



ANNUAL REPORT 2014

Hassle Free Clinic

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hasslefreeclinic.org

Hassle Free Clinic

Annual Report Contact:

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Published: May 2015

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A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Hassle Free Clinic is happy to celebrate its 11th year in the current Gerrard Street location. From its humblest beginnings, this sexual health clinic which started with just a few dedicated health care activists working out of a back room in what was the old hippy Yorkville area over 40 years ago, has morphed into one of the most respected, busiest and innovative sexual health clinics in the country. In the 40 years we witnessed the awakenings of the sexual revolution of the 60's and 70's, the AIDS crises of the 80' and 90's, and introductions of new STI's in the past decade. During these societal upheavals the Hassle Free Clinic was there in the very beginnings; leading, educating, informing, testing, treating, and supporting 100,000's of individuals with this ever changing landscape.

In an increasingly changing STI landscape, being and staying relevant has been one of the key drivers in Hassle Free Clinic's mission to deliver and adopt new sexual health services and programs before others. It is this vision of relevancy, that ensures clients will always receive the latest and most reliable medical service, and enables the clinic to be selected for additional funding from Public Health Agencies who choose the Hassle Free Clinic professional teams to provide outreach services throughout the city of Toronto.

Our relevancy and success in the communities we service is achieved by a dedicated, caring, and passionate team of health professionals, and we cannot thank them enough for making a difference to each client that enters into the clinic.

Strong leadership and vision will ensure that the Hassle Free Clinic will be here for many more decades. As Chris Phibbs, our outgoing President, Past Vice President and Board member of the past 15 years highlighted in her message last year, "we are proud of our legacy of service since 1973, and our growing role as leaders in developing sexual health policy and educational programming in Canada."

Chris, on behalf of the Board, Staff, Volunteers and Clients, I want to extend my heartfelt appreciation for your honesty when it mattered most, your wisdom, leadership and humour. You made a huge impact in elevating the ability of the Clinic to meet the ever changing requirements of the clients we are here to serve.

Regards,

Warren Ross – Acting President

Board of Directors

Chris Phibbs: President (resigned Dec.)
Warren Ross: Acting President (Dec. Onwards)
Mary Byberg
Hemant Gohil
Nicole Greenspan (on leave)
Corinne Hart
Sherri Helsdingen
Rob Howe
Rajendra Maharaj

**MANY THANKS
TO THE
HASSLE FREE CLINIC
BOARD MEMBERS
VOLUNTEERS &
PHYSICIANS OF 2014!**

Volunteers of 2014

Aidan Ablona
Richard Baer
Michael Baker
Jamie Baranek
Aisha Bartholomew
Ronald Benedetti
Alexandra Bieg
Afra Michael Boisserain
Robert Booth
Cheran Carty
Micaela Collins
Alexandra Conchie
Jonathan D. Cook
Bisa Dobson
Roisin Doherty
Emma Elliot
Leigh Farina (website volunteer)
Ed Follett
Sean Gamble
Richard Gilmour
Michael Gordon
Nora Graham

Lorraine Hewitt
Grant Hutchinson
Amy Huynh
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Kristopher Kinsey
Peter Locker
Matt Logue
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Warren Ross
Marla Schreiber
Sarah Siddiqui
Fiona Sillars
Harvey St Amant
Howard Song
Maggie Szpakowska
Gordon Taylor
Stephanie Thome
Dora Tzimas
Stephen Westfall
Thomas White
Camille Wright
Ken Yeung

CLINIC STAFF

Co-Directors

Jane Greer
Leo Mitterni

Staff

Anisha Abdulla
Elmer Bagares
Shawn Fowler
Esther Guzha
Emily Hao
Heather Jamieson
Jerry Juzkiw
Amy Lin
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Tara McKee
Lisa Ross
Sarah Siddiqui
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Richard Baer
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Angelo Cruz
Brendan Curran
Kevin Divinagracia
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Jason Haines
René Lopez Torres
Betty Parish
Leonard Tooley
Fernanda Villanueva
Thomas White

Public Health Nurses

Martin Duchesne
Wendy Johnston

Men's/Trans' Clinic Physicians

Michael Bartucci (Medical Director)
Vanessa Abdelhalim
Kelly Anderson
Pinella Buongiorno
Arlene Chan
J. Troy Grennan
Charlie Guiang
Karen Jang
Fareen Karachiwalla
David Knox
Karen Ko
Ed Lee
Allison McGee
Brian Minnema
Patricia Parsons
Jesleen Rana
Kate Reeve
Malika Sharma
Itamar Tamari
Kent To

Women's/Trans' Clinic Physicians

Nina Malayil (Medical Director)
Kelly Anderson
Kirsten Dixon
Erin Johnston
Jane Kiraly
Sarah Mahmoud
Zeenat Patel
Malika Sharma
Brigit Swenson
Sheila Wijayasinghe
Laura Winer

HASSLE FREE CLINIC SERVICES:

- Confidential Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) counselling testing and treatment
- Rapid Point-of-Care (POC) and standard Anonymous HIV testing with pre- and post-testing counselling
- Safer sex counselling & sexuality counselling
- Birth control methods & information
- Pregnancy testing, decision counselling, abortion referrals & follow-up
- HIV support for newly diagnosed individuals with an emphasis on linkage to care
- Health Promotion/Nursing Clinic for HIV+ women

Who We Are...

