

Thank You CATIE!

I am an educator who advocates for sexual and gender minority youth and young adults. In my own youth, I survived homophobic bullying and threats to my health, safety, security, and wellbeing. Now, I work everyday to address homo/bi/transphobia, which makes our communities and institutions unsafe for youth and young adults dealing with sexual and gender differences. I engage with so many amazing counsellors, social workers, youth workers, parents, teachers, police officers, healthcare workers, and other significant adults who are there for *all* young people. What a wonderful community I have come to know and value in Edmonton and across Canada.

The C.H.E.W. Project exists to assist street-involved and homeless youth and young adults who need sexual-health education so they might stay alive. Sadly, as many of these young people tell me, their families and schools failed to provide them with adequate or, in many cases, even any comprehensive health education. Let me be crystal clear: These youth and young adults count! They do not compose some disposable population. They are human beings, many of whom have been abandoned by their parents, proving my point that not every parent is a good parent.

Those of us working with the C.H.E.W. Project are so grateful to CATIE (<http://www.catie.ca/>), a superb resource for our intervention and outreach work with vulnerable sexual and gender minority youth and young adults. The acronym CATIE stands for the Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange. CATIE has ongoing funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada, which was an early funder of the C.H.E.W. Project. CATIE's other funders include the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. There are many ministries and agencies at the provincial / territorial and federal levels across Canada who are supporting good work like that done by CATIE and the C.H.E.W. Project to keep vulnerable populations alive and well.

For us, CATIE is an excellent resource, providing balanced and impartial HIV information. **On chewproject.ca, there is information provided by CATIE (the Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange). For more information, contact CATIE at 1.800.263.1638.** CATIE, like the C.H.E.W. Project, engages in intervention and outreach so vulnerable individuals have the connections, resources, and supports that they need to live lives with dignity and integrity.

The C.H.E.W. Project came about as one response to alarming provincial statistics. In 2013, Alberta Health reported that age-gender-specific rates of newly diagnosed HIV cases among 15 to 29 year olds in the province were disturbingly high (2013a, 2013b). In Edmonton, consecutive 2010 to 2012 rates as well as the 2013-annualized rate of HIV were the highest in the province. As PHAC (2010) asserts, youth need to be a primary focus since individuals aged 15 to 29 years olds have accounted for 26.5 percent of all positive HIV test reports since reporting began in 1979. With sexually transmitted infections including syphilis, gonorrhea, and HIV generally increasing among young people in Alberta, there are significant associated costs in social,

emotional, health, and economic terms; for example, the “lifetime direct cost of one HIV infection is [at least] \$750,000” (Government of Alberta, 2011, p. 2).

To the youth that the C.H.E.W. Project serves, I want you to know: We care about you! We are there for you when you ideate about or attempt suicide. We understand you have your reasons for doing this: Significant adults and institutions let you down. Purportedly caring adults using social media won't let you exist. We are there for you when you have worries and needs in relation to your mental, sexual, physical, and social health. We want you to be *happy, healthy, and hopeful* – still no mean feat when you're a young sexual or gender minority citizen. Always remember, we are here to help. We will help.

André P. Grace
The C.H.E.W. Project

References

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If humanity does not opt for integrity we are through completely. It is absolutely touch and go. Each one of us could make the difference.

R. Buckminster Fuller