



# act News

AIDS Committee of Toronto

Autumn 2009

**We can't stop.  
We won't stop.**

Photos from Pride 2009 P.03

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NOW MORE  
THAN EVER

# THANK YOU!

The AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT) is grateful to all of the volunteers who helped us stage our stunning and record-breaking fundraising events. From Fashion Cares and SNAP! to the Scotiabank AIDS Walk for Life, we couldn't do it without you.

With your support, these events keep our funding stable so that men, women and youth who are living with, affected by, and at risk for HIV/AIDS can rely on us for support and education.



At its annual general meeting in July, Mister Leatherman Toronto (MLT) presented a cheque for \$15,000 to ACT, the beneficiary of MLT fundraising last year.

This generous contribution will go towards the practical and social support programs offered to people living with HIV/AIDS in our community.

## Myth

HIV/AIDS is not a concern in Toronto, especially with medical advancements.

## Fact

There is no cure for AIDS and treatments for people with HIV/AIDS come with side effects.

**A study of Canadian youth conducted in 2002 indicated that knowledge about HIV/AIDS is declining. Two-thirds of Grade 7 students and half of Grade 9 students thought there was a cure for HIV/AIDS.**

**Help us bust the myths.** Support the outreach and education programs of the AIDS Committee of Toronto.

  
just the facts



ACT 25th Anniversary Volunteer Appreciation Party **January 2009**

Want to submit a photo for the next ACT newsletter? E-mail [communications@actoronto.org](mailto:communications@actoronto.org)



Honoured group at the Toronto Pride Parade **June 2009**





Photo by Nicola Betts

## Meet our new Executive Director

### Q&A with Hazelle Palmer

**Q: What made you think about coming to ACT?**

The opportunity to work with ACT is truly exciting. I have always admired the work of the agency and know how much its programs and services make a difference in people's lives. I remember years ago, when there were very few resources or organizations doing HIV/AIDS work, and ACT was that one resource. A place where people could turn for support, information, and counselling. I have watched, over many years, ACT grow to be an innovator, a leader and an advocate, and so the opportunity to join the ACT team was an easy decision.

**Q: What was your first experience with the agency?**

I've had friends who have accessed the services at ACT and I learned first-hand how much that support gave them strength, courage and empowerment. Years later, when I worked for Planned Parenthood Toronto (PPT), there were occasions where PPT staff invited ACT staff to do training sessions that would enhance our understanding of new trends and developments in HIV/AIDS.

**Q: What was your role at Planned Parenthood Toronto?**

Just prior to coming to ACT, I was the Executive Director of Planned Parenthood Toronto. I held that position for eight years, although I was with PPT for 12 years altogether, with four years as the Manager of Communications and Health Promotion Programs.

**Q: What are the similarities in the work of ACT and Planned Parenthood? What makes it different?**

There are many similarities between PPT and ACT, and yet there are differences. These are organizations that have strong values that help to define the work they do; both organizations are clear about their purpose and both are committed to bringing about social change.

PPT focuses on sexual and reproductive health, and that includes sexually transmitted infections (STIs), so it also provides information and education on HIV/AIDS. ACT focuses on HIV/AIDS, but as we know, there are other ways to transmit HIV/AIDS beyond sexual contact. The opportunity to concentrate on other modes of transmission is an important new aspect for me. Also, there are connections to other STIs, such as Hepatitis C, that are addressed by both organizations.

PPT, however, is a community health centre, and therefore has a mandate to provide primary health care services. This mandate allows PPT to explore broader issues affecting one's health and well-being. ACT does this too, but differently. We know that as people with HIV/AIDS (PHAs) are living longer, they face more complex issues and their social needs change as well. ACT has developed unique and creative programs that have been responsive to the changing needs of the clients we serve. Our Employment Action program, for example, is the first of its kind in Canada, and it helps to get PHAs ready to enter or re-enter the work force.

**Q: What are you looking forward to as Executive Director?**

My arrival couldn't have been timed better. ACT is about to embark on its next strategic planning process. I am looking forward to hearing from all of our stakeholders about what they think the future of ACT should be, what we do well and where there are challenges. I will also be working with staff, management and the board of directors to create a new five-year plan together. I'm not sure what the final outcome will be, but I do know that it will showcase opportunities for ACT to build on its past accomplishments, and to create new and innovative opportunities for the future.

**Q: What has your first few months on the job been like?**

I have to say how wonderful it has been at ACT. I have been so impressed by our staff, our volunteers and board of directors. Many people describe ACT as a family and I must say that I have been welcomed into this family with open arms. It has been a remarkable first few months, and I am looking forward to the years ahead.

