

spring • 2008

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gltb health & wellbeing



NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

Addressing HIV/AIDS among gay men in the Asia Pacific

MAKING CARE OUR BUSINESS

Helping GLBT patients with complex needs

I CAN SEE QUEERLY NOW

GLBT's look to the future with 2020 vision

THE OTHER PACKER FAMILY

Giving gay men in NSW a good wrap

courage • empathy • diversity • equality • partnership • community

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Give hope on World AIDS Day December 1

HIV/AIDS has already robbed us of over 6,700 Australians. Right now, 16,500 brothers, sisters, lovers and friends are living with HIV. And sadly, each week 20 more are newly diagnosed. You can help put a stop to HIV/AIDS and support those who are HIV positive by volunteering to sell red ribbons on the street, to your customers or to your colleagues on World AIDS Day, Monday December 1.

Call (02) 9206 2024 or visit www.redribbonday.org.au

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HELP US HELP OTHERS

Welcome to the Spring '08 edition of *Shine*, a biannual magazine which profiles the work of ACON.

ACON is a community-based organisation that promotes the health and wellbeing of NSW's gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community. We also provide information and support for people living with HIV or at risk of acquiring HIV, including sex workers and people who use drugs.

The last week of November is AIDS Awareness Week, the highest profile opportunity all year for ACON and other HIV/AIDS organisations to educate people about HIV/AIDS and to raise money for programs to prevent new infections and help people living with HIV. Please help us out this year by supporting one of our fundraising activities or remembrance events.

Thanks for your support.

MICHAEL BADORREK
EDITOR



Marcia Hines on set for the AIDS Trust's new TV ad

RED RIBBON APPEAL

Mon 1 Dec

Buy a red ribbon (\$2) or red wristbands (\$4) at selected locations all over NSW or make a donation via the official Red Ribbon Appeal web site: www.redribbonday.org.au

WORLD AIDS DAY CONCERT

Sun 30 Nov 7:30pm

Star Theatre, Star City

Sydney's first ever World AIDS Day concert will be a tribute to legendary Aussie entertainer Peter Allen: www.ticketmaster.com.au

WALK FOR AIDS

Sun 23 Nov 11am - 2pm

Royal Botanic Gardens

2 km walk with a \$20 rego fee: www.walkforaids.org.au

CANDLELIGHT

Mon 1 Dec

Venue TBA / 8pm

Candlelight memorial to remember people who have been lost to HIV/AIDS: www.candlelight.org.au

For full details visit www.acon.org.au/worldaidsday

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IN THE PINK

The health and wellbeing of lesbians and same-sex attracted women is about to take a turn for the better following the launch of a comprehensive new strategy...

Over the last ten years, there's been an increased focus on many issues related to women's health. Breast cancer, ovarian cancer, cervical cancer, domestic violence and fertility issues are probably the ones with the highest profile. However, one area that has been sorely neglected is the health and wellbeing of lesbians and same-sex attracted women.

Siri May, who heads up ACON's Lesbian Health Project, says this is because the majority of health professionals don't make any distinction between women's health and lesbian health.

"However, due to a range of social and lifestyle factors, lesbians experience a variety of lower health outcomes when compared to the general population," she says. "In fact, research shows that lesbians are under screened for all cancers and sexually transmitted infections and, compared to women in the general population, are up to four times more likely to be assaulted, have higher rates of anxiety and depression, and are more likely to use alcohol and drugs."

To help address this imbalance, ACON has worked with a team of lesbian health professionals to produce *Turning Point*, a comprehensive three year plan to inform, integrate, fund and raise awareness of lesbian health. The plan identifies nine key health issues that are relevant to lesbians including sexual health, alcohol and other drugs, mental health, violence, cancer, youth and ageing, relationships, parenting and fertility.

"It's a really important achievement because it addresses the invisibility of lesbian health", says Siri. "For too long, lesbians and same-sex attracted women have not been on the radar at all. Finally with this strategy we now have a plan that will help mainstream healthcare providers acknowledge, understand and address the health issues that affect lesbians. That's a big step forward."

In addition to focusing on how external service providers can lift their game, the strategy also sets out a variety of ways that ACON can improve its own service provision to lesbians and same-sex attracted women.

