



MAKING A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE

The Toronto People With AIDS Foundation Newsletter

FALL 2015

FEATURE ARTICLES

First year crew shares his thoughts on the Bike Rally experience.

Volunteer Highlights of a Passionate Gardener



Bike Rally Food crew and cyclists prepare to dish up much needed sustenance on Red Dress Day!

First Year Crew Perspective of PWA's Friends For Life Bike Rally



Stephen Sharpe experienced PWA's Friends for Life Bike Rally for the first time this summer, volunteering on Food Crew. We asked him to share his perspective with us.

At 4:45 a.m. on the morning of my first breakfast service of PWA's Friends for Life Bike Rally my fingers were numb from packing morning coolers with ice, milk and juice. I had spent my first night as a resident of a vast temporary tent city on Haskill's Farm atop a ridge overlooking Lake Ontario. By 5:30 a.m. I stood on the food service line-up, alongside my still unfamiliar crew, ready to serve breakfast to over 200 riders and 100 crew fuelling themselves for a long day ahead.

In its simplest, but also most rewarding

form, the Friends for Life Bike Rally is a beautiful articulation of community and what we can aspire to achieve in our own neighbourhoods. It also embodies PWA's Strategic Vision to be a "Creative Connector".

My good friend Robb Walker had for years been encouraging me to join the Bike Rally, which is PWA's annual sustaining fundraiser. It's a massive caravan consisting of cyclists and truckloads of volunteer support crews winding its way over six days between Toronto and Montreal along Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence. For a variety of reasons I answered his earnestness by financially sponsoring him and others instead. However, when I left my job this year to travel I had time to volunteer so I joined the food crew.

Each crew on the Rally was a family within the larger Bike Rally community.

Daily, the various crews willingly erected a village for the greater Rally. From Food service, to Rubbermaid Rustlers, to Wellness and Road support, well-intentioned volunteers supported the riders in their individual goals over six days.

That first morning volunteering with my fellow food servers, who were divided into two teams called "Bacon" and Lasagna", I was introverted and quiet, but committed and curious. We were a mix of men, women, white, black, Asian, younger, older, clergy, entrepreneurs, unemployed and regular nine to fivers. Without the Bike Rally, we may have never met.

As the week unfolded we got to know each other and found our natural fit on the team – be it food service, washing dishes, lifting tables or the team funny bone. By week's end we had bonded by shared experiences – whether it was an afternoon swim in the

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lake, late-night campfire social, or conversations and sing-a-longs in the relatively close quarters of our vehicle while driving from destination to destination.. But also due to the brilliant and accessible volunteer leadership of Todd Davies and Karen O'Connor. As needed they were mentors, counsellors and friends.

Our smaller community was committed to maintaining and caring for the larger community.

Community manifested itself across the camp. When a rider was visibly too tired to put their tent up on a given day, other teammates erected their temporary nylon home for the night. Or, an emotionally winded crewmember "hit the wall", and experienced rally participants sat with them and listened to whatever burden had clearly surfaced.

Day three is Red Dress Day. And, as the title suggests, participants wear a red dress (though anything red works). As I drove members of my team along Highway 33 into Kingston and passed the long convoy of cyclists in red dresses and scarves billowing in the wind, I felt overwhelming pride as riders steadied themselves metre by metre. After three days I already belonged to this large and diverse caravan.

Poz Day, for me, was the most profound example of community. On Poz Day participants who are HIV positive can choose to wear a specific jersey that is essentially self-identifying as HIV positive. It was a quiet but profound and very brave statement of self-expression and identity. But equally, the embracing and respectful reaction from the rest of the rally was humbling and left me examining my own role and how accessible I was as a neighbour.

At announcements during dinner the night before Poz Day, one gentleman stepped up to the microphone and explained that he had been positive for over twenty years. He had not told his family or co-workers. This man is stronger than me.

I was also touched by how we were received by towns, farms and cities along

the route to Montreal as people cheered us on. At several coffee shops (road fuel), I heard, "oh great, it's the Bike Rally group, we look forward to them every year." It's testament to the inclusive tone that the Bike Rally sets. Also, to the general good nature that I believe resides within all of us when given a chance to shine.

