

For the Heart, the Hand and the Hungry

CATIE educator **MELISSA EGAN** goes coast to coast to highlight the many different forms support can take.

Handicraft



For Simon Thwaites, an artist and minister living with HIV, attending a CATIE workshop on body mapping—a form of art therapy that sees participants draw life-size outlines of their bodies on paper and then fill them with symbols of their life with HIV—was inspirational in more ways than one. The Nova Scotian, who was familiar with art therapy

after having developed an artistic workshop for fellow members of the AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia (ACNS) a year earlier, saw in body mapping the idea for a new and powerful project.

Thwaites' Hand to Hand project was born in 2008, just as ACNS was working to get its members more involved and connected to the

broader community. The timing couldn't have been better. During the agency's annual HIV/AIDS Ceilidh (a skills-building and networking gathering), Thwaites led a group of 25 participants through an inspiring six-hour day. Tables were piled high with paints and glitter while participants traced their own hands and the hands of others to create a visual expression of their journey with HIV.

The final products, beautiful posters that document each person's experiences, are divided into themed sections that look at thoughts, feelings and strategies while exploring past, present and future hopes. Each piece is a powerful testament to the courage of an individual, the impact this disease has on people and the unexpected places we find strength. When placed together, the individual pieces connect to create a larger expression of HIV community.

ACNS is happy to share the Hand to Hand project with other agencies across the country. If you would like to experience the Hand to Hand project, your local group can contact ACNS at 902.425.4882 or acns@acns.ns.ca.

Peer Voices

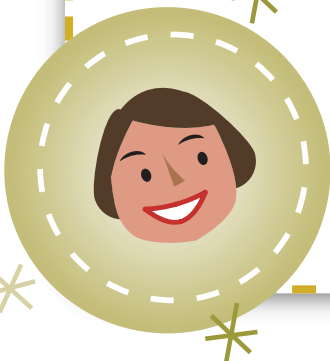
When Mariame learned she was HIV positive, her life came to a standstill. For a while she struggled to cope with her diagnosis but soon felt herself sinking into depression. Fortunately, Mariame found the AIDS Committee of Ottawa, which put her in touch with the provincial Peer Mentor Program run by Voices of Positive Women. With the goal of connecting women to services and support in their area, the program matches an HIV-positive woman in need with another woman with HIV who lives in the same area. The program was a lifeline for Mariame, who, with help from her peer mentor, has worked to accept her diagnosis, disclose to her children and even start mentoring other women.

Covering the province from Thunder Bay to Windsor to Ottawa and offering support in English, French and several African languages, the program is built on a vibrant community of about 40 trained HIV-positive women who volunteer their

time and skills to help other women living with the virus. Every effort is made to match women with similar experiences and to create a supportive relationship. Some mentors accompany women to hospital visits, some help women find local HIV-friendly agencies and support groups—and even attend meetings with new clients—while others provide a sympathetic ear. The goal is always to help women with HIV live positively and independently.

While the program is most often used by women who are newly diagnosed with HIV, it recently expanded to include women co-infected with hepatitis C and is also looking at ways to serve the needs of women who have been living with HIV for several years.

If you're interested in being paired with a mentor or want to help by becoming a peer mentor, contact Voices of Positive Women at 416.324.8703 or 1.800.263.0961 or info@vopw.org.



Good Eats!

Vancouver's Downtown Eastside is notorious for being one of the poorest postal codes in Canada, with many of its residents often struggling to find enough food to live. The struggle was recently made a bit easier by the publication of *Food Lines*, a booklet that lists places to obtain food in the Downtown Eastside.

Community organizations, food banks and faith-based charities are rated and placed on a map of the area.



The booklet was one of the results of the larger Good Eats! project, a workshop series on food security for people with HIV/AIDS (PHAs) living in the Downtown Eastside. The project was a collaboration of several community and university organizations, including the Community Based Research team at the British Columbia Persons with AIDS Society (BCPWA). Podcasts of the workshops are available on the BCPWA website. Topics range from "Stores in the Downtown Eastside" to "Food as Dignity."

To find out more about the Good Eats! project, contact BCPWA at 604.893.2200 or 1.800.994.2437 or info@bcpwa.org.

Meals by MIELS

At MIELS-Québec (Mouvement d'information et d'entraide dans la lutte contre le sida de Québec), lunch is wrapping up and the kitchen is bustling with volunteers from the health promotion team wanting to wash the dishes. Besides people who actually *want* to wash dishes, what makes this scene remarkable is that it happens every weekday at this AIDS service organization (ASO) in Quebec City.

The daily meal program is one example of how MIELS has put volunteerism and food at the core of its health promotion services. As many other ASOs do, MIELS also runs a monthly food bank, which is used by more than 100 people and provides non-perishable foods at about one-fifth of the regular price. There is also a weekly food bank in partnership with Moisson Québec offering free perishable foods.

But the agency goes further than that. In the collective cooking program, members meet once a month to prepare meals and then divvy up the dishes to take home. The agency even runs a community garden during the summer. Members and volunteers are involved in all aspects of the garden, from planning the year's planting to tending the budding shoots. And everyone enjoys the social and mental benefits of getting a bit of dirt under their fingernails.

For more about MIELS' health promotion programs, contact them at 418.649.1720 or miels@miels.org. +

HeartSong

For nearly 20 years, the HeartSong retreat in Manitoba has been providing PHAs and their caregivers a quiet place to reflect and rejuvenate. HeartSong was the inspirational idea of Sister Mary Coswin, member of the Sisters of St. Benedict in Winnipeg. Her intention was to give PHAs a chance to slip out of their usual routines and connect with others who may be experiencing the same struggles.

The annual retreat, held in the spring, is free to 15 to 20 PHAs and is spiritual, not religious, in essence. It is a place where people come to be cared for and to care for others, to share successes and to take time for reflection and quiet contemplation.

Set on the tranquil grounds of the St. Benedict's Retreat and Conference Centre alongside the Red River north of Winnipeg, the HeartSong retreat feels like a secret hide-away. Built in 1960, the grounds are the perfect place to slow down and think. Participants may choose any number of activities from creative writing workshops and marshmallow roasting to mindful meanderings through the peaceful grounds and spiritual contemplation classes. The retreat also holds a remembrance service for those who have passed away, with participants sometimes planting flowers or releasing balloons; Aboriginal smudging ceremonies have also been held.

For more information about HeartSong, contact the St. Benedict's Retreat and Conference Centre at 203.339.1705 or stbenscentre@mts.net.

