

One Foot Forward

A GIPA Training Toolkit

*Designed by and
for People Living
with HIV/AIDS*

MODULE

9

..... **STEPPING OUT, GETTING INVOLVED :**
INTEGRATING YOUTH LIVING
WITH HIV

CANADIAN
AIDS
SOCIETY



SOCIÉTÉ
CANADIENNE
DU SIDA



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STEPPING OUT, GETTING INVOLVED : INTEGRATING YOUTH LIVING WITH HIV

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.	1
SECTION ONE	2
GIPA 101	2
Assessing your agency	2
What about me?	9
How do you like to work?	10
Just do it... ..	11
SELF ASSESSMENT	12
SECTION TWO	13
Culture and Sub-culture	14
MENTORS AND MENTORING.	15
DEVELOPING YOUR OWN VOICE.	17
POV (Point of View)	18
SELF ASSESSMENT	21
SECTION THREE	22
Mindfulness	22
Talk	24
Developing respectful relationships	24
SELF ASSESSMENT	26
SECTION FOUR	27
Leading and following	27
BEING A LEADER AS A PERSON LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS	28
Getting involved	29
GENERAL AGENCY STRUCTURES	30
Organizational Culture	30
Meetings, meetings and more meetings... ..	31
SELF ASSESSMENT	33

ONE FOOT FORWARD

SECTION FIVE. 34

 Benefits of social media 34

 Limitations of social media 35

 Social media sites 35

SELF ASSESSMENT 38

SECTION SIX 39

 Self Care & Burnout 39

 It’s about time. 40

 NRG = Energy 40

SELF CARE. 41

 What are my options for getting involved? 42

 Paid Work 43

 Volunteering in the community 47

 Work and volunteering in an ASO – reality check! 48

 So...what do you want to be? 49

SELF ASSESSMENT 50



STEPPING OUT, GETTING INVOLVED :..... INTEGRATING YOUTH LIVING WITH HIV

MODULE

9

INTRODUCTION

This module is one of a series based on the Greater Involvement of People with AIDS (GIPA) principles and intended to assist people living with HIV/AIDS to become more meaningfully involved in their local agencies.

Meaningful involvement of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in all aspects of the AIDS movement is crucial to ensure that needs and interests of PLWHA are considered and incorporated in planning, service delivery, governance and evaluation.

This module is intended for young adults with an interest in learning more about how an agency works, GIPA principles, learning from past and current leaders and finding their own voice.

We encourage readers to explore the other modules in this series for a broader range of information.

The Canadian AIDS Society gratefully acknowledges the participation of:

- Stephen Alexander – National Programs Team Leader
- Michael Yoder – Project Consultant
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 - Zolu Gobah

ONE FOOT FORWARD

SECTION ONE

GETTING STARTED

“Begin at the beginning
the King said
“and go on till you come
to the end: then
stop.”

In this section you will learn more about GIPA principles; assessing how these principles are used in your agency; assessing what you want to do and how to get started doing it.

If you aren't connected to an agency, look around the community and see what's available. Simply because you are living with HIV doesn't mean you have to work or volunteer for an HIV organization.

There are many groups that can use your skills and talents. Explore what's out there and see what the best fit is for you.

Each section contains exercises you can do to explore what you think and feel. At the end of each section you can evaluate how much you learned and consider what else you might need to know.

GIPA 101

The GIPA principles were declared in 1994 by the United Nations at the Paris AIDS Summit as a way to ensure that people living with HIV/AIDS were fully involved in all decisions that affect their lives.

Simply put these principles mean “nothing about us without us.”

Some groups that are peer-based operate primarily through these principles. Other groups may have aspects of GIPA in programming and governance, but may be lacking in other areas.

Assessing the ways that GIPA is applied in your group can give you a better sense of the culture of the organization and ways in which they might improve. And you might be a part of that improvement.

Assessing your agency

Let's look at the GIPA principles and explore a way for you to assess or ask appropriate questions to help determine how inclusive your agency is. This can also help you to decide if you want to become more meaningfully involved.

STEPPING OUT, GETTING INVOLVED : INTEGRATING YOUTH LIVING WITH HIV

The following are the GIPA Principles.

- To support the greater involvement of people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHIV/AIDS) through initiatives to strengthen the capacity and coordination of networks of PLWHIV/AIDS and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) stimulating the creation of a supportive political, legal and social environment;
- To involve PLWHIV/AIDS fully in decision making, formulation and implementation of public policies;
- To protect and promote the rights of individuals, in particular those living with or most vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, through legal and social environments;
- To make available necessary resources to better combat the pandemic including adequate support for PLWHIV/AIDS, NGOs and CBOs working with vulnerable and marginalized populations;
- To strengthen national and international mechanisms connected to human rights and ethics related to HIV/AIDS;
- To protect and promote human rights in our work;
- To apply public health principles within our work¹.

Let's examine each of the GIPA principles separately.

To support the greater involvement of people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHIV/AIDS) through initiatives to strengthen the capacity and coordination of networks of PLWHIV/AIDS and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) stimulating the creation of a supportive political, legal and social environment.

You can assess some of these issues almost immediately.

Does your agency...

- Support PLWHIV/AIDS?
- Offer a safe social environment for PLWHIV/AIDS?
- Encourage PLWHIV/AIDS to talk together about issues that affect them directly?
- Offer a way for PLWHIV/AIDS to talk about issues with staff and board members, such as informal or formal meetings, letters, etc.?

¹ Declaration of the Paris AIDS Summit, 1 December 1994.

ONE FOOT FORWARD

If the answer to some of these points is “no”, there may be issues as to how the GIPA principle is applied. There may also be issues of capacity – in smaller agencies there may be fewer staff to meet the greater needs for PLWHIV/AIDS. If this is the case, there may be an opportunity for you to talk about improvements and to assist in working toward greater inclusion and involvement.