Hassle Free Clinic is a community-based agency providing medical and counselling services in all areas of sexual health. We are one of the busiest sexual health clinics and the largest Anonymous HIV test site in Canada.

Hassle Free Clinic has separate hours for men and women at the same location. Transgendered clients can attend during the hours they feel most comfortable. The Men/Trans Clinic provides Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) testing/treatment and HIV testing, counselling and support. The Women/Trans Clinic provides the same STI/HIV services as well as birth control, pregnancy testing, abortion referrals and other services related to sexual and reproductive health. The Women/Trans clinic also runs a Health Promotion/ Nursing clinic for HIV positive women and trans women. Each clinic is staffed by doctors, clinicians, counsellors and volunteers. A City of Toronto Public Health Nurse is assigned to work during the Men/Trans Clinic hours. The majority of STI testing is done at the Ministry of Health Laboratory and through a private lab. The Ministry provides treatments for most STIs free of charge. POC HIV testing is done on site. HIV testing is also offered and conducted through our Peter Bochove bathhouse outreach program and satellite clinics for men who have sex with men (MSM) in three different settings across downtown Toronto.

The clinic has always promoted an integrated, comprehensive approach to service delivery. A full spectrum of sexual health issues – HIV, STI, birth control and pregnancy and counselling – may be dealt with at the same time, rather than dividing sexual health care into separate services.

Most importantly, we ensure that service delivery is informed by a non-judgmental, supportive attitude towards all sexual health concerns. We believe active client involvement in health care decision making is paramount. Therefore, we provide appropriate counselling and education to help clients make well-informed decisions.

The clinic is incorporated as a non-profit charitable organization with a nine-member community Board of Directors. The Board takes responsibility for overall financial and policy direction while allowing staff to make program and policy decisions.

The clinic is core-funded by the City of Toronto Public Health Division with additional funding from the AIDS Bureau, Ministry of Health and Long Term Care. The clinic also accesses the provincial STI billing program, a part of OHIP that does not require health cards.

We would particularly like to acknowledge and thank the many individual donors we have, primarily grateful clients. The amounts can be large or small, but we appreciate all of these donations, many of which are made anonymously.

WE ALSO PROVIDE:

- Bathhouse & community outreach testing
- Hepatitis A, B & C screen and Hepatitis A & B vaccinations
- Presentations to community groups, agencies, organizations and at conferences
- Referrals to HIV specialists, gynecologists, midwives, therapists, counsellors, AIDS service organizations (ASOs), and health and social services
- Services are provided in several different languages. Please call for information
416-922-0566

OVER 40 YEARS OF HISTORY!

LOOKING BACK...

- Starting from grassroots initiatives and growing while maintaining its community-based approach to sexual health care. Hassle Free Clinic has been in operation for over 40 years!
- Hassle Free Clinic's location has changed several times to meet the needs of our perpetually growing and ever changing population. Our present location is wheelchair accessible.

History of Hassle Free Clinic

The main inspiration for Hassle Free came in part from the staff at the Rochdale Free Clinic. Hassle Free officially began operating in February 1973, when counsellors from Rochdale opened a 24-hour, 7 days a week street clinic on Yonge Street. The clinic was funded by a grant from the federal government's Local Initiatives Project, and offered drug crisis counselling and treatment in a discreet and non-judgmental manner as our name suggests.

By 1975, the drug-oriented street scene had largely disappeared. Meanwhile, the clinic had built a reputation for providing "hassle-free" medical care, particularly STI and birth control services. A small but significant step was taken in 1977 when the clinic's global budget was covered by a shared cost grant from the Ontario Ministry of Health and the City of Toronto Board of Health. The grant came as a dramatic last-minute intervention, when the clinic had exhausted its funds and was faced with imminent closure.

In January 1980, when Hassle Free Clinic moved to our previous location at 556 Church Street, it was reorganized into separate men's and women's hours. The separation was the result of increasing numbers of male (mostly gay) clients and limited space, making it difficult to serve men and women at the same time. By the early 1980s the reputation of the Men's clinic as a safe place for gay men to obtain sexual health services was well established, although we have always served large numbers of heterosexual men. The majority of women seeking services are heterosexual. From the early days, staff had also identified some of the unique sexual health needs of transgendered and gender fluid clients. This has now been translated into a comprehensive program of trans inclusivity.

