

# Red Matters

Volume 1 • Issue 2

THE NEWSLETTER OF AIDS CALGARY AWARENESS ASSOCIATION

June 2009

## Volunteering at AIDS Calgary

Over the past six months, AIDS Calgary has been working on improving our volunteer program.

In May we held a Volunteer Open House to launch our new program with numerous new volunteer opportunities.

Our entire volunteer program has been re-structured to make it simple and fun for you to be a volunteer. Whether you have a lot of time or a little, have skills you want to share or want to learn, would like to volunteer on your own or in a group, we can work together to find you the best volunteer position!

Volunteers make an invaluable contribution to the work we do at AIDS Calgary. In our last fiscal year, volunteers contributed over 11,000 hours of their time. That is the equivalent of over 5 full-time positions.

Volunteer opportunities take many shapes and sizes. Our positions are based on a three-tiered system. Each position is just as important as the next, but will require varied levels of commitment or training.

To keep you up to date with exciting new volunteer opportunities at AIDS Calgary we will now be including our volunteer newsletter, Volunteer Matters, in the same mailing where you receive Red Matters.

Check out the enclosed copy of Volunteer Matters to read more about our summer Volunteer Challenge and current volunteer opportunities.



Volunteer Open House Speakers



Signing up for the Volunteer Challenge



Staff and Volunteers enjoy the Open House

## EVENTS CALENDAR

### Core Training

Saturday, July 11 and Tuesday, August 11, Time: 9:00am - 4:00pm, Location: AIDS Calgary Training Room.

Increase your knowledge and understanding of HIV/AIDS in this free workshop. Topics covered include: safer sex & HIV/AIDS, living with HIV/AIDS and challenging stereotypes. To register, call (403) 508-2500 or email [info@aidscalgary.org](mailto:info@aidscalgary.org).

### Friday Lunch

June 5 & 19, July 10 (Stampede Lunch), Time: 1:00pm. Location: Calgary Cares Centre.

Friday lunches are an opportunity for those living with HIV/AIDS to share in a hot, nutritious meal in a safe non-judgmental environment. *For registered clients of AIDS Calgary.*

### Coffee Connection

June 12 & 26, Time: 2:00pm. Location: Calgary Cares Centre.

Drop-in support for people living with HIV/AIDS. Coffee and light snack provided. *For registered clients of AIDS Calgary.*

### RENT: School Edition

July 27 - August 8, Location: Olympic Plaza

AIDS Calgary Awareness Association is proud to partner with the Summerstock Theatre Society on their up-coming production of RENT: School Edition. For more information, please visit the Summerstock website at [www.summerstock.ca](http://www.summerstock.ca). Tickets will be available for purchase through Ticketmaster.

## Save the Date!!

2009 Scotiabank AIDS Walk for Life

September 20th, 2009

Come walk with us to raise awareness and reach our goal of \$130,000 to support our prevention, education and support initiatives.

# RENT: School Edition

AIDS Calgary Awareness Association is proud to partner with Summerstock Theatre Society this summer on their production of RENT: School Edition. We are excited to be involved in the presentation of this classic musical and to contribute in the education of the students involved as well as the audience. This version of RENT is the "schoolized" version of the Broadway classic and is performed entirely by students from high schools across Calgary, hosted by Westmount Charter School.

The rock opera deals with the lives of different characters as they struggle with HIV/AIDS in the early 1980s. The theme of AIDS being "everyone's disease" is explored with empathetic depth depict-

ing everyone from a gay NYU professor to a shy nightclub dancer. At one point in the epic song La Vie Boheme the entire cast bursts forward with the lyrics "Living with, living with, not dying from disease..." RENT: School Edition is about coping; it's about HIV awareness - it's about AIDS in all facets of our society.

