Philosophy Statement

The CLEAR Unit:

recognizes

♦ that HIV infected, HIV affected or HIV at-risk persons are vulnerable (for reasons of access to culturally acceptable resources, culture resistance and discrimination) and often voiceless (for the above reasons, silenced and marginalized);

♦ that AIDS service organizations (ASOs) are challenged to address (ameliorate) the needs of these affected persons and groups and are committed to a process of authentically reflecting, representing and responding to concerns of communities.

commits to

♦ support, enable and engender the capacity of ASOs (through linkages and partnerships agreed to by consensus) to reflect on and evaluate their work in constructive, imaginative and ethically accountable ways;

♦ the creation of a culture of learning—based on principles of inquiry, as well as inspired and mutual learning;

♦ a spirit of open, vulnerable and collaborative communication—based on respect, collegiality and which is inclusive of relevant disciplinary, theoretical and methodological perspectives.

hopes for

♦ partnership with ASOs, they are provided with the possibility of imaginative, constructive and enabling choices and alternatives for growth and transformation of their organizations.
Introduction

Welcome to the first Annual Report for the Community-Linked Evaluation AIDS Resource (CLEAR) Unit. The CLEAR Unit Steering Committee and Staff are excited to share their information regarding the work, achievements and plans of this new and innovative program conceived and funded by the AIDS Bureau, Ontario Ministry of Health & Long Term Care.

During the first seven months of CLEAR, we have endeavoured to achieve three main goals; First was to author a Terms of Reference for the Steering Committee while establishing philosophy statements for the program and Memorandums of Understanding for both the Staff and the Committee with the AIDS Bureau. The second goal was to begin establishing links with Ontario’s AIDS Service Organizations so that CLEAR can become accustomed with the AIDS community, their philosophies, their achievements and their needs as they pertain to evaluation. Thirdly, the CLEAR Unit has worked hard to establish the evaluative projects which would afford ASOs the opportunity to participate in four macro projects while also measuring their successes with smaller, micro projects. We are proud to be able to tell you through this Annual Report that we believe we have achieved those three important goals.

The inside cover of our Annual Report displays the CLEAR Philosophy Statement. This is without question, one of the most important documents the Unit along with the Steering Committee has created since its work began. This statement offers a foundation, a starting point by which all of the work is based and evolved from as we all work together to bring this new service to its potential.

On page two you will read from our Co-Director’s Report, Michael Sobota and Betty Anne Thomas, that one of the largest initial challenges was the early evolution stages of selecting the McMaster team, creating an infrastructure within the policies and procedures of the protocol and accountability framework of the program and establishing a working relationship between the world of academia and activism. We have also had to say good-bye to Betty Anne as she accepted a position with the Substance Abuse Bureau of the Ontario Ministry of Health. She will be dearly missed by the Steering Committee and the staff.

On pages three and four you will read with more detail the activities of the first seven months of the staff, particularly the Co-Directors, Greg Robinson and Gina Browne as they have shaped, developed and implemented a very aggressive and ambitious work plan. A detailed Communications plan was developed to assist the Unit with marketing itself with the target group (ASOs). The CLEAR mascot, Link, was created to offer a consistent, user friendly image to the AIDS Community. Link is a caricature of a measuring tape to represent and encourage ASOs to measure their success. The CLEAR Co-Directors quickly established excellent operational activities with their Investigators which allowed for expedient implementation of the early stages of the work plan. Phone calls, site visits and a provincial conference held at the Spring ‘2000 Ontario AIDS Network meeting provided avenues of information sharing and introductions.

On page 5 we take the opportunity to thank all those community partners across the province who have contributed to the early development and information sharing of the CLEAR unit. Also, this page introduces you to the Steering Committee and the staff.

We all look forward to the next twelve months which holds promise for exciting evaluative studies, where we can measure the success of Ontario’s ASOs. We will offer evidence-based data that will create windows of opportunity for new and innovative service delivery in the support of those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS as well as the programs to effectively assist in the prevention of the spread of HIV infection throughout this province.

“Go as far as you can see and when you get there, you’ll see further.”