"What's good for the goose is good

for the gander and we can't expect other organisations to follow unless we lead by example," says Siri. "So the other important aspect of this strategy is a complete integration of lesbian health across our organisation. Basically we're really putting the "L" into GLBT health and wellbeing."

This means that over the next three years, ACON will implement a range of new health promotion programs for lesbians as well as specific services like counselling, housing assistance and support groups. There'll also be parenting forums for same-sex parents and increased content on the ACON website for lesbians and same-sex attracted women.

The full strategy is available from the ACON website: www.acon.org.au.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

We'd like to employ a full-time worker for our Young Women's Project. But we don't have enough funding. Visit acon.org.au/communityfundraising to find out how you can help...



Would you wear it?

Racism is as hurtful and offensive as homophobia.

Excluding people or making jokes, assumptions and negative comments based on race may make some people feel superior - but it's racism!

Challenge our own and other people's ideas about race. Let's work towards a community where everyone is accepted & respected.

Report racism and get more information on how you can make a difference at www.acon.org.au/racism

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"...I went to a women's refuge. But because my partner was a woman, no one knew how to help me."

- Lucy 27



DOMESTIC HELP

For GLBT people, escaping an abusive partner can be even harder because the system is not adequately equipped to help. However, a new ACON project is set to make it easier for people to find a way through...

Lucy, 27, had been in a relationship with her girlfriend for several years. The once happy union between the two Newcastle women turned sour once Lucy's partner became emotionally and then physically abusive.

"I wanted to get out but had nowhere to go because my girlfriend had isolated me from all my friends," Lucy recalls. "So I went to a women's refuge. But because my partner was a woman, no one knew how to help me."

This situation is not uncommon for GLBT people who experience domestic violence as there's a widespread assumption that it simply doesn't happen in same-sex relationships or it's not as serious because it's between two people of the same gender.

However, research shows that over a third of gay men and lesbians are likely to experience violence or abuse at the hands of a partner and that the level and types of violence are similar to those experienced in the heterosexual community.

Nancy de Castro from ACON's Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project says research also shows that almost half of GLBT people experiencing domestic violence will be unlikely to seek help from available services.

"Many victims of same-sex domestic violence (SSDV) are reluctant to seek help for fear of homophobia," she says. "Those who do seek help are generally met with a lack of understanding of gay and lesbian relationships."

However, this is about to change thanks to funding from the NSW Office For Women's Policy. A \$98,000 grant has allowed ACON to employ a full-time SSDV Officer to develop resources to assist police, legal and healthcare workers become better equipped at dealing with SSDV.

"We'll also be able to start analysing gaps in the system and make recommendations to improve existing services," Nancy says.

In addition to building the capacity of service providers to respond to the

needs of GLBT people, the funding will also allow ACON to further develop education campaigns to raise awareness of SSDV within the GLBT community.

"In combating both homophobic violence and SSDV, advocating for support for victims must go hand in hand with initiatives to stop violence before it starts. This is where public education comes in. We're thrilled that we're now in a position to do this more effectively."

GET HELP

If you're experiencing domestic violence and need to find support check out www.ssdv.acon.org.au.

Or contact us to find out about counselling, housing and other support options

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**A free and confidential six week group
for gay and bisexual guys, 26 years and under.**

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get the latest information,
enjoy yourself!**

**For more information,
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Email: youth@acon.org.au
Web: www.acon.org.au/youth**

**Fun &
Esteem**

The Fun & Esteem Project: Bringing together Sydney's young gay and bisexual men since 1988

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HEALTH & WELLBEING



Warwick (left) with EPC Team Leader Niki Barr

MAKING CARE OUR BUSINESS

Living with a complex medical condition can be challenging enough, let alone managing the process of treatment and care. Helping people coordinate their care is a FREE community service provided by ACON's Enhanced Primary Care team...

Warwick is a gay man in his early 50s who has been living with a brain injury for 30 years. In 2005, when his relationship with his then partner ended, Warwick needed to find new accommodation that would meet his special needs. "I was trying to get help on my own, but I was getting nowhere," he recalls.