Don't think that just because some things don't “feel” right that there's a reason for alarm. Check it out for yourself and talk with other people before drawing conclusions.

To involve PLWHIV/AIDS fully in decision making, formulation and implementation of public policies

Does your agency...

- Discuss programs and projects that directly affect PLWHIV/AIDS before proceeding?
- Involve the clients/members in developing programs that affect them?
- Have dedicated seats on the board of directors for people living with HIV?
- Encourage people living with HIV to apply for paid positions as they become available?
- Actively seek people living with HIV to volunteer in programs?

This area is key to the GIPA principle. Every agency should strive to involve people living with HIV in all aspects of their work including planning, delivering and evaluating programs and services, especially where it directly affects the lives of PLWHIV/AIDS.

If you answered “no” to any of the questions above, there may be serious issues in the agency that need to be addressed. If the agency subscribes to the GIPA principles, and there is little inclusion and involvement of PLWHIV/AIDS in programs and services, talk about your concerns with staff members whom you trust, or ask to speak with a board member.

Make sure you are clear about what you wish to discuss and try to develop solutions that will enhance the involvement of people living with HIV.

STEPPING OUT, GETTING INVOLVED : INTEGRATING YOUTH LIVING WITH HIV

MODULE

9

To protect and promote the rights of individuals, in particular those living with or most vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, through legal and social environments

Does your agency...

- Provide advocacy for people living with HIV?
- Provide referrals to appropriate organizations that provide advocacy or legal advice?
- Speak to issues in your community that affect the rights of people living with HIV?
- Work toward ensuring that services and programs in the community are accessible to people living with HIV?
- Work toward educating the public about living with HIV, and the rights of people living with HIV?

Protecting and promoting rights of individuals is another key area supported by the GIPA principle. Agencies should, to the best of their ability, strive to:

- educate the public and addressing issues in each community about the realities of living with HIV;
- communicate the facts about transmission and prevention; and
- convey the importance of accessing services and programs freely and without discrimination.

If you answered “no” to any of the questions above, you may want to discuss with the agency to ensure public awareness and education are taking place and that issues are being addressed where they affect the lives of you, your peers and the community at large.

To make available necessary resources to better combat the pandemic including adequate support for PLWHIV/AIDS, NGOs and CBOs working with vulnerable and marginalized populations

Does the agency...

- Involve people with HIV and support marginalized populations such as Intravenous Drug Users, women, Aboriginal communities, men who have sex with men, immigrants, youth, etc.?

ONE FOOT FORWARD

The crux of this point is more about governments than about social agencies, but there is room to ask how the agency provides support to PLWHIV/AIDS.

You may also want to talk with agency staff or the Executive Director about provincial and federal government assistance available to the agency to fund programs and services. There may be some work you can do to assist the agency in securing the financial resources needed to improve programs.

To strengthen national and international mechanisms connected to human rights and ethics related to HIV/AIDS

This point again refers to government responses. You can speak about these issues with agency staff. You may be interested in helping the agency become more involved in the areas of human rights and ethics on a national or international level.

To protect and promote human rights in our work

Does your agency...

- Have clear policies about the rights of staff/volunteers?
- Have clear policies for staff/volunteers who are HIV+?
- Actively involve staff/volunteers in all areas of development in the agency (including developing job descriptions and evaluation tools)?
- Ensure that the rights of staff/volunteers are upheld?
- Ensure that there are mechanisms within the agency for people to appeal decisions?

If you answered “no” to any of these questions you may want to explore more. Ask to see any of the agency’s staff and volunteers policies. If there are no policies that clearly take into consideration PLWHIV/AIDS, ask why not?

Perhaps there’s room to work in the agency to make sure policies and support mechanisms are in place.

If there is no mechanism for appeal or for conflict resolution, again ask why not and see if you can assist in developing those tools.

To apply public health principles within our work

Public health principles look at the best ways to ensure that the physical, mental and emotional health needs of the community are met.

In Canada, we have a population health model through the Public Health Agency of Canada. Our understanding of what makes and keeps people healthy continues to evolve and be further refined. A population health approach reflects the evidence that factors outside the health care system or sector significantly affect health.

A population health approach considers the entire range of individual and collective factors and conditions - and their interactions - that have been shown to be correlated with health status. Commonly referred to as the "determinants of health," these factors currently include:

1. Income and Social Status
2. Social Support Networks
3. Education
4. Employment/Working Conditions
5. Social Environments
6. Physical Environments
7. Personal Health Practices and Coping Skills
8. Healthy Child Development
9. Biology and Genetic Endowment
10. Health Services
11. Gender
12. Culture

Other issues that affect our overall health can include homophobia/heterosexism, stigma, discrimination, aging, mental illness, and psychosocial factors.

Not all agencies will be working with all aspects of the population health model, but there will be some parts that apply.

ONE FOOT FORWARD

Does the agency...

- Work toward improving income and social status for people living with HIV? (advocacy, support programs, involvement of people living with HIV, etc.)
- Create social support networks? (support groups, social activities, etc.)
- Provide education programs for people living with HIV and the community? (informed decision-making in health care, available services in the community, HIV prevention, etc.)
- Support people living with HIV who are working, or employ people living with HIV in key areas of the agency?
- Create environments for people living with HIV to interact with each other? (support groups, social events, etc.)
- Create safe and clean physical environments?
- Offer information about personal health practices and support people making healthy decisions? (nutrition, safer sex, safer using, etc.)
- Support parents and children who are living with HIV or caring for a family member with HIV? (support groups, activities, etc)
- Acknowledge that a person's biology and genetics can play a role in health? (including aging)
- Provide health services, or referrals to appropriate health services for people living with HIV?
- Acknowledge gender differences and how those differences affect people living with HIV?
- Acknowledge cultural differences and work to support people from different cultures? (e.g. Aboriginal people, Asian cultures, gay men's subculture, etc.)

