

FOREWORD



I am writing this on the eighth anniversary of my HIV diagnosis, a time that is not easy to entirely recall. I was in the hospital, with full-on pneumocystis carinii pneumonia (PCP); I could not see, could not walk, and my partner was told to get my affairs in order as I would not make it through the weekend. After hearing all of this, I made a vow to myself that I would be victorious, not the virus. Further, I am happy to say that I am so much a better person today than I was before being told, “You have HIV.” I went back to school to study social work, holding down multiple part-time jobs to pay the bills so I could begin a completely new career path at the age of forty—because I had finally found my passion, HIV.

According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), there were more than 37.7 million people living with HIV globally in 2020 and 680,000 people died due to HIV-related illnesses. When I see these numbers, I ask myself why, why is this still

HEARTS LINKED BY COURAGE

happening? The answer(s) is not a simple one; it comes down to these inequities: access to treatment, access to medication, and access to social supports. Our work locally and globally must continue until there is affordable access to HIV treatments and affordable medications for all.

Working at the AIDS Bereavement and Resiliency Program of Ontario (ABRPO) and Turning to One Another Network (TTOA) is the highlight of my career. I get to work with an amazing group of peers and agency staff from around the province and we have really grown together and found our stride. We nourish one another with knowledge; support one another through the good times and bad; we laugh and cry together, we are a family. One of the biggest lessons I have learned at ABRPO and TTOA is that I am standing on the shoulders of some amazing people who came before me, and that without them I would not be here today. Those people I speak of are the millions who have died due to HIV-related complications, the allies that took care of the sick and dying when no one else would or cared. Their stories must live on.

Our community came together in the early years of the AIDS crisis, creating The Canadian AIDS Memo-

rial Quilt to memorialize more than 25,000 Canadian people who died of HIV-related complications. Today, thanks to technology, we can view panels of the quilt online at <https://quilt.ca/> via the Canadian AIDS Society webpage. The reason I am referencing the AIDS quilt is that each panel represents a person who has passed, who was loved, and whose story may never be told again as our memories of them fade.

Each of us have a unique story to share, and it is projects like The Canadian AIDS Memorial Quilt and this one, *Hearts Linked by Courage – People Supporting People*, where our stories will live on forever.

To the CAYR team and peers, this is your AIDS quilt panel; this is your legacy!

In gratitude,

— Craig Boucher

ABRPO/TTOA Coordinator

AIDS Bereavement and Resiliency

Program of Ontario (ABRPO)

Turning to One Another Network (TTOA)