Due to his medical condition, Warwick receives regular treatment from his GP. At the time, his doctor realised that Warwick's health would suffer if suitable accommodation wasn't found. That's when he put Warwick in touch with ACON. "From the day my doctor referred me to ACON, everything began to happen," he says. "The staff knew where to go and what to ask. When I did it on my own, I was left in the dark at every turn."

The service Warwick was referred to is ACON's Enhanced Primary Care Project, a free service which ACON provides to help people who are experiencing difficulties co-ordinating their treatment or care. Established in 2002, the project supports selected GLBT patients from three key inner-Sydney practises who are living with chronic or long term medical conditions. The practices are Taylor Square Private Clinic, Holdsworth House Medical Practice and East Sydney Doctors.

Patients with acute needs are referred by their doctors to the on-site ACON social workers for a comprehensive welfare assessment. They are then assisted as much as possible by ACON staff or put in contact with a range of allied health care providers such as physiotherapists, occupational therapists, psychologists, dieticians, podiatrists and exercise physiologists. Among the issues the patients are dealing with are HIV and AIDS, hepatitis C, mental health problems, homelessness, nutritional care, drug and alcohol use and domestic violence.

"Often the GPs don't have the time to deal with all the issues a patient may present with but they know that when patients access other services it can significantly improve their overall health," says team leader Niki Barr. "Many of the patients with complex needs have been through so many services in the past they find it hard to jump through all the hoops. What we try to do is make it a smooth process."

Back in 2005, the team were able to help Warwick find a new home. In September this year, a change in Warwick's health limited his mobility and he was again in need of new housing. "This time, I knew exactly

where to turn," he says.

Warwick is just one of hundreds of patients who've been assisted through the Enhanced Primary Care Project. In fact the service has been so successful the New Zealand AIDS Foundation is now considering setting up its own version based on the ACON model.

However, the success of the project means the two person team have a pretty hectic schedule and while a new social worker is set to join the team in 2009, the service could expand even further to meet the increasing demand. "There are always people – both doctors and clients – wanting this service," Niki says. "It's a system that has really helped to change lives."

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

We'd like to help more people through our Enhanced Primary Care project but we don't have the resources. Visit acon.org.au/communityfundraising to find out how you can help...

I CAN SEE QUEERLY NOW

Looking to the future of NSW's GLBT community is the focus of a new initiative called *GLBT NSW 2020*. So what's it all about and how can people get involved?...

Remember the Federal Government's 2020 Summit earlier this year? Lots of prominent Aussies putting in their two cents about Australia's future? Well some of NSW's leading GLBT community organisations got together recently to kick start a bit of forward thinking about NSW's GLBT community.

"Our community is evolving, and is doing so at a rapid pace," says ACON President Mark Orr, one of the organisers of *GLBT NSW 2020*, a special initiative which aims to create a plan for the development of NSW's GLBT community. "So we need to know what people are concerned about and where they see their lives heading."

Online questionnaires, focus groups and public forums are all set to be part of a wide-ranging community consultation to determine the best approach to dealing with the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for NSW's GLBT community.

"While the Federal Government's commitment to amending some pieces of discriminatory legislation is encouraging, there's a lot more to do to gain full equality and inclusion for GLBT people," Mark says.

"There are also many challenges within the GLBT community itself. In a

health care context, these include social isolation, the impact of alcohol and other drugs, an ageing population and, of course, HIV. But there are lots of issues that need to be addressed and we're confident this initiative will deliver the information we need to move forward."

The 2020 initiative began in late September when representatives from about 20 leading GLBT community organisations met to discuss the parameters and how it should proceed. Following the meeting, an interagency working group has been formed to drive the initiative through the process of public consultation.

"We need to speak to individuals and hear all voices," Mark says. "What is a key issue for a 22 year old man from Darlinghurst will be vastly different to an older lesbian couple living in the Blue Mountains. The way the community connects is also changing, with many GLBT people moving out of the traditional ghettos and into suburban areas. But we are all part of the same community and it's this complete range of voices we need to hear."

Details of the consultation phase will be announced in early December and organisers expect the process to take about six months. The findings will ultimately help determine

planning decisions across the health, legal, business, sporting, youth, media and cultural sectors as well as the next round of initiatives to be put into action by ACON and other key GLBT community organisations.