If you answered "no" to ALL of these, there's an issue; but if the agency works toward ensuring that people living with HIV are included and supported, regardless of their social status, income or life background, they are moving in the right direction.

Ask about how population health models are used to develop the programs and services in the agency.

What about me?

You may have a lot of interests and skills that you can offer to your agency. Sometimes, we only consider our “hard” skills. Hard skills are things like computer work, organizational abilities, math or accounting skills or other things that you may have studied. But we also have “soft” skills; these are things like getting along with other people, creative abilities, a good sense of humour and so on.

In most work places, soft skills can be at least as important as hard skills. It’s great if you can type 80 words per minute, but if you can’t get along with co-workers, that’s a problem.

Think about both your hard and soft skills. Here’s a checklist you can use. Be honest with yourself about what you’re really good at and areas where you might not be as strong.

Hard skills

- computer knowledge
- software programming
- organizational skills
- math and finances
- fixing things
- building things
- cooking
- cleaning
- decorating
- public speaking
- facilitation
- editing

Soft skills

- good sense of humour
- artistic
- strong imagination
- compassionate
- good communication skills
- good listener
- very organized
- work well in a team
- able to handle criticism

ONE FOOT FORWARD

How do you like to work?

We all have preferences about the ways we work. Some people are more comfortable working alone and others prefer working in groups. When you enter a workplace, either as a volunteer or paid staff person there may be times when you have to leave your “comfort zone” and work in ways you may not like.

Nonetheless, there may be ways to find a balance between what you like and the work that’s needed.

I like to work... (choose as many as apply)

- by myself
- in small groups
- in large groups
- to develop ideas
- where I can focus without distractions
- with lots of direction and instruction
- with no or little direction and use my skills on my own
- where I receive constructive feedback on my work

Generally, I’m... (choose as many as apply)

- shy and like to be alone
- outgoing and like to have fun at work
- able to communicate my concerns to others
- able to think through problems without help
- able to assist others with their work
- interested in creative activities
- interested in organizing

When we have a clear idea about what we like and situations in which we’re most comfortable, we can start to look around the agency and see where those skills, interests and abilities can be used most effectively.

STEPPING OUT, GETTING INVOLVED : INTEGRATING YOUTH LIVING WITH HIV

MODULE

9

Just do it...

Sometimes moving from the idea of getting involved and actually doing something may seem like a difficult task.

Where do I start? How do I know this is right for me? What's the best thing for me to do? All these and a million other questions might pop into your mind.

The best way to get moving is to start with something you know you can do well. There's no reason to think you have to be completely involved at the start. Remember that everyone starts at the beginning – small steps toward something else. Even an Executive Director probably started as a volunteer.

Take pride in what you accomplish; look for opportunities to improve yourself and use your brain to imagine where you might like to go next.

Take baby steps. It's better to walk first than start off running and fall flat on your face.

Confidence,
Capacity.
William Hazlitt

ONE FOOT FORWARD

SELF ASSESSMENT

After completing this section I learned:

I still need more information about:

My strongest areas right now are:

My weakest areas right now are:

My next steps will be:

I can complete my next steps by: _____

Circle the number that you think fits.

	Very confident			Need to work on this	
I spent enough time on this section	1	2	3	4	5
I'm using my energy wisely	1	2	3	4	5
I know where to find more information	1	2	3	4	5
I can find a person to help me out	1	2	3	4	5
I know how to apply what I learned	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION TWO

LEARNING FROM THE ELDERS

Everyone starts off from a place where we know very little: getting involved means being open to learning and growing. At your agency you may know people who have been involved for many years: these are the elders of the HIV/AIDS movement.

Sometimes we might think that people who have been around for years need to move along and let new people take over the work, but there's a danger in that way of thinking. Elders have wisdom and experience from a time when we weren't participating in the work. Being open to learning from our elders can help us as we form our own ideas and ways of doing the work.

Elders are not dinosaurs.

Most people who have experience are open to sharing what they know. If you know someone in your agency that you trust and admire, try to find time to sit down with that person and ask about the past.

Do not forget.
Do not remember.
Do not learn.
— Benjamin Franklin

The HIV/AIDS movement in Canada started in the mid-1980s. In North America, the majority of people contracting HIV at this time were gay men and so you may notice that many gay men are elders in HIV organizations. In the early days, there were no medications and people with AIDS were dying in great numbers. . Whole communities were affected by AIDS and there seemed little hope.

But people stepped up to help in whatever ways they could. Some of those people continue in the work even today, and as treatments for HIV improved, an increasing number of people living with HIV/AIDS became involved.

This influx of people living with HIV forced a change in the movement. Where previously, people living with HIV/AIDS were "clients" receiving services, now they are active participants in organizations: as volunteers, paid staff, board members and decision makers.

ONE FOOT FORWARD

Consider that some of the elders in the movement started out as youth. They were in the same place then as you are today. Use your wisdom and their wisdom to improve the situation for everyone. Elders can be found on boards of directors, among staff and volunteers. Ask people about their experiences.

Culture and Sub-culture

Each of us belongs to a culture. Whether our family came from Europe, were here as the First Nations, or arrived from other countries, we all carry aspects of culture with us. Our culture influences how we perceive the world and it can change over time as we are exposed to other cultures.

We can use those parts of our culture that teach us aspects about people to work with others. There isn't a right or wrong culture – it's all about how we view it and the ways we can incorporate it into our daily lives.

Sub-cultures are smaller groups within a larger group. For example, a gay or queer culture is a sub-culture within the broader community culture. In each culture there are smaller groups of people who perceive the world in a different way than the rest of the culture.

Learning from our sub-cultures and cultures can bring vision to the work we do and the agencies within which we work. Cultural influences can open each of us to the different ways people experience the world and enrich us as a society.

