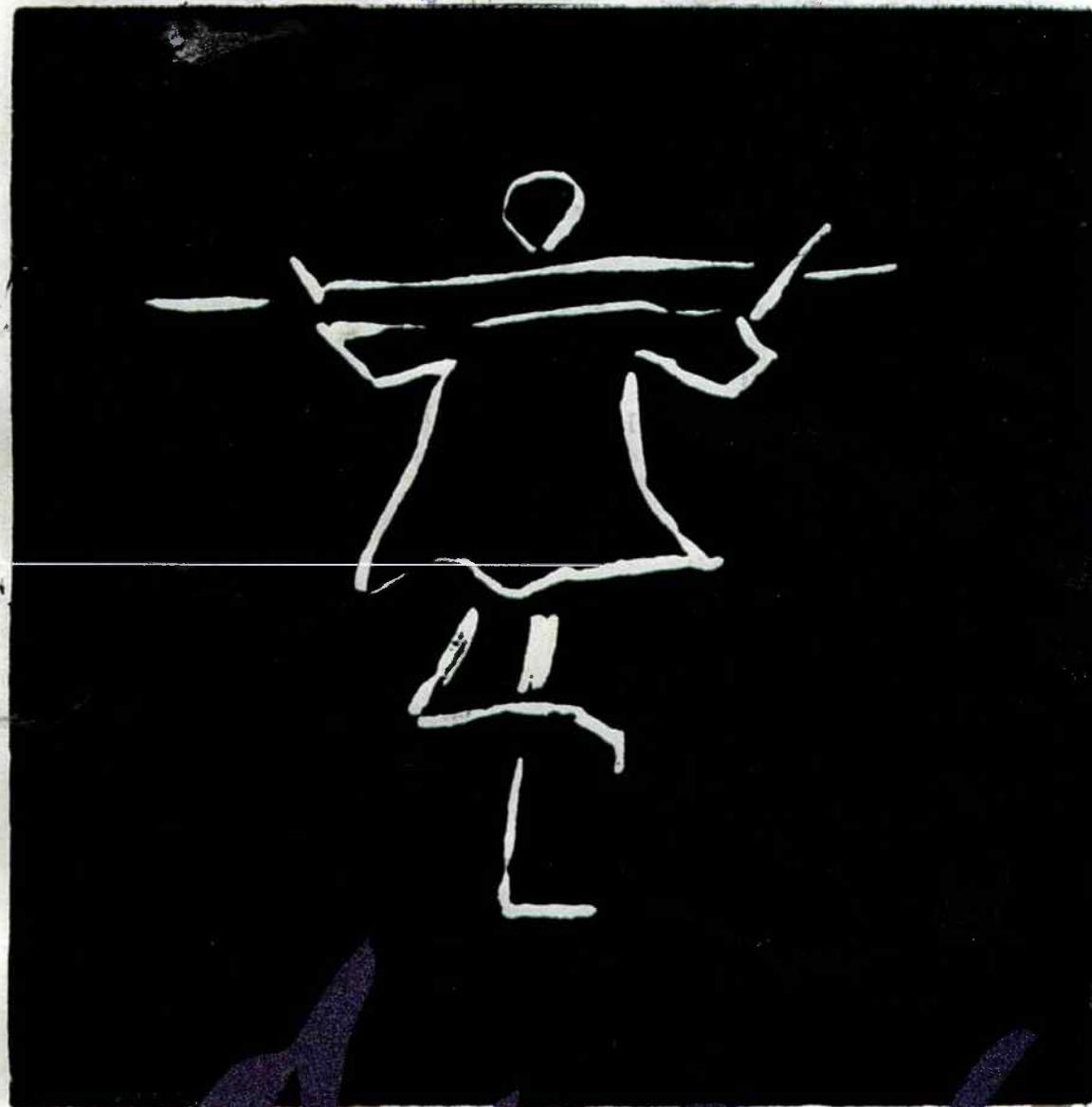


The Magazine of People Living With HIV/AIDS NSW Inc.

No. 112 December 2000/January 2001

talkabout

◆ Where We Speak for Ourselves ◆



ALKABOUT
out of the house

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COVER STORY

Talkabout

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George's 'Lady
in the house.
on page 7.



by Howard



by Tim Alderman



by David Jobling

flourishing with PLWH/A (NSW)	6
douglas barry reflects on four years involvement with PLWH/A (NSW)	
art out of the house	7
daavid jobling reviews a recent exhibition for AIDS awareness week	
housing wonderland	8
mark tietjen canvasses possible problems for people considering a return to work	
opinion: howard's way	9
christmas may not bring good cheer for HIV positive people on the DSP, writes	
daavid menadue	
world AIDS day awards	10
talkabout profiles the 24 world AIDS day award winners	
any women from my country?	13
introducing a support group for HIV positive asian women	
rural forum 2000 round-up	14
HIV positive people in rural areas want new partnerships that are meaningful, writes robert rogers	
the new, improved rural forum	15
building on what's there is the way to go, writes stephen delaney	
a change of scenery	16
daavid and glen drove north from their rainforest home to attend the rural forum	
fact or friction?	17
john douglas on what was hot and what was not at the rural forum	
stepping forward	18
on balance, life in the bush has improved, paul mcqueen writes	
at the cabana motel	19
by denis coric	
life in chapters	20
glenn flanagan reports on a writer's workshop at the rural forum	
... and pictures	20
a selection of photographs from the rural forum	
the impossible ask	23
by tim alderman	
summer fun	26
daavid jobling on what's cheap and cool at next year's sydney festival	

Positive Action 3 Tell it like it is 4 Talkshop 5 Street Jungle 5 Trials and Tribulations 22 Treatments Update 24 Money 25 Olga's and Diary 27 Hyperactive 28

Reconstruction Project 1FC HALC 21 ACON Positive Fun and Esteem 21 ACON Education 21 Taylor Square Clinic 25 Inner West Sexual Health 25 The Sanctuary 25

world AIDS day awards



The World AIDS Day Awards celebrated the outstanding work and collaboration of the hundreds of volunteers involved in the prevention of HIV/AIDS and the care and support of positive people. The former Uniting Church Minister Dorothy McRae McMahon (bottom right), herself recipient of numerous awards for her commitment to social justice, hosted the event held at the Customs House. The Wollongong Solidarity Choir entertained the 250 invited guests and award recipients from across New South Wales. Photos Geoff Friend. See our story on page 10.

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Thank you for your support

pos action

with **Antony Nicholas**

PLWHA (NSW) regularly reviews the organisation's priorities in order to monitor its effectiveness and meet the diverse needs of HIV positive people across the state. This is increasingly difficult in a climate of government cutbacks, reduced funding, and ongoing cutbacks to positive services. While our core work still revolves around advocacy, policy and lobbying we aim to encourage new and dynamic projects throughout the sector.

We have a few holiday wishes (and some do come true). We'd like to increase the capacity of our website, establish a positive advocacy mentor program, and develop our positive health promotion via *Talkabout*, the website and brochures, and increase opportunities for PLWHA to gain work experience by volunteering in our office.

PLWHA (NSW) Inc. staff and committee were a strong presence at November's Rural Forum in Ballina. The newly formed Rural Working Group, guided

The holiday season is a time to reflect on our achievements in the past year.

by Convenor Michael Riches, put in considerable work to set up positive workshops for rural participants. We got involved in the forum hoping to listen to the views of positive people from rural areas; a move away from us (city slickers) telling them (rural PLWHA) what we can offer.

Staff and Committee members were involved in workshops on Writing, Advocacy, Care and Support issues, Building Communities and Welfare Issues. We hope that we gave as much information and energy as we received from positive people at the Forum. The Rural Working Group will use the information gained at the forum to plan their future direction.

A highlight of the Forum was the launch of the rural PSB video, *The Human Face of HIV*. The AIDS Trust and Levi Strauss funded the video which is already selling well across New South Wales.

Tobin Saunders hosted the session to the clink of champagne glasses, a viewing of the video and a few words from two of the PSB speakers who appear on the video, Tony Creighton and Luke Chipperfield. The video aims to take the Positive Speakers' Bureau to isolated rural areas. The video also reached an entirely new audience when it aired on Community Television, Channel 31 on November 12.

The holiday season is a time to reflect on our achievements in the past year. I would like to thank all PLWHA (NSW) staff, committee and volunteers for the endless hours of work they contribute. I think it is fitting to reflect that without the support and energy of these people much of our work and many of our projects could never be achieved. Enjoy the New Year. **•**



Candlelight Vigil

The Candlelight Vigil attracted about 200 people to Hyde Park in late November including PLWHA (NSW) staff and volunteers. Pictured L-R are staff Glenn Flanagan and Will Klaasen and Management Committee members Paul Auguste Comefer and Norman Last. Photo Rod Warne.

Another Nevirapine Warning

In response to continued reports of severe and life threatening liver toxicities and skin rashes, the manufacturers of nevirapine Boehringer Ingelheim has strengthened the safety information about the drug. In a statement, the company stressed that to reduce the likelihood of adverse reactions, the first 14 days of nevirapine must be limited to one 200mg tablet a day, ie half the standard dose. The anti-inflammatory medication prednisone should not be used to reduce the incidence of rash because trials show it can actually increase the likelihood of rash. Patients experiencing a severe rash, or rash accompanied by fever, blistering, oral lesions, conjunctivitis, swelling, muscle/joint pains or general malaise, must permanently stop the drug. Severe or life-threatening liver toxicity has been reported in the first eight weeks of therapy with nevirapine, but some has occurred later. Doctors and patients should be aware of early warning signs of liver toxicity, which can include fatigue, malaise, anorexia and nausea. Patients should seek medical attention if these occur. Doctors should perform chemistry tests on their patients, including liver function tests, before starting nevirapine therapy and at appropriate intervals during therapy. Nevirapine must be stopped if liver function tests show moderate abnormalities, and should only be resumed when liver function tests return to normal. If the liver abnormalities return again, treatment with the drug must be permanently discontinued.

ddI once-a-day

In the US a new once-a-day formulation of the HIV drug ddI has been approved. The new formulation, known as Videx/EC, consists of just one tablet. The manufacturers of the drug advise that they expect this new formulation to be available in Australia sometime next year. Reuters

CD4 News

Results of a comparison study into the immune activity of the CD4 cells were presented last month at an international AIDS conference in Glasgow. Two groups of HIV-positive people, one group on treatment and the other on none were involved in the study. Dr Michael Lederman told the Fifth International Congress on Drug Therapy in HIV Infection that the CD4 cell responses seen in people who experience immune restoration on HAART appear to be just as good, if not better, than those of untreated people with a similar CD4+ cell count.

Treatment Briefs are supplied by ACON Treatment Officers. For more information contact 02 9206 2013/2036, freecall 1800 816 518, Email treatments@acon.org.au



tell it like it is

Tell it like it is is your opportunity to get a straight answer to questions about health, treatments and side-effects. Send your questions to Tell it like it is, Talkabout, PO Box 831 Darlinghurst 1300.

Dear Doctor

I read with interest your previous comments about HIV and Hepatitis C. I have both infections and would like to know more about what treatment is available.

Double jeopardy

Dear Double Jeopardy

HIV and Hepatitis C used to be treated separately without a good look at how dual infection will affect the health and immune system of a person. Many other questions are not addressed, such as how effective the Hepatitis C treatment might be, when people are on a lot of other drugs for HIV.

Interferon (given as an injection under the skin) was the first drug to be shown to work against Hepatitis C, but as a single drug its effectiveness is unsatisfactory, with only a 10-20% chance of a sustained response in chronic Hepatitis C infection. There are also several different genotypes of the virus, which can respond differently to treatment. Another drug now used with Interferon is Ribavirin (tablets twice a day). Ribavirin has been shown to work against a wide range of RNA and DNA viruses and, when used in combination with Interferon, the benefit is doubled. Patients in Sydney and Melbourne also have the option of a new form of Interferon – a regulated Interferon – which works better in the body than the old form. A research study, called Pegasys, comparing the old treatment with this new form of Interferon is currently underway at Albion Street Centre and at St Vincent's Hospital. This study may provide some answers to the questions above. If you want more information or wish to enrol in the study, contact us at Albion Street Centre or Dr Greg Dore at the National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research.

