

a place to be positive



Strategic Elements for the
Toronto People With AIDS Foundation
2007–2010



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Executive Summary

To mark its 20th Anniversary, the Toronto People With AIDS Foundation led a community-based, collaborative series of conversations to engage the broad community of people who most care about PWA in creating a vision and strategy for an energizing future.

Through these conversations, we heard many moving stories of what PWA has meant to our clients, volunteers, staff and other community partners. We heard over and over again that PWA is “**home**” to people who struggle to find affirmation, acceptance, and warmth. We heard that PWA’s strength is our grassroots client focus.

Most of all, we heard that PWA is a critical site for connection, for practical support that people can count on, and a space for people with HIV and AIDS to see “**life after HIV.**” PWA is a “**welcoming space**” in the sense of being both a real place and a welcoming community.

The stories from our community helped us realize that PWA can be a permanent version of the PHA Lounge at the World AIDS Conference in Toronto in August 2006. Building on our experience at the Conference, we re-imagined PWA as “**a place to be positive.**” We see PWA as a comfortable, revitalizing, safe space where people living with HIV/AIDS (PHAs) can feel affirmed and gain access to practical services, a warm, welcoming environment and sense of community, and physical space that can be used for many purposes, including social connection.

To continue creating this space, PWA will focus our work in three strategic elements:

1. An Affirming Connection Place

Creating the experience of a permanent zone that reflects the “PHA Lounge” means building on and expanding the aspects of PWA that our clients tell us feel like a safe harbour, a second home, and a comfortable place of acceptance where they feel connected and less isolated.

To formalize this welcoming, positive space, we will:

- a. reconfigure the physical space of PWA,
- b. ensure that clients have access to services in multiple languages,
- c. reinforce the internal culture of care and concern, and

At PWA, I feel accepted, I feel safe. It’s where I knew for the first time that there are other people like me.

Who I am is okay – more than okay, I feel strong.

— a client and volunteer

making a positive difference

Mission: The Toronto People With AIDS Foundation exists to promote the health and well-being of all people living with HIV/AIDS by providing accessible, direct, and practical support services.

- ensuring staff and volunteers act and use language in ways that foster acceptance and welcome,
- d. reshape our existing health promotion and social support programs to increase peer support connections and opportunities.

2. A Point of Access

Clients can expect to be welcomed, and to be supported in accessing the broader PHA network of support as seamlessly as possible and in response to the full range of needs that span the diversity of all PHAs' experience.

We will sharpen this role by providing clients with:

- a. information about what support is available,
- b. the means to access it,
- c. support to navigate key sources for basic needs like income support and access to treatment.

3. A Practical Direct Support Services Provider

Along with resources and guidance to access the broader PHA network of support, we will continue to be a responsive grassroots agency providing Practical Direct Support Services — food, income support, access to medication and health promotion services — and to provide immediate crisis support.

To strengthen and streamline core practical services, we will:

- a. conduct an analysis of our programs, to ensure that they are best serving our clients' needs,
- b. continue to build on staff skills to support immediate crises for clients, either psycho-social or related to concrete needs such as income, access to medication or food.

Throughout our dialogue, we recognized that for many people, PWA is a lifeline to compassion, caring and absolutely vital practical support. We also recognized that PWA has a unique role within the larger PHA network. Serving our clients most effectively means linking with efforts like the Toronto Community Planning Initiative and the strategic plans of other community partners. As we move forward, we will preserve and sustain our core, grassroots values – and we will work with our community partners to build a generative, vibrant web across the entire network that serves and supports PHAs.

“When I first started using the services at PWA, I had all three of my kids living with me. The support services at this organization really kept me and my family together. I believe that the food bank at PWA has literally kept me alive at times. And I also believe that through PWA’s support, I found my strength to live. I really believe it saved me from suicide. Knowing that I could go to PWA and see others with the same diagnosis, with no fear of being ostracized, just plainly being able to be us, is more than I could put into words. All that PWA offers has made me a survivor, made me who I am today.”

— a client since 1989



Introduction — PWA as an affirming, connecting space

Since 1987, the Toronto People With AIDS Foundation has lived its mission to promote the health and well-being of all people living with HIV/AIDS by providing accessible, direct and practical support services.

