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AIDS ACTION
COUNCIL OF THE ACT

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Up Front



Christmas is upon us and it's time for peace on Earth. And, as the prospect of a recession looms, we are urged to spend up to keep the economy going, even though part of the problem has been prior spending and the racking up of huge household debt. Still, our Government has helped the spending call by putting an additional \$10.4 billion into the pockets of some. Our theme this issue is well-being and no doubt extra dollars can add a lot to feeling well.

But important as money is, there are many things that make us feel well, and empowering people to feel well is a primary goal of the AIDS Action Council.

In the first half of next year, we will be launching our new "Living Well" project. This is a whole-of-agency program that will incorporate all of our existing services and add new ones. The new ones will be based on evidence of need and informed by consultation with the affected communities they will be designed for.

Living well is all about getting the most out of life, being better equipped to cope with challenges and being positioned for personal development and growth. It is clear that any person who develops these things will be at lower risk than another person who feels marginalised, stigmatised, lacking skills, or who does not perceive available opportunities.

Broader social issues including homophobia, stigma and discrimination are what we call 'upstream' issues, because they create an environment that

is not conducive to good health and a feeling of well-being. These are also amongst the many social determinants of health that have potentially serious implications and nowhere more so than for minority groups within our population.

Social Inclusion is a wonderful concept, and it needs to be supported within a legislative and human rights framework to have any effect. This is one reason why advocacy continues to be an important part of our work. Safe space is also an important component of well-being. A safe space is where you can feel fully relaxed about who you are, although safe spaces may be harder to find in smaller population centres such as our own. It is also an important component of our work to provide safe spaces for all groups we work with including gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, HIV positive and a variety of sub-groups within them. Our community is fortunate to have a resource like Westlund House that can provide opportunities to meet in privacy and in comfort.

Even though we have Westlund House and other venues, we need to continue to work towards developing a total environment that is safe for everyone no matter who they are. While stigma and discrimination continue to exist in any form, our environment cannot be fully safe. This means that activism also remains an important part of our work.

Everybody is different, but everybody needs a little for that difference to grow. Welcome to Westlund House and Happy Christmas.

The Gap Group

The Canberra Gap group meets on the first Sunday of every month at Tilley's Divine Cafe at Lyneham shops, from 3pm onwards.

Gap is a social coffee group for women who are attracted to women and provides those women a chance to sit and chat in an informal atmosphere.

This year Gap celebrated its 6th birthday.

Reminders are sent out to the ACT Queer mailing list towards the end of each month, so keep an eye out for details.

There is also a Gap Group page on Facebook.



Dealing with Grief

Nada Ratcliffe - Client Support Services Manager

Grieving for the loss of a loved one can be with us at any time of the year but may be particularly painful at special times such as birthdays and at Christmas. The holiday period is a time when everyone is supposed to be happy and come together to celebrate. However, it can also be a poignant reminder that someone special is no longer with us.

Everyone reacts differently to this and has their own way of coping. First of all it is very important that you look after yourself. You can treat yourself to something special – have a massage, go to the lake, listen to your favourite music or go on that shopping spree!

It's OK to be sad. It is normal to feel this way when you think about someone you have lost. You may wish to:

- Go somewhere quiet to remember – maybe to a favourite place
- Share some memories if you wish with someone you trust
- Write a letter to the person
- Do something you used to do together
- Spend time at Christmas with people you are close to and trust

Try not to make any major decisions over this period. Some people find it helpful to talk with someone they trust about their feelings and emotions. It doesn't have to be a family member, it could be a friend or agency worker. Don't bottle things up as this can lead to further stress and anxiety. If you find that your normal routines are being affected, it might be useful to speak with a counsellor. The Westlund House Resource Centre has an experienced counsellor on staff whose contact details are listed below.

That said, there is no rule that says you have to celebrate Christmas with your family and friends, you may feel like taking a year off. Spend the day watching your favorite movies alone if that is what you feel like. You don't have to put up a tree or send out Christmas cards.