Think about the culture in which you were raised. What positive aspects of that culture have shaped who you are? Those aspects could come from not only your cultural or ethnic identity, but your religious beliefs as well.

My culture teaches me...

- ___ to be compassionate toward others
- ___ to listen and think before I speak
- ___ to understand my spirituality and relationship with my spirit
- ___ to share what I have with others
- ___ to respect the land and nature
- ___ to respect the differences in people

Others: _____

Of course, there are many other aspects of our cultures that influence the way we think. Beginning to know and understand how we are shaped by cultures and sub-cultures gives us insight into the way we make decisions and see our place in the world.

MENTORS AND MENTORING

A mentor is a person who can guide you and help you learn. But mentors do not find you – you must find them.

If you think you'd like a mentor, you'll need to do a lot of listening and watching. This is a relationship you are trying to develop with someone you respect and who respects you and your ability.

A mentor is not a person who will tell you what to do or not do: that's your job. A good mentor relates their experiences, provides you with suggestions and asks you questions that make you think.

A mentor will also challenge you. Being challenged to try new and different things, as well as difficult things, is a way that you'll grow and develop. At some point the mother bird pushes the babies out of the nest.

You can learn to fly and a mentor can help you spread those new wings.

Here are some things to think about...

Qualities you might admire:

- Honesty
- Respectfulness
- Approachable
- Easy to talk to
- Really listens to people
- Has a good sense of humour
- Works well in groups
- Gets the job done
- Supports other people in their ideas
- Approaches you with their concerns
- And more...

ONE FOOT FORWARD

What qualities do you admire in a person? (e.g. honesty, straightforwardness, etc)

What qualities do you admire in yourself?

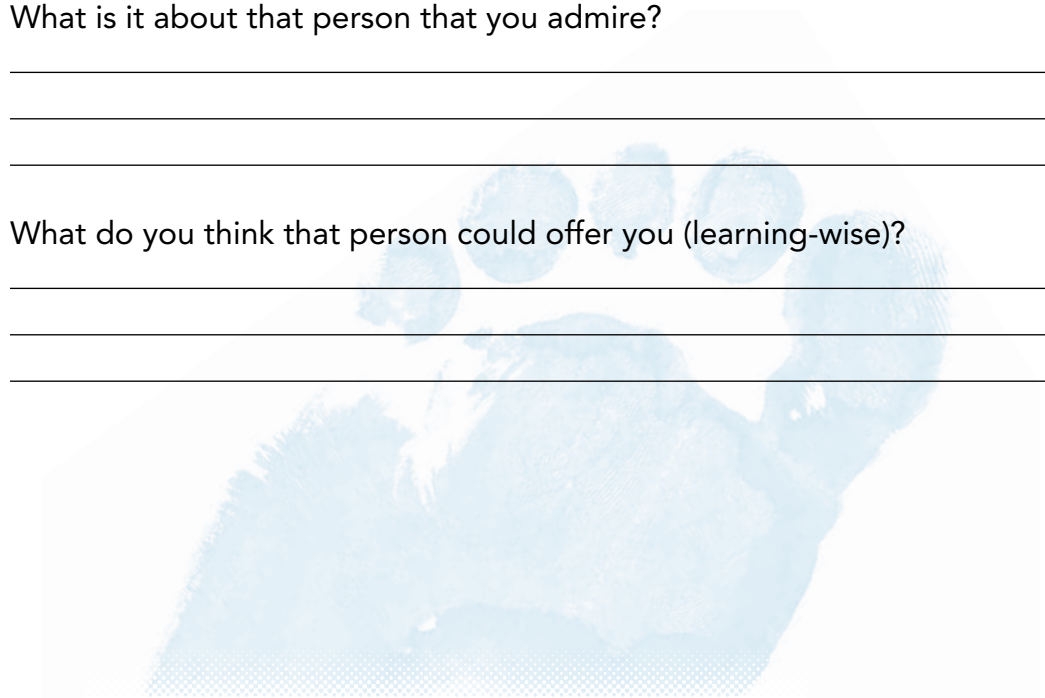
What skills do you want to improve? (e.g. computer skills, organizing meetings, writing articles, etc.)

What new skills do you want to learn?

Who in your community, agency or peer group do you admire?

What is it about that person that you admire?

What do you think that person could offer you (learning-wise)?



STEPPING OUT, GETTING INVOLVED : INTEGRATING YOUTH LIVING WITH HIV

MODULE

9

Now you have a basic starting point from which you can approach a potential mentor.

Ask that person out for coffee and talk about what you'd like to be doing in your agency (board, volunteering, etc). You can let them know that you'd like to "pick their brain" over issues and learn more about what they think or about their experiences in a certain area.

And don't be hurt if they can't offer you too much time; but you can be persistent. It's very flattering when someone values your ideas and thoughts: we feel good about being able to help another person.

If you want to mentor someone look around you. Is there a new person getting involved in the agency that you think has potential? You might want to talk to them about what they want to do – and help them learn more to reach their own goals.

Remember! A person you look up to started exactly where you are now. They had to learn from others as they went along.

And they learned from their mistakes. Never be afraid to make mistakes – that's how we all learn.

DEVELOPING YOUR OWN VOICE

For each of us, we all have our own way of thinking, doing things and we need to find our "voice". Developing our voice means finding the ways through which we can best make our points without creating conflict.

Think about times when you've been in a group and found one person who was able to make their points in a convincing way.

What did that person do that was so effective? Were they passionate about their concerns and issues? Were they able to be logical and straightforward? What convinced you that the person was saying something that was important and needed to be heard?

Now think about someone you may have encountered who was difficult to get along with.

ONE FOOT FORWARD

What did that person do that was disagreeable to you? Did they argue? Did their points not make any logic or sense? What “turned you off” about that person?