In that 20 years, the landscape for the HIV and AIDS community in Toronto has shifted significantly. Today, PWA's clients represent multiple, diverse communities – age, gender, sexual orientation, disease progression, ethnicity, culture, nationality, family structures – and are increasingly living longer with HIV and AIDS. Government funding for support services such as housing and disability income has declined or increased only slightly and is nowhere near what is needed. Client needs for basics like income support, food, housing and medication, and for intangible needs, like alleviating social isolation, continue to be critical.

Against this landscape, PWA led a community-based series of conversations to explore what the people who most care about PWA could imagine it becoming. Through collaborative, strategic planning, we asked a basic question – “What does the world have that it would not have without PWA?” – and then explored, “How do we build on our core to continue to meet our clients’ needs in the niche that only we can fill?”

Through the dialogue of our planning process, we heard many moving stories of what PWA has meant to our clients, volunteers, staff, and other community partners. We heard over and over again that PWA is “home” to people who struggle to find affirmation, acceptance, and warmth. We heard that PWA's role to support clients in obtaining basic needs is the cornerstone of our value in the community. We heard that PWA's speakers and outreach touch people long before they ever become HIV positive, and serve as a reassuring force to people who feel isolated with their HIV status. We heard that PWA's strength is our grassroots client focus.

PWA is a critical site for connection, for practical support people can count on, and a space for people with HIV and AIDS to see life after HIV. Our planning process helped us sharply recognize and articulate how people see PWA as an affirming connection place. We realized PWA is a welcoming space in both a literal and metaphorical sense. PWA is a real space -- an actual place where people can relax, breathe freely, feel accepted, and be concretely supported. PWA is also a conceptual idea of a welcoming space, in the sense that we provide all our services with acceptance and openness.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Toronto People With AIDS Foundation exists to promote the health and well being of all people living with HIV/AIDS by providing accessible, direct, and practical support services.

STATEMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

People living with HIV/AIDS play a crucial role in the governance and operation of The Toronto People With AIDS Foundation, but, most important, are its heart and soul. Although the Foundation seeks supportive partnerships in support of fulfilling its Mission, its response to HIV/AIDS is, more than anything else, inspired by the voices and experience of people living with HIV/AIDS.

In our planning conversations, the shape of how we imagine PWA's future emerged – around the idea of a “PHA Lounge.” The idea grew out of people's experience creating and being part of the PHA Lounge at the World AIDS Conference in Toronto August 2006. That space was greeted as a haven for people living with HIV and AIDS. There was one powerful moment for us at that conference, when an African woman shared the impact of the lounge by bursting into tears and saying it was the first time she'd ever felt at home in talking about her HIV, feeling part of a safe community and understanding what it means to live positively.

We realized that at its best, PWA can be a permanent version of that space. We envision offering practical services, a warm, welcoming environment and sense of community, physical space that can be used for many purposes - privacy, social connection, and support for wellness. We imagine PWA as a place to be positive, a comfortable, revitalizing, safe space where PHAs can feel affirmed and gain access to whatever services they need.

To create this space, PWA will focus our work in three ways:

- We will continue to be an Affirming Connection Place – and will strengthen this role with peer-to-peer programs, language accessibility, learning programs for clients, and new social spaces.
- We will sharpen our role as the Point of Access to the complex network of support for people living with HIV and AIDS by providing clients with 1) information about what support is available, 2) the means to access it, and 3) support to navigate key sources for basic needs like income support and access to treatment.
- We will continue to provide Practical Direct Services – food, income support, access to medication and health promotion services – and to provide immediate crisis support.

As a Point of Access, we are always aware of our role in the larger PHA network. We are aligned with efforts like the Toronto Community Planning Initiative, which is aimed at developing a community HIV/AIDS strategy to improve service access and provide more integrated, comprehensive and effective support and care for people living with or at risk of HIV. We are committed to working with our partners in other agencies and programs to reduce the complexity of the PHA-support system and to create the most seamless experience for clients possible.

Note from the Board Why this planning now?

Strategic Planning is one of our Board's most important responsibilities. Along with our Mission Statement, the Strategic Plan should guide everything PWA does. Every decision we make, every action we take, and every program or service we offer, should either fit within the plan or help us achieve the goals we have set out.