Finally, there is one sure fire cure for the Christmas blues, and it goes right to the heart of what Christmas is all about anyway. If you can do just one small thing for someone else, no matter how bad you're feeling yourself, you'll feel so much better.

Christmas is exactly what you make of it.

Stephanie Buckle, Counsellor, is available at the Westlund House on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. For further information or to make an appointment, phone 6257-2855 or contact stephanie@ aidsaction.org.au

Lifeline's 13 11 14 service is staffed by trained volunteer telephone counsellors who are ready to take calls 24-hour a day, any day of the week from anywhere in Australia. These volunteers operate from Lifeline Centres in every State and Territory around Australia



AIDS Awareness Week

Megan Munro

Papua New Guinea, our nearest neighbour was the focus for the launch of World AIDS Awareness week launch. This was held on November the 24th at the Legislative Assembly. Andrew Burry, General Manager of the AIDS Action Council reminded the audience that HIV is still very much with us and outlined some of the latest data.

Amanda Bresnan MLA, health spokesperson for the Greens, called for renewed leadership and a continuing bi-partisan approach to HIV. Kenn Basham, Board member of the National Association of People Living with HIV/AIDS (NAPWA) gave a very moving account of his recent experiences in Papua New Guinea. Kenn's reflections really 'brought home' the emerging health catastrophe in Papua New Guinea and how seriously the whole population is affected.



Megan Munro of the AIDS Action Council created a large art installation in Civic Square with Papua New Guinea as the focus. The artwork carried important messages to the public. 70% of beds in Port Moresby Hospital are occupied by people living with a HIV related illness; 62% of people living with HIV in Papua New Guinea in need of treatment are unable to access it and 59,537 people there are estimated to be living with HIV.

The proceeds of this year's campaign will go to IGAT Hope, an organization run by positive people for positive people.



Launched Up Ya Bum

Keiran Rossteuscher

Up Ya Bum is the latest work the Council is doing to reduce the infection rates of HIV and Syphilis amongst Gay and Bisexual men in the ACT. What makes this campaign so different from some of our more recent campaigns is that we have chosen to target four very specific groups of men.

Some of you will remember that a few months ago the first stage of this campaign was successfully launched at the Bears Canberra Christmas in July Meet and Greet party. This launch was targeting the Bears Community.

The bar for launches in the ACT has well and truly been lifted.

The second stage, the Spring theme – targeting community connected men, was launched at the Westlund House SpringOut Fairday on the 1st of November. The grounds were splashed with the iridescent pink posters. Volunteers dressed as spring faeries laden with their flower entwined baskets full of spring condom packs, calendars and posters, wandered amongst the bustling crowd. The faeries added a real sense of festivity and character to the day.



Then there was the Raunch weekend, the 15th of November – targeting men that use SOPV's (sex on premises venues) and are in the BDSM scenes. Two seminars (Ready for Raunch) were held at Westlund House facilitated by Brian Mier from Melbourne's Eagle Leather to introduce and refamiliarise gay men with basic BDSM skills and principles of safety. This highly successful day was followed up by the equally successful Raunch dance party held at Cube. Raunch was a BDSM event that was entertained by Susi House and prizes of hundred of condoms and litres of lube helped launch the 3rd stage.

There is still one more stage to go... keep an eye out for something exciting early next year.

Community spotlight

SpringOut '09



HIV Futures Six: Making positive lives count

The Sixth National Survey of People living with HIV/AIDS.

The AIDS Action Council of the ACT and People Living with HIV/AIDS ACT are actively seeking the input of HIV Positive in Canberra to ensure a representational view of all people living with HIV across Australia not only those in the bigger cities.

Now is the time and opportunity for you to have a say about what your life is like living with HIV.

The survey is completely anonymous and can be completed on line.

Survey findings enable us to plan community service delivery and advocate for better access to things like housing and health services.

HIV futures six is now available online at www.hivfutures.org.au and paper copies are available from services around town or Westlund House Resource Centre. Survey runs until the 15th January 2009.