When embarking on a journey like the Bike Rally there comes a point when we all have to trust one another. We trusted that PWA had established protocols and provisions to get us safely and to Montreal. Riders relied on their teams and captains to have their backs through flat tires, injuries and low moments that inevitably visit everyone. And on crew, we expected that our fellow team members would show-up on time, act responsibly and be supportive.

What I didn't expect was the genuine camaraderie that grew out of the ride, not only within my crew but also across the whole camp. Faces that looked both familiar and stranger in my daily life, spoke to me with the ease of friends with years of history, "hey, want to come and have an end-of-day glass of wine with us?" was a great welcome..

The Friends for Life Bike Rally is not a place for egos. Instead, I witnessed generosity and citizenship. These characteristics that were so evident in the travelling Bike Rally family will hopefully spill over into our own neighbourhoods, work places, friendships and relationships. The Bike Rally effectively fulfils PWA's strategic vision to "creatively connect" with people and communities. When I think of the Friends for Life Bike Rally now, I no longer think of just PWA or HIV/AIDS awareness but instead I think of community...and what ice feels like on my fingers at 4:45 a.m.

If you are interested in signing up for the 2016 Friend for Life Bike Rally, please visit www.bikerally.org or contact Trevor Ouellette at (416) 506-1400 ext. 238 +

Community Garden & Summer Highlights

Every Wednesday morning for the past few months, a group of generous green thumbed gardeners have been harvesting the bounty of their efforts. The daily maintenance of planning, tilling, planting, watering and weeding followed by continuous watering, weeding and harvesting certainly paid off.

In its fourth year, PWA's Community Garden has seen consistent growth and increased harvests. From one garden bed in the beginning to now fourteen garden beds, PWA's success is largely due to the dedication of its community volunteers.

This year the volunteer team leads began to look at opportunities for multiple crops and increased yields in order to produce more nutritionally rich vegetables and herbs.

Clients of the Essentials Market have raved about the variety of vegetables such as Kale, Swiss Chard, Bok Choy, and Celery as well as the mint, pineapple sage and cilantro.

Already planning for next year, the garden team is currently looking at opportunities for workshops to expand their knowledge on multiple crops and season extension.. +

On August 16th, 2015 Steamworks held it's 9th Annual Tightly Whitey Car Wash to benefit PWA. To date this fun event filled suds has raised more than \$40,000 for PWA programs and services. Thanks to the management and staff of Steamworks and all who volunteered for the event. +

Spearhead L.D.S.C. held it's annual food drives for PWA's Essentials Market on Saturday September 19th at Flash and Sunday September 20th at Woody's. Thank you to all who dropped off food, especially Spearhead and its members for their long term support of PWA's food programs. +

Volunteering and Gardening Instilled at a Young Age for Tiffany!



Tomatoes, Red and White Swiss Chard and Green Peppers—grown by and for PWA!

Tiffany started volunteering for PWA in the fall of 2012 and has been a volunteer team lead for both the Essentials Market and the Community Garden. Tiffany's incredible efforts have made a positive difference for both programs. We asked Tiffany where she gets her passion for volunteering and gardening.

Why did you start volunteering at PWA and what keeps you volunteering?

I started volunteering at PWA to better understand my diverse neighbourhood and myself; my desire to invest in my community and help the people who live in it also led me to start volunteering at PWA. The potential and opportunity to contribute and develop new, helpful and worthwhile changes kept me volunteering at PWA

Where does your motivation to give back come from?

As a child, my grandmother exposed me to many individuals and charitable church organizations that went above and beyond to give back to those in need. Today, my motivation to give back comes from an instilled value of giving back and helping others in need.

What changes have you seen over the last few years at PWA?

There have been progressive changes within the Essential Market. The Market updated its interior to resemble a regular supermarket where clients get a regular shopping experience –walking down the aisle with their shopping buggy and choosing from a variety of food and produce from the shelves. Over the last few years, there has been a drastic decline in personal care products; I have also seen a drop in pet food. The Market moved from a numbering system to a computerized card system which provides clients with more information making it easier.