Dear Doctor

My viral load has been over 10,000 copies/mL for 18 months and my CD4 T cell count is stable at about 300/L. I am well and have no really serious side-effects. I have used almost every HIV drug known since 1990. My doctor wants me to have a resistance test and change to more effective treatment. What should I do?

Confused

Dear Confused

Resistance to HIV drugs is a big problem. Resistance tests are only recently available for HIV patients. At the moment we do not know what the real place of these tests will be – in fact there is a trial looking at this issue in Australia at the moment. Because it is not always simple to predict on your past history what drugs you are resistant to, resistance tests may play a role. They may tell you which drugs to stay on as well as which drugs you may need to change. Your doctor probably feels that you may be able to improve your viral load by changing to new drugs suggested by the resistance test. In this case, I would advise you to have the test. It is also a good idea to talk over the possible results with your doctor before you get the result. In this way they will be easier to understand and not be a surprise.

Answers provided by Virginia Furner and Mark Kelly – both doctors at the Albion Street Clinic and members of PLWH/A (NSW) Treatments Working Group. Decisions about treatments should be made in conjunction with your GP. Virginia and Mark can be contacted on furner@sesahs.nsw.gov.au and kellymark@sesahs.nsw.gov.au

talkshop

with Glenn Flanagan

PLWH/A (NSW) Community Development Project Worker
Glenn Flanagan profiles what's happening in NSW.

Larder still stocked

The Larder still operates on Wednesday and Friday at the Pride Centre, 26 Hutchinson Street, Surry Hills. The Larder has food and basic household items for PLWHA on a low income. To register you will need a letter confirming your HIV status and proof of receipt of a Disability Support Pension.

New at the Positive Living Centre

The PLC has refurbished the computer room with upgraded computers and access to the Internet. Free massage and spiritual healing is available on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Booking for these services is essential.

Wanted: Positive writers

Qstage Digest, an Internet arts and film website and journal, is recruiting HIV positive writers in conjunction with the PLC to write reviews of new films and theatre. Although there is no payment involved, you do get tickets to a show or a film.

The PLWH/A (NSW) Writers Group meets at the PLC. If you are interested in writing and would like to join the group please contact Feona on 9361 6750 or David on 9699 8756 or email Gavin at gavin_au@yahoo.com.

Planet Positive has also been hosting movie nights at the PLC beginning very successfully with *Queer as Folk* in November. If you are interested in any of the activities at the PLC contact David on 9699 8756.

Grants for skill development

The Ratten Fund, administered by the Bobby Goldsmith Foundation, gives small one-off grants to individuals living with HIV/AIDS for projects that develop skills and improve wellbeing. Projects could include such things as computers, work clothes, education and training courses. You must be on a low income and not working full-time. The deadline for applications is February 1. For further information and application forms contact the Bobby Goldsmith Foundation on 9283 8666.

Pozhet 2001 calendars available

New events on next year's calendar at Positive Heterosexuals and Positive Heterosexuals West include therapy clinics, treatments workshops and lifestyle events and a number of joint events in the city. Positive Heterosexuals will hold a series of alternative therapy nights beginning in January with reflexology, demonstrated by qualified practitioner, Greg Millan at the Tree of Hope Drop-In Centre in Surry Hills.

Pozhet West will host treatment and lifestyle workshops in Western Sydney at the Diocesan Centre in Marion Street, Blacktown. The popular Retreats will continue with a weekend away in Shellharbour (near Wollongong) scheduled for March.

For a calendar or further information phone David Barton (Pozhet) on 9515 3095 or Marie Lavis (Pozhet West) on 9671 4100. 

musings from street

Well, what a month of running around like mad chooks! The community gardens picnic, the Open Day at Newtown and Waterloo and the official launch of the Woolloomooloo garden have all been a bloomin' marvellous success and thanks to all of you who helped us celebrate. The highlight for me is Barrie's amazing chamomile tea. A sentiment shared by all those who jumped at the chance of picking their own chamomile from the Newtown garden to take home.

The Christmas period is going to be a quieter time for Street Jungle organisers, so it offers the perfect opportunity to get involved. If you are interested in gardening call Barrie on (02) 9206 2000, and meet up with him at one of the gardens.

Upcoming Events

There will be a compost workshop at the Newtown garden on December 14 at 6pm. The workshop is open to all, so if you live in the area and would like to compost at the garden, or if you just want to know more about composting in general, give Barrie a call.

In the garden with Gladys

As far as Gladys is concerned, this is the time of year to do as little as possible because there are just too many other things happening to concentrate on gardening. A couple of quick tips: firstly, make sure you keep up your successive plantings - when life calms down there will still be lots of food in the garden. Slash those unwanted weeds but leave them where they lay as mulch (this way you won't have to do as much watering) or you can soak them in a bucket of water for a couple of days to make a fabby liquid fertiliser. Just dilute it until it looks like weak tea and water away - your vegies will just love you for it.

Well a very cheery Christmas and New Year to all you petit cherubs. Until next *Talkabout*, glorious gardening.

For information about getting involved with Street Jungle gardens call Barrie on Thursdays at (02) 9206 2000.



Lifestyles Expo

Service providers like ACON Peer Education Officer, Graham Norton (pictured right) gathered to show their wares at the Western Sydney Healthy Lifestyles Expo in late November. The day was hosted by the lovely Vanessa Wagner (pictured left). Photo Glenn Flanagan

flourishing with PLWH/A (NSW)

Douglas Barry reflects on four years of involvement with PLWH/A (NSW)

It dawned on me at the recent PLWH/A (NSW) Inc. Annual General Meeting that I am an example of what PLWH/A (NSW) Inc. is all about. I've reached a stage in my personal journey with HIV, when I can look back and say, "Yes, the association has been good for me".

The last three words are important – "good for me" rather than "good to me". The distinction is important. Although there's no doubt I've received material benefits in the past four years, such as use of an email facility and attendance at local conferences, what I'm talking about is the simple fact of involvement. Let me explain.

In 1996 the arrival of combination therapies meant I knew I would be around for a while – I didn't have to wait for the HIV time bomb to go off. Instead of rushing back to work I waited to find out if the therapies would work. Meanwhile, I wanted a space where I could explore my capacities and find something valuable to do with the rest of my life. PLWH/A (NSW) Inc. was that space.

I was interested in writing about ideas and I nervously sent a piece to *Talkabout*. It was tremendously satisfying when my first piece was printed in 1997.

My legal background ensured I was roped in to the Legal Working Group. I had no idea what I was supposed to do, or why. I knew nothing about community advocacy and the way HIV and the health system worked, so I asked a lot of questions and some of them were probably pretty silly. There was always someone in the office who was patient with me and took the trouble to put me right.

After a while I joined the Management Committee. Having never worked with a team and with no idea of what it was all about I was right out of my

depth. The best way, it seemed, was to put my ideas in writing and talk about them at the meetings. Nobody laughed when I did and as I became more confident, I took a stand on some issues; usually I lost, but I was contributing.

I've volunteered since early 1993. But in 2001, I want to be back in the paid workforce ...
Can I, after seven years, convince employers that I have something to offer?
I reckon I can.

Joining the Publications Working Group at a time when *Talkabout* and *Contacts* were seriously revamped was another valuable experience. However small a role I played in that, it felt good to be involved.

I represent the interests of positive people on a number of community and government bodies. Eventually I considered myself as some sort of 'committee junkie' – all those minutes of

meetings to read, proposals to digest, meetings to attend. What is clear is that wherever I go the voice of people living with HIV and AIDS is respected.

I've volunteered since early 1993. But in 2001 I want to be back in the paid workforce. I'm a stranger to the routines and motivations of daily involvement in the work place. Self-doubts about my ability to front up to and win over those selection panels are not far away. Can I, after seven years, convince employers that I have something to offer? I reckon I can.

I say that because my involvement with PLWH/A (NSW) gives me confidence and self-respect. It gave me the confidence, and much support, to do a postgraduate degree to enhance my qualifications.

The association is good for me, because I choose for myself what and how much I want to do.

If this sounds like a recruiting drive, you are partly right. PLWH/A (NSW) has developed Positive Decisions – a program of training and on-the-job placement for positive people. We hope the program will assist PLWHA to assess whether they can go back to work and what sort of work they want to do. The scheme will formalise the sort of experience I have had and in a safe and supportive environment. Take it from me – PLWH/A (NSW) is a good place to do it. ●

Douglas Barry is a member of the PLWH/A (NSW) Management Committee and Legal Working Group.

For more information about the Positive Decisions project call Glenn on 9361 6011

art out of the house

David Jobling reviews an exhibition of work for AIDS Awareness Week

Thirty-two works of art in one room created by sixteen artists – all but one, HIV positive – including Paul Anderson (1945 – 1999) and Margaret Jones (1936 – 2000). The work is fresh, personal, intimate, emerging and raw. Over all Out Of The House reflects simply a depth of humanity. The binding between the works is that they are created by one of our own PLWHA tribes.

Mixed media works by Leslie Clarke, Peter McGill, Ross Kelly and Terry Farrell are excellent – visually complex and inventive. I particularly admired the 'Wattle Firecracker'. There was also a series of wonderful Lino Prints on display, some of which were zen indeed, such as Mike O'Keefe's 'Teddy Bear' and 'Lady Muck' by Mark Hodge. 'Summertime 3000' by JBC insinuated both joy and despair in a complex simplicity. A series of Acrylics on paper 'Nude 1', 'Nude 2' and 'Nude 3' by Blue Flamingo showed strong brush work, intense colour contrasts and pure clear lines. There was a single piece in Crayon, 'Feeling Dark' by Jorge Gascon.

Charcoal drawings outnumbered the rest. Charcoal is an all time winner as a medium and often the first mediums an artist explores. It is a noble, ancient material with massive potential to induce great sensitivity in the artist due to its frustrating way of turning to ashes in your hand. This work is where the undeveloped potential of the artists involved stood out for me. Ross Kelly's work 'Changing of President' shows more a blueprint of what may come if Kelly moves towards screen print or water colour. Rodney Hutton, Craig Green, PR and the rest could all develop the fine gestures of expression they are revealing.



Peter Rutkin's Untitled linocut – one of 32 pieces exhibited in Out of the House

Out of the House is certainly not the Archibald (there were no prizes) but it's just as important because as we commemorate AIDS Awareness Week 2000 it provides a space for artistic expression, and a space for the viewer to admire and reflect.

Each artist has contributed something of their spirit and longings with cherishable objects. Out of the House is certainly not the Archibald (there were no prizes) but it's just as important because as we commemorate AIDS Awareness Week

2000 it provides a space for artistic expression, and a space for the viewer to admire and reflect. A percentage of money raised from sales of the work will be donated to PRERANA, The Nepal-Australia AIDS Project.

Congratulations to the community HIV/AIDS Team at Central Sydney Area Health Service who supported this initiative. The name of the exhibition says it all in so many ways, Out of the House. That's certainly where you need to be. ☺

Out of the House showed at the Chrissie Cotter Gallery, Camperdown during World AIDS week. The Art Project will run again in 2001 at the Sanctuary Holistic Centre. For details contact Lisa at Redfern Community Health Centre 9690 1222.

David Jobling is Client Liaison Officer at the Positive Living Centre and editor of the arts website Qstage Digest <http://www1.loom.net.au/home/dpj> Contact David at djp@loom.net.au

housing wonderland

If you receive SAS and want to return to work, plan carefully, writes **Mark Tietjen**

The NSW State Government introduced the Special Rental Subsidy (now known as the Special Assistance Subsidy [SAS]) in September 1993. Before then it was rare to encounter clients who lived alone in self-contained accommodation such as a flat or apartment. Such a style of living was simply not affordable for most single people. Some lived in shared accommodation and many of those who chose to live alone lived in boarding houses or private hotels with minimal kitchen facilities and usually shared bathrooms.

Those who were allocated Department of Housing accommodation often could not believe their good fortune - many were allocated a standard of accommodation normally beyond their means, even when they had received a wage. Back then the wait time for priority housing was well over a year.

