

NEWSLETTER

June 2003

(Vol. 2) Issue 2



- In Memorandum - Alex Archie

The Aboriginal AIDS Community in Canada mourned the passing of long-time Aboriginal AIDS activist Alex Archie, who was called to the spirit world on May 7, 2003 at his home in British Columbia. Alex was involved in the Aboriginal AIDS movement in Canada for over ten years. He was a tireless advocate for Aboriginal people living with HIV and AIDS, and helped bring the issues of Aboriginal people and HIV/AIDS to the national stage. He was the first Aboriginal person publically elected to the board of directors of the Canadian AIDS Society, where he presided for two years. He also was a former employee of Healing Our Spirit in Vancouver, a co-organiser of the first APHA Gathering in Canada, worked in the HIV/AIDS division at Health Canada in Ottawa and was a board member of the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network.

Alex was also an artist. He played musical instruments, painted, wrote, sang and generally enjoyed his life and the lives of those around him. He brightened a room when he walked into it, and he could not be

accused of being unmemorable. Everyone always remembered Alex.

At the first CAAN skills building in 1998 in Ottawa, Avis Archembault, a Navaho elder from Scottsdale, Arizona, sang a Sundance ceremony song and called forth some great, ragged, unfinished grief from Alex. Those of us who were there that day will always remember this: it was an example of a First Nations Man who, despite living in the modern colonized world, was connected and able to respond deeply to his ancestral past. Many of us will always have memories of Alex in different places, and at different times. His passion, his warrior spirit, his capacity for joy and love and fun and his efforts at systemic change, will not be forgotten. Goodbye Alex. You will be missed.

[Photo: Alex is standing to the right of friend and AIDS activist Dr. Terry Tafoya in the opposite photo.]

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Greetings From The New Executive Director

I am honoured to have been selected as the new executive director for the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network. It was an exemplary hiring process and I want to thank the Personnel Committee and the Board of Directors for devoting their time and energy to ensuring everything was done in a good way. I am looking forward to working with Denise Lambert who also brings many years of experience, wisdom and a wide array of talents to her new role as CAAN Chair. I am especially grateful to the staff who 'held down the fort' in the month long absence of their former ED Art Zoccole and National Programs and Projects Consultant Kim Thomas, both of whom will be missed dearly. Good luck as well to departed board directors Ken Clement and Margaret Akan. Don't any of you go away too far as CAAN needs you and appreciates sincerely all you have contributed to our organization.

On the day I was leaving the Second National Aboriginal and Hep C Conference in Richmond BC on the day long trip to Nova Scotia, the phone rang as I was literally hauling my suitcases out the door for the shuttle. It was the CAAN office advising me of Alex

Archie's leaving us. His passing affected many of us as we had all worked with and known Alex for many years. I sat by myself for over 10 hours on a plane or in the air terminal and there was no one to share my loss with, no one who could even fathom what a bright and contrary man Alex was when he was among us. I felt incredibly angry with the world that AIDS even happened given the attention paid to West Nile Virus, SARS, and now Mad Cow Disease. AIDS keeps taking our young and old and babies, leaving us to grieve for years after their passing. This still astounds me after nine years of HIV/AIDS work. It will continue to astound me.

I arrived home at 3:30 am in my community of Pleasant Harbour, Nova Scotia and had exactly eight hours to sleep, re-pack, spend time with my family of six, ensure there was a CAAN presence at Alex's funeral, and get to the airport for my flight to Ottawa to start my new job the next morning. The staff had chosen to wait until my arrival in office on Friday to have a Circle for Alex which was led by Albert McLeod in an Ojibway manner. It was both a good-bye from us and a welcome for me and all was very touching and meaningful. We had finished and had left the candle burning until it was ready to go out on its own. Except about an hour later, there were suddenly two-foot flames shooting from it and clouds of white and black smoke and none of us could contain them nor wanted to get in trouble for blowing out Alex's candle. Fearful of setting off the smoke alarms and water sprinklers or burning down CAAN and a good portion of our decrepit building, Lisa Dixon ran with the candle plate to the window where it promptly started melting the screen. Randy had run for Albert who came and stopped the shooting flames with a gentle "good-bye Alex". For those of us who knew Alex, this was all so what he would have enjoyed.

I know in future articles I will have more opportunity to share some of the many creative, strategic and visionary ideas for CAAN as put forth by members, staff, board directors and friends and partners of this movement. We are looking forward to the new relationships we will form with the revitalized Two Spirit People of the First Nations and others who recognize CAAN has much to offer toward all our relations living with, affected by, at risk for and dying from AIDS. All Our Relations, Arlo

Summer Training Awards Interview With Kim McKay

The following is an interview with Summer Training Awards participant Kim McKay. Kim is an Aboriginal mother of four children. She and her husband are both pursuing post secondary education. She is currently a student at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College taking her BA with Honours in Psychology. She has recently been accepted to the Clinical Psychology program for the Fall of 2003, and is just completing the analysis on a project in Regina which focussed on sexual health of Aboriginal youth and young adults. Kim was awarded the Summer Training Award Grant last year and will be taking the award again this year.