Following the first wave of the AIDS crisis in 1983-84, the clinic began offering HIV education and prevention counselling. When HIV testing became available in 1985, the clinic immediately offered testing on an anonymous basis. At this time “anonymous” testing was illegal in Ontario. The number of male clients testing positive for HIV increased each year, reaching a peak of 230 in 1990. The seropositive rate in the Women’s Clinic was low and remained stable during this period. In the late 1980s, the clinic introduced HIV positive support group programs for women and men which were well received by clients, and highly regarded by other health providers.

In 1989 the clinic mounted a campaign to legalize anonymous testing. Under pressure from community organizations, Toronto City Council and the Board of Health publicly endorsed the program. The Ontario Ministry of Health, however, refused to support the program until January 1992, when the NDP government legalized anonymous testing. Having offered anonymous HIV testing for the previous seven years, HFC was relied on to develop Ontario’s Anonymous Testing Guidelines and train staff in designated sites across the Province.

In 2001, Hassle Free became the first clinic in Canada to offer rapid point-of-care (POC) HIV testing on site, which was halted due to questions about the accuracy of the device. In May 2006, HFC once again became the first clinic in Canada to offer such testing with a newly approved device. This device has proven to provide consistently accurate results since that time. Results are ready in a few minutes as opposed to waiting a week or two with the standard method. Individuals still have the choice of choosing either testing method but the vast majority of individuals choose rapid POC testing. Based on our experience with POC testing and our lobbying efforts, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care announced in 2007 that it would be making POC tests available at designated sites across Ontario.

... LEADING THE WAY

- Did you know Hassle Free Clinic was one of the early responders at the beginning of the HIV/AIDS epidemic?
- Did you know Hassle Free Clinic was the first in Ontario to offer “illegal” anonymous HIV testing?
- Did you know Hassle Free Clinic was the first clinic in Canada to offer rapid point-of-care HIV testing?
- Hassle Free Clinic often provides training and support to other agencies interested in providing rapid point-of-care HIV testing

“Thank you so much for helping me when I needed some help. I greatly appreciate it. I know I am not your usual target group – so please put this donation to good use so I won’t feel bad about taking your resources”

“Thank you for your kindness and consideration through a very difficult time. I can’t express how much I appreciate the caring and understanding you showed me”

– Quotes from
Hassle Free Clinic clients

Another area that is very important to the clinic is our on-going commitment to trans inclusivity. Physician, staff and volunteer training about trans care is an ongoing process.

Since the beginning, Hassle Free Clinic has played an important front-line role in identifying and serving the sexual health needs of a large and diverse at-risk population. We are increasingly called upon as consultants in developing health policy and educational programming. Without compromising our front-line status, we are now firmly established as a partner in Toronto Public Health’s sexual health program, as well as the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care’s HIV testing program.

After more than 40 years of providing medical care to high-risk clients in a non-traditional setting, we are proud to be one of Canada’s largest and most influential sexual health clinics!

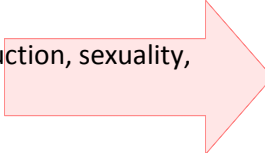


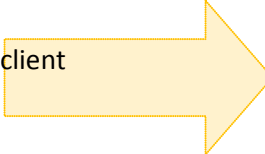
**IN MEMORY OF ROBERT TROW
NOVEMBER 23, 1948 – OCTOBER 21, 2002**


Robert Trow will always be remembered as one of the pioneer advocates of anonymous HIV testing, leader within the AIDS movement and for his important role within Hassle Free Clinic’s history.


Hassle Free Clinic Philosophy

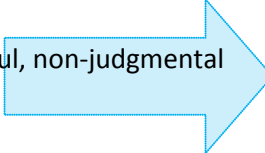
Hassle Free Clinic places great importance on maintaining equitable staff-client relationships and non-judgmental attitude to sexually related health concerns. The Clinic is committed to maintaining the following values and principles in the provision of sexual health care:

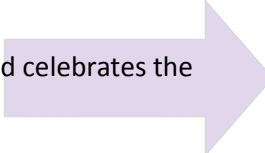
Complete and understandable information about reproduction, sexuality, birth control and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) 

Confidential STI testing and treatment, with emphasis on client responsibility for follow-up and informing contacts 

Access to Anonymous HIV counselling, testing and support 

Active client involvement in health care decisions, emphasizing fully informed choice 

Medical treatment and counselling provided in a respectful, non-judgmental manner 

Work from anti-oppression framework that recognizes and celebrates the wide diversity of Toronto's communities 

HASSLE FREE CLINIC'S CORE VALUES

INFORMATIVE

CONFIDENTIALITY

ACCESSIBILITY

INFORMED CHOICE

RESPECT

CELEBRATING DIVERSITY

Research Studies

Hassle Free is often invited to be involved in research related to sexual health matters. The Clinic acted as recruiters for a study entitled “Linking Molecular and Social Clusters in analyses of HIV Prevention.” This study was conducted by the Ontario HIV Treatment Network (OHTN) in conjunction with the University of Windsor. Recruitment is now scheduled to end in May 2015. We also concluded a study funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation that looked at biomarkers with the goal of developing an early-detection HIV urine test. The M/T clinic also began recruitment for a Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) study conducted by St. Michael’s Hospital. This study will follow a group of 50 gay men and MSM for one year on PrEP and monitor results. Hassle Free was involved in this study’s development and training.