Caught in housing wonderland

The SAS means clients can choose to live alone in a self-contained unit, many with the added benefit of a second bedroom. This is fantastic, but is it realistic or affordable for anyone, let alone our client group? Most ordinary wage earners can not afford to live alone.

We have recently seen a number of people whose circumstances have changed, in particular their health has improved and they have gone back to work. If you live alone and your gross income exceeds \$395 per week you are no longer eligible for any assistance from the Department of Housing or in most cases, any other form of charitable assistance. This means that you will have to pay all rent and living costs from your income. The obvious thing to do is to move to cheaper accommodation such as shared accommodation that may not be as desirable or appropriate.

Catch-22

There are other complications. Under the SAS the Department of Housing covers the rental bond of many PLWHA clients, but if they move out the bond returns to Housing. So, not only do clients who lose the SAS find they are paying a level of rental they cannot afford, they will also have to find a new bond plus moving costs if they decide to move to cheaper accommodation.

The SAS means clients can choose to live alone in a self-contained unit, many with the added benefit of a second bedroom. This is fantastic, but is it realistic or affordable for anyone, let alone our client group?

Most ordinary wage earners can not afford to live alone.

We see people who are angry because they have lost their rental subsidy and find themselves unexpectedly and suddenly thrown into the harsh world. They see this as unfair because in trying to rebuild their lives without relying on government and charitable support they find themselves more financially disadvantaged than when they received the pension.

This is a difficult situation to find yourself in. Many people find the stress overwhelming. Their health then starts to fail and/or they are unable to focus on the new job. If going back to work then fails, this can be detrimental to their health and make them less motivated to try again in the future.

Plan your next move

Before returning to the workforce consider a few hard questions. How much will you earn? Will you be able to afford your current housing? Think about writing a list of the pros and cons of returning to full time work and remember to consider that when and if it happens, you'll be expected to pay for everything yourself.

If you decide to return to work consider moving to accommodation you can afford before you seek work and before you relinquish your subsidies and benefits. This will allow you time to adjust to a changed living situation before you contemplate the stress of settling into a new job. Plan for any changes and be prepared. Volunteering on a regular basis can help you adjust to the demands of working without effect on your financial situation. Consider part time work to get used to the idea and ease back into the workforce. Depending on your income, you may then be able to retain some benefits until you feel you are ready to manage everything yourself.

Even though it can be difficult, especially financially, there are many positive benefits of being in the workforce. Returning to work can help you feel productive and lift your self-esteem. Often the benefits of increased contact with people and a regular routine can outweigh any difficulties encountered in returning to work. ☐

Mark Tietjen is the Client Services Manager at the Bobby Goldsmith Foundation (BGF). BGF offers a Financial Counselling service and a Positive Employment Support service. The Reconstruction Project, based at BGF, can also help people considering a return to work. Phone 02 9283 8666.

opinion howard's way

Xmas may not bring good cheer for HIV positive people on the DSP, writes **David Menadue**

In the media in recent times Prime Minister John Howard has insisted that the Federal Government will respond to the McClure Report on welfare reform before Christmas. This is despite media rumblings that a number of Cabinet members would like to delay that announcement until next year's election campaign is underway.

If welfare reform becomes a federal election issue we may see a divisive debate in the community. The National Association of People with HIV/AIDS (NAPWA) is concerned that welfare recipients will become scapegoats as politicians attempt to win over the ultra conservative (aka One Nation) voters. The concept of mutual obligation has gained political currency. According to the polls, Work for the Dole programs for young unemployed have some support from voters. We may now see the concept expanded to include single parents and people with disabilities. Given the close margins likely in the forthcoming election many more desperate politicians may willingly include in their election rhetoric the old line about welfare bludgers trying to rot the system.

Disability organisations are divided over whether people on the Disability Support Pension (DSP) should perform some sort of mutual obligation activity in return for payments. When the McClure Committee first raised the question there was an outcry from consumer organisations. They argued that even if this activity took the form of voluntary work rather than paid employment, there were many who would not be physically or mentally able to fulfil this commitment. NAPWA believes it is difficult to require some PLWHA to commit to regular activity requirements given the unpredictable nature of their health and treatment side effects. We also oppose compulsory mutual obligation activities – as if DSP recipients were somehow placed on the pension through some kind of fraudulent medical judgement!

The McClure Committee addressed these concerns in their final report and recommended against compulsion to engage in mutual obligation activities if an individual does not have the capacity.

Disability organisations recognise the opportunities that might arise from reform. The *HIV Futures II* report found that 52.9% of PLWHA surveyed received a government benefit or pension as their primary source of income. NAPWA supports the report's recommendation for a participation allowance – an allowance plus increased one-on-one assistance to help people with a disability who wish to return to work overcome current obstacles. The report suggested subsidising the DSP for the costs associated with disability. NAPWA strongly supports this idea based on the high costs of antiviral and other HIV treatment.

Breaking Centrelink into a series of private providers will not only risk the loss of consistent standards and policies in welfare delivery but may lead to greater discrimination.

The *McClure Report* is a recommendation to government. The suggestion for individualised service delivery – rather like the old Commonwealth Employment Service model of individual case management – is hugely expensive and unlikely to gain government support. There is disturbing talk in the media that we may see the privatisation of Centrelink. For all its faults, Centrelink has improved its service to PLWHA after training staff in PLWHA issues. Breaking Centrelink into a series of private

providers will not only risk the loss of consistent standards and policies in welfare delivery but may lead to greater discrimination. Several of the larger Job Network members are Church-run agencies. If the Federal Government follows the privatised road we may see a repeat of the recent discrimination case, in which a gay man was denied assistance by a Catholic Church employment provider because homosexuality is against Church teaching.

At a recent Welfare Reform conference in Melbourne, Professor Bob Gregory, an Australian National University economist, said that despite rhetoric about welfare reform bringing greater cohesion and narrowing the divide between rich and poor, the Howard Government intends to save dollars. The number of people on the DSP has grown enormously since earlier reforms of the unemployment system with some suggestion that Centrelink has placed out of work 50 year-olds on the DSP to take them off unemployment records. The Federal Government considers this level of welfare payment unsustainable given the imminent arrival of Baby Boomers into the age pension category.

However, there can be no suggestion that this Government has depleted economic resources. In fact, as the proceeds of the GST start to pour into Canberra the surplus is greater than projected. If Scrooge McHoward and his Dickensian Cabinet open the Federal coffers and increase resources for people on welfare to explore life options – without the heavy hand of bureaucracy breathing down our necks – then perhaps we might have something positive to celebrate this festive season. However, if people on a DSP are used as political pawns in the coming federal election many of us it will not enjoy a happy or prosperous New Year. ●

David Menadue is the Care and Support Spokesperson for NAPWA.

world AIDS day awards



Pictured (left to right) The Block Harm Reduction and Outreach Service Team; Pat Kennedy; Marie Fisher; Barry Fitzgerald; Cameron Sharp

The World AIDS Day Project aims to focus the world's attention on the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The project also acknowledges the hard work and achievements of the thousands of people involved in both the prevention of HIV/AIDS and the care and support of positive people.

This year people and organisations across New South Wales celebrated AIDS Awareness Week with over two hundred events including a Candlelight Memorial, the sale of Red Ribbons, Quilt Displays, Educational Talks, Street Stalls, Football Tournaments, Film Screenings and much more.

At the 6th World AIDS Day Awards, which mark the close of the week's activities, the World AIDS Day Committee presented 24 awards to volunteers (and one organisation) in three categories: Outstanding Contribution; Posthumous; and Partnership.

Talkabout congratulates the winners.

The Block

Harm Reduction and Outreach Service of the Resource and Education Program for Injecting Drug Users (REPIDU)

Originally the Newtown Needle Exchange, REPIDU has developed as a cooperative effort between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff who provide blood born disease prevention strategies to Indigenous people in and around the Block. In the 1960s and 1970s many Indigenous and new migrant families lived

and squatted in Redfern, an inner-city suburb of Sydney. The area opposite the Railway Station that became known as the Block was the first land to be handed back to Indigenous Australians in 1973. The Block is the backbone of the Aboriginal Housing Co-op and is both a residential site for Indigenous people and a regular stopover for travellers. The Block offers an excellent opportunity for a service like REPIDU to get information about safe needle use and blood borne viruses into the Indigenous and wider communities. The team was awarded an Outstanding Achievement award for their contribution to culturally appropriate and technically sound HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis and other communicable disease prevention strategies. The committee also applauded the outreach service for excellent teamwork, effective resource sharing and partnership building.

Pat Kennedy

Pat is a committed volunteer and an advocate for the support and care of people living with HIV/AIDS in Western Sydney. Since 1986 she has volunteered many thousands of hours.

Pat is well known for her work at the Western Suburbs Haven, a community service that offers lunches and practical assistance. Pat is also involved in bereavement and emotional support, visits to partners, carers, relatives and friends. Pat is an energetic fundraiser and has helped to develop the World AIDS Day and other community activities in the West.

Marie Fisher

Marie's volunteer work is well-known in the inner city. Marie spends an enormous number of hours each year as a volunteer for the Luncheon Club, ACON and the AIDS Trust.

One of the reasons Marie is so highly regarded is her reliability; Marie never takes on a task without following it through. She has given tirelessly to many organisations and individuals in this community and shines out as an outstanding volunteer.

Barry Fitzgerald

Barry is a PLWHA activist, an extraordinary nurse, and a champion for his community. His activism goes back to the pre-ACON days of the AIDS Action Committee.

Since then he has helped his friends in the transgender community organise and given his support to the development of the Gender Centre. He also worked on the old Badlands Project that became the Foley House Committee. In the late 1980s and early 1990s at ACON he coordinated liaison with gay venues and developed education campaigns to target the Sydney Gay Community. He worked closely with sauna and sex on premises venue owners to encourage safe sex and was instrumental in getting sex venues and gay bars to display HIV/AIDS education campaigns and information pamphlets.

Cameron Sharp

A dynamic and generous man of action who works to initiate and maintain collaborative relationships between service providers and individuals around HIV/AIDS issues in the Illawarra community.



Helen and Neville Bowers; Rita Delfino (right); Bobby Babbin and Eva Plevac

Cameron's commitment spans many years and organisations including Coordinator of Our Pathways Drop-in Centre, Coordinator and a volunteer at the Illawarra Gay and Lesbian telephone referral service and a presenter of Pink Nation the Queer hour, on 2VOX FM Wollongong. Cameron has also been a member of the Wollongong Gay and Lesbian Solidarity Choir, and a volunteer for Ankali, CSN Sydney and Wollongong.

Other Outstanding Achievement awards went to

Helen And Neville Bowers

Foundation members of the Central West Community HIV/AIDS Task force and PFLAG Bathurst.

Partnership awards

Rita Delfino

Rita has been caring for people living with the HIV/AIDS since her daughter was diagnosed HIV positive in 1988. She has worked tirelessly to reduce the impact of the virus on both family members and in the wider community.

Bobby Babbin

Bobby is a driving force on Ankali's marketing committee. He is committed to doubling the number of Ankali volunteers and developed the innovative Double the Rainbow campaign. Bobby has also been a volunteer Ankali carer for two people over the last few years.

Eva Plevac

Eva has worked with PLWHA in the Western Suburbs of Sydney for six years. She is an Ankali volunteer and volunteer for the Haven. Eva is known for her smile, a hearty laugh and her ability to listen to and empathise.

Rachanepon Chantra-Argg

In the years Rachanepon has worked in the Multicultural HIV/AIDS Service, she has shown devotion, compassion and strong commitment to her work supporting Thai PLWHA. She has been instrumental in opening doors into the Thai community.

Jenny Jagger

Jenny has been a volunteer with Ankali Project since early 1984. She is an excellent carer and friend and her contribution has made an untold difference to her client.

Terry Cooper

Terry has been trained volunteer with the Positive Support Network for three years. Terry's work as a carer means supporting clients physically and emotionally including cleaning, cooking, personal care and filling dosette boxes.

Grant Galvin

Grant Galvin is Secretary on the BGF Board. Grant is also a solicitor and provides voluntary legal advice to a number of community based organisations. Since 1997 Grant has helped guide BGF through considerable change and growth.