Now think about you...

When I’m making my point in a discussion I... (choose all that apply)

- think before I speak
- consider all possible sides to an argument
- can agree to disagree and not get upset
- can change my mind if someone else’s points make more sense
- try to be logical and not emotional
- can be passionate but not pushy
- don’t hold a grudge if people disagree with me
- can take criticism if it’s reasonable and constructive

Learning to be a critical thinker means understanding that there are many ways to view an issue. Sometimes we need to hear a lot of different ideas before we develop our own thoughts on a topic. That’s okay, because it means we’re being responsive and not reactive.

Reacting is quick and we usually do it from an emotional place. Responding takes more time and we usually are more concerned that we do the right thing.

POV (Point of View)

Here’s an exercise to try. There are two different scenarios. Be very honest with yourself about your thoughts and remember that there are no right or wrong answers.

1. A person with HIV comes to you and tells you that a staff person was being a jerk and banned them from the premises for a week.

What are your initial feelings? _____

What do you know right now? _____

STEPPING OUT, GETTING INVOLVED : INTEGRATING YOUTH LIVING WITH HIV

What other information do you need before forming an opinion?

When you have more information what do you think would be the best thing for you to do? _____

What do you think the person might do? _____

2. You're in a meeting about how to improve access to better health care for people living with HIV/AIDS. There is no consensus on this issue. Some people think that being aggressive is best and other people think that meeting and consulting with the medical community is best.

What information do you have about this topic? (it could be things you've experienced or you've heard from others) _____

What information do you think you need? _____

What are your emotions about this topic? _____

What do you think would work with an aggressive approach and why?

What do you think would work with a consultative approach and why?

ONE FOOT FORWARD

What do you think you would say in the meeting to convince others of your stance on the issue?

What do you think others might think about your stance? (both positive and negative)

In these two scenarios you have the potential to react or respond. When you feel anger or fear about a situation you may tend to react. If you can pull your emotions out of the issue and stand back you can often see things more clearly and understand that there are many different points of view.

As you get more involved in the work of your agency you'll have the opportunity to see many different points of view. By listening to and learning from others you can begin to develop your own voice and you'll be able to speak with clarity and confidence that you see how things fit in the "big picture".



SELF ASSESSMENT

After completing this section I learned:

I still need more information about:

My strongest areas right now are:

My weakest areas right now are:

My next steps will be:

I can complete my next steps by: _____

Circle the number that you think fits.

	Very confident			Need to work on this	
I spent enough time on this section	1	2	3	4	5
I'm using my energy wisely	1	2	3	4	5
I know where to find more information	1	2	3	4	5
I can find a person to help me out	1	2	3	4	5
I know how to apply what I learned	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION THREE

OVERCOMING FEAR AND INTIMIDATION

We mentioned it earlier, everyone starts from the same place. We don't know everything. When we enter new situations we can feel nervous, insecure, inadequate and fearful.

Do NOT run screaming in the other direction.

It's natural to be nervous when we're faced with new situations. The trick is to overcome those feelings and move into a place where we can feel confident, at least a little.

Confidence is built over time. Some people may seem to be confident right from the beginning, but even they may feel insecure in new situations. Some people talk a lot to overcome their fear, some people stay quiet and don't talk until they feel more comfortable. Whatever way you deal with your emotions is okay and right for you.

Feeling intimidated happens when we feel threatened. However, we can control how we feel and how we react or respond to any situation or person. If a person is purposefully trying to shut you down, that's a form of bullying. And many of us know how difficult it can be to stand up to a bully.

Different situations may intimidate us as well. It isn't always a person, sometimes it's about feeling overwhelmed. When there's too much information it's like having a huge plate of food in front of us and not knowing where to start eating. We can feel confused and that can lead to fear which can lead to us wanting to quit or just stop being involved.

Mindfulness

One way we can start to overcome some of our fears is through mindfulness. Mindfulness is a very old technique used in meditation. It allows us to look at our emotions and physical reactions without being attached to them.

Think about a time when you were afraid. What happened in your body? Was your stomach upset? Were you sweating? Was your heart beating faster? As you recall that feeling, even though you're just sitting here reading this, you might even start feeling some of the same things.

STEPPING OUT, GETTING INVOLVED : INTEGRATING YOUTH LIVING WITH HIV

MODULE

9

Being mindful acknowledges that “I am having the feelings, but I am NOT the feelings. I am what knows the feelings”. A thought is like a cloud – it’s just there. There is no right or wrong to the feeling or thought.

Look at something in the room. Perhaps it’s a chair. Describe the chair without any positive or negative statements. For example: it’s a chair; it has four legs, it’s made of wood; the wood is brown; there is a cushion on the chair; the cushion has stripes; and so on.

In this example, we only describe the “Chair-ness” of the chair. We don’t like or dislike the chair. It’s not pretty or ugly, comfortable or uncomfortable – it just is.

We can do the same thing with our physical feelings and emotions. When we feel fearful or anxious we have a “fight or flight” response: our heart may race, we might sweat and our breathing changes. All those physical things are preparing us to either fight for our lives or run away, even though we aren’t really threatened.

Just as you described the object in the room, you can describe your physical and emotional feelings. “My stomach is upset.” “My jaw is clenched.” “My heart is beating quickly.” “My breathing is shallow.” All those are facts but we don’t attach meaning to them. We simply accept that we are having those feelings and let them be. Put them aside and let them go like a leaf drifting down a river.

If someone is upset or angry we can slow our internal reactions by mentally describing the facts. “The person is yelling.” “The person is red in the face.” “The person’s body is tense.” We say nothing about anger, nothing about our own feelings – just the fact of what is in front of us. And again, we can let it be.