Our last Strategic Plan was developed in 2002. It served as a solid foundation for our work for five years, supporting us in responding to the changing needs of people living with HIV/AIDS, developing strategic alliances, and strengthening our presence in the community.

Last fall, as part of planning discussions related to our 20th anniversary, we felt it was the right time to launch a new strategic surge to determine who we need to be in the future. We were linked into other initiatives underway in the community – including the Toronto Community Planning Initiative, several other ASO strategic planning processes and other landscape assessments – which had already produced a lot of good current information about issues such as the changing demographics of AIDS in Toronto, client needs, gaps in service delivery and external factors which have an impact on our clients.

Drawing from the energy of the processes underway, we decided to develop our new Strategic Plan using a somewhat non-traditional process - “appreciative inquiry.” We had been part

Our Vision for the Network that Supports PHAs

PWA's planning process was about understanding what role we play that we absolutely must sustain – and about sharpening what we do and how we target our resources to best support people with HIV and AIDS.

Through the process, we always had our eye on the grassroots core of PWA and the fact that we are part of a broader system that supports PHAs in multiple ways. Our goal was to understand how to strengthen our distinct node in that network and to identify how we can collaborate with our partners to make certain that the limited resources within the PHA network are used most effectively to meet the ever-more-diverse needs of clients.

We see our work as twofold: focusing on our own role and delivering the best service within our own walls, and, as a community partner, working together to decide how all client needs are met within the PHA network. This will include who does what, how we support and refer to each other, and, we hope, innovative ways of creating collaborative programs.

In keeping with the direction of efforts like the Toronto Community Planning Initiative and the strategic intent of our partners like the AIDS Committee of Toronto, our goal is to work with other initiatives to offer our experience and knowledge and to learn from them. Through this work, we envision recognizing more explicitly the strengths of other agencies and their roles and, we hope, deepening our capacity to make collaborative choices about who does what and how we share knowledge.

PWA will focus on our vision of a PHA lounge that provides “a place to be positive,” deepening our roles as a welcoming and affirming space, a point of access and a provider of practical direct services. Within that frame, we expect that staff roles will be clearer than ever before, and PWA's role will be crisper than it has ever been. We will develop a clear test for where we choose to spend our time and resources – if something will build our capacity to support our clients in the services we focus on, we will do it.

For example, we hope to identify clear roles and procedures related to critical advocacy initiatives with partner agencies who have the mandate and capacity to utilize the extensive, first-hand knowledge that we have to share about the changing needs of PHAs.

At the same time, our goal is to help strengthen the PHA network, ensuring that when our clients have a need, we will know exactly how to get that need met – and that the clients have the most effective, supportive experience possible.

Note from the Board cont'd...

of planning that had used this approach in other organizations, and we liked the idea that it focuses on building organizations around what works, rather than trying to just fix what doesn't. We also liked that it acknowledges the contributions of individuals, and engages people across the organization in renewal, change, and focused performance.

This plan is an articulation of that process – of the energizing and lively conversations that directly included approximately 75 members of our community. We are grateful for everyone's enthusiastic participation. We're impressed by how the conversations built over several months, and we appreciate how our planning was both original and creative and grounded in ideas generated in other parts of the PHA network and community planning.

More than anything, two aspects of the planning resonate for us – how important the support PWA offers is to our clients, and how critical it is that we see ourselves as part of a broader network. Over 20 years, PWA has lived those roles and built a base for the future. The next few years will be about strengthening our core services and the resilience of the PHA network – always with the voices and stories of our clients in front of us to remind us that our purpose is to provide critical, life-giving support to people living with HIV and AIDS.

— David Church, Chair, Board of Directors

— Murray Jose, Executive Director

Who We Are and How We'll Grow: Three Strategic Elements

Our unique contributions to our community are providing direct practical services and offering a welcoming space, “a place to be positive.” As we adapt the rich concept of the “PHA Lounge” experience to PWA, we will shape our work in three interlocked, strategic elements: an Affirming Connection Place, a Point of Access to the network PHAs need to navigate, and Practical Direct Services Provider.

1. An Affirming Connection Place

Creating the experience of a permanent zone that reflects the “PHA Lounge” means building on and expanding the aspects of PWA that our clients tell us feel like a safe harbour, a second home, and a comfortable place of acceptance. This means creating an actual physical space that takes into account our clients’ different needs and requirements – from a calm, confidential area for initial intake for newly-diagnosed PHAs or for support for people in crisis, to a social gathering zone where people can meet each other, ask questions, get advice and hear other people’s stories.

