In the Beginning Was ACON

In 2010, ACON is marking its 25th anniversary. Historian Garry Wotherspoon charts its evolution from the early days of the HIV epidemic to becoming Australia’s largest GLBT health and well-being organisation.

AIDS Public Meeting

AIDS is a serious and growing problem for the Gay Community

What is being done
What are we planning
What can we do...

Thursday 7th February '85
Teachers Federation Auditorium
300 Sussex St, Sydney
7.30 p.m.

AIDS played an integral role in the Australian response to the AIDS crisis, and its ‘model’ has been praised by international health bodies.

The advent of combination therapies from 1996 changed the disease from a killer to a chronic, manageable one. ACON’s programs changed, so that HIV prevention was in the context of sex, relationships, and the full and complex lives of members of our community – a change in emphasis from ‘dying with HIV’ to ‘living with HIV’. But the stigma associated with HIV / AIDS was something that has always been there to contend with, and it was ACON that initially gave a voice to people living with HIV/AIDS.

ACON played an integral role in the Australian response to the AIDS crisis, and its ‘model’ has been praised by international health bodies. Over the years its work evolved, responding to the changing needs of a society dealing with the infection, particularly as the disease was no longer confined to the gay community.

ACON continues to advocate, for changing public attitudes and laws and regulations that impact on the whole person; its programs now focus on an infected person’s health in context, rather than just upon the disease. Most recently, it has expanded further to become a health promotion agency for the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community. But throughout this evolutionary process, ACON’s HIV work has stayed at the heart of what it does, and these have set the foundations for its responses at both a policy and service delivery level.

ACON is now Australia’s largest community-based GLBT health and HIV/AIDS organisation.

Garry Wotherspoon is a historian whose books include Being Different: nine gay men remember, and City of the Plains, a history of Sydney’s gay subculture since the 1920s.

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25 Years of ACON: In Pictures

RUBBA ME

SAFE SEX!

KEEP IT UP

SAILORS

STRIPPERS

KEY TO IMAGES
1. ACON safe sex poster, 1987
2. ACON’s first safe sex campaign, 1985
3. ACON safe sex pamphlet, 1988
4. ACON safe sex poster, 1989
5. ACON safe sex poster, 1990
7. ACON safe injecting poster, 1992
8. Lesbian safe injecting poster, 1993
9. SWOP poster, 1995
10. ACON Aboriginal Project poster, 1999
11. ACON HIV advocacy postcard, 1990
KEY TO IMAGES
1. Community Support Network volunteers, 1985
2. ACON’s first Mardi Gras Float, 1996
3. Fun & Esteem workshop, 1993
4. Out West support group, 1994
5. ACON’s Positive Women Mardi Gras parade float, 1996
6. Former Bingay Hostess Mitzi Macintosh with Bingay’s original barrel boy, 1999
7. Mature Age Gay members, 2004
8. Candlelight memorial, 2005
9. Red Ribbon volunteers, 2006
The Sum Of Us

Mark Orr

From the last 25 years, there are countless stories to be told about the impact of HIV/AIDS – many sad, many inspirational, some joyful, but all precious to the people and communities affected by the virus. However, perhaps the greatest story would have to be the grand coalition of people, groups, communities, institutions and governments here in NSW that has achieved what is universally regarded as one of the most effective responses to HIV/AIDS anywhere in the world.

For a quarter of a century, ACON has been a key protagonist in this story and has made a significant contribution to the health and wellbeing of our community. But this would not have been possible without the bravery, determination, respect and common sense which have underpinned the HIV/AIDS partnership in NSW from the earliest days of the epidemic.

So it is with much gratitude and great sincerity that we thank the thousands of people and organisations which have contributed to or participated in ACON’s work over the last 25 years. To our staff, Boards, members, volunteers and supporters, we thank you for your time, effort, expertise and support. To all our organisational stakeholders, especially the successive NSW governments, NSW Health, Positive Life NSW, researchers and clinicians, we thank you for your remarkable and committed collaboration. And finally to our clients and community members, thank you for caring for each other and working with us to build the health and wellbeing of our community.

Over the last 25 years, ACON has evolved to meet the changing needs and circumstances of the GLBT community and people with, at risk of or affected by HIV, including sex workers and people who inject drugs. However, the one constant among all the transformation has been a desire to work with and support the people who we proudly claim as our community – people who have been, and continue to be, denied opportunities and services on the basis of their sexuality, HIV status, gender identity, sex work or drug use. Caring for our community means building the health and wellbeing of the people we serve and ACON does this through a range of health promotion services as well as by influencing government policy and participating in legislative reform.

ACON’s evolution will continue into the future as our programs and services adapt to whatever challenges and opportunities lie ahead, be they medical, social, political, or technological. But whatever issues we confront, I’m sure they’ll be addressed with the courage, empathy, diversity, equality, partnership and community which has guided the work of ACON through 25 years of caring for our community.

Mark Orr is the President of ACON.

Images from ACON’s social inclusion project ‘This Is Oz’. Go to thisisoz.com.au