Breathing is very important. In fact it keeps us alive, so it’s particularly important! When we feel overwhelmed or afraid, our breathing often becomes shallow. Shallow breathing brings less oxygen to our brains and limbs. When we pay attention to our breath we can calm ourselves down. By taking slower breaths; or breathing from our stomach, we give our brains more oxygen and it functions better.

Using mindfulness techniques can assist in keeping you out of the internal battle and present in the moment.

ONE FOOT FORWARD

Talk

Another way you can sort out the thoughts and feelings you're having is to simply talk to other people about it.

If there's someone at the agency you feel comfortable with, talk to that person. It's likely they've had similar feelings themselves. If you don't feel safe talking with someone at the agency, find a friend or confidant and discuss your situation with them.

Just remember that you're not alone and there are many ways you can find the support you need to work through your concerns and fears.

You're worth it!

Developing respectful relationships

In any work environment, whether you're a volunteer or paid staff person, respectful relationships are extremely important.

In most agencies there's a line of communication. Many agencies use a governance model that is intended to make sure communication is clear and that roles and responsibilities are defined. This may seem at times to create barriers, but really it's to maintain respect.

For example, some agencies may insist that volunteers and staff persons do not speak directly to board members: that's the role of the Executive Director (ED). This line of communication is intended to ensure that there is no "back room" talking and that there is openness between the board and staff. The ED is entrusted to deliver messages from the staff and volunteers to the board and relay any communication from the board back to the staff and volunteers.

Sounds like a wall, right?

It can be a wall where there is a lack of trust and respect, but in most cases, this system works well. Staff and volunteers should be able to access board minutes, and where concerns have been brought by the ED these should be noted. Beyond that, there should be mechanisms to communicate as freely as possible between levels within the agency.

STEPPING OUT, GETTING INVOLVED : INTEGRATING YOUTH LIVING WITH HIV

MODULE

9

Respect is something we all deserve and want. We gain the trust and respect of others when we show that we can be trusted and that we offer trust and respect in return.

Think about people you respect. What did they do to gain your respect? What do you do to make sure that respect is maintained? What could break that trust and respect?

When we're in respectful relationships, especially on the work front, we need to learn that others won't always see things the same way that we do and that's okay. We need to listen and really hear the thoughts, ideas and opinions of others, just the same as we would like to be heard.

It's the old "golden rule": do unto others as you would have them do unto you. If you want respect from other people then offer the same respect in return. Come from a place of integrity and you'll find that others respond from a place of integrity.

It's not complicated.

ONE FOOT FORWARD

SELF ASSESSMENT

After completing this section I learned:

I still need more information about:

My strongest areas right now are:

My weakest areas right now are:

My next steps will be:

I can complete my next steps by: _____

Circle the number that you think fits.

	Very confident			Need to work on this	
I spent enough time on this section	1	2	3	4	5
I'm using my energy wisely	1	2	3	4	5
I know where to find more information	1	2	3	4	5
I can find a person to help me out	1	2	3	4	5
I know how to apply what I learned	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION FOUR

LEADERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY

If you're interested in being involved as a young leader your level of responsibility will increase. As well, people will be looking to you to set an example for others.

Pressure? Sure, but you can handle it. Consider ways that you can decrease the stresses you might feel, such as talking with others, meditation or anything healthy that works for you.

Leading and following

Leadership is about presence, it's not about "managing". The best leaders are those who are barely known, because they offer people space to do the work and feel good about their accomplishments. Sometimes we think that leaders are people who are good at convincing others that they're right and everyone else is wrong. But often leaders are simply good listeners.

We don't think of leaders as followers, but in fact effective leadership means letting others take the lead.

Leaders don't bully or push.
Leaders listen.
Leaders think before they speak.
Leaders don't know everything.
Leaders respond - they don't react.
Leaders allow others to lead.

Think about someone you believe is a good leader. What qualities does that person have? What qualities do you think you have that are similar? What could you do to develop those qualities even more?

In your agency there may be many opportunities to develop your leadership skills. Taking on responsibilities is the first step. Is there an area of work that interests you where you could take the lead with enough support? Start small and work your way up. And don't be afraid to ask questions and seek support as you grow in your role within the agency.

ONE FOOT FORWARD

If there are youth oriented activities or programs in your agency, that's a good start. If those programs aren't in place, you may be able to create new programs and services that target youth – whether it be safer sex/using projects, support for HIV positive youth or creative activities that involve youth in self-expression. All these may serve the youth in your area.

BEING A LEADER AS A PERSON LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS

There are many things that you as a person with HIV can do in your community. Discovering where potential for leadership exists is the tricky part.

You can...

- Get on the board of directors of your agency
- Become an “expert” in a particular area of work (e.g. treatments, peer support, substance use)
- Get on committees locally, provincially or even nationally (there's a lot of temporary work that needs to get done)
- Be an advocate for issues experienced by people with HIV
- Be a public speaker for HIV issues in your area
- Be willing to be interviewed about living with HIV by the media
- And many more...

Deciding your focus is very important. Take a look at Module 6: What About Me? Think about your strong and weak areas; think about your interests, hobbies and passions.

As a person seeking to lead, there are some things worth considering:

- A person willing to take the lead sometimes has a steep learning curve – are you open to learning a lot in a short period of time?
- A person willing to advocate and speak up can be a target for those who don't like criticism – can you develop a thick skin?
- A person willing to take on responsibility is sometimes asked to take on more responsibility, simply because they'll do the work that's needed – can you learn to say “not right now” and look after yourself?
- A person willing to do public speaking or media work is now openly positive in the community – how might that affect you and those in your life?

STEPPING OUT, GETTING INVOLVED : INTEGRATING YOUTH LIVING WITH HIV

- A person seen as an “expert” can sometimes be seen as a “know it all”, aloof and not like everyone else – can you express your strong opinions modestly and accept criticism when it comes?
- Sometimes you may not have the answers – can you say “I don’t know” and be confident that it’s okay?