Clockwise from top left: 'Dorris and Dicky' the Pensioners at the Purple Party; Two of the SpringOut Faeries; The crowd at Hush AIDS No More benefit; David Mills at the AAC stall at FairDay; Some props at the Ready for Raunch Seminars; Maurice and other partiers at the Raunch dance party; Dr Nelson and Senator Annette Ellis at the World AIDS Day launch at Parliament House; The Canberra Kings performing at Hush AIDS No More; The crowd enjoying the day at FairDay; Ms Susi House performing at Raunch; The Canberra Gay and Lesbian Qwire singing at FairDay; Another display at the Ready for Raunch Seminars.

Canberra Sexual Health Centre

An important community resource in the ACT is Canberra Hospital, together with all the general and specialist services it provides. This month, we asked Dr. Sarah Martin to tell us about the Canberra Sexual Health Centre, and its services for our communities.

Canberra Sexual Health Centre (CSHC) is a specialist clinic with a difference at the Canberra Hospital, and focuses on sex, sexuality and sexually transmitted infections (STI). Services are provided both at the clinic itself and in a range of outreach settings, and are often in partnership with other organisations. One of the distinctive characteristics about CSHC is that our services are free, no referral is needed and a Medicare card is not required. The latter ensures that we can provide sexual health care with a high degree of confidentiality. Above all, we aim to provide friendly and understanding care.

Services we offer at the clinic itself include:

- Same day medical and nursing consultations (walk-in clinics, no appointment needed)
- Booked appointments
- Testing, treatment and contact tracing for STI including chlamydia, gonorrhoea, genital herpes, genital warts, hepatitis, syphilis and HIV
- HIV post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP)
- Care, information and counselling in relation to
 - o Safe sex
 - o Sexuality
 - o Sexual function
 - o Sexually transmitted infections.

People living with HIV in the ACT are well served with a specialist HIV unit. Positive Canberrans benefit from some Australia's leading clinical and support professionals. We offer both walk-in and booked appointments, and after hours urgent advice is available.

As an integral part of the wider community, it is important to provide access to our services in places other than the hospital itself. Outreach is therefore a very important part of our overall approach. Frequently these are provided in partnership with other organisations, including the AIDS Action Council. An example is the "Partnership Approach to Comprehensive Testing" or PACT. PACT is a model of sexual health promotion which aims to reach people who would not readily access sexual health care or STI screening in mainstream clinic-based services. Other Partners working with the CSHC Outreach Clinical Team to deliver these screening programs within the PACT program include the Division of General Practice and Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT.

There are a range of reasons that deter people from readily accessing testing. Consequently, we work in a range of non-hospital sites including sex-on-premises venues, community agencies, youth centres, and brothels and provide services to men-who-have-sex-with-men (MSM), young people, and sex workers. Again, the emphasis is on professional, understanding and confidential care.

A positive diagnosis of any STI including HIV can be

Althea Wellness Centre... a Place of Healing

Genevieve Lai

DIRECTIONS ACT opened the Althea Wellness Centre in July 2008. It is a small clinic that works in partnership with other agencies and organisations to deliver excellence in health and allied services. All people are treated with respect and dignity while accessing the services.



Bookings are essential as many of the clinics will be offered fortnightly for a few hours. We call clients a few days before their appointment so we can offer the appointment to someone else if you can't make it. Althea is a free or low cost service. Some of the clinics require people bring their Medicare card.

Althea provides a range of clinics;

- The medical clinic has a General Practitioner and a Practice Nurse
- Mother and Child Clinic
- The Liver Clinic and Hep C Wellness Clinic
- Mental Wellbeing Clinic
- Mental Wellbeing Support Clinic
- Sexual Health Clinic
- Youth Health Clinic
- Naturopathic Healing Clinic

The Althea Wellness Centre is located at, 1 Bradley Street in Woden, next to the Bus Interchange. It is part of our ongoing commitment for better health outcomes for people with alcohol and other drug issues.

Call 6122 8000 for more information.

DIRECTIONS ACT

difficult to cope with, and it can be equally difficult telling current and former sexual partners that they too may have come into contact with an infectious disease. It is an important aspect of providing care for anyone in this situation to assist with the process of informing those known to be at risk. This is done with support, sensitivity and care; confidentiality is highly respected.