Clinic involvement in other research initiatives was of a consultative nature. We consulted on a successful Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR) grant. This proposal is to facilitate knowledge transfer and exchange (KTE) among stakeholders looking to implement HIV POC testing on a more widespread basis in Atlantic Canada. We were also involved in the development of another CIHR grant proposal being made by researchers looking to conduct a year long study in three cities investigating supervised and self-testing for HIV. Trends worldwide indicate the movement toward point-of-care multiplex devices, i.e. platforms that can test for more than one infection. We look forward to potentially being involved in projects that continue to improve on testing options for clients.

Student Placement & Training

Clinical health education is an important part of our commitment to community education. The clinic often supervises residents, nursing and medical students from several institutions. Most notably, the clinic often has nursing students taking part in their practicum placement within the clinic. Students gain valuable sexual health and community based work experience. Over the years, the clinic has had many excellent students and over time, several have been recruited to work as relief, as well as for outreach and our bathhouse programs. Likewise, some residents proceed to be employed in our clinics.

Frequently, we also have staff from various agencies attend the clinic for observation and training, particularly around rapid HIV POC counselling and testing.



**HASSLE FREE
CLINIC**



Year in Review

After the major organizational changes of the last couple of years, transitioning from a collective to more hierarchical structure, 2014 was relatively quiet from a change perspective.

Our very stable Board of Directors did go through some changes this year. With the loss of our President, Peter Bochove in 2012, we were very fortunate to have our Vice-President, Chris Phibbs, step in to that role. Toward the end of the year, however, Chris resigned when she accepted a new position with the City of Toronto (our main funder). Over 15 years, she provided vision and leadership to Hassle Free as a Director, Vice President and President. She always brought a very welcome, results-oriented approach to decision making which we will miss. On behalf of the staff, physicians and volunteers, we want to thank her for all of her work, dedication, and of course, her wonderful sense of humour. We were very fortunate to have two new Directors join our Board this year, Hemant Gohil and Mary Byberg. We welcome them and look forward to working with them for many years to come.

Our staffing situation remained very stable, with one resignation and one new hire. Our clinics were busier than ever this year, with a corresponding rise in lab diagnoses of STIs. All in all, a good year for Hassle Free Clinic.

Creating greater
clarity and
accountability to
our clients,
communities
and funders

Did you know?

- Ontario positivity rates at Anonymous Test Sites is approximately 3 times greater than in other forms of testing (Nominal or Non-nominal).
- Ontario has one of the highest pre-natal testing rates in Canada based on a client-centred, express consent policy
- Approx. 400 people in Toronto tested HIV positive in 2014
- Women represent 1 in 5 new HIV diagnoses in Ontario
- Hassle Free Clinic saw nearly 8,000 people for HIV testing in 2014

Anonymous HIV Testing Program

Anonymous and POC HIV testing continue to be the clinic's best-known programs. Counselling focuses on HIV transmission, willingness and ability to practice safer sex, identifying barriers to safer sex practices, and a rational understanding of relative risk. The impact of testing positive and dealing with an HIV positive result are discussed. As in all sexual health counselling, STI, birth control, pregnancy, assault and abuse issues are dealt with as appropriate.

HIV anxiety is ever present. We regularly see clients who have considerable HIV anxiety yet have negligible or no risk. Testing is not refused, except where too-frequent testing is contributing to their anxiety.

HIV testing is conducted by appointment only. This is to ensure that proper consent, counselling, referrals are made and adequate time is allotted for a potential positive result. However, on occasion the clinic does offer walk-in HIV POC tests for individuals with extenuating circumstances. The Men/Trans Clinic offers immediate POC tests for all suspected and confirmed syphilis cases. This is a persistent challenge given the on-going syphilis epidemic, although in 2014 it was determined HIV positive individuals do not need additional bicillin injections to be effectively treated.

Overall the total number of in-clinic HIV visits for the year was 4,955 with 1,406 and 3,549 in the women/trans clinic and the men/trans clinic respectively. In 2014 we reported 97 HIV positive test results compared to 105 in the previous year. The total number of HIV positive results remained relatively consistent from previous years. There was a slight decline in the number of women who tested HIV positive; with 5 new cases among heterosexual women. Women represent 1 in 5 new HIV diagnose in Ontario. The Men/Trans had 93 HIV positive results. This number includes 2 positive results from our Bath House Outreach Program and 41 from our Enhanced Testing Program.