How does volunteering affect your life? Do you volunteer for other organizations?

Volunteering has exposed me to new cultures and friends, new communities and boosts my social life; it's been a win-win affect. Currently, I only volunteer at PWA, but in the past have volunteered at Peel Memorial Hospital, Street Haven, Addiction Research Foundation, Toronto Victim Services, Scott Mission...

What would you say to other's thinking about volunteering for PWA?

Volunteering at PWA will profoundly influence how you think, communicate, and behave. You will be on a constant learning curve –learning about your community, about compassion, and about yourself. Volunteering at PWA will give you new insights and broaden your horizons while giving you real world hands-on work experience.

What do you enjoy about volunteering for the Essentials Market and Community Garden?

I totally enjoyed helping with the development of the new registration system. I also enjoy greeting and mingling with the Essentials Market clients; creating, in the registration area, an environment that cultivates an "I can" attitude and nurtures clients' beliefs in their abilities to Dream and live their dreams. Proper nutrition is the key to living and accomplishing one's dreams; the Community Garden provides me with hands - on experience in learning and growing nutrition dense vegetables and herbs. I love and enjoy the smell and colours of the garden which, for me, produce emotions, energy and excitement.

You are very passionate about the Community Garden – where does that passion for Gardening come from?

Oh yes, I am passionate about the community garden. My passion for gardening started as a child. My grandparents planted and raised all their food; I prefer and will always buy my meat at the supermarket, but planting vegetables/herbs and watching them grow and in the process feeling closer to nature, and impacted greatly by the awe that is Mother Nature –it's absolutely exciting.

If you are interested in volunteering for PWA please contact Rachel Dickson at (416) 506-1400 ext. 262 +

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Give Monthly & Be A PWA Positive Life Champion

Make a positive difference and become a PWA Positive Life Champion by donating monthly to PWA. Monthly giving is crucial to making a positive difference in the lives of people living with HIV/AIDS and provides a reliable source of revenue while keeping administrative costs low thus making your donation stretch further to help more clients.

- \$15** Provides 3 Food for Life meals (for people recovering from a hospital visit)
- \$25** Provides TTC tokens for 4 medical appointments (to assist with medical transportation costs)
- \$50** Provides 29 Essentials Market clients with 7 selections of fruits and vegetables (to help with affording a healthy diet)
- \$100** Covers almost 50% of a person's average Ontario Trillium Drug program deductible (to help people access their life saving medications)

Your donation directly supports our ability to meaningfully engage people living with HIV/AIDS in supporting their health and well-being.

To make a one time donation or set up monthly donations online visit pwatoronto.org or to donate by cheque or discuss other giving options with someone from our Philanthropy department please email donate@pwatoronto.org or call (416) 506-1400 ext. 240

You are important to PWA and we would like to know more about YOU. Share your story on why you've chosen PWA as one of your partners, recipients of charitable dollars and/or in-kind donations. Please email donate@pwatoronto.org, or call (416) 506-1400 ext. 240

Notables and Coming up...

PWA's Annual Report came hot off the presses just in time for our Annual General meeting held September 29th, 2015. To see the Annual Report online go to www.pwatoronto.org or for a copy please call us at (416) 506-1400 ext. 240.



World AIDS Day, held annual on December 1st, is fast approaching and this year coincides with Giving Tuesday. Stay tuned for details on our Community Carnation Memorial and for other ways that you can Reflect, Remember and Recommit.

Mission Statement

We engage people living with HIV/AIDS in enhancing their health and well-being through practical and therapeutic support services and broader social change, and we inspire them to live into their dreams and discoveries.

Our Vision

We live in affirming, sustaining communities where we find inspiration and support for our dreams, health, well-being and meaningful contributions.

Our Board

President/Chair - Brian Fior

Vice President/

Vice Chair - Francisco Remolino

Treasurer - Michael Shreve

Board Secretary - Nancy Pryce

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Carol Grandison

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