Clients should be able to walk in, feel a sense of confidentiality and safety, and be able to immediately see and sense that they will be able to have their needs met. As a welcoming and affirming place, PWA helps to reduce isolation and increase people’s sense of belonging; all programs should continue to reflect this.

To formalize this welcoming, positive space, we will:

1. Reconfigure the physical space of PWA,
2. Ensure that clients have access to services in multiple languages,
3. Reinforce the internal culture of care and concern, and ensure staff and volunteers act and use language in ways that foster acceptance and welcome,
4. Reshape our existing health promotion and resource support programs. We will explore what this will look like, but they may include:
 - Semi-structured programs around “drop-in” needs, such as hair cuts on a particular day of the week, yoga and meditation, cooking courses to build skills at cooking for wellness, etc.,
 - Peer programs, such as the development of a mentoring program that matches up PHAs to support each other, and peer discussion groups,
 - A resource space for computer and telephone access to support

How we developed our strategic plan

In keeping with our role as a community-rooted organization, our strategic planning involved the people who care about PWA in a creative, exploratory conversation about what they now value about PWA, and how we can continue to grow and sustain ourselves over the next 3 – 5 years.

Our process was based on the principles of “appreciative inquiry,” which centres on the idea that “what you feed grows.” This approach uses storytelling and people’s hopes to identify the existing core strengths of the organization and to imagine new possibilities that build on those strengths.

We defined our community as clients, volunteers, staff, our Board, and other agencies and programs that make up the PHA support network – a network that we define to be all the community services available to people living with HIV/AIDS. In late 2006, we created a core strategic team of 12 people, and each member of that team interviewed 4 or 5 people to understand their perspectives on PWA’s strengths and how to continue to build a relevant, sustainable agency going forward.

Building on those interviews, we then held a “summit day” on February 18, 2007. There, we brought together 28 people to tell their stories of where PWA has made a difference in the lives of PHAs and other community members, to explore and imagine what the future should look like.

- clients in navigating the broader system and gaining information,
- An enhanced resource library,
- Peer volunteer “greeters” to direct people to appropriate spaces.

2. A Point of Access to the PHA Network

People living with HIV and AIDS must navigate a complicated network of services to receive medical care; basic needs such as housing, food and income support; information; psychosocial and counseling support; peer connections and legal and immigration support when needed. Through our process, we identified the importance of PWA’s role in directly offering basic practical services, and the need to expand on our ability to be the point of access for PHAs for information, referrals, and direct services.

At the “point of access,” PWA’s clients can expect to be welcomed, to be able to tell their story for an intake assessment, and to be supported in accessing the broader system to have all of their needs met. For certain basic needs, including income support and access to treatment, we will directly support clients in navigating the network. For all other needs, we will provide information, guidance, and access to the network.

The goal is for clients to experience the PHA support network as seamlessly as possible. PWA will deepen and sustain its strength as a continual point of access across the span and diversity of all PHAs’ experience, from the new diagnosis to all transition points through the experience of long-term survivors, women and men, young and old.

To enable the reshaped “point of access” role, PWA will:

1. Work with community partners and existing processes to create a shared bird’s-eye view of the system and to make collaborative decisions about who does what, so all services that clients need are provided in the right place.
2. Recognize that clients need to experience the most seamless navigation possible, which includes collective decision-making about programs and services offered by each agency (in line with Toronto Community Planning Initiative).
3. Take a leadership role in further investigating the possibility of a “single intake” concept, so clients will need to tell their full story only once to receive basic services from any ASO. This may result in PWA as “a common intake site,” or may take the shape of more seamless communication between agencies. This kind of program would need to honour confidentiality while minimizing

How we developed our strategic plan cont’d...

We then added to the ideas generated at the summit the people who know PWA inside out – the staff. Finally, we held a half-day conversation with a sub-group who had been part of the process from the beginning to carve out a plan from the multiple ideas generated through all the different conversations.

In total, approximately 75 people directly contributed to the planning conversations in some way, representing all aspects of PWA’s stakeholder groups.