TOTAL
NUMBER
OF HIV
VISITS IN
2014

8396

WOMEN/TRANS
CLINIC

TOTAL HIV
VISITS

1406

TOTAL HIV
TESTS

1368

TOTAL NUMBER
OF POSITIVES

4

MEN/TRANS
CLINIC

TOTAL HIV
VISITS

3349

TOTAL HIV
TESTS

3670

TOTAL NUMBER
OF POSITIVES

50

TOTAL
NUMBER
OF HIV
POSITIVES
RESULTS
IN 2014

97

BATHHOUSE
OUTREACH

TOTAL HIV
VISITS

837

TOTAL HIV
TESTS

368

TOTAL NUMBER
OF POSITIVES

2

ENHANCED
TESTING

TOTAL HIV
VISITS

2604

TOTAL HIV
TESTS

2601

TOTAL NUMBER
OF POSITIVES

41

There were 105
HIV positive results
last year

**DETECTING THE VIRUS
AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE**

5 of 97 HIV positive test
results were early
seroconverters detected
through a combined
antigen/antibody
laboratory screen test.

Sexual Health Program

In 2014 the clinic had 2,915 more sexual health visits (non-HIV) than in 2013 representing an almost 12% increase. There was an overall corresponding increase in STI positive results. We were able to accomplish this by increasing doctors scheduled hours.

Reasons for sexual health visits to the Women/Trans clinic include contraception, pregnancy testing, abortion referrals, sexual assault and other miscellaneous gynecological concerns. There continued to be fewer Pap smear tests this year as a consequence of the 2012 Ontario Cervical Screening Guidelines. These guidelines raised the age of first Pap to 21, and changed the normal screening interval from 1 to 3 years. This has raised the issue of the necessity of more routine pelvic exams in the absence of annual Paps. The clinic is currently reviewing our protocols. Almost all non-HIV visits to the Men/Trans Clinic are for STIs and/or STI related concerns.

WOMEN &
TRANS CLINIC

TOTAL SEXUAL
HEALTH
VISITS IN 2014

MEN &
TRANS CLINIC

25,119

10,214

14,905

The total number of
positive chlamydia,
gonorrhea and
syphilis cases has
increased from
last year.

18
more cases
of syphilis

Both clinics

82
more cases
of gonorrhea

There was a notable
increase in rectal
gonorrhea in both
clinics

31
more cases
of chlamydia

Both clinics

Bath Stats for 2014

- Total number of HIV tests conducted at the bathhouses increased to: 368 (Compared to 324 done the previous year)
- Total number of HIV Positive results collected from bathhouse outreach: 2 (Unchanged from 2013)
- Total number of STI tests done (Syphilis/ Hepatitis): 72 (Compared to 96 done in 2013)
- Total number of clients seen during bathhouse outreach: 882

Peter Bochove Bathhouse Outreach Program

Since 1975, the clinic has provided anonymous STI testing and information at local bath houses. The service began as a routine STI testing clinic, with an HIV counselling component added in 1983, anonymous testing in 1995 and rapid POC testing in 2010. Clinics usually run for 3-hour sessions in four Toronto bathhouses. We provide free condoms and lube, and testing for HIV, syphilis and hepatitis. Bath management has always cooperated, offering space for testing, regular announcements and display areas for educational materials.

The program is aimed at all bathhouse patrons, but in particular at men who otherwise might not attend a clinic or their doctor for STI and HIV concerns. While many patrons are self-identified gay men who have no difficulty accessing services, others fall into a variety of hard-to-reach communities. Bathhouses have always attracted closeted bisexual and married men who have sex with men (MSM). These individuals require the anonymity of this setting, as they are unwilling to access sexual health services in their communities. The clinic has been actively cooperating with other agencies offering community-specific outreach services. The bath program offers an ideal opportunity for staff to provide information and testing to specialized groups within the MSM community. It is noteworthy that the number of HIV tests has more than doubled since we began offering rapid POC HIV testing at the baths. This year, 2 individuals tested HIV positive in the bath program.

The clinic regularly collaborates with the M2M network partners for several regular special-event Bathhouse testing nights. In particular, we partnered with Asian Community AIDS Services (ACAS), Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention (ASAAP) and Centre for Spanish Speaking People (CSSP).

Health Promotion & Nursing Clinic Program

Our successful Health Promotion/Clinic Program for HIV Positive women/trans women is now in its fourth year. The Program is made possible through the generous contribution of Nursing staff and childcare funds from Casey House. In addition, some costs are offset through annualized AIDS Bureau funding. It is also made possible through the generous donation of space from the Toronto People With AIDS Foundation. We would like to offer a particular 'thank you' to the PWA volunteers who greet participants as they attend our twice-monthly group.

Women who attend the program are referred from ASOs in Toronto, as well as from hospitals, community health centres and primary care providers from sites such as St. Michael's HIV Clinic and Maple leaf Medical.