I have a 16-year old daughter who has also been embraced by ACT staff and volunteers. She joined me on the ACT float this past Pride, and as we danced down Yonge Street I recognized it was a memory she and I will share forever. My first Pride as a member of the ACT team, the agency being recognized as the honoured group, and me and my daughter screaming out, "Happy Pride!" It's already been a remarkable journey.

# Gay Men's Outreach: Serving men since 1994

In Toronto, gay and bisexual men make up the majority of people living with HIV/AIDS. According to Toronto Public Health, 61% of new HIV infections in 2007 were in the gay community. Of the 16,000 people living with HIV/AIDS in Toronto, it is estimated that about seven out of ten are gay or bisexual men.

Facing an even higher percentage of new infections in the gay community 15 years ago, ACT expanded its prevention work with gay men and created a program dedicated to the sexual health needs of this community. The Gay Men's Outreach program was born and served as a unique combination of community-based education, outreach and action.

Although this is the 15th anniversary of the program, ACT's roots in the gay community go back much further. The precursor to ACT was "Gays in Health Care," a small group of gay health professionals who later went on to co-found the agency in 1983.

ACT has always provided education and outreach programs to gay men. The agency still chooses to be located in the heart of Toronto's gay village in recognition of its deep roots in the community and the combined impact of HIV/AIDS amongst gay men.

Since the first year of the outreach program in 1994, the staff positions dedicated to HIV prevention and education have expanded to full-time positions in community education, community outreach, harm reduction, and online outreach.

While maintaining its core outreach programs in bars and bathhouses, the program has built on its success with new innovations like the community Condom Stuffing Program and the Condom Dispenser Network. Nearly all of these services are delivered by outreach volunteers, reaching thousands of men in 2008.

Duncan MacLachlan, the current Gay Men's Outreach Coordinator, attributes the success of the program to its foundations in the community. "Program volunteers are peers recruited from the community," he says. "Volunteers have direct input into program development. People living with HIV/AIDS form part of the team."



Current and former Gay Men's Outreach Coordinators.

From left to right: James Murray, John Maxwell, Duncan MacLachlan.

"The program has always pushed the envelope in terms of its public campaigns."  
—John Maxwell

The benefits are mutual. Not only do community members contribute thousands of hours to deliver these outreach programs, but all volunteers receive a minimum of fifty hours of training. The knowledge and experience they gain is taken back to their social circles, which further enhances community education. Volunteers of the agency sometimes find employment in the field of HIV/AIDS prevention and support, thanks to their experience.

"Our education and outreach programs are the first line of defence against HIV transmission in our community," says John Maxwell, Director of Policy and Communications for ACT. Maxwell began at ACT in 1992 and was part of the expansion of Gay Men's Outreach in 1994.

"The program has always pushed the envelope in terms of its public campaigns," he added. "From Safer BDSM pamphlets to frank, direct language and imagery, we've never shied away from sending hard-hitting messages that speak to the gay community, even if they're controversial."

Gay Men's Outreach has sometimes come under fire for sending such controversial messages. For example, ACT has faced criticism for providing risk reduction tips for gay men who bareback (have anal sex without a condom). Outreach volunteers are trained to provide non-judgmental advice adapted to the needs of individuals who may be at greater risk of HIV transmission.

Now entering its 15th year of action in the gay community, the program is broadening to include new areas like online outreach.

MacLachlan assures us that Gay Men's Outreach will keep adapting to the changing realities of sex in the gay community. "We can't stop and we won't stop," he says, echoing the theme for this year's Pride. "Until HIV/AIDS is over."



# Volunteer profile: David York

David has been volunteering with ACT for years, but his involvement began in the 1980s when AIDS first hit Toronto. He was studying nursing at the time, and the emergence of a mysterious illness in the community had a profound impact on him.

While waiting to attend a meeting of another community organization he volunteered with, David dropped in to an ACT condom stuffing party to pass the time. He was hooked from his first volunteer experience, and quickly signed up for more.

“I had friends who volunteered for ACT and had said good things about their experiences,” David says. He signed up for Core Skills Training, the mandatory program that all ACT staff and volunteers proceed through. The training — held over weekends and a few weeknights over the course of a month — teaches everything from facts about HIV/AIDS to active listening skills and cultural competency.

After graduating from Core Skills Training, David expressed an interest in volunteering in the service access centre, teaching computer classes, and assisting the Buddy Program and Gay Men’s Outreach.

David spends most of his time in the latter program, serving as a condom co-captain for the ACT Condom Dispenser Network. The network exists in numerous clubs, bars and bathhouses throughout the gay community, to distribute free condoms and lubricant to patrons.