Through the dialogue, we saw and felt PWA’s heart as a welcoming, affirming community space. The conversations also drew inspiration and shape from other initiatives simultaneously underway, such as the Toronto Community Planning Initiative, and from the participants’ familiarity with other community agencies and their strengths. Through the process, we considered the world that serves our core constituents – PHAs – as one system, and examined PWA’s unique, most important contribution to that network.

Through the conversations, we expanded on PWA’s core as an affirming space and honed who we should be going forward. This plan is the result of those conversations, and should be considered an adjustable gauge for PWA’s direction and focus for the next several years. As we live the next phase for PWA, we will continue to calibrate and shape how we serve the community based on emerging needs.

clients' need to have their needs assessed more than once – and of course, would be optional for clients who choose not to participate.

4. Build on our communications and branding program to ensure that all relevant players are aware of PWA and our services, and know how to direct all PHAs to us – ranging from a grand mother supporting a newly-diagnosed grandchild, to health care professionals, to other agencies, to the broad community.
5. Create a liaison program for more porous, fluid relationships between PWA and other agencies and programs, so knowledge is shared, communication heightened, and all processes work together for a seamless experience for clients. PWA staff may work sometimes in other agencies and vice versa. This will allow us to explore the possibilities for “satellite” service to expand access.
6. We will also investigate the viability of other expansions to our point of access role, including:
 - Creating a “personal point of contact” staff role, so each client has “their person” at PWA who will support them in navigating the broader system. New clients will have immediate access to a personal point of contact, who will welcome them, provide in take and information, make referrals, and enable access to the system.
 - Providing resources for clients to access the system (computers, telephones, etc.).
 - Strengthening knowledge base and information sources among staff, through community liaison and community knowledge programs, and through concrete resources such as databases, awareness of clearinghouse and other information sources, internet access and guidance, etc.

We will work with other agencies on these initiatives wherever possible, such as building on the existing project with ACT to create a joint intake form and the OHTN common database pilot project.

Example of Possible Collaborations

In our vision of possible collaborations, we imagine creating relationships that allow us to share resources where it makes sense, in both practical and more strategic ways. We could, for example, provide a smaller agency infrastructure support in the form of access to a more extensive financial administration team, allowing them to use their resources more effectively. We also envision co-developing programs, in which we might, for example, work with a culturally-specific organization so that we can offer a more responsive program that builds the network of resources for our clients.

3. A Practical Direct Support Services Provider

PWA's foundation is as a provider of services that meet the most basic needs for clients. We will expect to continue to provide core practical support services of food, income support, access to medication, health promotion, and crisis support inside PWA, along with resources and guidance to access the broader PHA network of support. We need to be as responsive as possible to provide core services to all clients when they need them.

To strengthen and streamline core practical services, we will:

1. Continue to build on staff skills to help deal with immediate crises for clients, either psycho-social or related to concrete needs such as income, access to medication, or food.
2. Conduct an analysis of our programs to ensure that they are best serving our clients' needs. We will investigate and consider:
 - Creating learning programs for clients to build cooking and nutrition skills.
 - Exploring the possibility of different options for the food program, such as shifting from the "food bank" model to "a grocery store," or introducing nutritional value models.
 - Evaluating our current approach to medication access, exploring possibilities for expanding responsiveness to short-term medication.
 - Increasing access to housing support services through networking with partners such as Ontario Housing, Casey House, Toronto Community Planning Initiative, Fife House, etc.
 - Strengthening the income support program by expanding partnerships and links with other agencies.

"We see our work as twofold — focusing on our own role and delivering the best service within our own walls — and as a community partner, working together to decide how all client needs are met within the PHA network."

Moving Forward — Accountability and Waves of Action

Our strategy will be incorporated into the core work of PWA – We will build the key actions into our Board planning and our staff workplans, as appropriate. The Board and staff leaders are accountable for ensuring that we move our ideas into action. As we move from the foundational work into implementation, staff will take on different pieces of the change work appropriate to their roles.

We will bring the strategy plan to life in four waves. We expect to initiate the first wave immediately, and complete the first two waves by the end of 2007. By April 2008, we expect to have waves three and four well underway.