These are women/trans women who either are newly diagnosed or those who, for different reasons, were experiencing isolation but are now starting to connect with community services. Generally, the group has women/trans women from different backgrounds but the majority are of African background. In addition, we have participants from Romania, the Caribbean, the Philippines, as well as white and indigenous Canadians

Beside support offered to participants through the Nursing Clinic and accompaniment to doctors' appointments, there were also individual home and hospital support visits.

In addition to the stigma of having HIV, the major challenges suffered by some of the women who come to the Nursing Clinic are ill health and immigration issues, as well as lack of adequate housing.

- In 2014, the number of women and trans women attending the group was consistent throughout the year; averaging at 20 people per session.
- 21 new participants registered for the group in 2014.

Popular group discussions topics included:

- Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)
- Immigration
- Gender-based violence
- HIV stigma and discrimination
- Criminalization of HIV non-disclosure

Some sessions were occasionally facilitated by group members. Participants are very eager to share their experiences and expertise when they get the opportunity.



Enhanced Testing Program

Gay bisexual trans men and men who have sex with men (MSM) continue to be among those greatly affected by HIV and syphilis. The Enhanced Testing (ET) program is funded solely by the AIDS Bureau and its goal is to educate MSM and trans people about issues relating to HIV and syphilis while providing an opportunity for them to test at several testing sites across the city. It builds on the strengths and momentum of the HIV and Syphilis Testing Blitzes that preceded it. The program incorporates an online website presence; come-on-in.ca including social media and “hook-up” apps popular among MSM. The key messages of the promotion campaign, include awareness of seroconversion illness, early HIV testing and the relationship between STI’s and HIV infection.

Satellite clinics are now offered twice-monthly at St. Stephen’s Community House in the City’s west end (Kensington Market), South Riverdale Community Health Centre in the east (Leslieville) and the ever popular 519 Church St. Community Centre. These clinics have been extremely well attended and well received. Hassle Free Clinic is now able to offer at risk men more choice in where, when and how they test, and provide an important solution to the overflow of demand for in-clinic testing. In addition to our regular testing sites, we also provided ‘special event’ testing for the Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention and Asian Community AIDS Services.

In a separate, unfunded initiative, The Clinic provided STI/HIV information and HIV POC testing for the first time at OASIS Aqualounge in 2014. It is a neighbourhood sex club that offers special events and welcomes people of all gender identities and sexual orientations. The 'talk and test' event was very well received with plans underway to continue this program in 2015. Once again, the W/T Clinic also offered special event HIV POC testing at a women's retreat held by Asian Community AIDS Services (ACAS). This has become an annual event.

Moving forward, we intend to continue this program in our current locations, as well as filling requests for one-time clinics. We also hope to expand 'Come-on-in' to include information specific to MSM & trans sexual health, including PEP, and the increase of rectal infections.



Links Statistics

- 99 clients accessed the program in 2014
- 240 clinical encounters (in-person/over the phone counseling sessions)
- 98% of clients who responded to client feedback surveys were satisfied with the overall program
- Anxiety (49%), depression (34%), self-esteem (31%), and body image issues (21%) were documented as the most prevalent mental health-related concerns.
- Aside from substance misuse (15%), another emerging issue was clients' difficulties moderating their use of hook-up applications (app) and on-line sites (e.g. Grindr).
- A growing number of clients (37%) reported that their app use has negatively impacted their work, interpersonal relationships, and ability to use risk reduction strategies with partners.
- There was an overrepresentation of racialized men who reported difficulties navigating the on-line world because of the overt racism.

Making the Links Program

The "Links Program" as it has come to be known, is a free in-house, short-term counselling program for gay, bisexual and men who have sex with men (MSM). Using a brief solution focused therapy model, this HIV prevention intervention aims to unpack the underlying factors that impact the ability of MSMs to negotiate and practice safer sex with partners and help clients strengthen and/or develop insight, coping mechanisms and risk reduction strategies. This initiative is partially funded through the City's Toronto Urban Health Fund (TUHF), with Hassle Free providing the balance of funding necessary to meet program demand. 2014 saw the 'Making the Links' and 'Peter Bochove Bathhouse Outreach Programs rolled into a Purchase of Service Agreement, a welcome change from year to year funding. A comprehensive psychosocial assessment is conducted to determine suitability for the short-term counselling program and/or community referrals.

There was a total of 240 clinical encounters (in-person/over the phone counselling sessions). Of these clients, 46 responded to two anonymous on-line client feedback surveys which reported a 98% overall satisfaction rate with this program's ability to meet the unique counselling needs of the gay, bisexual, MSM community.