“Gay Men’s Outreach includes more than just free condoms. We have an opportunity to provide one-on-one contact with the public.”

Along with an assistant, David delivers condom and lube packages as well as information to gay community venues throughout the year. “I sometimes refer to this as my bar-hopping, because most of our dispensers are in bars,” he jokes.

Gay Men’s Outreach includes more than just free condoms. “In outreach, we have an opportunity to provide one-on-one contact with the public and our target clientele,” David explains. “Instead of just having the condoms available from our dispensers, we also hand them out to a very willing public.”

While he is now a seasoned outreach volunteer, David still participates in the regular condom stuffing parties held in the ACT office. He has also attended two Pride parades with the Gay Men’s Outreach program, including this year when ACT led the parade as honoured group.

This was the second year David walked in the Scotiabank AIDS Walk for Life, to raise funds for the practical and social support services ACT offers for people living with HIV/AIDS.

David believes that everyone has a role to play in preventing HIV transmission and supporting people living with the virus. “I am HIV-negative, with a positive outlook on helping others,” he says.



**Scotiabank**  
**AIDS WALK FOR LIFE**   
*The Walk will do us good.*

# Thank you for walking!

[www.aidswalkforlifetoronto.ca](http://www.aidswalkforlifetoronto.ca)

The Scotiabank AIDS Walk for Life Toronto raises much-needed funds for ACT. For more than 25 years, ACT has been providing services to people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS, while also working to prevent the spread of HIV in our community.

This year, funds raised from the Scotiabank AIDS Walk for Life Toronto were directed to the practical social support services ACT offers to people living with HIV/AIDS. These are the most essential programs, meeting the most basic needs of individuals that must be addressed before more complex issues.

Food programs, counselling, social support, and a furniture bank — these are just some of the crucial programs your pledges and donations supported. Every pledge makes a difference in the lives of people with HIV/AIDS in our community.



**Danielle Sandhu**  
**University of Toronto Students' Union**

I'm walking to reduce stigma, challenge stereotypes, and support ACT and the valuable services it provides to my friends and neighbours. It's important to raise awareness about the fact that we are all susceptible to HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS does not discriminate; it does not see boundaries of ethnicity, class, gender or sexual orientation.



**Patrick Casey**  
**Team Scotiabank**

My own involvement in AIDS charities began eight years ago with the tragic death of a friend. That made me realize that HIV/AIDS was something that affects us all, and that the horrifying prejudice against those suffering with the disease was perhaps the worst symptom of all. Throughout the last eight years, I have been a vocal supporter of those living with HIV/AIDS and the charities that support them. There is no cure and no vaccine for AIDS at this time. The fight those infected face on a day-to-day basis is heroic at the best of times and horrific at the worst. Until there is a cure, there will be a need for the walk.



**Sandy Whitbread**  
**Team Jessica**

We all have our reasons for walking in the AIDS Walk, and here's ours. My daughter Jessica became HIV-positive in 2001. Jessica has touched everyone's heart on the team. Our team walks under one name, but each and every one of them is a star on the team.

# Volunteer Core Skills Training

The people behind the scenes

Thousands of volunteers contribute countless hours to the ACT every year, in programs like gay men's outreach, fundraising and development, service access, and many more.

With the level of skills and qualifications these roles require, it's no wonder why ACT has implemented a rigorous training program for all volunteers and staff, held in conjunction with the Toronto People With AIDS Foundation (PWA).

We would like to thank all of our supporters who attended the weekend-long training this past spring, and our fabulous facilitators who lent their knowledge and experiences to new volunteers.



Peter Stephenson



Rui Pires



Jocelyn Watchorn, Sergio Martinez & Janet Caswell.



Albin Lopez



Carlos Rivas

**Sergio Martinez**, **Darryl Ramsay** (PWA), and **Sarah Shultz** coordinated and facilitated the entire weekend of activities. **Rui Pires** and **Carlos Rivas** provided a detailed overview of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections. **Janet Caswell** and

**Jocelyn Watchorn** turned us all into active listeners. **Peter Stephenson** and **Albin Lopez** gave us the run-down on programs and services available at ACT, PWA and other AIDS service organizations. **Devan Nambiar** from Rainbow Health

Ontario and **Meera Dhebar** from Ryerson University facilitated excellent workshops on LGBT issues, anti-oppression and cultural competency. **Lisungu Chieza** from Women's Health in Women's Hands conducted a workshop on Living Well with HIV.