Posthumous roll of honour

Bill Phillips

Bill died in April 2000 at the peak of his energetic, passionate and constructive commitment as a board member of ACON. He represented PLWHA (NSW) on the board and positive people with his energy and engagement.

Bill lived a varied and complex life. He had been an actor, a journalist, a writer and a theologian. He studied acting at NIDA, theology at Flinders and Oxford Universities, and wrote for *Campaign*, the *Sydney Star Observer* and *Talkabout*. Bill was a member of the PIWTA (NSW) management committee, Advocacy Working Group, and Publications Working Group.

Irwin Diefenthaler

Irwin arrived in Australia with his partner George from the United States almost 26 years ago. He was a founding member of Metropolitan Community Church Sydney and involved with church programs for PLWHA in the early years of the epidemic. In particular he worked in the Caring and Sharing program that became the Community Support Network.

He was a founding member of the Matraya Day Centre and manager of the Day Care Centre for PLWHA in Bourke Street, Surry Hills. He helped establish the Albion Street Clinic, and AIDS Hotline and was a former committee member of BGF.

After retirement Irwin put his energy into the MCC Welfare Services. Only two days before his death Irwin was busy at work. We will remember Irwin as a fun-loving generous person committed to PLWHA and his church.

world AIDS day (continued)



Pictured (left to right) Rachanepon Chantra-Argg; Jenny Jagger; Terry Cooper; Grant Galvin; Alan Scard; John Lennon and Lee Simpson

Partnership Awards continued from page 11 >

Alan Scard

Alan is a committee member of CSN Coffs Harbour and Chapps Outback, two groups that provide essential and practical care and support to PLWHA in Coffs Harbour area. Alan helped establish and continues to coordinate a voluntary meals service for PLWHA. He also offers a much-needed transport service in and around the Coffs Harbour region.

Frank Velossi and Trevor Hopper

Frank and Trevor were responsible for establishing initial policy and getting Our Pathways Drop in Centre, started and running in the Illawarra. They also established a flourishing vegie garden for OPI and PLWHA.

John Lennon

John is a coordinator for the PLWHA support group 'Chaps Outback' in Coffs Harbour. He is a client representative and advocate at meetings within the area health service and with ACON and CSN.

Lee Simpson

Lee has been with Ankali since August, 1994. Lee is a member of a group, a group leader and a "friend" to several

clients. Her commitment and loyalty to Ankali has been exemplary.

Rosemary Maher

Rosi is a Camp Goodtime volunteer and a key member of the Goodtimers who organise and run the camp for positive children and their families. Her contribution to children and families living with HIV/AIDS over the last ten years is invaluable.

Therese Patterson

Therese has been a volunteer carer for five years. Therese is always willing to roll up her sleeves and do whatever is required to maintain or improve the quality of life for people living with HIV/AIDS.

Kim Heap

Kim has worked tirelessly as a volunteer facilitator for ACON CSN in the Mid North Coast. She coordinates carer teams, provides one-to-one support to other carers and raises funds for both PLWHA and the Gay and Lesbian communities. Kim developed the HIV/AIDS service directory for the Mid North Coast area and much more.

Val Carter

Five years ago, Val set up a stall in the main street of Tumut selling red ribbons, handing out HIV/AIDS information flyers

and condoms raising funds for different HIV/AIDS charities. She is still raising much needed funds today with the same stall.

Rob Humphrey

Rob has been a volunteer with the Ankali project since February 1991. He has supported six PLWHA over difficult times. Rob has also been a co-leader of the Parramatta Emotional Support Group for Ankali Volunteers. Without volunteers like Rob, the Ankali project could not operate and survive.

Sharon Junck

Sharon has been involved in the Albury HIV Carer's Support Group for a number of years. In her voluntary capacity she has cared for several people, offering social, emotional and practical support. Sharon coordinates the Red Ribbon initiative in Albury.

Allan Wood

Allan is the chairperson of CSN Coffs Harbour Branch and instrumental in coordinating carer teams, WAD and candlelight memorial activities. He is an advocate for PLWHA rights and services. Allan assists with local fundraising projects and co-facilitates a meal service for PLWHA in the region. ☺

Pictured (left to right) Rosemary Maher; Therese Patterson; Kim Heap; Val Carter (right); Rob Humphrey and Allan Wood



thank you

any women from my country?

Julie Howell and Maria Petrohilos introduce a support group for HIV positive Asian women

Many positive women often feel alone – particularly when they are first diagnosed. Often HIV positive women don't know other positive women. It may be hard to find support because they may not want to burden or pressure family members. They may not know which services to use or how to take the first step. Sometimes services may be a long way from home for women who live, for example, in Western Sydney. This can add to the stress and isolation women experience.

Although existing services and support networks welcome PLWHA of all backgrounds, there are particular barriers for women and this is emphasised when there is cultural difference.

Sue, a young Thai woman, often talks to her social worker about feeling lonely. "I cannot tell my family in Thailand because they would worry for me. There is nothing they can do for me. I do not want to burden them. I do not want others to reject them. I cannot tell my Thai friends in Sydney because I worry they will gossip about me and then my family might find out".

When Kim, a Vietnamese woman, tells her story she is sad. "My parents are old. In my culture – if I am a good daughter – it is my job to take care of them and provide for them financially and physically. I have a duty to repay them. I have family obligations that I can not meet because of the HIV."

Women from different cultural backgrounds may live in Australia for many years and have different levels of written and spoken English. Lily, a Cambodian woman, became depressed twelve months after starting treatment, when she understood that she would be on HIV treatments for life. When her doctor

had discussed her treatment with her she had nodded – indicating to the doctor that she had understood but in fact she was only being polite. All the written information the doctor could give her was written in English and Lily would not use an interpreter because she was worried that the interpreter might be someone she knew. Confidentiality was explained to her but the concept was not meaningful because of her experience in her country of origin.

A common question asked of workers at the Multicultural HIV/AIDS Service is "Do you know any other women like me?" or "Any woman from my country?"

Sue, Kim and Lily are three of many Australian women of Asian background who share similar experiences around isolation either because of language or cultural barriers. This year, several HIV/AIDS agencies have facilitated a peer support group in Western Sydney to address the unique needs of Positive Asian Women.

The group aims to provide the women with a safe place to meet other positive women and discuss issues related to living with HIV/AIDS as migrant women who have the experience and trauma of leaving their homeland. Another aim is to provide information in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner on a range of health and lifestyle issues.

The challenge for the working party is to bring the women together. Disclosure continues to be the overriding concern of women and a major barrier to developing the support group. Women regularly ask,

"do you know any other women like me?" but when they are offered peer support the question becomes: "I'm worried it might be a woman I know".

Workers of the Multicultural HIV/AIDS Service work with case managers and individually with women. Much work is done with the women individually before the group, to reduce their anxiety and answer all their questions about safety, confidentiality and purpose of the group.

We checked the program to make sure it was culturally appropriate and relevant. HIV was only one aspect of the women's lives and the group aimed to focus on overall life experience. The women shared their experiences as refugees or immigrants, family and community with the group. Information was translated into Asian languages and promoted in those languages. The group runs bilingually and the women have their co-worker with them during the meetings.

The women all reported a sense of relief through coming together. For most it was the first time they could tell their story to someone other than a health care worker. Some experiences are common and some are unique to each woman, but telling of their experience and a sense of being listened to was of great benefit to all the women. They feel stronger because they know they are not alone. They felt more in control of their lives and better able to understand what it means to live with HIV as migrant or refugee women in Australia. ☺

The Positive Asian Women's Support Group is a project of the Multicultural HIV/AIDS Service in partnership with Positive Heterosexuals, Parramatta Sexual Health Clinic, Bigge Park Clinic, the HIV Services Unit in SWSAHS. Contact the Multicultural HIV/AIDS Service for more information on the Positive Asian Women's Support Group and other services for people from culturally diverse backgrounds. Co-workers are available (in 17 languages). 02 9515 3098 clerical@hiv.rpa.cs.nsw.gov.au

atroduction

Over 200 people gathered in the small coastal town of Ballina last month to attend the 2000 HIV Rural Forum. The three-day event featured a range of workshops about issues affecting the daily lives of people living with HIV/AIDS outside major metropolitan centres. On behalf of PLWH/A (NSW) Talkabout congratulates everyone who attended and especially Paul Phillips, his team of organisers and the Forum Committee. As you'll read in the following pages, the Forum presented opportunities to canvass new and ongoing issues and initiated some rural PLWHA to the range of services on offer in New South Wales.

rural forum 2000 round-up

HIV positive people in rural areas want new partnerships that are meaningful, writes **Robert Rogers**

The Rural Conference in Albury two years ago was immensely valuable, fun, and informative so I was pleased to have a more hands-on role in planning this year's Rural Forum in Ballina. I was curious to see if the issues faced by rural people living with HIV/AIDS had changed, and interested in seeing how people were coping two years down the track.

On the road

A couple of months before the forum I spent a week on the road with three other members of the PLWH/A committee visiting rural positive people on the North Coast and in the New England area. Our purpose was to discover what issues they wanted on the program at the coming forum. The usual things came up such as treatments, sex and disclosure, Centrelink, employment, financial management and assistance, confidentiality, and discrimination. People also wanted to be more involved – especially since the AIDS Council had shifted its service direction. I got the sense from the people I met that they want to make new partnerships that are substantial and meaningful. With this in mind we constructed a series of workshops and presentations called Building Community. These sessions, which were for PLWHA only, explored local networks, state issues, and national issues. Brent Allen, ACON's Director of Regional Services facilitated.

When in Rome

The proposal to set up an email rural network to ensure the PLWH/A (NSW) committee hears the voices of positive people in rural areas proved very popular. The Rural Working Group, convened by Michael Riches hopes to establish this network quickly.

Many found it difficult to get the range of services they need because of distance and travel, but necessity being the mother of invention they were making it all work somehow or other.

Working the rural net

Ballina is a beautiful coastal holiday town in northern NSW. At this time of year, before the holiday season, it is quiet and conservative. The locals must have wondered what was going on when two hundred PLWHA and HIV activists and workers converged on the RSL club but on the whole the locals treated us with respect. Staff at the RSL club are professional, courteous, and helpful. I didn't have any problems with the usual RSL dress code but one person I saw had a hard time

getting in wearing nothing but his leather pants and vest. I figure that we had agreed to their dress code when we booked the venue and if we want respect the least we can do is show a little respect back.

Ballina is close to the Queensland border so we had the diverse experiences of people from Queensland and all over NSW. As well as the serious business of debate and discussion there were many opportunities to socialise. A positive dinner to kick off the forum, a breakfast mid-way, Vanessa and Nurse Nancy's Wheel of Misfortune, and the Tropical Fruits party as a finale were popular.

All in all I think the Rural Forum was a great success. We asked participants to write suggestions about what they wanted from the forum at the beginning and revisited these at the end. Thankfully no one was disappointed. I spoke to many people I had previously met in Albury and others that I met for the first time in Ballina. There were people in various states of health and many found it difficult to get the range of services they need because of distance and travel, but necessity being the mother of invention they were making it all work somehow or other. Just listening to people talk about these difficulties and the various ways they had found to solve them lifted my spirits and reminded me that where there is a will there is a way. ☺

Robert Rogers is a member of the PLWH/A (NSW) Management Committee, Rural Working Group and Talkabout Editorial Committee.

the new, improved rural forum

Building on what's there is the way to go in rural areas, writes **Stephen Delaney**

I live on the Mid-North Coast. This was my second of rural get-together. A lot has changed both on a personal level and in the rural PLWHA community since the first Rural HIV Conference in Albury two years ago. I went to the forum seeking the latest news.

The 500km drive north to Ballina with my partner was not the best of trips. The weather was terrible with driving rain most of the way. We emerged weary, irritable and hungry from a harrowing journey. Gathering ourselves, we headed off to the informal get together and dinner for positive people. It was great to catch up with so many friends from up and down the coast. However, the meal was a disaster. Due to some glitch in the kitchen it took two hours to serve and many people left to find sustenance elsewhere. I never did meet anyone who stayed for dessert. A bad end to an awful day was not a good start to the forum. It could only get better, and it did – much better.