The positive payoffs in deciding to take on responsibility are many:

- You’ll learn a lot
- You’ll meet people
- You’ll be involved and active
- You’ll be contributing to improving your community and the lives of your peers
- You’ll be helping your agency
- You’ll gain confidence
- You’ll feel good about yourself

Getting involved

Step One...

You’ll need to look around and see what’s available.

Ask staff people, meet with a board member, talk with your peers and think about your options.

Step Two...

Put your name forward for the work.

For a board position you may have to wait until the next Annual General Meeting, or you may be appointed if there are open seats.

For a volunteer program you may have to wait until training starts.

If you’re interested in paid employment, you’ll have to keep your eyes open to see if there are job postings and whether you have the skills for the position.

ONE FOOT FORWARD

Step Three...

Jump in!

The best way to learn a new skill is to get into it. You can read all you like, but until you're into the work you won't know what will crop up. And every group and program is different – different cultures, different methods, etc.

- Don't worry that you don't "know it all" – you'll never know everything.
- Don't wait until it's "perfect" – it'll never be perfect.
- Don't wait for someone to ask you – you'll be waiting a long, long time.

GENERAL AGENCY STRUCTURES

Each agency has its own culture, values, vision, mandate and mission. As well, each agency will have its own staffing structures. The following are fairly typical components of an agency's framework, which guide agency operations.

- **Mission:** the main work or purpose of the Society
- **Mandate:** similar to the mission, but more focused, it outlines who the agency works with
- **Values:** the organization's beliefs or ideals. They are usually communicated in a values statement. You may have to ask to see a copy of the agency's value statement. Not all agencies have one.
- **Vision:** another statement for the broader direction of the Society, it defines where the organization is going. Again, you may need to ask to see if there is a vision statement

Organizational Culture

This area is not so easy to define. You may have to do some observation on your own to judge for yourself the culture or working environment of the agency.

Culture is the way people interact with each other and generally accepted norms. Some larger groups have a more "corporate" culture: they are more structured and perhaps more bureaucratic than smaller agencies. Some cultures are relaxed and informal while some are chaotic and may seem to have an underlying tension.

Each agency is unique, and its culture will reflect the norms of the people who work there and access its services.

Meetings, meetings and more meetings...

It seems sometimes as though there are a lot of meetings in the work we do. Whether it's an advisory group, a teleconference, a gathering or a board meeting, it may seem that there are faster ways of doing things.

While we use email to a greater extent, there are reasons that meetings are important to the work we do.

Email is good for passing on information, but it doesn't replace a conversation. In person discussion, even by phone, allows us to debate ideas and discuss plans in a way that email can't. Talking with other people about your ideas as well as listening to their ideas can shape and re-shape what it is we want to accomplish. We may gain more insight into an issue that will give us a better understanding.

Processing is a part of what we do in meetings. Allowing people to work through issues, debate and discuss the best course of action means that the most effective results can be achieved.

Meetings usually have an agenda. An agenda is a list of items for discussion and keeps the meeting on track. There is always an opportunity to add or postpone items on the agenda depending on the level of importance or the amount of time needed to discuss the items.

Meetings generally have a chairperson. The role of the chairperson or "chair" is to keep the meeting moving and to make sure that everyone has a voice at the meeting.

Some meetings work with a consensus model. That means that all people at the meeting must come to an agreement on what action should take place. People cannot block consensus by simply saying "no"; they have to think of an alternative that will work for everyone.

Other times actions are decided through voting. Usually a motion is passed when fifty percent plus one (50% + 1) votes in favour of the motion. For example, if there are 10 people at the meeting, 6 would have to vote in favour of the motion for it to pass. The Chair does not vote, unless there is a tie.

ONE FOOT FORWARD

Attending conferences allows an even larger number of people to talk about and debate issues. It doesn't matter that everyone participating agrees – we all have different opinions about issues. The opportunity to talk with many different people from all over the region or country can expand our understanding of issues and even affirm that what we think and experience is similar to what others think and experience. There are increasingly more opportunities to conference by internet. Video conferencing can be useful, but doesn't always replace the same kind of interaction and social interaction that attending a conference in person provides.

While it may seem that there are more meetings than action, adding to the conversation as people living with HIV/AIDS can achieve results that benefit the whole community.



SELF ASSESSMENT

After completing this section I learned:

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My weakest areas right now are:

My next steps will be:

I can complete my next steps by: _____

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I know how to apply what I learned	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION FIVE

SOCIAL MEDIA

A phenomenon that perhaps most distinctively characterizes young Canadians is their engagement with social media – media enabled by the ease of new digital and frequently mobile information and communication technologies. We need to remember however, that while social media can be a great tool there are implications of this phenomenon with regards to safety, privacy, free expression, cultural engagement, sense of identity, and civic role.

Benefits of social media

The immediacy of social media can bring people together in ways that have been impossible in the past. When used properly it has immense power to reach, educate, engage and mobilize mass audiences.

Previously, engaging a group of people in a rally took lots of work; posters, phone calls and organizing. Now with a simple click we can quickly gather together a large group of people.

Today text messages and email make it possible for people to connect and share ideas and opinions much faster than in the past. We can share documents and have online feedback within minutes or hours rather than days or weeks. Social media allows us to reach an audience at all times and in “real” time.

Another benefit of social media is the ability to connect with people we probably never would have met. We can connect with people on the other side of the planet and exchange information and share our experiences. We can quickly gather news and information that can assist us in shaping our thinking and the way we approach our work. We can target people who may be interested by mining their current interests or communicating with other groups who may be sympathetic to our cause through the use of emotion, personal stories, education, information, calls to action, videos, games and the list goes on.....

Limitations of social media

Social media connects people instantly, and yet as connected as we are, we run the risk of being disconnected as well. Text messages, email and tweets can't replace the same level of communication we get when we meet with someone face to face.