To attend the next Core Skills Training, contact Sergio at [smartinez@actoronto.org](mailto:smartinez@actoronto.org) or 416-340-8484 ext. 224



## Have you talked to him yet?

That's what it says on cards distributed by Marco Posadas in bathhouses around the city. He's a registered social worker and a counsellor for Towel Talk, the first program of its kind in Canada.

Towel Talk places professional counsellors in bathhouses throughout Toronto to give patrons an opportunity to talk about any issues they may be facing, whether inside or outside of the bathhouse.

"Sometimes just talking can make a big difference," says Posadas from his daytime office at ACT. "Guys in bathhouses can be dealing with concerns from body image issues and racism to guilt and shame about using the bathhouse."

The program is a collaborative effort among many community partners, housed at ACT.

The project was created out of recognition that psychosocial factors play a role in the prevention of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. By helping to address these issues, Towel Talk counsellors are contributing to the existing outreach and education efforts of ACT staff and volunteers in bars, clubs and bathhouses.

The bathhouses that have opened up their doors for the program are Central Spa, St. Marc's Spa, Spa Excess and Steamworks. To see a calendar of when the counsellor will be in, visit the Towel Talk website at [www.actoronto.org/toweltalk](http://www.actoronto.org/toweltalk)

## 2009 Volunteer Core Skills Graduates

### New Graduates

Andy S.  
Avinash R.  
Ayaz A.  
Corina T.  
Evaldes R.  
Gabriel S.

Hayley M.  
Hurly M.  
Jack C.  
James A.  
Jay T.  
Johnny C.  
Kristen L.

Kyla L.  
Leanna B.  
Mark V.  
Michael G.  
Paulo L.  
Robert P.  
Sandra G.

Sandy W.  
Shawn A.  
Steve F.  
Terry G.  
Zanini P.

### ACT Staff Graduates

Adrienne Giroux  
Andrew Brett  
Anthony Tsoumbris  
Marco Posadas  
Mary Ann Stoddard  
Natasha Ward



# Ten years of quietly making a difference.

by Dayna Shereck, Job Developer

It wasn't too long ago that an HIV or AIDS diagnosis was a death sentence. Before the 1990s, few treatments were available for people who were infected.

With the advent of anti-retroviral therapy in Canada, everything changed. While AIDS continued to take many lives every year, the new treatments prolonged the lives of many people and allowed them to live more active and fulfilling lives.

Of course, this presented newer challenges for people living with HIV, many of whom had taken leave from employment when they became sick. How would job applicants explain a period of absence to an employer in an atmosphere of fear and stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS? How would an HIV-positive person find an employer understanding of his or her unique needs?

In response, ACT founded Employment Action in 1999, the first program of its kind in Canada. Ten years later, the program continues to operate from the ACT building.

At Employment Action, a diverse group of employment consultants, job developers and a retention specialist work together to assist people living with HIV who want to enter or re-enter the workforce.

Although the challenges faced by people with HIV have changed over the past decade, the need for employment support has not. Even today, some employers can be misinformed about HIV/AIDS, and people looking to re-enter the workforce after a period of absence may require re-training to update their skills. Employment Action also provides training and assistance to employers and clients to meet these needs.

Don Phaneuf, Director of Employment and Volunteer Services, was one of the founders of Employment Action

ten years ago. He has seen the program go through many challenges to get to where it is today.

"In the beginning, the program was based on full disclosure: all the employers knew they were hiring people who were HIV-positive," Don explains. The program later developed a non-disclosure policy due to HIV stigma, which hindered the goal of securing jobs for clients. "We are slowly working towards moderating the policy, to allow for appropriate disclosure in certain circumstances. However, no employer will ever be informed of an individual client's HIV status without his or her consent."

John (a pseudonym) had been out of the workforce for over ten years, having lost a partner and hope for himself. The transition from living off of Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) payments into the workforce presented a challenge.

"I was stuck in a rut, and my ODSP cheque didn't go very far, although I learned to live on it," John says. "But most of all, I had become socially isolated. I missed the social aspects of working, and I didn't realize how my self-esteem was really taking a beating by not feeling like part of society."

John works with the help of Employment Action, part-time at a university, where he has been promoted and feels valued. He says he now feels more empowered in social situations and his employment has enhanced his general well being.

As HIV/AIDS has evolved over the years, so has Employment Action. The program serves a diverse clientele of men and women from all walks of life. This September we celebrate 10 years of working behind the scene, and quietly helping clients achieve their goals and better their lives.



# Do **you** give good phone?

Since 1983, ACT has been providing compassionate, practical, emotional, and social support services to men, women, and youth living with HIV/AIDS, and working to prevent the spread of HIV.