According to survey results, the majority of clients (65%) accessed our single session counselling services, where the program was able to respond to clients who presented in crisis and/or educate them on STI/HIV. The second largest group (30%) was comprised of clients who opted to receive 3-5 sessions. The most common themes that emerged and were reported to impact sexual behaviours were related to mental health, addictions/compulsions (i.e. substance, sexual, hook-up apps) and interpersonal difficulties. For those who chose multi-session support, the survey showed that 89% of clients agreed that the strengths-based and

change-oriented model of counselling empowered them to change patterns of behaviour. Of the clients surveyed, 96% agreed that the change was linked to increased insight into the underlying factors contributing to their high risk activity, and 86% reported that they had adopted or strengthened new risk reduction strategies and coping mechanisms to address their high risk sexual behaviours.

The “Links Program” as it has come to be known, was initiated in July 2010 and has quickly evolved and grown to include aftercare support and services to those recently diagnosed with HIV. Informed by innovative research on the HIV treatment cascade and best practices in the delivery of HIV care, the Making the Links Program Manager implemented a comprehensive follow-up process for recently diagnosed clients in early 2014. This process involves assessing and addressing any barriers a client might be experiencing when navigating HIV-related health care and social services systems. Every client who tests positive at Hassle Free Clinic is eligible to access: a) a referral to an HIV primary care physician; b) upwards of 8 free and confidential counselling services; and c) case management/referral coordinator services: housing, drug coverage, income/employment, social supports, mental health, substance use etc. The services provided, as well as the frequency of meetings between the Program Manager and client, are tailored to meet each client’s unique needs.

The program is still under development and frequently undergoes evaluation in order to identify areas of improvement. The first client feedback survey conducted in December 2014 found that 92% of clients were satisfied with the program and all (100%) of respondents stated that they would like the clinic to continue providing these services.

Testimonial from Making the Links Program client:

“Making the Links has and continues to play a huge role not only in my acceptance of my HIV diagnosis; but my overall mental health and attitude towards life. The program has empowered me with the community resources, tools, confidence & positive outlook, which have been important in this new chapter of my life. I am currently seeing an HIV specialist, sober and have a better outlook and thought process all thanks to the program and [my counsellor]. Without her assistance & guidance I would be continuing my old habits of having impulsive sex on an array of drugs, resulting not only in possibly infecting others but putting my own life at risk.”

Interested in volunteering ?

- Volunteer duties are mostly administrative such as filing, booking appointments and other tasks as needed
- Prospective volunteers are interviewed, must sign a confidentiality agreement form and go through an orientation and training process provided by staff and other volunteers
- On-going training and support is provided
- Please note that volunteer applicants will be contacted on an as needed basis

APPLY IN PERSON

- Volunteer application forms are available at the front desk

APPLY ONLINE

- Volunteer application forms are also available online at:
www.hasslefreeclinic.org/VolunteerForm.php

Volunteer Program

Hassle Free is extremely thankful to have a very committed team of volunteers. There were over 65 active volunteers in 2014, contributing well over 5,000 hours of service. They form an integral part of our perpetually busy clinic. From greeting people at the reception counter to booking appointments, they are in many ways the face of Hassle Free – the first voice and face with whom clients come in contact. This can be very challenging, as clients often are in crisis when they call or attend the clinic. We rely on volunteers to also assist with research, collating data, and the day-to-day maintenance of the clinic.

Periodically, the clinic undertakes volunteer training to train new recruits and sharpen the skills of our more veteran volunteers. Front desk volunteers are trained to do appropriate screening when booking appointments. Even though this can involve complicated assessments of a variety of situations, it is working extremely well. Our volunteers have a strong knowledge base, but ensure staff are consulted when appropriate.

Hassle Free also works with a very solid and committed group of “behind the scenes” volunteers. Our nine-member, community-based Board of Directors continues to lend a wealth of expertise, skill and guidance to our overall operations. The staff is particularly grateful for the Board’s unwavering support.

Many of our volunteers take initiative and go above and beyond the call of duty with regard to hours, added duties and responding to last minute requests. Our volunteers take great pride in their work and many have been extremely loyal for years.



Conferences and Professional Education

- ACT & Community AIDS Treatment Information Exchange (CATIE) PrEP In-Service
- ACT Volunteer training
- AIDS Bureau Couples Counselling Refresher Training, Participants
- AIDS Bureau Social Media and MSM Outreach, Presenter
- Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention (Black CAP) STI/HIV 101
- Central Toronto Community Health Centre POC Observation
- Covenant House HIV POC Test Training
- Gay Men's Sexual Health Network (GMSH) Conferences
- Humber College Nursing Program STI 101 and Clinic Services
- London Intercommunity Health Centre HIV POC Test Training
- Nipissing University Nursing Students – Clinic Services
- OHTN HIV Back to Basics Research Conferences, Participants
- Polyamory Toronto – STI/HIV Education
- Ryerson University; Midwifery Program – STI/BC/HIV Information
- Sherbourne Health Centre – HIV POC Test Training
- Sudbury District Health Unit HIV POC Test Training
- Toronto Public Health HIV 101 -- HIV Counselling and Testing
- Unison Community Health Centre POC Observation
- University of Toronto Medical Students – HIV Counselling and Testing
- University without Walls (OHTN) Training Participant
- Women's Health in Women's Hands – HIV/POC Test Training