"We need the community to tell us what they really need," Mark says. "This is the time for people to talk, and for them to know that what they're saying is leading somewhere that we hope will help everyone."



Participants at the *GLBT NSW 2020* summit

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Let us know what you think by completing the *GLBT NSW 2020* online questionnaire at www.acon.org.au/2020. Details of further community consultation will be published on the 2020 webpage after World AIDS Day (December 1).

According to the Bible – as well as a certain iconic Aussie TV drama – we should all strive to be good neighbours. And whether you prefer the word of God or a schmaltzy soap theme, it's a sentiment that lies at the heart of a revitalised engagement between Australia and our neighbours in the Asia Pacific region.

This new approach to regional cooperation is a hallmark of the Rudd Government's foreign policy agenda as Australia moves to carve



Steven Scott (right) in Mexico at the 2008 International AIDS Conference

problem, particularly in societies where attitudes to homosexuality may be intolerant or even hostile.

As a world leader in HIV prevention among gay men, ACON has been expanding its work in the Asia Pacific region over recent years to help local GLBT communities contain the epidemic. Sydney is the only

health campaigns in an epidemic. Over the past two years ACON has worked with organisations in Thailand, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Tonga, Samoa and the Cook Islands.

"Sharing ACON's expertise is important not only for these communities but for everyone in the region as none of us are living in isolation," says Stephen Scott, ACON's Manager of International Projects.

"Gay men are mobile and are ready travellers so we really can't think of our own community in isolation. A crisis in Bangkok or Hong Kong is something we should all be concerned about as it affects all of us in some way. That's why ACON is working with these other countries but we're also learning plenty

"In Thailand, more than one in three gay men are HIV positive"

out an influential niche for itself in the Asia Pacific community. However, regional collaboration isn't limited to geopolitics and economic trade. Being a good neighbour also means taking care of each other and one of the biggest health issues facing the Asia Pacific community is HIV/AIDS.

As in many other regions throughout the world, the HIV/AIDS epidemic continues to expand relentlessly throughout Asia and the Pacific. Papua New Guinea has the highest incidence (70,000 people or 2% of the adult population) closely followed by Thailand and Vietnam. However, the incidence of HIV infection among gay men in the region is staggeringly high. In Thailand, for example, more than one in three gay men are HIV positive and there are disturbing projections of further increases. It's a massive

industrialised city on the planet where the rate of HIV has been contained for the past 10 years. As a result, the health initiatives and information campaigns ACON has developed for NSW's GLBT community are being adopted as a model for how to successfully wage

about how we can be more effective with what we're doing at home."

In response to Thailand's dramatic rise in HIV infections among gay men, ACON formed a partnership two years ago with Rainbow Sky, an GLBT health and HIV/AIDS organisation based in



Ken Moala (Front, 2nd from left) with ACON CEO Stevie Clayton and members of the Pacific Sexual Diversity Network.

Bangkok. With assistance from the Australian Thai Institute, delegations from the two organisations have travelled between Sydney and Bangkok over the last two years to help Rainbow Sky improve its programs, systems and strategies. In return, ACON has learnt better ways to work with Thai gay men in Sydney. With the support of AusAID and UNAIDS, ACON also posted staff member Rob Sutherland to Bangkok in February for a one year secondment to work on relevant programs in the region and support our relationship with Rainbow Sky. A new staff member is expected to replace Rob in February and continue work on the program for another year.

In Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, HIV rates among gay men have



Rainbow Sky Staff at the 2007 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras

rates as Bangkok unless appropriate action is taken. In October, Stephen teamed up with members of the Albion St Centre and travelled to Hong Kong to train local organisations in programs to work with gay men. Regular visits have been organised for the next 12 months between ACON and Hong Kong's leading HIV education

of the most pressing issues for us," he says. "It's very difficult to encourage safe sex and testing when sex between men carries a jail sentence." Ken says the other major concern is the small percentage of HIV/AIDS funding being spent on gay men in the region. "We need to ensure that vulnerable groups like gay men, sex workers and maritime workers are effectively targeted and we can't do that if we haven't got the money and the resources." To help meet this need, one of the delegation's areas of focus was political advocacy and how to lobby governments and policy-makers.