We were fired up for the first session on treatments the next morning. There was much negativity about side effects but I came away feeling it wasn't all bad news. Many PLWHA are doing well on therapy and for all its shortcomings, antiviral medication keeps many of us alive.

Building community

Building community was a dominant theme of the forum and two initiatives particularly impressed me. CHAPS Outback (Coffs Harbour) and the Clarence Valley PLWHA Support Group (Yamba) are fine models of small, self-funded community networks that others could adapt. Such is the pull of CHAPS that people have driven 300km just to attend one of their lunches!

The Internet is a useful tool for building a community. PLWHA (NSW)

hopes to establish an email network and possibly a website for rural PLWHA in the coming year. It will be a platform for social interaction and provide information. A drawback is that not so many people in rural areas can get onto the internet either because of the cost of computers or experience with the technology.

CHAPS Outback (Coffs Harbour) and the Clarence Valley PLWHA Support Group (Yamba) are fine models of small, self-funded community networks that others could adapt.

Peter Canavan coordinated a workshop about NAPWA's role in building community, outlining its place and function as a national advocacy body for HIV positive people. About 7,000 PLWHA live in New South Wales. Of these about thirty percent (approximately 2000) live outside Sydney mainly in regional centres such as the Central Coast, Newcastle and Wollongong. Even fewer PLWHA live outside regional centres. Being so few it is important that people in rural areas speak loudly to be heard. NAPWA and PLWHA (NSW) are two avenues through which we can do this.

It's not difficult to see that isolation is a key issue for rural PLWHA. There are two sides to this coin. It's quite possible for a positive person not to know anyone else who's positive. On the other hand, some people move to the bush in search of isolation.

Major improvements

My favourite workshop was Writing your Life Story, facilitated by Glenn Flanagan of PLWHA (NSW). I haven't been to anything like this before and it was a great, if scary, experience to be able to put some of my innermost thoughts down on paper.

It's inevitable that I should make comparisons with the Albury meeting but I think the Ballina Forum was an improvement. Perhaps I had a better idea of what to expect. I had left Albury in 1998 feeling that city people had dominated the conference without a good grasp of rural issues. This wasn't the case in Ballina. The main improvement was the choice of a workshop format rather than the lecture style used at Albury. More people were able to contribute as a result. Finally, a lot has happened in the last two years and the sense of community among rural HIV positive people has benefited.

My thanks to the organisers for their efforts in staging this meeting and making it possible for me to attend. Well done. Would I go to another one? Definitely. 

Stephen Delaney is a retired scientist who spends some of his time writing. He is a community representative for NAPWA and other agencies.

a change of scenery

David and Glen drove north from their rainforest home to attend the HIV Rural Forum.

Scaly-breasted and Rainbow Lorikeets festoon the bottlebrush outside my office window and Middle Brother Mountain glowers across the little valley where my partner Glen and I live on the Mid North Coast of New South Wales.

I had been with the New Orleans AIDS Task Force for five years when I met Glen, an Aussie boy wandering down Bourbon Street. I had grime and sadness from the City That Care Forgot, emotional exhaustion from the crisis years and was more than ready for a sea change.

Our local GP refers us to services in Port Macquarie. He is a gentle and cultured man who has adopted HIV as a hobby. He attends conferences, keeps up on his literature, and eagerly awaits news from visiting HIV specialists. Australians rarely realise how integral the threads of honour and character are in Australian professions – most GPs in the United States would hardly bother to read up or go outside their billable service requirements, harried as they are by insurance company guidelines.

We feel lucky to live here with a responsive and well-organised area health service. There is a HIV/Sexual Health clinic each month with lashings of support staff, including mental health and referral services. Our phlebotomy goes to Newcastle as a rule, and we often find ourselves carrying our blood in a little Esky so it can make the airplane south in time. We wave goodbye to our bloods, with hopes of happy loads and lively counts.

On the drive north to the HIV Rural Forum in Ballina the beautiful coastal rainforest yielded to floodplains and sugar cane, banksias and tea trees. Ballina is an easy four hours drive on the Pacific Highway with good accommodation options and fantastic forum facilities. Both staff and food at the RSL were better than expected.

We attended morning and afternoon sessions on most days, and were frankly rather intrigued with many of the subjects. The most interesting were centred on services that we can't get here, such as HIV-related legal advice. Since our circle of rural PLWHA is small (we discuss HIV-related matters with perhaps half dozen people), it was illuminating to understand commonalities and other issues experienced by other rural PLWHA.

We often find ourselves carrying our blood in a little Esky so it can make the airplane south in time. We wave goodbye to our bloods, with hopes of happy loads and lively counts.

Over the course of the conference we came to know several people better, and certainly gained a better understanding of what it was like to be a person living with acronyms. Our main exposure to agencies here is to ACON, and then PLWHA (NSW). It was interesting to see their intertwining functions in conjunction with NAPWA, as well as QPP and other state agencies.

It was thoroughly refreshing to talk with the intelligent, gentle, and humorous staff of the various agencies and service providers; people like this are not common at our little General Store. Some had exceptional depths of knowledge in HIV medical subjects, and others excelled in

counselling skills. We even found out that the cheery guy from PLWHA (NSW) behind the information display table was just short of his PhD!

We do not suffer the bias and bigotry that some PLWHA talked about, and we are all the more grateful for our luck after hearing some of the stories. We are not particularly guarded, and find our neighbours supportive. Our direct neighbours know that we have HIV, and since they are over 70 years old, our across-the-fence chat centres on how many pills we are all taking.

Curiously, the enormous amounts of information exchanged one-on-one outside the scheduled sessions could be quite dangerous. People in the hallways and lobbies, bubbling with animated expression, would slam into support pillars, or miss the first step on the escalator. The lunchrooms saw a confluence of conversation and cheese sandwiches so close that the risk of aspiration was great.

We learned much from the HIV Rural forum, and have taken home a slightly broader knowledge of PLWHA issues, and a much better understanding of how we can use services in our community. With our computer and the PLWHA (NSW) website (plwha.org.au), we can have legal and other HIV/AIDS organisations online – even chat with Vanessa Wagner at juice.net!

We do look forward to our next HIV Rural Forum! ☺

David and Glen run a small web hosting and design firm on the Mid North Coast, and are developing a website for rural PLWHA in conjunction with the Rural Working Group of PLWHA, Inc.

fact or friction?

John Douglas on what was hot and what was not at the Rural Forum

Two points to note. One: this was a forum, not a conference. A conference is where you have a series of talks and talkers. Afterwards everyone complains about what was said and who said it. At a forum, the seminars are open discussions so everyone snipes and whinges during the sessions, followed by more informal complaining later. Two: the forum was held in Ballina, an inconsequential but creepy country city in northern New South Wales, a place where I suspect there's a serial killer living somewhere close by. Ballina features such tourist attractions as the St Andrews Church Cake Stall, slowly shuffling shoppers with webbed feet on too much lithium, and of course, The Big Prawn. That's Ballina in a nutshell.

Pensions and parties

One hundred and ten of the 185 people at the Forum identified as members of the Lurgy Social Club, and over seventy percent of those were on the Disability Support Pension. A lot of us wouldn't have been able to take part if it hadn't been for our travel and accommodation being paid for by Queensland Positive People, ACON, PLWHA (NSW) Inc., Northern Rivers and other regional Area Health Services. So for me, the entire proceedings began on a positive note.

I missed the Opening Ceremony because I was far too hung over to attend. I'm sure it was tasteful and moving, but I had gone to the pre-forum PLWHA (NSW) dinner and booze up, and ended up a tad worn. As a consequence of my meet-and-greet tour the RSL Club, which hosted the forum, politely but firmly requested that I never wear again sliver-sequined Lycra shorts into the building. These people have no party spirit.

Number 1 with a bullet

Being a rural symposium, workshops covered such topics as Ma, Daisy's Got That Rash, Again, Bareback vs Gumboots, Foot and Mouth Compliance, and then some. I took part in the 'Why I Live in the Country' session, and it was heartening to see that my reasons for moving bush are much the same as everyone else's - we prefer our isolation and poverty without pollution, thanks.

I took part in the 'Why I Live in the Country' session, and it was heartening to see that my reasons for moving bush are much the same as everyone else's - we prefer our isolation and poverty without pollution, thanks.

Most of the workshops were politically/sociologically focused rather than treatments orientated. Some didn't like this. However, given that L'il Johnnie Howard and his Ship of Fools are intent on making our life miserable I enjoyed the chance to hear what's coming for those of us struggling to get by.

As I hinted earlier, there was a bit of bitching, mostly centred on the lack of services available in rural areas. ACON bashing remains solid at number 1 in the Top 10 AIDS Sufferer's Gripes. My favourite was the statement from a fellow

participant that if ACON was dismantled there would be enough money to provide an extra \$30,000 per year to each PLWHA on a pension in New South Wales. Fact or fiction? Don't ask me, I am but a simple tattooed love child with a cat that has dog's breath, so my entire life is built upon a foundation of delusion and uncertainty.

Isolation without pollution

For all the exciting chat about forming a Rural Networking Group for positive people and so on and so on that took place, for me what was exciting was what happened outside the official program. I'm not referring to the Pee Wee door tag frenzy played out in the small hours at the motel - although it was cheering to see the energy and commitment displayed by some in their enthusiasm to get to know each other no matter what time of the night.

What I found especially affirming was to sit with a few others and talking over a drink or ten. The networking and sharing of stories, hints on how to get by and the plain ol' connecting with others in the same boat was for me the great triumph of the forum. I've realised that living in the country makes it easy to be insular, and I found the Forum a fantastic opportunity for new ideas and viewpoints, a refreshing experience just as valuable as the sharing of similar concerns.

Like anything in life there were aspects the 2000 Rural Forum that could have been better (the lack of sessions on treatments and alternative therapies and no grief counselling available). Even so, I have to say a big thank you to everyone who contributed to the success of the event. There was talk of the rural forums becoming an annual occurrence. I hope so. I've already repacked my Lycra shorts for next year. 

John Douglas is an artist and occasional writer.

stepping forward

On balance, life in the bush for HIV-positive people has improved, **Paul McQueen** writes

I attended the Ballina Rural Forum with some trepidation. One of the main issues in my mind related to the 1998 conference held in Albury. I asked myself, have rural HIV/AIDS related issues moved forward in the bush? During the Albury conference we had expressed a definite need for improvement to HIV services in rural areas. We had called for Internet websites, needle exchange services, a country AIDS network, needs analysis projects, collaboration between agencies, the inclusion of HIV positive heterosexuals, outreach services for youth and children, AIDS dementia complex management and treatment compliance/adherence campaigns. Had any of these happened in the intervening two years?

So I listened carefully at the Ballina Forum as they ticked off the many service improvements in country areas over the last couple of years. For example, the AIDS Dementia and HIV Psychiatry Team (ADAHPT) and ACON Mid North Coast both have improved outreach services in rural areas, programs such as Me, Young and Proud are established, and communication between various health service providers has improved. The rural based Internet websites are still in their infancy and will have to address the issue of access to computers for people in rural areas before they will be truly effective. There was humorous comment about ACON's Roo Boy campaign targeting compliance/adherence to anti-HIV medication in rural areas. We all agreed that it is a great flyer with a rural setting and that lovely Roo Boy image, but that's about as rural as it gets. The problems associated with isolation/compliance or distance and compliance are not discussed.

Some steps forward

I guess it's swings and roundabouts when it comes to moving forward in the bush but on balance those of us living with HIV seem to have come out on the optimistic side of the ledger.

The improvement in quality of life for many means some of the HIV based service providers will re-evaluate their place in the grand scheme of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Australia. In the last two years we have seen headlines such as The Rocky Road to Change, Future Shift - Where we go from

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here, The Futures Manifesto. I question this process of re-invention and wonder whether it will be HIV positive people in rural communities who will lose their services. It was quite difficult to assess this at the Ballina Forum but the number of services still available, the positive nature of most discussion and the service providers present at the Forum suggested room for confidence. It would be good to see the CEOs, Managers, Care and Support Workers, and Educators of more agencies such as ACON Hunter attending the next forum.

Working for me?

