

FROM THE FRONT LINES

What's happening at AIDS service organizations across Canada

PACIFIC

New grassroots initiatives mentor positive women leaders

In spite of excellent services for HIV-positive women in British Columbia, opportunities for these women to be leaders in their own communities have been few and far between. Until now.

Two new grassroots initiatives—the **Positive Advocacy Project of British Columbia (PAPBC)** and **SAHWANYA** for African women living with HIV—are by positive women, for positive women.

PAPBC

The brainchild of the Vancouver-based Positive Women's Network (PWN), PAPBC was formed in response to the increasing diversity of PWN's membership and the clear need in B.C. for a committee made up entirely of positive women. "PWN is trying to be responsive to women where they're at," says PWN board member Margarite Sanchez.

PAPBC members currently include Aboriginal women, recent immigrant women, urban and rural women and women living in Northern B.C., the Interior and on Vancouver Island.

Under the leadership of Sanchez, PAPBC recently completed a client evaluation of the Oak Tree Clinic, which provides specialized HIV care for positive women, children and families. PAPBC's long-term goal: to create a community of leaders by providing training and mentoring opportunities for positive women.

New members are welcome and all meetings are confidential. For more information, contact PWN at pwn@pwn.bc.ca or 1.866.692.3001.

SAHWANYA

SAHWANYA is run by and for African women living with HIV in the B.C. Lower Mainland. It first began meeting in June 2007. Jeanne Nzeyimana founded the group when she heard from a doctor that African PHAs were dying in Vancouver not from lack of access to HIV treatment, but from isolation. "It is difficult for immigrant and refugee women to integrate because of poverty, illness, language barriers and

stigma in their communities," explains Nzeyimana. Women who have recently arrived in Canada and who speak little English often have difficulty gaining access to services.

With the support of AIDS Vancouver, PWN, the Oak Tree Clinic and the Bridge Clinic, which provides health care services to newcomers, SAHWANYA is currently meeting every two months for a Community Kitchen. Members bring their children and cook and eat together. Having a safe space to meet, support and educate one another helps them discuss common issues such as treatment, how to disclose to their children and how to prevent HIV transmission. Members also provide translation support for each other at medical appointments.

For more information or to join, e-mail sahwanya_ck@yahoo.com or call 778.998.2692.

THE PRAIRIES

Focus on diversity, service delivery

Like all regions across Canada, the Prairies has its share of funding and staffing challenges. With a growing immigrant and refugee population, many ASOs are rising to the challenge by partnering with translators and ethnocultural-based organizations. At the *Faces of HIV/AIDS in Manitoba—Past, Present and Future* conference, speakers focused on issues of diversity within HIV care, such as culturally appropriate ways to work with Muslim clients. And now, Nine Circles Community Health Centre in Winnipeg has started working with translators to better serve its Spanish-speaking clients.

A vast geography continues to dictate service delivery across the Prairies. Population density shrinks the further north one goes, and as such, so do resources for services.

To address these challenges, service providers and advocates, representing 13 organizations across Manitoba and Saskatchewan, came together in mid-January to discuss how to

best share resources and build upon collective expertise. Historically, Manitoba and Saskatchewan have been home to some of the largest populations of First Nations and Métis peoples, as well as a growing number of Inuit. For this reason, discussions around best practices of service delivery across large regions went on to acknowledge the important role of Aboriginal service providers and leaders in these areas.

For more information about the network, contact Sugandhi Wickremarachchi: swickremar@catie.ca or 1.800.263.1638 ext. 246.

ONTARIO

New services and programs

The Toronto People with AIDS Foundation (TPWAF) has added two new services: interpretation services and a program for seniors. In partnership with Multilingual Community Interpreter Services (MCIS), TPWAF will provide an on-site interpretation service in more than 85 languages. The service is available in person and on the phone. A second new program, the Positive Seniors Fund, will cater to those who are 65 years of age and older. For more information, go to www.pwatoronto.org or call Pamela Beavis at 416.506.8606 ext. 630.

