

FROM THE FRONT LINES

What's happening across Canada

Youth Blaze the Trail

Jessica Yee gives props to youth groups that are taking the lead in HIV treatment, prevention, education and activism.

Being a youth myself and working at a national youth sexual and reproductive health organization, one of my favourite things to write about is the amazing young people I get to meet and work with all across Canada. Here are some HIV-related youth projects and organizations you just MUST know about!

The Queer Youth Community Development Program (QYCDP)

AIDS Vancouver Island
www.avi.org/queeryouth
1.800.665.2437

This project is worth mentioning because it is no longer funded and it really should be. Youth on Vancouver Island already know very well what it's like to live outside of an urban centre and to lack relevant programming. This very cool project sought to meet youth where they were at, with interactive high school workshops focusing on stigma-busting and peer role-modeling of HIV education information. Bring back QYCDP!

TRIP Project

Toronto
www.trippproject.ca
647.822.6435

Thinking of hosting a party? Be sure to invite TRIP, whose volunteers will come ready to boogie down with enough safer-sex and safer-drug usage info and supplies to last you all night long! TRIP has been a part of the rave community in Toronto since 1995, which means that they've been listening to youth, helping them talk about health issues, and providing information and supplies for HIV prevention and harm reduction for more than 15 years of partying. TRIP's message is clear: Youth need to be aware and empowered to make decisions about their own bodies and spaces.

YouthCO

Vancouver
www.youthco.org
1.877.YOUTHCO (968.8426)

Sigh. I love YouthCO so much—but really, who doesn't? One of the longest-running youth AIDS service organizations (ASOs) in Canada, YouthCO was started by and for youth some 15 years ago. YouthCO lives up to all the hoopla about its peer education model and more—they really just exceed all expectations in successfully working with youth in a meaningful way. With a pulse on emerging youth engagement trends such as "Theatre of the Oppressed," as well as community-based collaborative initiatives like the Aboriginal Harm Reduction Project, it's fair to say that if you work with youth and HIV, you likely already know about YouthCO. If you don't, be sure to check 'em out. While you are at it, look into becoming a YouthCO superhero!

The Sense Project

Montreal
www.senseproject.org
514.481.0277

Any project coming out of Head & Hands, the Montreal-based organization offering a full gamut of youth health-related services (including legal stuff!), has got to be awesome. The Sense Project, with its slogan "Because sex ed makes sense," definitely fits this bill. The project is a peer-based education program that offers young people the opportunity to get the real facts about sexual health. Partly motivated by the Quebec government's decision to yank sex ed out of the school curriculum (and instead "encourage" teachers to bring in materials of their own), the Sense Project makes sure youth have tangible options to get information about sex, HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

We already featured Montreal-based JASE (www.accmontreal.org/jase) in the Winter 2008 issue, so this time we want to tell you that Project 10 (www.p10.qc.ca) also has a discussion group for HIV-positive youth.



HIV/AIDS Arctic Youth Fairs

Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada
www.pauktuutit.ca/hiv/main.html
1.800.667.0749

For the past five years, whenever funding has been possible, Pauktuutit has supported communities wishing to host HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C Fairs. The fairs are essentially contests where youth create projects to raise awareness of any aspect of HIV and/or hepatitis C; these projects are judged and prizes are awarded to winning participants. Aboriginal people living with HIV and/or hepatitis C travel to the fair to speak about their experiences. For the youth who attend, the fairs provide opportunities to share their perspectives and inspire each other.



HIV/AIDS Labrador Project

Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Labrador
www.lfchvgb.ca/home/14
709.896.5144

A project out of the Labrador Friendship Centre, the HIV/AIDS Labrador Project was created due to the lack of information about HIV/AIDS in Aboriginal communities—50 to 70 percent of the Aboriginal population is under the age of 25. Youth MUST be part of the equation, as they have always had a place of leadership within the Aboriginal community. Taking this to heart, the project hosted Reawaken the Spirit—Aboriginal Youth HIV/AIDS Gathering, in January of this year. The two-day gathering of Atlantic-region Aboriginal youth (ages 16 to 30) brought young people together to talk with their peers about HIV. Building on the success of this event, the group's organizers continue to seek the guidance of youth to steer the project in the right direction.

Positive Youth Outreach

Toronto
www.positiveyouth.com
416.340.8484

An organization started by and created for HIV-positive youth (under the age of 30) has simply got to be incredible, right? Right. Positive Youth Outreach (PYO) was founded in 1990 to break isolation and create a safe space for Toronto youth. PYO has grown into an organization with a comprehensive roster of services that range from support groups and wellness weekends to career planning and skills-building workshops. Considered by its members to be a lifeline of hope in the city, PYO offers a space to kick it with other poz youth and many opportunities to nurture young health advocates. Once you've drunk from the fountain of PYO, it's hard not to be hooked and want to get involved. Which is perfect, since they're always looking for volunteers. Why not give back to a group that has given positive youth so much?

Klinik's Teen Talk

Winnipeg
www.teen-talk.ca
204.784.4010

I've often said that YouthCO and Teen Talk ought to get together for a weeklong love fest of best practices for youth HIV and STI education, because the fabulousness of the YouthCO staff continues right on eastward to Teen Talk in Manitoba, which uses a similar peer-to-peer model for engaging youth. Everyone in Manitoba knows that if you want to talk to youth, not only about HIV and STIs but also about other crucial intersecting topics such as suicide and violence prevention, you call Teen Talk, the one-stop shop for these issues. This youth health-education service goes north, they go south, but most importantly they go wherever they can provide needed information, all the while training youth as peer leaders who can spread the message even further—in their own words, of course.



Jessica Yee is founder and executive director of the Native Youth Sexual Health Network. For more info about her work go to www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com