Stephen says the challenges faced by GLBT communities in the Asia Pacific region demonstrate the need for ongoing education and support. "Many

NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

The HIV/AIDS epidemic among gay men in the Asia Pacific region is threatening to spiral out of control. Helping our neighbours to meet this challenge has become an important part of ACON's work...

increased in recent years, with forecasts predicting the rate could double in the next decade. In the coming months, ACON will spend two weeks with representatives from these countries, creating networking opportunities between the various gay organisations. Stephen says authorities are worried that these countries could go down the same path as Thailand. "No one wants that," he says, "but rather than ACON creating individual relationships with each of these countries, the idea is for local groups to take care of their own and support each other with Rainbow Sky providing strong leadership for the immediate region."

In Hong Kong, the HIV epidemic is putting gay men increasingly at risk. As with Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, there are concerns that the regional hub could face the same kind of HIV

organisation AIDS Concern.

While the epidemic among gay men in key Asian centres is well understood, little is known about the prevalence of HIV among gay men in the Pacific. To this end, ACON recently hosted a delegation from various Pacific island nations including Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Tonga, Samoa and the Cook Islands. During the visit, delegates from the Pacific Sexual Diversity Network learned about ACON's HIV/AIDS education and prevention strategies as well as ACON's broader role in promoting the health and wellbeing of NSW's GLBT community.

Heading the delegation was Ken Moala from Samoa. He says one of the biggest challenges for HIV prevention in the Pacific is the fact that homosexuality remains illegal in many countries. "Law reform is probably one

of these communities are incredibly isolated, particularly in the Pacific, yet they are our close neighbours. It's vital that we continue to grow this area of our work because we're not only learning how to be better at what we do, we're also having a lasting impact on the health and wellbeing of our region."

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

We'd like to do more work with our neighbours in the Asia Pacific but we don't have the resources. Visit acon.org.au/communityfundraising to find out how you can help...



Photo: Rod Spark

Hockey demo at Team Sydney's *Sports Day Out*, a GLBT sports festival sponsored by ACON, SSO and the City of Sydney



Photo: Ann-Marie Calilhanna

Matinee guy-dolls at *Afternoon Delight*, a movie matinee for GLBT seniors presented by ACON, Queer Screen and DADHC



Photo: Morgan Carpenter

Justice Michael Kirby helps celebrate the 17th birthday of ACON's Mature Age Gay Men's Group



ACON staff and volunteers toast the success of the Oxford St Safe Place



Peter Trebilco accepts his community service award at Honour



Honour award winner Bruce Pollack with ACON CEO Stevie Clayton and ACON President Mark Orr



Photo: Ann-Marie Calilhanna

Volunteers at ACON's Red Ribbon Working Bee



Volunteers fundraise at *Priscilla The Musical*



Photo: Ann-Marie Calilhanna

Guests at the Sydney Launch of *Turning Point*, ACON's new lesbian health strategy



Photo: Rod Spark

ACON stall at the Parramatta Pride Picnic



Photo: Rod Spark

ACON Rovers at Sleaze Ball 2008

THE OTHER PACKER FAMILY

A tight knit group of dedicated volunteers are helping gay men in NSW to get a good wrap...

Preventing the spread of HIV is one of the most important jobs that ACON does. So every year, ACON staff distribute over 150,000 safe sex packs to gay men at clubs, pubs, sex on premises venues and community events. Each pack contains a condom, a sachet of lube and a small card with information about safe sex.

The service is a cornerstone of ACON's HIV prevention strategy and, together with a range of education campaigns and programs, has helped create a situation where most gay men in Sydney use condoms most of the time. This behaviour has helped keep HIV infection rates in NSW relatively stable.

It's a commendable effort, but just as commendable are the efforts of the ACON Packers, a team of dedicated volunteers who've been meeting twice a month for the last 13 years to make the safe packs that help keep our community healthy.

"They're a really nice bunch of blokes," says Brian, a 75 year old retiree who's been a Packer since 2001. Brian started as a volunteer carer for people with HIV but found it too

emotionally draining. "Seeing all those beautiful young men wasting away, it was too much." So he became a Packer. "It's a really wonderful way to spend a morning or afternoon because there's a lot of giggling and joking around as well as working."