We have a need for:

## **Volunteer Development Interns – Individual Giving**

We are looking for a few good men and women who will help us execute a volunteer telemarketing campaign in the coming months. This will involve calling our supporters, talking with them on the phone, asking for gifts, preparing and mailing donation packages, conducting research, and other duties as assigned.

This is a great opportunity to help round out your studies, get some hands-on experience in a fundraising department, and help work towards a world without HIV/AIDS at the same time.

Candidates must be very comfortable talking on the phone and have good organizational skills. Training and support will be provided... and fun is guaranteed!

Interested candidates should submit a résumé with two or more references:

## **AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT)**

Attention: Jim Billing, Development Volunteer Coordinator  
399 Church Street, 4th floor

Toronto, Ontario M5B 2J6

**T** 416-340-8484 ext. 255 **F** 416-340-8224

**E** [jbilling@actontario.org](mailto:jbilling@actontario.org) **W** [actontario.org](http://actontario.org)

***Thank you for ACTing!***



AIDS Committee of Toronto

# Get involved in ACT! Become a member!

## Membership

ACT members receive a biannual newsletter, a copy of the Annual Report, and the ability to get involved in the governance of the agency.

**If you are already a member but haven't renewed since April 1, 2009, your membership has expired!**

You can purchase or renew your membership for \$5 at the fourth floor Access Centre of ACT, at the corner of Church and Carlton Streets. You can e-mail [membership@acttoronto.org](mailto:membership@acttoronto.org) or join online at [www.acttoronto.org/membership](http://www.acttoronto.org/membership)

## Annual General Meeting

**Monday, October 26, 2009**

Oakham House, Thomas Lounge  
63 Gould St, Toronto.

7:00 – 8:00pm

A light dinner will be served at 6:30 p.m.

If you will be joining us for dinner, please RSVP to Anthony at 416-340-8484 ext. 279. Please RSVP no later than Monday, October 19th.

Only members in good standing who have renewed by September 26, 2009 will be able to vote.

Documents for the meeting are available from the ACT office or online at [www.acttoronto.org/agm](http://www.acttoronto.org/agm)

### AIDS Committee of Toronto

399 Church Street, 4th floor, Toronto, Ontario M5B 2J6

T 416-340-8484 ext. 279 F 416-340-8224 E [ask@acttoronto.org](mailto:ask@acttoronto.org) W [acttoronto.org](http://acttoronto.org)

Monday to Thursday 10 am-9 pm Friday 10 am-5 pm



@ACToronto



[facebook.com/ACToronto](http://facebook.com/ACToronto)

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.

design: Raymond Helkio

**YES! I want to support**  **act**

Name  First name(s)  Surname

Address  Street number/name  Suite number

City  Pr.  Postal Code

Tel.  Area code  Email

Occasionally, ACT trades its mailing list with other progressive charities for a one-time exchange. If you'd prefer your name wasn't traded, please check off this box, complete and return this coupon, or contact us.

Please provide me with information about leaving a *Legacy of Hope* to ACT like a bequest in my will, gift of life insurance, or gift of securities.

Charitable Registration No: 11877 9024 RR0001

DM09N1

Gifts of \$20 or more are automatically receipted; others upon request. Monthly gifts will be processed on the 15th of each month, and you will receive a consolidated income tax receipt early in the next calendar year.

You can change or cancel your arrangement at any time simply by contacting us. New or renewed members:

by completing this form you agree to ACT's Mission, Vision, and Guiding Principles: more at [www.acttoronto.org/membership](http://www.acttoronto.org/membership). *THANK YOU FOR ACTING!*

[www.acttoronto.org/membership](http://www.acttoronto.org/membership). *THANK YOU FOR ACTING!*

To receive regular updates by email from ACT please visit [www.acttoronto.org/subscribe](http://www.acttoronto.org/subscribe)

### I'd like to make a one-time donation of:

\$250  \$100  \$50  \$36  other: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

### OR I'd like to become a *Partner in Caring* and make monthly gifts of:

\$25  \$18  \$10  \$6  other: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

I've included a void cheque for my monthly gifts.

I've included my cheque, payable to ACT.

I prefer to use my credit card:

VISA  MasterCard  American Express

Card no.

Exp.  /  /  Signature

### I'd also like to become a member of ACT! (Fee \$5)

I've included the fee with my enclosed cheque.

Please charge my credit card above the additional fee.

I can't afford the membership fee – it will be waived by ACT.

I've given \$5 or more to ACT in the last year through monthly giving; please apply to my membership.