Interviewer: In your own words, what are the summer training awards and how do they benefit the Aboriginal community in Canada?

Kim: The summer training awards are an opportunity for Aboriginal students to research important issues that are affecting Aboriginal communities across Canada. The training award provides the financial assistance that many students need for the summer


months in order to survive. The award also encourages students like me to think of what research needs to be conducted in my community. I am driven by my focus on our community. To me the award encourages my ties within my community and encourages me to expand my ties in to other provinces across Canada.

Interviewer: Describe the experience of working on last year's STA?

Kim: My experience last year was awesome. I was introduced to other students across Canada which was great because we all worked on research interests that were related to HIV/AIDS. I was really glad when we had the opportunity to experience the workshop for us last year. I learned so much and I have used the knowledge that I acquired at the workshop in many parts of my life. Overall the experience was great and that is why I applied again this year. It is a great opportunity to try and build national relationships with other students who are working on similar interests with HIV/AIDS. CAAN has been very supportive and I received a lot guidance from them last year.

Charlotte Loppie is an amazing woman who was at our workshop last year. She is a brilliant woman who inspired me. She taught me a lot in such a short time and I would like to thank CAAN for inviting her as she is inspirational and I am blessed to have met her.

I was a new mother last year and when I found out we were invited to Ottawa I got really excited. Then I thought I would not be able to go because I could not leave my son as he was only four months old. I contacted Randy Jackson to see if this would be a problem. He totally accepted us as a package and said that we were welcome to join the workshop. That just made me realize that CAAN is all about family and our community. My son Isaiah was a part of the whole workshop. When he was upset I would leave the room



so I wouldn't disturb everyone else. I was so glad that everyone there accepted him and I am really glad that he was welcomed with open arms.

Interviewer: What are your thoughts on next year's STA?

Kim: This summer, my training award is important for me because I believe it is going to have an impact on our community. I believe that this research is needed and as far as I have found, very limited research has been done in this area. I am going to Grad school this fall and I would like to take the information that I research this summer and apply it to my Master's thesis. It is also important to me because I work with All Nations hope and I always disseminate my findings with this agency. My STA for this year is titled "Aboriginal People Living with HIV/AIDS: A Preliminary Investigation of the Reasons for Mortality." This project is important to me because we are losing our people not to the illness, but to other causes. My research this summer will hopefully point me in a direction that may tell us why that is happening.

Interviewer: Describe a little more about yourself and your background.

Kim: It is important for me to try and make a difference for our communities and our Aboriginal people. My future will always include work with HIV/AIDS as it began as a memorial to my deceased sister, it has now become an important part of my life.

My family travels the pow-wow trail in the summer. In the winter months we live in the hockey rinks all over Saskatchewan for five months of the year. My husband and my children play hockey and we travel all over to support them. Family is the most important thing to me. I am blessed to have the opportunities

that I have had in life and have my family to support me and encourage me.

[The photo is of Kim, her husband and her four children.]























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This is a Publication of the

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Acknowledgements

Funding for this newsletter has been provided by the HIV/AIDS Policy, Coordination and Program Division, Health Canada, under the Canadian Strategy on HIV/AIDS. The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect Health Canada policies.

CAAN Mandate

The mission of CAAN is to provide leadership, support and advocacy for Aboriginal people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS regardless of where they reside.

ISSN 1499-8696

Distribution: Over 1000 Copies Circulated Annually.



Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network

Newsletter Policy

The Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network's (CAAN) newsletter focusses on issues of importance to the HIV/AIDS Aboriginal community. This publication provides individuals with an interactive opportunity for exchanging information. As such, we are actively encouraging submissions from members of the Aboriginal community and others affected by HIV/AIDS.

All submissions should provide insight and give information that is of benefit to Aboriginal communities infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. Submission should be original and written in clear and easy to understand language. Furthermore, work should also be accurate, appropriate, useful and life affirming. In the interest of space and clarity, CAAN reserves the right to edit a submission. However, the author remains responsible for their work. The Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network also reserves the right to refuse any article that does not conform to this newsletter policy. When submitting articles for consideration, please do electronically and include your name, complete mailing address, telephone, fax, and email address. Authors will be identified by name in the article unless they make arrangements with CAAN to use initials or a pseudonym.

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