The AIDS Committee of London is adding new and innovative



programs to help people with HIV/AIDS (PHAs) living in rural areas access services. The programs include Stories of HIV & AIDS Related Experiences (SHARE), a PHA peer volunteer program as well as an initiative to build Internet resources to support on-line education. For more information, call 519.434.1601 or go to www.aidslondon.com

AIDS Thunder Bay (ATB) has extended its Positive Prevention campaign. In early March, ATB held a special town-hall workshop on health and housing and the decision has been made to hire three new staff: a front-line support worker/IDU outreach worker; someone to head the education department; and a full-time nurse practitioner focused on hepatitis C. For more information, go to www.aidsthunderbay.org or call 807.345.1516.

The AIDS Network, Hamilton, has launched a series of new agency posters. The Network also had its second annual Oscar gala, "Play It Again Sam," on Feb. 23. A two-day workshop on community-based research and knowledge transfer for PHAs will be presented in partnership with McMaster University on April 9 & 10. For more information, go to www.aidsnetwork.ca or call 905.528.0854.

The Ontario AIDS Network (OAN) launched the Leadership Level III in January and will be providing ongoing skills leadership training Level II in April and Level I in June. Check

www.ontarioaidsnetwork.on.ca for details of current and ongoing course descriptions.

QUEBEC First Learning Institute focuses on increasing community treatment knowledge

On March 5 & 6, CATIE and COCQ-Sida invited 20 workers and volunteers from AIDS service organizations across Quebec for *L'Institut d'apprentissage des info-traitements VIH* held at the Sheraton Hotel in Montreal.

This first Learning Institute in Quebec focused on increasing community knowledge of clinical trials and basic pharmacology so that participants could benefit from *La 8ième Journées québécoises VIH*. The opening reception featured a presentation by AIDES, the French national HIV/AIDS organization, on its work providing HIV treatment information and advocacy in France. *L'Institut d'apprentissage* ended with an overview of the upcoming conference.

Drs. Mark Wainberg and Jean-Guy Baril opened *La 8ième Journées québécoises VIH* with an interactive discussion on important research presented at CROI 2008, moderated by Lyse Pinault, Executive Director of COCQ-Sida. During the two days that followed, epidemiology, basic science, prevention and clinical research on HIV as well as hepatitis C were presented from the perspective of clinical practice in Quebec.

For participants attending *L'Institut d'apprentissage* and *La 8ième Journées québécoises VIH*, it was an intense and rewarding learning experience as they gathered important HIV treatment information to be reported to their communities across Quebec. CATIE and COCQ-Sida feel that *L'Institut d'apprentissage* was a great success in keeping community members updated on the state of HIV treatment information and transmission knowledge in Quebec. The two organizations are planning a similar Learning Institute to precede the *14^e Symposium sur les aspects cliniques de l'infection par le VIH* to be held at the end of November.

For more information, contact Michael Bailey:

mbailey@catie.ca or 1.800.263.1638 ext. 260.

ATLANTIC Charlottetown RAAN meeting coming in May

The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) has awarded CATIE funding to host the first official meeting of the Regional Atlantic AIDS Network (RAAN) in Charlottetown, P.E.I. in May.

This is both exciting and newsworthy as the Atlantic region is one of the only regions in Canada that doesn't have a community-based HIV/AIDS network. A meeting to discuss the possibility of forming this network was held in March 2007 and 17 participants from Atlantic ASOs attended. CATIE staff facilitated a discussion with participants, which determined that a community-based HIV/AIDS network could:

- assist all participants to share skills and knowledge;
- build and strengthen the Atlantic region's response to HIV/AIDS;
- provide continuity and allow regional shared projects to be developed;
- build capacity for PHA leadership;
- improve communication and build a collaborative vision of HIV prevention, treatment and support; and
- provide professional peer support.

Organizations from the four Atlantic provinces that will make up RAAN include:

- AIDS Committee of Newfoundland and Labrador
- AIDS P.E.I.
- AIDS New Brunswick
- AIDS Saint John
- SIDA/AIDS Moncton
- AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia
- AIDS Coalition of Cape Breton
- Healing our Nations
- AIDS Committee of Western Newfoundland
- Nova Scotia Advisory Commission on AIDS

Membership in RAAN will consist of two members per ASO: an executive director (or other appointed staff person) and a PHA who volunteers or works with the organization.

For more information, contact Tricia Smith: tsmith@catie.ca or 1.800.263.1638 ext. 230. +