- S. Covey
A Message from
The Co-Chairpersons

“You cannot harm me/you cannot harm/one who has dreamed a dream like mine.”

- Ojibwa chant, first recorded in the 18th Century

CLEAR is a dream. Since the first conceptual idea that community based AIDS service organizations could benefit from coordinated, competent and thorough evaluation many, many years ago, it has been a dream to develop that concept into reality. This dream floated into many of the sleepless (I’m sure) nights of Ontario’s AIDS Coordinator. Then it began to move, in small steps, into wakefulness and the real world. Funding for “evaluation” was included in a major announcement by the Minister of Health in spring of 1998. During that year, the AIDS Bureau assembled a working group made up of community partners and other professionals to begin the long path of transforming the dream from concept to structure. A call for proposals went out. Applications were screened and proposal authors were invited in to be interviewed (grilled) and analyzed.

The team of professionals from McMaster University, headed up by Gina Browne and Greg Robinson were chosen to proceed. For months, the team carried out further development work with a newly named Steering Committee. It is in this period that CLEAR itself found its name and it’s breath and began to take baby steps forward. Following an official authorization from the Minister of Health, CLEAR was able to walk forward into the Spring 2000 meeting of the Ontario AIDS Network and shake hands with everybody. Hi, how are ya? Let’s get to know each other.

CLEAR is like a big baby elephant, right now. It is lovable, lumbering, engaging and finding its balance. Its presence is still tentative. Watch out: as CLEAR matures in the next year, you will have a great, big, powerful ally in this work.

During this past year, those of us on the CLEAR Steering Committee – which includes the Co-Directors and their professional staff – have been forming, storming and norming in route to performing. We have done all that hard work of defining Terms of Reference and Policies, and holding almost regular meetings. And we have listened and learned from each other – a complex task of its own.

On behalf of Betty-Ann Thomas who served as my Co-Chair during this past year, we are grateful to Gina and Greg, the staff of the CLEAR unit and to our colleagues on the Steering Community for moving along as swiftly as we have been able to. All of the community representatives on the Steering Committee contribute volunteer time and their experiential maturation, in addition to their regular full time work. I specifically acknowledge and thank them for this past years dedicated work.

Please read this Annual Report as a reflection of how we got to where CLEAR is now. But it is just the beginning. What CLEAR can accomplish is still a dream, waiting to be actualized. But don’t worry: it will not harm us but rather help us. I invite you to consider that we are on the brink of some very exciting and ultimately very important collaboration together, as we all move forward the community response to HIV/AIDS in Ontario.
We are excited, enthusiastic and energized to assist AIDS Service Organizations (ASOs) in Ontario to evaluate their agencies, programs and services. ASOs have developed over fifteen years, leading the community-based constructive, compassionate response to HIV/AIDS throughout the province. Intuitively, many ASOs know their successes. Now, for the first time, the AIDS Bureau is investing $1 million in a Provincial Unit (CLEAR) to document, through evaluative research studies, the successes of ASOs. There are many community-based interventions that have been learned and can now be shared within and outside the AIDS movement through evaluative studies. Successes can be built-on to advance our ASOs, their programs and services across Ontario. This in turn will allow them to continue to respond to changes in the HIV epidemic affecting the care, treatment and support offered to people living with HIV/AIDS.

CLEAR is a province-wide Unit, based at McMaster University, to service the ASO community in evaluation. Two worlds meet to collaborate on research: ASOs and academia. The team at McMaster led by Dr. Gina Browne has fifteen years experience and history in evaluative research on community-based health and social services. Some team members have worked in HIV/AIDS while others have worked in community-based health and social service delivery in many areas. All team members are motivated to work with and serve the needs of ASOs and their stakeholders.

While the Unit was officially funded in February 2000, much preparatory work by the CLEAR Steering Committee and staff has occurred over the fall and winter 1999/2000. Here are some brief accomplishments.