Canberra Sexual Health Centre, Building 5, Canberra Hospital

Walk-in clinics: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday 9-2pm and Wednesday 1.30-3.30pm.

<http://www.health.act.gov.au>

6244 2182



Lesbian Spaces

Nelida Contreras

I come out every day, cause doing it once is clearly not enough.

For the main, I am invisible in the world in which I live. It's not that it's done deliberately, but in reality I don't exist. Except when I'm with my own kind.

When I'm around other dykes, queers, lesbians, gays and others who fit within the LGBTI banner, I am visible. My sexual orientation is not the most important, nor most obvious thing about me. I feel free and I don't have to come out, stand out, stick out or any other thing. I can just be.

I've discovered a few of these spaces in Canberra over the past few years and I really like them.

The Dykes Dinner/Movie/Coffee group is a great place where I can indulge three of my favourite things - coffee, movies and dining out. Once a week we meet and spend a few hours together, enjoying each other's company and not having to explain ourselves and our lives to each other. We get to make friends, enjoy a movie and then chat some more over a shared meal. It's a really nice and intimate way to spend a few hours.

To share my other passion - reading - I have, with a friend, started up a queer book club, for women to come

together and share their experiences and love of reading. This has been a really eye opening experience for me, allowing me access to previously unknown books where queer, dyke and lesbian are the norm and not the oddity.

Meeting these women and reading these books has given me a fantastic way to view and experience myself as part of something bigger than my narrow, almost exclusively heterosexual world. I've read love stories, biographies, and fiction stories, where the lead characters are women who love women and are also strong, vibrant, and full of life with a desire to live authentically and brazenly.

As a mother of two small children, I want to find a space that is positive and safe, where my children can feel they are also part of something bigger than them. The queer playgroup has given all of us that experience. Whilst most of the other children are younger than mine, we go whenever we get the chance because it is good to find others who are like us. Queer parents sharing with each other, making friends and getting to know each other is really empowering and affirming.

The Canberra Gap Group was my first experience of a women's only space in Canberra, so I hold a soft spot for it ever since. At the time I needed to find a place where I could meet women and not feel so isolated and weird, so I went along. My heart was racing, but I went. I made some friends that day and whilst I felt overwhelmed, I felt safe and welcome, and that's why I go back month after month.

After the agony of nightclubs in my teens, Girls Nights at Cube are fantastic. There is no pressure, no sleaze, and no threatening vibe. Here I can meet up with my friends, dance and enjoy a night out without fear.

The Stepping Out workshop was another really good women's only space to find as a newly coming out woman who is same sex attracted. It gave me a place to talk about the things going around and around in my mind, and have my questions answered in a safe and caring way. I met some lovely women there too.

My most recent women's only space find has been the Canberra Kings group - a group of women who dress in drag (as men) and perform. We have created some fabulous male characters and, in the process, explored a masculine side to our personalities and psyches in a women's only space. We've experimented with instant beards, moustaches, side burns and flavour savers. We've bushed up our carefully waxed or tweezed eye brows. We've stuffed socks down our pants and lip synched to our favourite songs in front of screaming female fans. I've really loved every minute of it and felt so safe and accepted.

I don't hate men; I don't want to live in a world without them. Every now and then I want to be with women and especially those who love other women and I want to enjoy their company. I want to know that it's OK to be me, and in these women only spaces I know I can do just that.

Oh, Hush Now!

Marcus Bogie

Where were all the fabulous people on Saturday the 11 October?

Well if you were like half of Canberra they would have been at the official opening of the GLBT community's newest meeting spot the Hush lounge.

Not since the days of the Meridian club have I seen so many GLBT community members relax and have a catch up over some drinks and canapés. It truly was an opening night for the community to come together and celebrate the growth of places catering to the various needs of our diverse community.

Rachel/Richard an enduring community identity is the bar manager and makes sure that everyone feels comfortable, relaxed and secure. If you haven't already taken the opportunity to check out the space give it a go, who knows you might enjoy it!

Open Tuesday to Sunday, early to late
Chr Launceston and Irving st Philip
Loads of parking

62821944



Naughty or Nice?