The Forum was interesting and everyone put a lot of effort into sessions. It's always good to brainstorm around the issues. There was more clarity at this forum about which sessions were only for PLWHA. One of the difficulties I found was maintaining interest in a topic for three hours. Ninety minutes may have been better. Having concurrent sessions is always awkward, but how do you get over presenting large amounts of information in three days? The post-conference PLWHA meeting at Albury in 1998 recommended running sessions twice and presenting round-ups of the previous day during the first session of the next day. It was unfortunate the Ballina Forum didn't integrate this recommendation. I wasn't aware of any children at the meeting; however there were a number of couples, irrespective of sexual orientation, complaining about the lack of childcare facilities.

Finally, irrespective of the issues that were or were not covered at the forum, the coordinator Paul Phillips and the numerous volunteers deserve a medal for bringing it all together on a shoe string budget. Congratulations, we appreciate your effort. ☺

Paul McQueen is a community representative for NAPWA on the NCHECR vaccine working group and lives on the Mid North Coast.

at the cubana motel

By Denis Coric

I am what you call a sero-converted straight or heterosexual male. Not wanting to be gay but not totally disowning the idea at the same time. Top of the tree though, I want a woman. Just to marry. So when Marilyn rang and asked if I wanted to go to some get-together at Ballina I thought, ok, yep, I'm in. Good to get out of the Wankatorium for a while.

Marilyn linked me up for a lift from my native Tweed with Frankie and speaking of natives, this guy, for a guy, was pretty well, tanned and such, and also drove well. Jet black spiky hair, Calvin Klein T-shirt, Ricky Martino sandals and he was a punter, like me. Way to go, amigo.

We stopped in to visit Jag at Murwillumbah, another horse nut. Had coffee while he's ironing and we're all pumping for the jockey, Jim Cassidy, known as the Pumper. Jim Cassidy. Jumpin Jimmy. Then Frankie and I left him still ironing to follow later. He came out to the car but he brought his iron with him.

Finally found the Cubana Motel at Ballina, checked in, rooms alongside and basically sprinted up to the RSL. There I met two people. One yelling at me out of the crowd was Caeleen, who looked and even sounded like a Polish Weather Woman. I didn't really know I'd had such a lifelong fetish for Polish Weather Women, up until that very moment. Yes I guess it was love at first sight.

She disappeared and my attention turned at once to Steinrich, a pleasant, hazy, absurdly good-looking chap, who flashed images of Bowie, DiCaprio, James Dean and a youthful Brad Pitt every time he smiled. So it was hard not to notice him.

At dinner Caeleen reappeared and I was fortunate to sit with her, her friend Bluebell-Star, hyphenated, Frankie, Steinrich and Jag, and it soon became

apparent we were the coolest people at the conference, the whole shindig. The only question – what was I doing here?

On the second day I said to Frankie, I'm going to back Savrocca in the 2400M race at Bendigo, because it'll win; it won the Queen Elizabeth just last week! His eyes lit up spontaneously, he hadn't known the races were on. He'd been so busy he'd plumb lost track of it! He disagreed and felt Yammer would win. I scoffed, he smirked, and a little while later back at the Cubana, he turns up after the race looking depressed. I rush out to gloat. But no, he's not in any way depressed. Yammer won, Frankie picked the whole Trifecta and Savrocca hadn't run a place in an eight-horse field at Bendigo even with four scratchings.

So now I was, teetary.

Which would it be?

Frankie, Steinrich or the

Polish Weather Woman?

Or the mysterious Jag?

I just didn't know.

Meanwhile Steinrich had flown in. He had connections in LA; his own room at the Cubana and had constructed an Asthma-relieving Device that would ultimately benefit all of mankind – in his bathroom. So now I was, teetary. Which would it be? Frankie, Steinrich or the Polish Weather Woman? Or the mysterious Jag? I just didn't know.

Late at night, at our campfire soiree, Hootenanigans at the Cubana, we the gang – well I personally – had one of the best times of my life. I met Jethro and Moose and Trojan, Sindoll Sadie and Gorgeous George. All with a story to tell.

I didn't see much of the workshops, or the movie finale. I did have two plates of bacon and four peaches at the 7.30am breakfast. I watched Karaoke, got an autographed poster of Vanessa Wagner [Mum will be pleased!] and mingled with the locals wherever I could. Doing my bit for PLWHA (NSW). What a group we are. What a force!

Final Act. Caeleen has to catch the 8am bus on the other side of town and I take her bag, because the stroller gizmo has snapped. So there I am, carrying a twenty-pound suitcase on my head, for my very own Polish Weather Woman, all the way across Ballina just to see her drive away. If that 'aint love what's more to say. ☺

Denis is writing his life story.

life in chapters

Glenn Flanagan reports on the writer's workshop at the Rural Forum

If we imagine our lives as a book what would we call the chapters? If we divided our lives into twelve chapters, would we divide it by work, relationships, where we lived or some other way?

This was the theme of the writing workshop I facilitated at the Rural Forum in Ballina. I'm an English teacher by trade but I was a little nervous about convening this class. A workshop for adult writers seems a very different deal. The short exercise to break the ice worked for me at least because I immediately felt more at ease. This was a group of interesting positive people who were very supportive and open to everybody's experience. This was important because the workshop would focus on writing our life story.

We warmed up with short exercises, including a simple time line of our lives, and a list of lucky and unlucky experiences. Beneath the surface of each

person there are so many different interesting experiences. We wrote a list of words to describe ourselves, and then a list of words others might use to describe us. This raised questions about perspective, and how well we knew ourselves (have you ever looked in the mirror or heard your own voice and felt surprised?).

Draw a floor plan of the house you lived in as a child. Write a description of your favourite room and why it is special. This is one of my favourite exercises and I loved many of the short descriptions people in the workshop wrote about that special childhood place. It is a time and place in life, when time itself stretches out and so many of the little details are a rich source of stories. We could easily fill an issue of *Talkabout* with these stories.

Then we got down to the serious business of dividing our life into chapters. We chose one of our chapters to expand into a first draft. In this draft we wrote

quick bullet points. In the second draft, also written quickly, we turned the bullet points into sentences and paragraphs. If we'd had the time, we planned to polish these paragraphs into a third draft.

In the final session we shared our stories with the group. People read out so many wonderful pieces of writing. I'd like to thank everyone in our workshop for their inspiration and I hope they consider sharing their stories with *Talkabout* readers. ●

Glenn Flanagan is the Community Development Officer at PLWH/A (NSW). A writing group for positive people meets every fortnight at the Positive Living Centre. Contact David Jobling on 9699 8756 or Gavin Austin at gavin_aust@yahoo.au. Talkabout welcomes stories from positive people. Contact the Editor, feona studdert, on 02 9361 6750, Freecall 1800 245 677 or email feonas@plwha.com.au

... and pictures

A collection of photographs from the HIV Rural Forum 2000 taken by Michael Riches, Glenn Flanagan, Antony Nicholas and Tony Creighton



HALC

HIV/AIDS Legal Centre

The HIV/AIDS Legal Centre is a community legal centre. We provide free legal advice and referral to people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS in NSW. A staff solicitor is available Monday to Friday from 10.00am to 6.00pm. Alternatively HALC holds an information night on alternate Monday evenings where volunteer solicitors give free advice sessions. We deal with topics such as superannuation, discrimination, social security, wills, power of attorney and more.

To make an appointment please call us on

02 9206 2060.

All information is kept strictly confidential.

HALC

HIV/AIDS Legal Centre Incorporated
9 Commonwealth Street, Surry Hills NSW 2010
PO Box 350 Darlinghurst NSW 1300
Telephone **(02) 9206 2060** Fax **(02) 9206 2053**
email halc@halc.net
Freecall 1800 063 060

Talkabout

welcomes stories and letters from PLWHA.

In the February/March issue **Talkabout** features positive people and their pets. Have you got a favourite photo of you and your best animal friend?

Send the photo with 300 words describing what you love about this photo or why this is your favourite pet to the PLWH/A **Talkabout** PP&P (positive people and their pets) competition. The winner will be featured on the cover of **Talkabout**. Deadline for entries is January 20.

Please note this competition was first advertised last month and has been extended to give people more time.

For more information please call the Editor, feona studdert on **(02) 9361 6750**, or email your story to feonas@plwha.org.au.

Deadline for other copy the February/March issue is **January 10, 2001**

Contributors fees available for PLWHA receiving disability pension or similar low income.



Young, HIV Positive, Gay?

A group of guys 26 years old and under, who happen to be positive, have a chance to meet and talk to other young guys in the same situation.

Sharing the experience. Dealing with the issues.

Getting on with our lives.

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Anthony 9206 2034

You're no longer alone!



Unsafe sex fucking without condoms barebacking raw sex ...

ACON invites the gay community to discuss when we do and don't use condoms and what influences our decisions

To be part of this discussion or to check out what others are saying log on to the "Love, Lust or Lonely - When do you lose the condom?" discussion board on www.acon.org.au.

quote

"I've had guys get pissed off when I started putting on a condom. Once a guy swore at me and walked out."

"I only pursue bareback sex and there is practically a Sydney subculture of like minds."

"It's all about risk and return"

"Some guys I've come across have figured if they become poz its just a matter of taking a few pills each day ... if only it was so simple."

unquote

Shoot off on the message board.

www.acon.org.au

trials and tribulations

Barrie Harrison on two new clinical trials

Although AIDS-related Kaposi's sarcoma (KS) is less common now than five years ago, it remains a life-threatening condition for those people whose immune system is severely damaged. Over the past few years, advances have been made in the treatment of KS with chemotherapy but less toxic therapies are urgently needed. A new study is now examining the effectiveness of a peptide (or very small protein IM862), that is found naturally in the body, to treat KS.

IM862 is an angiogenesis inhibitor, which means that it may prevent the formation of new blood vessels that are essential for KS tumors to survive and grow. IM862 is also a stimulator of the immune system. In a recent (February 2000) US study of 44 patients with KS, thirty-six percent showed either complete or partial remission of their KS lesions after a median of six weeks of treatment with IM862.

Now a larger international study IM862 for the treatment of KS is underway. The National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research in Australia is participating in this study at centres in Sydney and Melbourne.

IM862 is delivered as nasal drops that are inhaled once every other day. In the current trial, half of the patients who are enrolled will receive IM862 and the other half placebo nasal drops (with no medication). The nasal drops are self-administered every other day for six months. IM862 is generally well tolerated. The most commonly reported side-effect is mild to moderately severe headache (35% of patients). Less than ten percent of patients experience nausea, fatigue, insomnia or diarrhoea. One person

Over the past few years, advances have been made in the treatment of KS with chemotherapy but less toxic therapies are urgently needed. A new study is now examining the effectiveness of a peptide (or very small protein IM862), that is found naturally in the body, to treat Kaposi's sarcoma (KS).

– a chemical messenger of the immune system – to cells in the human body to trigger an immune response against the virus. Patients will receive a series of injections and be closely monitored over twelve months. If the trial shows the expected immune response, further trials will be carried out to determine its effectiveness in larger, later stage studies.

It is important to note that this is a small trial with only 36 patients. It is not expected to start until early 2001. To be included patients must have begun antiretroviral therapy within six months of infection and remained on antiviral therapy with an undetectable viral load and CD4 counts above 400. 

discontinued IM862 after developing severe sinusitis that may have been caused by the drug treatment.

Vaccine trial for recent HIV infection

An announcement was made in November 2000 about a human clinical trial of a vaccine for people recently infected with HIV. This vaccine trial is for people who have been on antiretroviral therapy since infection. It will be conducted in Melbourne and Sydney, in association with the National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research. The vaccine uses a delivery method invented by Australian researchers, in which a harmless fowl pox virus will carry genes from the HIV virus and a human cytokine

Barrie Harrison is Treatment Officer at ACON. For further information about either of these trials contact the ACON Treatment Officers freecall 1800 816 518, 02 9206 2013/2036 email treatments@acon.org.au

the impossible ask

by Tim Alderman

If you are newly diagnosed with HIV or have just started treatments, this article will not interest you. If you have taken HIV medication for up to two years, it might pique your curiosity, but if you have taken HIV treatments since the days of AZT monotherapy – you will be interested and you'll probably relate to it.