- The CLEAR Steering Committee was formed.
- The Steering Committee has met 5 times for full-day planning sessions.
- The Steering Committee has completed its Terms of Reference.
- A Philosophy Statement for CLEAR has been created.
- A Communication Strategy has been initiated.
- ASOs have been surveyed about their evaluation needs.
- Some site visits with ASOs have occurred.
- The CLEAR Unit was officially announced to the ASOs community at the OAN meeting on March 3, 2000, with a full day session on evaluation.
- CLEAR Staff have met with key partners who are also invested in assisting ASOs, including the AIDS Community Action Program, Health Canada (ACAP); the Organizational Development Program (ODP); the Ontario AIDS Network (OAN); and the Ontario HIV Treatment Network (OHTN).

The CLEAR Steering Committee is now assisting the staff in prioritizing its work for the
The areas for study include: ASO information services, ASO community-capacity building, ASO prevention/education efforts, and ASO volunteer and staff recruitment, retention and deployment. Other smaller studies with individual ASOs will also be planned over the next year as requests are received and processed by the staff and Steering Committee.

Our biggest challenge is to build trust, which we acknowledge is only earned over time. To listen, to learn, to respect and to work hard are all values shared by staff and the Steering Committee. These will go a long way to ensure and build a trusting relationship with ASOs. We are up to the challenge.

We have so many to thank for their investment of time, expertise and commitment. The CLEAR Unit acknowledges the financial and planning support of the AIDS Bureau, Ontario Ministry of Health for their insightful initiative to provide this unique opportunity to the province’s AIDS community.

The experience, wisdom and history that the Steering Committee provides to us as Co-Directors and to the Unit as a whole is invaluable. We thank them all for their participation and particularly to Michael Sobota and Betty Anne Thomas for their leadership as CLEAR’s first Co-Chairpersons.

The cooperation and interest of other community partners has been significant to the early evolution of this program. We thank the Organizational Development Program (ODP), the Ontario AIDS Network (OAN) and the Ontario HIV Treatment Network (OHTN) and look forward to an exciting and productive working relationship.

We also are grateful to the AIDS Community Action Program (ACAP) for their ongoing participation with the CLEAR Steering Committee and strategic planning process.

As Co-Directors of CLEAR, we offer our sincere appreciation to all of our staff for their time, energy and creative wisdom in helping to shape this new program.

Most importantly, we thank all of the AIDS Service Organizations in Ontario who have allowed us into their agencies and gave of their time on the telephone so that we may become more familiar with them. They are our priority and we are most excited to serve the needs of the province’s community-based AIDS movement.

As we turn the page on the first chapter of the new CLEAR Unit, we look forward to working in partnership with the AIDS community throughout Ontario, as we together measure the successes and document the learning of ASOs through evaluative studies.

“We realize ASOs are, at once, the players, the cards and the stakes. Nothing can go on if they leave the table.”

- Teihrad
CLEAR Steering Committee

Michael Sobota       (Co-Chairperson)
Betty Anne Thomas * (Co-Chairperson)
Trevor Gray
Roger LaRade
Joanne Lush
John Maxwell
Joanne McAlpine
Derek Thaczuk
Keith Wong
Frank McGee         (Ex-officio)
Stephanie Mehta     (Ex-officio)
* resigned

CLEAR Staff

Co-Directors
Greg Robinson
Gina Browne

Investigators
Carolyn Byrne       Dale Guenter
Joan Crook          Basanti Majumdar
Amiram Gafni        Jacqueline Roberts
Robin Weir          Dennis Willms

Managers
Rose Sokolowski     - Unit Manager
Sue Whittaker       - Projects Manager
Mark Bulbrook       - Manager, Communications
Maria Wong          - Manager, Information System

Full & Part-Time Support Staff
Ellen Bowen          Kathleen Gibbons
Anne Adams           Marijana Prica
Karen Auld           Karen Henderson
Fiona Myers

With special thanks to the following community groups, committees and government bodies for their assistance in the early development of CLEAR

AIDS Bureau,
Ontario Ministry of Health & Long Term Care

AIDS Community Action Program, Ontario Region Health Canada

Ontario AIDS Network

Ontario HIV Treatment Network

HIV Information Infrastructure Program

HIV Ontario Observational Database

Organization Development Program

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