David Mills

You don't have to choose: Be a little naughty this Christmas and New Year and still be nice to yourself. It's that time of year again. It's a time of excess, when we max-out our credit cards, drink too much, eat too much and sometimes say and do a few things we wish we hadn't.

Our bodies take the brunt of it and a few extra kilos are only the beginning. Excess drinking and hot summer nights can leave the body in a semi-permanent state of dehydration, risking permanent organ damage. All that rich, high-fat food and long nights partying put strain on the immune system too.

A little boozy

I certainly get more party invitations around this time of year, and it can be hard to say no to a glass or two of champagne. With people constantly topping my glass it is impossible for me to keep track of how many I am having and before I know it I'm a binge drinker by the government's definition.

This year I'm going to space it out a bit. There's no need to drink at every party (make sure you're serving non-alcoholic drinks, please!), and when I drink I'll limit myself to one glass an hour.

It's a good idea to have water or a soft drink between alcoholic drinks. As alcohol levels rise, the liver draws water from elsewhere – including the brain – to help flush it out. This is what causes the headache the next morning.

The bonus is that with all those kilojoules I save by cutting back on the booze, I can treat myself to another piece of pudding!

The chinking of crystal

If you're taking any drugs you'll need to be extra prepared. Make sure that you have plenty of water and keep hydrating yourself all night. Make sure you tell your friends what you're taking and be sure you're with people you can trust to take care of you if something goes wrong.

If you're on crystal you'll burn up heaps of energy but won't feel like eating. Your body needs something, though, so it's a good idea to have something reasonably nutritious in the fridge that you can easily heat up in the microwave when you get home.
Hot summer nights

Having condoms handy is a must. Is that pack at your bedside still within its use-by date? A pack of 12 Ansell Contempo Nuda is just \$3.00, and a handy 100ml tube of water-based lube is just \$5.00 at Westlund House.

So what to do if you think you didn't use a condom or the condom broke? If there is a risk that you or your partner may have been exposed to HIV get yourself down to the Emergency department of either Canberra Hospital or Calvary Hospital and ask to



see someone about PEP. PEP is a course of medications that has been shown to be effective at preventing HIV infection after exposure but it needs to be started as soon as possible, and absolutely within 72 hours. More information on PEP is on our website or available by contacting us.

However you celebrate over Christmas and New Year, whether it is with family or with friends, or whether it is making time for yourself, have a great time and take care of your body so you'll be in shape to tackle the year ahead.

For more information about what to do if partying hard or if you have partied too hard, or in case something else went wrong try contacting...

Directions ACT (02) 6122 8000 www.directionsact.com

CAHMA - Canberra Alliance for Harm Minimisation and Advocacy (02) 6279 1610 www.aivl.org.au

Sobering Up Shelter - Centacare (02) 6163 3711 www.centacare-canberra.org.au

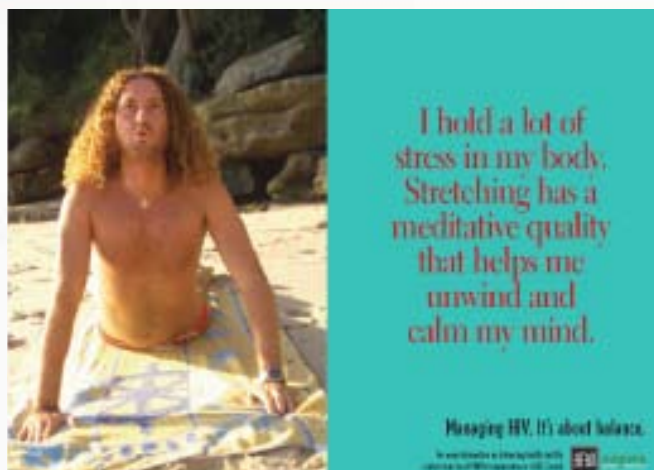
AIDS Action Council (02) 6257 1640 www.aidsaction.org.au

SAMSSA - Service Assisting Male Survivors of Sexual Assault (02) 6247 2424 www.samssa.org.au