AIDS Calgary will have a booth set up at the performances to distribute HIV/AIDS and STI information to those interested in learning more about these preventable diseases. AIDS Calgary is also hosting an educative workshop for the cast of the show. The workshop will include our HIV 101 and 201 presentations which encompass more detailed

information about HIV transmission, biology, statistics and real life accounts of the daily struggle living with HIV/AIDS. In keeping with our mission to reduce the harm associated with HIV/AIDS, the actors and actresses involved in portraying afflicted HIV individuals will have a solid understanding of the disease along with the reality of stigma and discrimination associated.

**What: RENT: School Edition**

**When: July 27 - August 8, 2009**

**Where: Outdoors at Olympic Plaza**

For more information, please visit the Summerstock website at [www.summerstock.ca](http://www.summerstock.ca). Tickets will be available for purchase at ticketmaster in July.

## A Picture of HIV/AIDS in France

VIH/SIDA - French for HIV/AIDS. After six months of living with a French host-family, I discovered the power of this word when I uttered it for the first time a few weeks ago. The whole family had just watched a two-hour fundraising telethon for Sidaction featuring musical performances on the streets of Paris by high-profile artists including Seal and Celine Dion. With concerned looks, my host parents had called to make a donation and listened intently to the statistics and preventive messages being expressed by the hosts.

Having observed their reaction to the program, I thought they might be open to discussing the topic. I brought it up at lunch a couple of days later. "I'm writing a blog entry about French perceptions of HIV/AIDS," I said. "What do you think?" The table fell silent. My host parents puffed their cheeks, looked shocked, guilty and sad then swiftly changed the subject. In turn, lowered my eyes, not with

embarrassment but with disappointment that despite an intense three-day fundraising and awareness campaign broadcast on 11 national television and 5 radio stations it had remained a taboo topic of conversation.

Not to let this be my only point of reference, I sought out Sabina, a caseworker at the local branch of AIDES in the nearby city of Chartres. Located 80 km from Paris and with a population of 90,000, it is the capital of the Eure-et-Loire region where we live. She was not surprised by my hosts' reaction and the size of their centre revealed that it's not just residents, but the local government that are turning a blind eye to the AIDS pandemic in France.

Sitting in the center's tiny lounge Sabina shared her observations about the region, which echoed many of the statistics I found on the National Health Institute's website:

- In 2007, over 50% of newly reported cases were among heterosexuals
- The number of women, as a proportion of new cases, increased from 20.5% in 2001 to 31.3% in 2006

Aside from sharing literature and free condoms, she told me about the populations she's involved with - mainly gay men, migrant women and intravenous drug users.

In the absence of a gay club, or even openly gay-friendly hang-out, in Chartres, Sabina is forced to seek out this group in the woods, where meetings are pre-arranged via the internet. In the company of male volunteers, Sabina makes regular visits to the most commonly designated areas to dispense condoms and information for anyone concerned about recent risky encounters.

Among the women she works with (largely from Sub-Saharan Africa), she noted that most contracted HIV after arriving on French soil. The

hardship associated with their displacement makes them vulnerable to risky sexual behaviour, especially since it is difficult to escape abusive relationships.

Aside from providing a confidential, non-judgmental space for empowerment and open communication, AIDES also works to dispel stereotypes and prejudice; but Sabina lamented the slow pace of change with respect to social values. A lack of acceptance and visibility in Chartres has kept progress slow; and the lack of communication between the various HIV/AIDS-related associations in the region has further impeded efforts to strengthen the community. Sabina refuses to be discouraged, however; despite its low-profile, AIDES Chartres continues to be funded almost solely through private, albeit anonymous, donations - a sign that the general population is more concerned than they might let on.

**By: Emilie Zaloum**

**Reprinted from The A Word**

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**AIDS CALGARY**  
awareness association

AIDS Calgary's mission is to reduce the harm associated with HIV and AIDS for all individuals and communities in the Calgary region. Red Matters is published six times per year and is made possible by the support of the Alberta Community HIV Fund, a joint community/federal/provincial initiative with the Alberta community Council on HIV, Alberta Health and Wellness, and the Public Health Agency of Canada. Please send submissions or queries to the address listed above. The opinions expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of our funders.