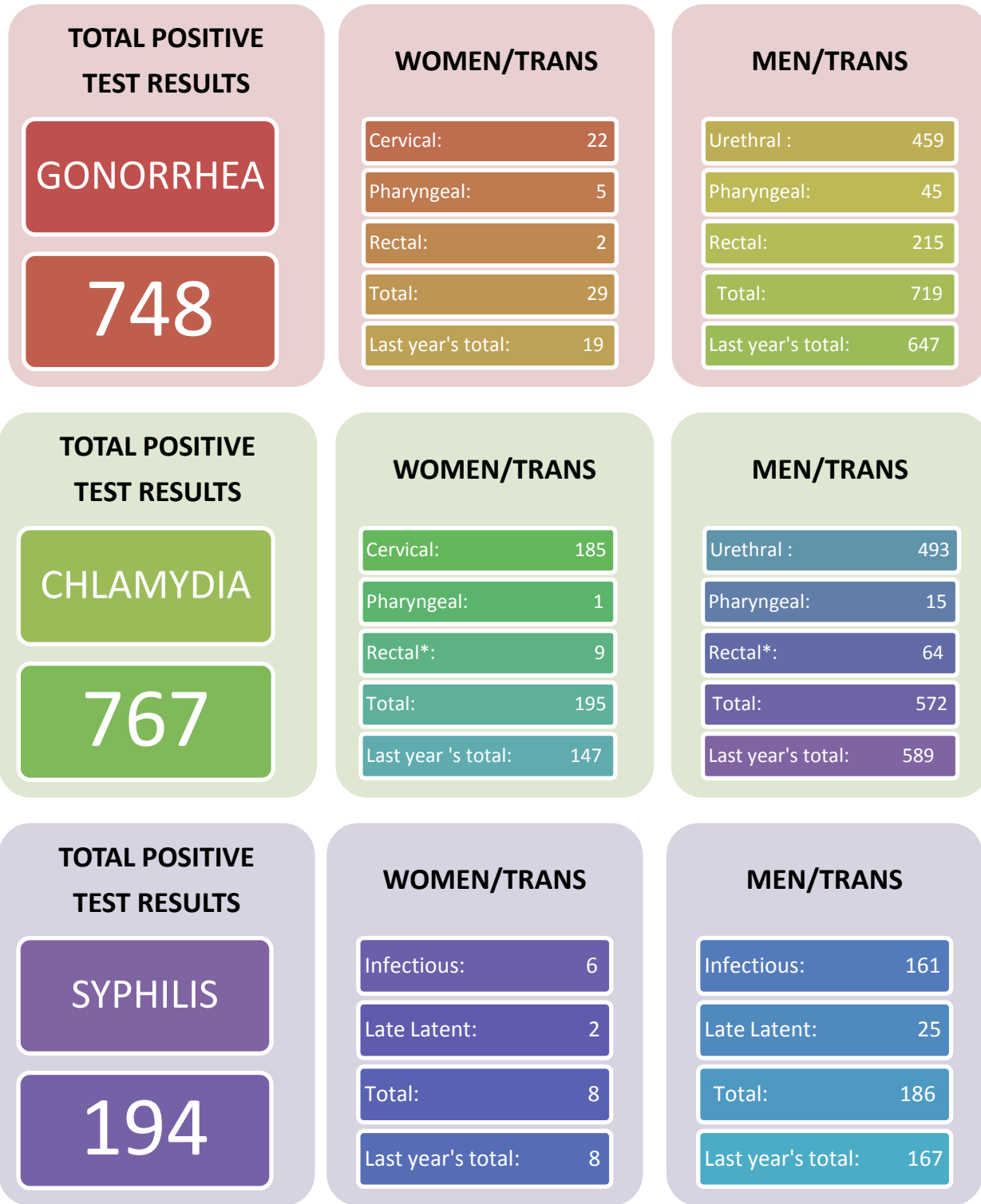
Networks and Working Groups

- AIDS Bureau HIV Disclosure Working Group
- Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention (ASAAP) Access Identity and Men (AIM)
- ASO/ Gender Based Violence Joint Response Task Force
- Clinic Sharing Network
- GMSH Alliance of Aboriginal and Racialized Men of Ontario Region (AARMOR)
- GMSH Working Group
- M2M Network
- OHTN HIV Prevention in Gay Men/MSM Working Group
- Point of Care Testing National Working Group
- Sexual Health Network
- St.Michael's Hospital PrEP Study Working Group
- University of Toronto HIV Patient Instructor Steering Committee

Media Interviews and Articles

- CBC News
- CTV News
- Global Television News
- Toronto Star

POSITIVE TESTS RESULTS



* All Rectal Chlamydia is processed for LGV

POSITIVE TESTS RESULTS