Having recently put his partner of 53 years into a nursing home, Brian says his Packer family offer him "a lot of companionship and pleasure." In addition to the three packing sessions per month, he says team members often meet up for lunch in the city or other social activities.

"They really are like a family," says ACON Information and Venue Liaison Officer Gavin Prendergast who oversees the team. "Over the years we've had maybe 300 people involved in the program. It's really wonderful to see them working together and having such a good time. And of course they make a vital contribution to the health and wellbeing of our community. 150,000 safe packs a year is an incredible effort. They're an inspiration really – and a hellava lot of fun!"

COMMUNITY



At 53, Greg is one of the youngest in the group. He joined two years ago after losing his partner to an AIDS-related illness. "I love coming along to hear the stories of the older generation," he says. "It's fascinating finding out about gay life back in their days. Plus I feel like I'm doing something really positive and giving back to the community."

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Want to be an ACON volunteer? There's heaps of different ways you can help out. Just contact Alberto on (02) 9206 2024 or volunteers@acon.org.au and he'll get you on board!



Gavin Prendergast, (front centre), with Brian, (back centre), Greg, (back 2nd from left) and the rest of the ACON Packers.



EMPATHY

IN WE TRUST

For the first time ever, a nationally coordinated campaign will be at the heart of this year's Red Ribbon Appeal...

This year marks the 20th anniversary of World AIDS Day. For the last two decades, various charities and organisations around the world have used the occasion as a way to help increase awareness of HIV/AIDS and to raise money for people living with HIV.

Chief among these efforts is the Red Ribbon Appeal which takes place every year in the lead up to and on World AIDS Day on December 1. In the past, the AIDS Trust of Australia (ATA) and each state-based AIDS Council (including ACON) have conducted their own independent fundraising activities. However, following an overhaul of the relationship between the ATA and the AIDS Councils, a new nationally coordinated approach is being taken to HIV/AIDS fundraising and this includes the Red Ribbon Appeal.

"It's a welcome change," says ACON Business Development Manager Mark Thomas, "because it's helped us garner a new level of support from a whole range of organisations and individuals."

Marcia Hines is the spokesperson for this year's Red Ribbon Appeal and she appears in a 30 second TV commercial financed by Foxtel, created by ad agency The Works and produced by Foxtel subsidiary Area 51.

"The concept focuses on people in every day situations who have loved ones affected by HIV/AIDS," Mark says. "Their love is symbolised as a glowing red heart which is eventually revealed as a red ribbon. Basically we're asking people to have a heart and show they care by wearing a red ribbon or making a donation on World AIDS Day."

The ad will play as a community service announcement on selected Foxtel channels and on free-to-air TV across the country during November. In addition, the NSW World AIDS Day Committee has arranged for the ad to be played in cinemas across NSW. Also, the print component of the campaign, which features real people whose lives have been affected by HIV, will be placed free of charge or at heavily

discounted rates in mainstream and community media all over the country. The print campaign was also produced at no charge by The Works, as well as leading photographer Adrian Cook.

"It's a truly amazing outcome to get a professionally produced national campaign at almost no cost," says Mark, "and we're incredibly grateful to Foxtel, The Works and everyone else who has contributed to the campaign. We're now hoping lots of other people will show their support and get behind the Red Ribbon Appeal on December 1."

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

You can volunteer to sell red ribbons on the street or in your workplace by visiting www.redribbonday.org.au. Or you can make a donation at www.aidstrust.com.au. Also, check out page 3 for information about all our AIDS Awareness Week activities.

1988...2008

some things
have changed
some have not

HIV remains with us

use condoms to protect
yourself, your partner
and our community



www.TheGlamReaper.com

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BUILDING OUR COMMUNITY'S
HEALTH & WELLBEING



my life

I feel very lucky. Lucky to have had good care, lucky to have my friends, lucky to be alive.

With over 16,700 Australians living with HIV today, chances are you know someone who has been affected by the virus. Monday, December 1 is World AIDS Day. Buy a Red Ribbon as a sign of support or make a donation at aidstrust.com.au

Or volunteer to sell red ribbons on the street, to your customers or to your colleagues.

For more info visit www.redribbonday.org.au

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