



MAKING A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE

The Toronto People With AIDS Foundation Newsletter

FALL 2016

A Volunteer's Journey With PWA



Serge is a dedicated hardworking volunteer at PWA. His passion for volunteering and commitment came as a result of his personal journey with the agency. He continues to inspire others with his story.

My introduction to PWA was as a client, in 2008. Like a lot of good relationships though, we didn't exactly hit it off - at least not at first. You see, I was still quite uncomfortable with my HIV status and all of the things in my life that it seemed to disrupt, discontinue and diminish. When you feel this way, every task from the simplest to the most complicated is overwhelming, scary, confusing. When I presented myself at the PWA office, I remember noticing someone with a wonderful smile and the person who was wearing it - Kevin, PWA's Food Programs Coordinator, who I met in 1995 when I first moved to Ontario.

When I had my first meeting with my

caseworker, Rajesh, I still felt very awkward and confused, still trying to accept this new reality. The experience was both informative and overwhelming as a lot of information was presented and I struggled to understand what I needed to do, how I was to do it, or what the next steps would be. I remember how ashamed I felt when I could not get my head around these things that were so very important to my everyday life, comfort and happiness.

In our next meeting, feeling pretty bad about myself, I confessed to him that I forgot what I was supposed to do although I had managed to bring some documents that I believe were required for the meeting. Rajesh smiled and patiently walked me through everything again. He verified my documents and we completed my Ontario disability application that same day. My application was approved within the week!

It was another year and a half before I returned to PWA. I needed some help with groceries and household products. So, swallowing my pride, I started going to the Essentials Market, PWA's food bank, a place I could not have imagined myself ever using. So there I was, trying to be cheerful but feeling ashamed and scared. With my heart beating I asked the volunteer at the reception desk where to go. I was so nervous it took all my energy to not to run out the door I had just come in. As I approached the Activity Centre, where clients go to register for their visit, another volunteer noticed me and sensing my anxiety, started talking to me casually and even got me to laugh. Before I knew it, it was my turn and I was on my way to the food bank.

Once in the food bank, I was introduced to several of the friendly and welcoming volunteers. They took the time to explain the food bank procedures with great patience and warmth. And so, after so much anxiety, fear and shame, the experience wasn't at all what I had imagined. In fact, it was quite the opposite. I felt that I was among friends. I felt welcome and that I could be myself. And once I felt comfortable enough, I could see what a privilege it was to have access to such a helpful and essential service.

Overall PWA provided a very welcoming and healing space for me and it has changed my life. I am currently a proud volunteer and have lots of new friends with whom I can share my experience with. +



Read more about Serge at
www.pwatoronto.org

Summer Highlights

High Heel Strut



June 26 saw the Launch of our First Annual High Heel Strut held during the Village BIA's Circus So Gay Street Festival. Eight energetic individuals took to Church street to participate in a strut and race and together raised \$3000 for PWA.

Tighty Whitey Car Wash



On August 21st, 2016 Steamworks held the 10th Annual Tighty Whitey Car Wash to benefit PWA. This fun filled event raised \$2,000 for PWA's programs and services and in our 10 years of partnership have raised more than \$42,000. Thanks to the team from Steamworks and the wonderful PWA volunteers.

Community Garden

PWA expanded our Community Garden program by partnering up with two new garden communities.

PWA was provided with a garden plot at Allen Gardens as part of the pilot program [Edible Allen Gardens](#).



The second partnership was with the [Bowery Project](#) located in the vacant lot directly across the street from the PWA office. This project is the third of its kind in the Toronto area providing temporary and mobile urban agriculture on vacant lots across the city.

In addition to our 13 garden plots in Moss Park and 1 garden plot in Regent Park, more fresh produce was available for clients through the Essentials Market.



July 24, 2016 saw 299 dedicated individuals depart on the 18th Annual Friends for Life Bike Rally, the 6 day ride from Toronto to Montréal. This incredible signature fundraiser raised \$1,025,000 to support PWA's programs and services. This year we also launched the 1-Day Ride. Forty-four 1-Day Riders joined us as we left Allan Gardens on Sunday morning for Port Hope and the start of an incredible journey raising money for and awareness about HIV/AIDS.

Annual Volunteer Summer Picnic



PWA ventured to Christie Pitts for the Annual Volunteer Summer Picnic. Forty-five volunteers came out and enjoyed a BBQ, sport activities, art and a scavenger hunt (with prizes of course!)

