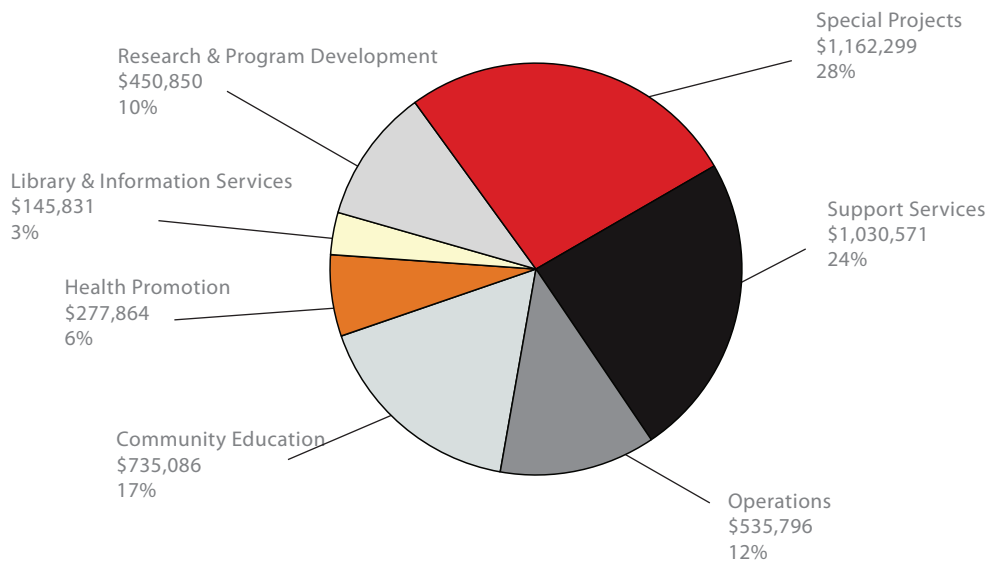
- Sara Angelucci
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- Mickey Smith
- Marshall Sterling
- Andy Summers
- Kevin Viner
- Jan Von Hollenben
- World Salon
- Clare Yow
- Zoe Yuristy
- Balint Zsako

## Financials

Total Agency Revenue: \$ 4,104,762



Total Agency Expenditures: \$4,338,297



We apologize for any errors, omissions, or inaccuracies. Please contact us at 416-340-8484, ext. 279 for any corrections, additions, or inquiries.



[www.actoronto.org](http://www.actoronto.org)

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Charitable Business Number: 11877 9024 RRO001