1st wave

1. Program analysis -- determine how our current programs reflect the shape and priorities of building ourselves as “a place to be positive” within our three strategic elements, and identify how programs need to be continued, redesigned, moved into other agencies or newly developed. (PWA may use the model ACT is using to map whether a service is something we lead, collaborate with other agencies on, or support other agencies to provide). This process will include consultation with other key agencies for open conversation about how best to allocate who does specific programs and where resource sharing is possible. Central to this analysis is how to ensure that the programs reinforce a culture of care and concern.
2. One Intake Concept – in collaboration with other key agencies, lead the development of the “common intake” concept currently being discussed with ACT, to a broader level, working together to ensure confidentiality, client choice, and client ease of use.
3. Communication – PWA will build on its existing broad communications and branding program to lay the foundation for a higher profile and awareness of who we are and what we offer. In the first phase, we will focus on ensuring that our community partners are aware of our strategic direction and focused role. As we roll out subsequent phases, we will build awareness much more broadly, with the ultimate goal that anyone who knows a PHA would know to direct them to PWA for support.
4. Language Access – in partnership with other ethno-cultural agencies, PWA will expand access to services in multiple languages.

“As a young woman in high school with a gay brother, I heard a speaker living with HIV tell his story. I remember admiring his courage and, based on my own preconceptions, thinking ‘This might be helpful to me someday if my brother becomes infected.’ Years later, I am the one who ends up becoming infected with HIV. Looking back, the speaker set me up to be prepared to support the people I care about and also led me to a critical space to be able to meet my own needs. The speaker was a PWA Speakers’ Bureau member and the support came full circle when I approached PWA and found the practical support I needed — and just as important, found community and acceptance.”
— a client

2nd wave

1. Create system links. To strengthen our capacity as a Point of Access and ability to focus on the direct service we offer in-house, we will integrate with the efforts generated by the Toronto Community Planning initiative to create the most effective PHA support network. The goal is to share resources where appropriate, make collaborative decisions about who does what, and strengthen awareness of, ties with, and confidence in each other's services. In this phase, we will choose key partners, and create a model for liaison with related systems (e.g., health care, immigration lawyers, etc.), and explore the creation of satellite partners to strengthen geographic diversity.
2. Space redesign. The physical space of PWA needs to embody the "PHA Lounge" concept, ensuring privacy for clients while also offering a welcoming, warm, connecting environment. In this phase, PWA will design the contours of that space and begin the process of considering appropriate location, costs, moving implications, funding, etc.
3. Organizational design. As programs are shifted, organizational structure, staff roles and job redefinition needs to reflect program needs. Staffing positions may need to be reorganized around newly-defined needs (e.g community liaisons, personal points of contact for clients, core service provision). In this phase, PWA will reshape its internal structure as needed and create a staff development program. (As appropriate, we will draw on the tools created in the HR project conducted jointly with Fife House and ACT). This project will deepen our culture of concern by integrating a higher level of proactivity in all roles.

3rd wave

1. Peer-to-peer program. Explore the creation of a peer mentoring program that matches PHAs up with other PHAs to learn from and support each other.

4th wave

1. Measurement & Ongoing Evaluation: As reshaped programs are launched, a process to gauge whether programs are fulfilling their goals and meeting client needs will be put into place. Assessment will become an ongoing element in operations.
2. Resourcing: PWA will undertake appropriate funding efforts to ensure that all program needs are met.

A man enters the doorway of PWA within hours of receiving an AIDS diagnosis. The doctor in the clinic told him that there was no point in starting a regime of medication. He is in complete crisis. The staff form a buffer zone to support him, help him navigate the medical system, and give him other basic supports he needs. Two years later, he is on meds, living positively.

making a positive difference

Mission: The Toronto People With AIDS Foundation exists to promote the health and well-being of all people living with HIV/AIDS by providing accessible, direct, and practical support services.

Conclusion

At the conclusion of our planning process, the participants reflected on how energized they were by being able to reflect on and imagine PWA's role in the world. Our twenty years of support to the community have left an indelible impression on everyone involved. For many people, PWA is a lifeline to compassion, caring, and absolutely vital practical support. As we move forward, we will preserve and sustain our core, grassroots values – and we will work with our community partners to build a generative, vibrant web across the entire network that serves and supports PHAs. This is a transformative vision – and one that the PWA community feels is both possible and necessary

“PWA allowed me to come out of my shell and empowered me to be able to focus on living.

— a client and volunteer

making a positive difference

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