A Refugee's New Beginning



Sasha was born in the Ukraine and immigrated to Canada in March of 2016 as a refugee. He left the Ukraine because of persecution, discrimination, cruel punishment and the risk to his life as an HIV positive gay man. He left behind his parents, sister, and nephew to start a new life in Canada. His efforts as a volunteer have made a positive difference in his life. We sat with Sasha to find out where his motivation comes from and how his volunteering at PWA has impacted his life.

What brought you to PWA? I heard about PWA from a contact at the 519 who made an appointment and who went with me to support and interpret because English is my second language. I needed help to find my way in Canada and she felt this was the best place for me.

Where does your motivation to give back come from? I wanted to spend more time surrounded by Canadians so I could improve my English, make friends, and give back. PWA has been helping me as a client and I wanted to give back to them and other clients.

How does volunteering affect your life? I feel better around people from different backgrounds who share my circumstances. I have been able to make new friends. Because I am a refugee

without a work permit I am not able to work. Volunteering gives me a purpose and shows my willingness to be a contributing member of society. I researched how I have to work in new living conditions. This is a new mentality for me.

What would you say to others about volunteering for PWA? PWA is a great place to meet new people with shared experiences. It is a great way to give back to the community.

What do you enjoy most about the volunteer experience at PWA? I met amazing open-minded people. I enjoyed being around them. There are wonderful people who help me feel happier.

How does being at PWA create a Welcoming and Healing Experience? Every smile and greeting to me by PWA workers gives me inspiration and hope for the future. I want to live and to enjoy my life.

How was your first Bike Rally experience? It was amazing! Every day I remember it and am glad for the wonderful experience and friends for life. When I first applied to volunteer for the Bike Rally I didn't believe that it could happen. I was surprised when I was approved and scared because I was afraid I would not be understood. But my worries were unfounded. I was approved to be a part of the Rubbermaid Rustlers where I met my truck buddy, Garry. With his help I had a wonderful week which included celebrating my important day, my birthday. I didn't think that I could find such a brilliant friend. My travels to Kingston and Montreal were my first time outside of Toronto and showed me what a great country Canada is. People amazed me every day as I had not seen such polite and educated people and I want to say thank you to everybody I met during the Bike Rally.

Why should someone get involved with the Bike Rally? Because you can have a great experience, make new friends, and help to gather money for PWA and to get new life goals. +

Welcome New Board Member



Kelly O'Brien is a physical therapist and Assistant Professor in the Department of Physical Therapy (PT) at the University of Toronto. Kelly works in collaboration with researchers and community members engaging in research focused on disability and rehabilitation in the context of HIV and chronic disease. She teaches in the research curriculum at the Department of PT at the University of Toronto and is a founding member of the Canada-UK HIV and Rehabilitation Research Collaborative (CUHRRC), which is a collaborative of researchers, clinicians and community members interested in HIV and rehabilitation research.

"I am continually impressed with PWA's leadership as a health and well-being champion. Given the challenges people living with HIV may face accessing formalized rehabilitation services such as physical therapy or occupational therapy, PWA is a leader in the field. Furthermore, I am impressed by PWA's longstanding engagement in community-based research, and evidence-based approach to service provision. Having had the opportunity to collaborate with PWA on various education and research-related endeavours, I admire their collaborative approach and outstanding commitment to research in order to enhance future HIV care, programs and support. I look forward to continuing the opportunity to collaborate with PWA in this new role." +

Did you hear about PWA's 29th Annual General Meeting?

Read about it at www.pwatoronto.org

Become A Positive Life Champion

Toronto People With AIDS Foundation
200 Gerrard Street East, 2nd floor
Toronto, Ontario M5A 2E6
TEL: (416) 506-1400 FAX: (416) 506-1404
www.pwatoronto.org
Charitable Registration #: 13111 3151 RR0001



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

What Will Be Your Legacy?

Do you think about your legacy? You have the ability to shape that legacy now and ensure support for many in the years to come.

Contact PWA and ask to speak to Mike Twamley or Robb Walker at (416) 506-1400 or donate@pwatoronto.org

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

Members at Large

Shae Byer

Carol Grandison

Bruce Mayhew

David McIntosh

Kelly O'Brien

Rodney Rousseau

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