'Treatment failure' is a term I intensely dislike. I dislike it almost as much as being told I have 'advanced disease', that people with Lipodystrophy have 'Buffalo Hump', or that I am 'not being "compliant" (read: "you are a naughty boy and should be caned"). Unfortunately, treatment failure does exist and it's a problem I am grappling with myself. I can't think of another term for it except 'forgetfulness' or maybe 'I'm over it'. How long have you shovelled pills down your throat? Ten years or more, probably. How's your viral load and CD4 count? The big nowhere, undoubtedly! Ten years of pill taking for nothing more than stable blood results.

"Results look good" says my doctor. "Nothing to write home about but it's stable, which is great news." Well I'm sorry Doc, but it's not good! It's frustrating. Years of promises and adherence (more jargon!) for the absolute minimum quality of life. This isn't exaggeration. You can never return to full-time work and you never know when the next illness will strike. Your energy levels expire mid-way (even during sex). Your libido is depleted, there are side-effects, you have more blood taken out of you than the Vampire Bank, and you live with the legacy of any AIDS related illness you may have had. Add to that the total lack of knowledge on long-term side-effects and judge for yourself how much quality there is.

My doctor's pretty good, I have to say. We talk about these issues, and he genuinely tries to help. It's true, I'm no longer one hundred percent compliant. Two years ago I was pushing 350 plus pills down my throat every week. I have days when I just forget, or – because of it being such a regular habit – days when I can't

Imagine not queuing at the hospital pharmacy once a month or no dietary considerations or no side-effects or adherence.
Imagine Heaven.

remember if I have taken the bloody things or not. Now there are days when I just can't be bothered. If I see another report of 8,000 viral load, or another 170 CD4 count, I will scream. I've had the same results for years, and that's the main reason I can't be bothered. Doc calls it 'Pill Fatigue' and that sounds as good as anything to me. As he says, pills and people just don't go together.

What to do is the major problem. I'm tempted to take a structured treatment break ('drug holiday' sounds like more fun). Imagine getting up or going to bed without having to remember pills. Imagine a few drinks, without a grumbly stomach ten minutes after getting into bed. Imagine not queuing at the hospital pharmacy once a month or no dietary considerations or no side effects or adherence. Imagine Heaven.

There's other options. Counselling or an HIV psychiatrist for instance. I don't mind counselling as long as I don't have to relive my childhood again! It is so irrelevant. What I want is either a treatment change, or a trial that shows results. I always thought the point of treatment was to show a result, not just to maintain equilibrium. Of course I realize that changing treatments will mean adherence. Getting onto a trial is more difficult because people, like me, who have had an AIDS-defining illness are sometimes not eligible and trials often use a combination therapy of some description. Find me someone who needs therapeutic trials and hasn't had AIDS, and I'll show you a walking miracle!

Well, I've got this far without reaching any conclusions. Frankly, I don't think I will because I, and my doctor, don't know if there are any answers. In my more depressive moments years ago, I used to think it would be easier to exit the way of most of my friends, and just die. It would have been less lonely and I wouldn't feel (sometimes) like a freak. Today I don't see that as an answer. There are more battles to come, and I don't know how all of us keep fighting, but I know we will. It's the human spirit? To quote an Olympic cliché, it's 'the fire within'. Or maybe it's the hope that eventually we'll take just one pill a day! 

Tim Alderman is a member of the PLWHA (NSW) Publications Working Group. He will shortly begin a Bachelor of Arts at the University of Technology, Sydney in Professional Writing.

treatment update

diary of a trial

John Cumming writes about his experiences in a new trial[†] examining the benefits of Interleukin-2 (IL2)

Day One

I front up at the office of Karen, the trial nurse, at 9.00am feeling excited and optimistic about the chance to try something besides boring old pills to defend myself against HIV. Karen has started me on anti-inflammatory and anti-nausea medication and paracetamol the previous day and I'll continue to take these during the next five days of injections. These will hopefully minimise the chances of fevers and skin rashes. Karen shows me a preloaded syringe of 7.5 million international units of IL2 and explains how to attach a needle to it and inject myself. I follow her instructions and select an injection site just below my waistline and not too close to my navel, swab it with an alcohol wipe, pinch a roll of fat, jab the needle in and depress the plunger slowly. It's simple and painless and there is no bleeding. I massage the injection site for five minutes to prevent the formation of a nodule. Karen sends me home with enough pre-loaded syringes for five days, needles and a sharps container. She has warned me to expect side effects in four or five hours, but today these never show and at 5pm I am able to do a strenuous gym workout. I've decided to take my IL2 shots twice daily with my usual HIV medication so at 7.30pm I take my second shot of the day. The only hitch this time is that as I massage the injection site I get up to go into the kitchen to dump the needle in the sharps container and accidentally jab myself in the knee with the needle. No harm done but I make a mental note to have the sharp container within reach for my next shot.

Day Two

Wake up after a good night's sleep, but feel tired. Ring work and tell them I won't be in for a few days. Take my shots as normal. For the rest of the morning,

daytime TV suddenly becomes very engrossing. Around 2pm I get violent shivers that immobilise me and force me to bed. The chills and chattering teeth go on for about 45 minutes.

Wake up after a good night's sleep, but feel tired.

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Around 2pm I get violent shivers that immobilise me and force me to bed.

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Day Three

I'm awake at 5am feeling feverish. My temperature is slightly up at thirty-seven point eight degrees. I'm unable to get back to sleep but don't take the sleeping pills that Karen suggested because they give me a hangover. At 3am my temperature is thirty-eight degrees. I take some paracetamol and get to sleep around 5am but still manage to wake up in time for my 7.30am shot and HIV meds.

Days Four and Five

The side effects have doubled in intensity. Chills kick in around 2pm that feel as if they might shake the fillings from my teeth. The fevers usually wake me in the wee small hours, but never reach the danger area of thirty-nine degrees. The red blotches from the first few injections have faded but the recent injection sites are swollen and red. For two days I've had severe diarrhoea, but Imodium is a good control. The morning after my last day of injections I wake with a swollen face, particularly round the eyes, which are half shut because of the swollen tissue. By the end of the day the swelling has gone away. However the last two days of injections have left nodules, little bumps in my abdominal fat.

A Week Later

I'm just getting over the fatigue and low mood that I have been warned is an after-effect of IL2. My blood chemistry is fine but my liver enzymes are elevated. The nodules in my abdomen are slowly receding. My T-cells won't be counted until a week before the next cycle. I am not looking forward to it but as they say, forewarned is forearmed. ☺

[†]ESPRIT - a new trial examining the benefits of the immune booster Interleukin-2 (IL2) - recently started recruiting Australian patients.

John Cumming is an ACON Treatment Officer. For more information about the trial consult your doctor or ACON Treatment Officers on 02 9206 2000; freecall 1800 816 518; or email treatments@acon.org.au

money

Maree Crosbie reports on financial issues for rural PLWHA

Rural clients face similar financial issues and problems to people in the city plus a few extra, like transport costs. In most rural areas there is limited public transport and you need a car to get to appointments and visit your friends. This means high petrol costs (particularly at the moment), repairs, insurance and green slips.

There are less ATMs in the country and country people often pay more in bank fees. Banks charge higher fees if you use an ATM from another bank. In the city it is possible to go to the next suburb to use an ATM from the bank with which your account is held, but in the country this may mean driving 300 kilometres to the next major town.

There is not a wide range of services available in rural areas. Many positive people pay, for example, for a massage because there is no local HIV day centre offering meals or alternative therapies.

I saw several clients individually during the course of the Forum, the issues raised varied from how to go about getting a home loan to basic budgeting. A disturbing fact was the number of PLWHA from both the city and rural areas who were not aware of available services, or the possibility of using Sydney services regardless of where they live in NSW.

Isolation is a major issue, many PLWHA travel a long way to see the doctor and may bear the extra cost of staying overnight plus the transport costs. Sharon Taylor, a Clinical Nurse Consultant in Tamworth, travels vast distances to visit clients both to address the costs to clients of visiting town and to avoid the possibility of disclosure and discrimination. She also hosts a get together twice a year so her clients can catch up and share experiences.

There was a diversity of PLWHA at the Forum and the mix of different sexualities and backgrounds seemed to work well. Many local people attended, but people also came from Sydney, Wollongong, Dubbo, interstate and everywhere in between.

There is not a wide range of services available in rural areas. Many positive people pay, for example, for a massage because there is no local HIV day centre offering meals or alternative therapies.

I met clients who have been positive for some time and have never spoken to another positive person. The Forum provided an opportunity for people to mix with others, tell their own story and hear about the lives of other PLWHA. ☺

Maree Crosbie is a Finance Worker at the Bobby Goldsmith Foundation. She travelled to Ballina to attend the recent HIV Rural Forum.

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Neil Bodsworth ◊ Cathy Pell ◊ John Byrne John
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summer fun

David Jobling on what's cheap and cool at the Sydney Festival

Free events at the Sydney Festival kick in from January 5.



The Australian Centre for Photography's **NEW AUSTRALIANA** redefines Aussie icons. State Library of NSW exhibition of photographs by **H WALTER BRANETT** (1862-1934) is a must see until February 18.



BERLIN: PLANNING POTSDAMER PLATZ - AN URBAN EXPERIMENT IN CENTRAL BERLIN at the City Exhibition Space, Customs House is worth a look if you enjoy architecture.

Catch film maker Jean-Luc Godard's **LETTER TO JANE**, an examination of a newspaper photograph of Jane Fonda with a group of North Vietnamese during the Vietnam war, or go see **BLADERUNNER**, Ridley Scott's sci-fi masterpiece at free screenings in the Domain Theatre at the Art Gallery of NSW.



FUZZY PRIME MINISTERS OF AUSTRALIA is so high camp you'll scream. Textile artist Mark Wilson's series of hooked rug portraits of Prime Ministers is the perfect Centenary of Federation gift. Wipe your feet before you go to the Object Gallery at Customs House.

MULWARR DANCE AUSTRALIA and **PLASTICIENS VOLANTS** create **NGALYOD** [pron. Nelly-odd] a rich colourful, marvellous procession of a mammoth inflatable Rainbow Serpent, starts at Campbell's Cove in The Rocks, finishing at the Opera House, four performances only, 8:45pm, January 16 - 20.

FREE outdoor concerts, **JAZZ IN THE DOMAIN**, January 13, 7pm.

SYMPHONY IN THE DOMAIN, January 20 at 8pm.

Down at Darling Harbour the **BACARDI FESTIVAL DE CUBA** will be buzzing with all boy 'Punk Salsa' band **LOS DE ABAJO** direct from Mexico and New York's **WAYNE GORBEA & SALSA PICANTE** on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights with free **LATIN DANCE CLASS** at 7pm and bands from 8:15pm.

As ever, January 26 **AUSTRALIA DAY** is a megathon of free activity.

