

Fight Poverty, Not the Poor!

AIDS ACTION NOW!

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December 17, 1991

Honourable Marion Boyd

Minister of Community and Social Services
6th Floor, Hepburn Block
80 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, Ontario
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Dear Minister Boyd:

I write on behalf of the steering committee of AIDS ACTION NOW! to voice our disgust at your recent announcement of a 2% increase in basic social assistance levels.

An increase significantly below the cost of living means a reduction in real income to those who can least afford it. This is a measure of cruelty unprecedented in recent decades in this province. That this mean-spirited decision should come from a party which professes to represent the poor is even more appalling.

Your decision will inflict real harm on all those struggling for survival on inadequate assistance levels. For people living with HIV or AIDS who are on social assistance, your decision could be fatal. Inadequate nutrition, sub-standard housing, lack of access to complementary therapies and the stresses of abject poverty will all be worsened. These conditions can mean - literally - the difference between life and death for people battling AIDS/HIV.

We call upon you to immediately increase social assistance levels by at least the cost of living. We also call upon you to return to the agenda for social assistance reform, as your party has repeatedly promised.

Fight poverty, not the poor.

Sincerely,

Glen Brown

for the AIDS ACTION NOW! Steering Committee

Voices of Positive Women Launched

Voices of Positive Women, founded early last year to provide an organizing voice for women living with HIV, is facing a busy agenda for 1992.

VOPW is the first of its kind in Canada, as a group run by and for HIV positive women. The group aims to provide information, support, a safe environment, and a common voice. Accessible information on symptoms, treatment options, reproductive and safer sex issues, legal rights and discrimination will be shared and produced.

Because the needs of women living with HIV/AIDS are diverse, VOPW will also refer women to other community groups suited for individual needs.

VOPW hopes that with information, support and empowerment, women can live longer, healthier, more productive and more hopeful lives.

VOPW will also have an educational function, dealing with the media and other forums to provide accurate images and information on women living with HIV/AIDS.

The organization is working on pamphlets and other materials for the coming year.

To get involved, or for more information, contact Voices of Positive Women at Box 471, Station C, Toronto, Ontario M6J 3P5 or phone (416) 324-8703. **ANN**

Activists Confront Human Rights Commission Delays

Media work, a flurry of briefs and letters, and lots of meetings. Those were the ingredients in an AIDS ACTION NOW! strategy to take on the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

The Commission had come under heavy criticism from human rights activists last year for delays in dealing with human rights complaints. In many cases related to HIV discrimination, those delays had reached absurd levels, despite a policy which was alleged to put them on a "fast-track". Complaints of insensitivity to HIV discrimination had also been levelled at the Commission.

Enter the AIDS ACTION NOW! Human Rights Committee, which included several people who had personally experienced Commission delays and insensitivity.

The AAN! Committee met with other human rights and AIDS activists, prepared detailed briefs and recommendations, and highlighted the problems through the media. After several meetings with Chief Human Rights Commissioner Catherine Frazee and commission staff, AAN! was pleased with several commitments for reform.

The Commission agreed to: develop a "Bill of Rights and Responsibilities" for all clients; ensure HIV/AIDS sensitivity training for commissioners and officers; guarantee "fast-tracking" for discrimination based on real or perceived HIV status, and ensure complainant confidentiality.

The AAN! Human Rights Committee will continue to monitor these developments to ensure that people fighting HIV discrimination have the Human Rights Commission firmly on their side. **ANN**