Canberra Rape Crisis Centre (02) 6247 2525 www.rapecrisis.org.au

Canberra Sexual Health Centre (02) 6244 2184 www.health.act.gov.au/sexualhealth

Emergency 000 - Only for emergencies



For your *Diary*

December

- 17 International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers
- 24 AIDS Action Council and PLWHA ACT close for break
- 25 Christmas Day Public Holiday
- 26 Boxing Day Public Holiday
- 31 New Years Eve

January

- 1 New Years Day Public Holiday
- 5 AIDS Action Council and PLWHA ACT re-open for new year
- 26 Australia Day Public Holiday

February

- 5 Out There workshop for Gay/Bi men under 25 years
- 12 Out There workshop for Gay/Bi men under 25 years
- 14 Valentines Day/National Condom Day
- 14 Stepping Out workshop for Lesbian/Bi Women
- 18 Volunteer Meeting and Orientation evening
- 19 Out There workshop for Gay/Bi men under 25 years
- 21 Stepping Out Workshop for Lesbian/Bi Women
- 26 Out There workshop for Gay/Bi men under 25 years

For more community events,
subscribe to the ACTQueer email list:
groups.yahoo.com/group/actqueer



Join the AIDS Action Council

The AAC belongs to you, the community.

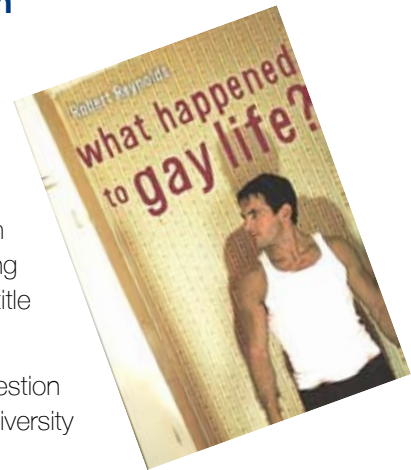
Proud to be a grass-roots organisation, we rely on our members. Members help us to carry out important work for our community. Join today and become part of our team.

To join, contact Lynn Parry on 6257 2855 or visit www.aidsaction.org.au/membership

Whatever Happened to Gay Life?

Opinion - Stephen Lawton

Actually according to a quick Google search the correct title is "What happened to gay life?". It's a book written by Robert Reynolds. I haven't read it or even scanned the dust jacket, which is my preferred way of reading nowadays, but I do find the title interesting.



I think my answer is to the question "What happened to gay life?" is diversity and dispersion is what happened.

I have been thinking that as gay people have become more visible and more accepted (obviously this isn't uniform across rural and metro areas) there has been less need to congregate in so-called 'ghettos'. Maybe it was the case that 'gay ghettos' and gay streets happened because there was safety in numbers and a collective need to band together to show how many of us there were. Maybe that need has now disappeared.

Maybe now we can live wherever we like as we realise that our money is just as good as anyone else's (you'll pardon my middle classness in all this I hope!) and we are no longer tolerant of being first class taxpayers but second class citizens (as was so wonderfully put by Tony Whelan in his submission to the HREOC inquiry into discrimination and queer people).

So if we no longer have to hide or even congregate in the same suburbs what does it mean for gay life? Well perhaps the other outcome of being visible and congregating together was that we realised how diverse we are.

The stereotypes that even we may have partly believed became unsustainable once our diversity was visible to ourselves and the wider community. So you can be a Circuit Boy, Diesel Dyke, Muscle Mary, Lipstick Lesbian, Bear, Femme, Butch, Twink, Emo, Daddy (are there lesbian Mummies?!?) and all the other myriad of names and labels that exist nowadays.

Indeed even the concept of a 'gay life' as a single uniform idea has broken down. Like so many non-homosexual counterparts, my guess is that we live lives that look remarkably like theirs (not that non-homos should be our only reference point), whether it be going out drinking and clubbing on the weekend with friends, or dining and brunching, movieing and coffeering, taking drugs, exercising, walking the dogs, doing the shopping or any other of the things that people can do in these lovely villages of ours.