Telephone contact numbers

Museum of Contemporary Art
☎ 9252 4033

Australian Centre for Photography
☎ 9331 6887

State Library of NSW
☎ 9273 1566

City Exhibition Space
☎ 9242 8555

Art Gallery of NSW
☎ 9225 1744

Australia Day Events Line
☎ 1300 654 124 (cost of a local call)

Websites

Sydney Festival 2001
www.sydneyfestival.org.au

Australia Day Events
www.australiaday.com.au

Museum of Contemporary Art
www.mca.com.au

Australian Centre for Photography
www.acp.au.com

Art Gallery of NSW
www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au

City Exhibition Space
ces.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au

David Jobling is Client Liaison Officer at the Positive Living Centre and editor of the arts website Qstage Digest. For previews and reviews of Sydney Festival events go to Qstage Digest at <http://www1.loom.net.au/home/dpj> or contact David at djp@loom.net.au

olga's personals

gay guy in his 40s I am a friendly guy, HIV+ looking to make some friends. Healthy, working and studying which means not spending any time socialising. Like to meet others to spend quality time with. **Reply 020900**

sincere, romantic, HIV+, gent 41yrs with a good build and health, like fitness, movies, eating out, will try dancing and almost anything else. GSOH, no ties, seeks sincere female age and nationality open. To experience some good times, with view to a permanent friendship/relationship. **Reply 010900**

good looking, optimistic and independent man, 34yrs. HIV+ living in eastern Sydney seeks HIV+ female for friendship. I am self-employed, fit and healthy with broad interests, including exercise, reading, and having fun. A liking for Japanese food, children and new experience. **Reply 070800**

good looking, recently diagnosed 39yr male looking for similar mate(s) 30-45 years old diagnosed within the last two years. Enjoy movies, gym, music. To support and share experiences of becoming HIV+. **Reply 060800**

late 30's HIV+ maintaining good physical and emotional health (never been sick). 6ft, 83kgs. Is caring, affectionate and reliable. Lives in Melbourne. Is seeking a genuine, loving female. Also would like penfriends interstate. **Reply 040800**

HIV+ positive woman, 42yrs looks much younger. Intelligent, easy going, warm hearted, attractive, and petite. I have a nice style about me. Love walking, movies, swimming, music and writing. Have a healthy lifestyle, passionate about life, also realistically optimistic, confidentiality important. North Coast, NSW. Would love to connect with a man who could appreciate these qualities. **Reply 030800**

ot 30 Gay boy HIV+, smooth, slim, well-defined gym fit body. Seeks attractive HIV+ guy to 35 years to share my life and bed with. You must be honest, fit, healthy, looking for 1-1 relationship. I live in Potts Point. **Reply 020800**

good looking HIV+ het male living in Sydney. 37yo. I'm a caring and caring person, want to meet a HIV+ female for friendship/relationship. My first advert. **Reply 010800**

good looking, great body 34yo male in Surry Hills. Recently diagnosed looking for male similar age, looks and interests. Hang out with, share experience of becoming recently positive and have some fun. Enjoy keeping well, meditation, movies, drives and coffee. **Reply 010700**

blue Mountains. Two friendly HIV+ guys (40s) living in the Blue Mountains invite other HIV+ guy/s for day or stay overnight. Own room with double bed (Couple OK). Take the opportunity to visit the beautiful Blue Mountains! **Reply 020700**

gay guy, 40s HIV+, genuine, DTE GSOH, good health, enjoys what life has to offer and makes the most of it. Seeking friendship with other gay and heterosexual HIV+ people. Could do with penfriends. **Reply 010600**

tyo HIV+ guy, 6ft, 80kg, good-looking, masculine, muscular, fit, healthy. Into gym, travel, clubbing, love, sex, and intimacy. Seeking HIV+ guy to 30 y.o., smooth, sexy, rebel-boy. Share good times, some/all of above. Please include phone number. **Reply 020600**

ow to respond to an advertisement Write your response letter and seal it in an envelope with a 45c stamp on • Write the reply number in pencil on the outside • Place the envelope in a separate envelope and send it to **Olga's Personals, PO Box 831, Darlinghurst 1300.**

ow to place your advertisement Write an ad of up to 40 words • Claims of HIV negativity cannot be made, however, claims of HIV positivity are welcomed and encouraged • Any letter that refers to illegal activity or is sexist will not be published • Send the ad to Olga, including your name and address for replies. Personal details are confidential.

diary

social and events

Outings from South Sydney Community Transport have organised a bus trip to Palm Beach on the Feb 12 2001. For more information and to book ☎ Jane 9319 4439. Call Jane for information about the Moonlight Cinema in January 2001 regarding dates and bookings.

Southern Cross Outdoor Group Check out Southern Cross Outdoor Group's new website, for details of their upcoming social get togethers, including walks, dances and trips away. Website www.scog.asn.au or ☎ John on 9907 9144.

Community Garden learn how to grow your own vegies ☎ Carolyn at Waterloo on 9382 8374, or ☎ Robert in Newtown 9690 1222 and if you're in and around Woolloomooloo ☎ Michael on 9206 1222, remember spring and summer is a great time to be had in the fields.

Newtown Neighbourhood Centre has a number of groups ranging from Ninja Warrior Arts, Women's Kick Boxing, Exotic dance classes and Shaja Yoga Meditation. ☎ Charlotte on 9516 4755 for more details

support

South Sydney Carers Support Group A support group for carers of PLWHA. Meets 3rd Tuesday of each month at Sutherland Hospital. Guest speakers and information. Contact Terry or Emma ☎ 9350 2955

Friends of Waratah A support group for PLWHA who live in Southern Sydney. 1st Monday of each month at Kogarah. Emotional support, information and social activities. ☎ Emma or Terry 9350 2955

Pozhetwest Western Sydney peer support and education for men and women living heterosexually with HIV/AIDS. ☎ 9671 4100.

Grief Support and Youth Suicide Project The Project provides individual counselling, support for schools after a suicide, community education and a schools program promoting mental health. This is a free service available for young people aged 15-25 living in the Eastern Suburbs. ☎ 9360 3232

Support Group for Significant Others of People with HIV/AIDS related Dementia The group offers respite care, company and support. Meets last Wednesday of every month at the Tree of Hope, cnr Riley and Devonshire Streets, Surry Hills. ☎ Angela Kelly 9829 4242 and Carole Knox ☎ 9580 5718, the AIDS Dementia Outreach Team ☎ 9339 2078 or ☎ David at The Bridge 9552 6438.

Shopping spree The Newtown Neighbourhood Centre runs a shopping service six times a week to Marrickville Metro and Market Town, Leichhardt. They'll pick you up from home, give you two hours to shop, then drop you off again. \$4.00. Available to residents in Dulwich Hill, St Peters, Tempe, Newtown, Enmore, Marrickville, Camperdown, Stanmore, Petersham, Erskineville and Darlington. ☎ Diana 9516 4755.

Living with loss Evening groups (six weeks) for people who have had someone close to them die within the last two years. ☎ Sacred Heart Hospice on 9380 7674.

HIV living Peer Support Groups Joining a support group can be a great way to meet other positive guys and to share experiences of what it means to be HIV positive. For more information about when the next support group is starting, ☎ the HIV living project at ACON on 9026 2037.

learn

Your Community Gym Fit X Gym Fit X Gym is at the Community Pride Centre, Hutchinson St, Surry Hills. "Positive Access Project" offers qualified instructors, free assessments, free nutritional advice, free individual programs and free session to try out gym. \$2 a session = \$18 - 10 visit pass. ☎ Fit X Gym 02 9361 3311 4pm-7pm Mon to Friday.

Yoga for PLWHA Special weekly classes at Acharya's Yoga Centre Mon-Fri, 12.30pm-1.30pm. ☎ 9264 3765.

The Sanctuary Free massage, acupuncture, therapy information, social work and Shiatsu services are available. ☎ Robert for details and bookings on 9690 1222.

Complementary Therapy advice Advice and referrals for PLWHA interested in exploring complementary therapies is available on Monday and Friday at the Sanctuary. ☎ Mac on 9519 6830 or email complementarytherapies@hotmail.com.

Talkabout Diary is a free listing for community and non-profit events. Listings in the Talkabout Diary are welcomed and encouraged. Please keep your listings below 40 words. Deadline is the 10th of each month. Please send your listing to **Talkabout Diary, PO Box 831 Darlinghurst 1300, email feonas@plwha.org.au or fax 02 9360 3504.**

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hyperactive 15

... anywhere in the world with **Tim Alderman**

Bobby Goldsmith Foundation

<http://www.bgf.org.au>

Rating A must-see site for all local PLWHA. An effective site that offers everything you need to know about one of our longest running, and most beneficial organisations.

There's a run down of BGF Services including *Financial Assistance*, *Counselling*, their *Housing Program*, and the *Positive Employment Support*. You will need Adobe Acrobat installed on your system to download the complete *BGF Guidelines for Financial Assistance*, but there is a link to a download site on the page.

Forthcoming events and other fundraising activities are on the *What's On* page, and right now features the Green Park Hotel Affair 2000, the Versace Party, the reserved seating for the Mardi Gras Parade, Shop Yourself Stupid, and Fair Day.

If you want to get involved there's plenty of opportunities. Try the *How You Can Help* page for a full rundown, plus contact details. If you want links to other HIV related sites, click on *How To Contact Us*, scroll down to *Our Community* and click on the link for Australian Links.

Foundation For Traditional Chinese Medicine

<http://www.ftcm.org.uk>

Rating There is growing interest in complementary therapies to treat HIV, and most sites are informative. As this is an area I'm not proficient in I favour sites - like this one - that give information on the history of a particular therapy, as well as non-judgmental information, and an insight into all the various areas of the therapy.

Includes a number of interesting research projects that information can be

gleaned from. My personal experiences with acupuncture, especially in regard to Peripheral Neuropathy have been very positive. There is a *Women's Health Project* that covers acupuncture for menstrual disorders, and features a two-part study, both preliminary and feasibility. *Integrated Medicine* links to contributors to national debates, and acupuncture in general practice that lists an actual case study of an acupuncturist working in this area. *Publications* is a comprehensive reading list, and *Links* sends you to various sites worldwide.

HALC (HIV/AIDS Legal Centre)

<http://www.halc.net>

Rating Impressive, cleanly designed site that dispenses information with little fuss. For those of us who have used the legal centre for HIV legal issues, we know they go to any length to help you, even when the odds are against you.

About Us takes you to sections dealing with a variety of legal issues related to *Medical Treatments* and a *Sentencing Kit* which can be downloaded by members of the judiciary unfamiliar with issues around living with HIV/AIDS. Other useful content explains how to make a will or award power of attorney. There's also explanations of sometimes confusing legal concepts like Enduring Guardianships, Discrimination, Tenancy Disputes, Social Security, Debt, Employment, Superannuation and Insurance.

FAQ did not seem to have any information. Either it is still under construction, or they have no FAQs (Lucky them!). *News* updates information on recent changes to law.

There are links to the ADB (Anti-Discrimination Board) and HREOC (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission).

PAWS/STL

<http://www.paws-stl.org>

Rating Pets are a wonderful support for PLWHA, and - unlike other sites - this happy site promotes the benefits rather than the dangers of having a pet. My budgie gave it five feathers.

Client Services gives you assistance with daily chores such as walking, grooming, feeding and transporting pets to vets. There is a foster home service for people who are hospitalised, and assistance can be arranged in case of an emergency - for example, vet bills. Permanent homes can be arranged for pets if the need arises.

Animal Information has two sub-headings. *Safe Pet Guidelines* gives sensible advice on diseases that can be transmitted but reiterates the benefits of animal companionship. It lists conditions that place people at risk, hygiene, how to care for litter boxes, Preventative Veterinary Medicine, animal bites, diet, adopting new pets, pets to avoid, cats, Feline Leukemia Virus and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus, Cat Scratch Disease, fish, dogs and birds. The second sub-section is a *FAQ* on everything you wanted to know but couldn't find out.

There is a link to a Postnet Community site that has message boards, and personal stories about people and their pets. You can join the site's mailing list.

Tim Alderman is a positive person and a member of the Talkabout Editorial Committee.

QUICK CLICK

I received an email from the designer and publisher of <http://www.hiv aids.webcentral.com.au> - a site I reviewed in September 1999 - to say the site had been given a new coat of paint. I went and checked it out, and my, what a difference. Much easier to navigate, and very professional looking. If you wish to access any of the feature stories that appear in *Talkabout*, this is the site that hosts them.

Artist Square at <http://artistsquare.com/community> hosts the *Healing Hands Suite*, a community gallery supporting the HIV Art Outreach Project. You can check out art by invited artists, or students.



Yes, I want to be a member of PLWH/A (NSW) Inc.

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- \$2 Full member (I am a NSW resident with HIV/AIDS and receiving benefits)
(Please forward a copy of your current Health Care Card)
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Membership fees include a subscription to *Talkabout*, *Contacts* and other PLWH/A (NSW) Inc. publications.

membership

Yes I want to subscribe to *Talkabout* (annual subscription July 1 to June 30). Please select (tick the circle) the rate that best suits your circumstances.

HIV positive people and people affected by HIV/AIDS who live in New South Wales should consider membership of PLWH/A (NSW). Members receive a complimentary subscription to all PLWH/A publications. Details overleaf.

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- Overseas** \$120

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To save you postage we suggest you put the completed slip in an envelope and address to:

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