Much of how people communicate is through body language and facial expression. The tone in a person's email may not reflect the true nature of what the person is telling you. By being with the person you can see what they look like, gauge the tone of their voice and read their facial expressions.

Social media encourages people to share opinion and is so immediate that we might make statements, or personal opinions that may be interpreted in the wrong way and offend people. We may not think we're being offensive, simply honest, but there are many stories of people who made negative remarks about their employers or even internet friends that have back fired. Once you have posted something on the internet you no longer control that information, and this includes your personal information so it is wise to think before posting.

Use social media to connect and communicate and remember that there's a real world where people actually sit together and talk.

Social media sites

Using social media sites for your agency can be a way to expand the number of people who are aware of the group and the work. You can use your own social media connections to tell your friends and family about the work you're doing. For social media to be effective you need to reach a critical mass. If branching into social media is new for you and the group you are dealing with the network you need to reach will at first be small. It will take time to build a network that is loyal and motivated to follow your cause.

ONE FOOT FORWARD

More often than not people are voyeurs of social media, not fully engaged. Remember that people follow people and not digital noise so there needs to be strong leadership that can find a fine balance of relevant information that will keep an audience engaged. This is tricky. Too much information becomes spam and too little information can mean that you will lose followers. This means an investment of time and energy. Social media can't exist on its own for distributing information and engaging people. High quality content is necessary to compete for attention with the vast amount of internet "noise".

Below are three of the most popular social media/networking sites with which you are likely familiar. There are differences and similarities with all sites, but often they have more in common than not.

Facebook

Facebook is one of the most popular forms of social media. Millions of people have profiles and keep in touch with their friends and colleagues through routine updating. Organizations use Facebook as a way to promote their group as well as build support for their cause or business.

If you have a profile on Facebook you can start a group. Groups are used for discussion and posting events more than your profile where you post personal information and updates for friends.

If you're working in an agency that does not have a Facebook page, you might consider approaching the appropriate staff person about setting up a profile for the agency or starting a group or page.

There is a difference between a group and a page on Facebook. Groups can be started by anyone and can be made open to anyone. The administrators can allow new members and remove members. However, groups are more difficult to locate, as Facebook searches don't always locate the group by name (e.g. HIVgroup).

A page, or fan page, can be set up by an organization. The person must have permission to set up the page and act as administrator. Pages allow the same types of posts and discussion and are easier to locate. Facebook pages receive a separate "domain" (e.g. www.Facebook.com/HIVgroup). If you want to set up a page, you'll need to get permission and guidance about what the page is for, who can join, what to discuss and post and so on.

In either case, think about what the page or group might offer to the agency and how much time and effort you can provide to maintaining the site.

Twitter

Twitter is another very popular form of social networking. You can tweet from your computer or from any phone or gadget that provides support for internet connection. Twitter is a great platform for driving traffic to other locations that have more information or content.

As with other social networking sites, you need to set up a profile. When you tweet something, others who are interested in similar things can search and locate your posts and tweet back or “re-tweet”. This allows followers to feel engaged and involved.

If you have an interest in Twitter and your agency is open to it, you might get involved in tweeting the daily goings on at the office, upcoming events or interesting news. You can link tweets to YouTube videos, or other websites and articles.

YouTube

YouTube is a social media site where members can post videos and video logs but requires the user to have a webcam to post.

If you have an interest in video and YouTube, you might approach someone at the agency about starting a YouTube channel for the group and posting videos from recent events, v-logs about the daily activities at the agency or whatever your team thinks would be interesting for the world to watch. However you must be mindful of confidentiality and the privacy of others who may not want to have themselves publicly associated with HIV or an ASO.

In all these forms of social media and networking, the only real limit is your imagination. Be creative and consider ways that social media can assist your agency in getting the word out about who they are, what they do and how the community can get involved!

ONE FOOT FORWARD

SELF ASSESSMENT

After completing this section I learned:

I still need more information about:

My strongest areas right now are:

My weakest areas right now are:

My next steps will be:

I can complete my next steps by: _____

Circle the number that you think fits.

	Very confident			Need to work on this	
I spent enough time on this section	1	2	3	4	5
I'm using my energy wisely	1	2	3	4	5
I know where to find more information	1	2	3	4	5
I can find a person to help me out	1	2	3	4	5
I know how to apply what I learned	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION SIX

SELF CARE AND OTHER OPTIONS

Self Care & Burnout

Self care is the most important aspect of our work and the one we pay the least attention to.

Self care means being kind to ourselves and making sure that we remain healthy in mind, soul and body. We all have our own way to take care of ourselves; the most important thing is that we DO IT.

No one wants to burn out and no one wants you to burn out. "Burn out" simply means we are completely worn out and used up. We have no energy to do the work and we can even lose interest in the things that make us feel good.

Avoiding burn out means paying attention to yourself: your body, your mind, your emotions and your spirit.

Everyone experiences burn out differently, but some common warning signs include:

- Memory loss – oops did I forget to do that?
- Irritability – get off my case and shut up!
- Crying – because you're exhausted
- Fatigue – all the time, not just after running a marathon
- Lack of interest in fun stuff – maybe later...
- Lack of emotional feelings – "numbness"
- Lack of sleep – just ten more minutes on snooze...
- Lack of concentration – what was I doing and why was I doing it?

If your gut is telling you that you're doing too much, listen to it! We have "gut reactions" and often dismiss them. Pay attention to YOU and you'll get the messages you need to know when to slow down or pull back.

And be honest with others about how you're doing. It's much better to be up front about your ability than to be a "good soldier" and keep going until you drop.

ONE FOOT FORWARD

It's about time.

Working in an agency, whether as a volunteer or paid staff person means devoting time to the task.

Think about how much time you are willing and able to commit. This is an area where people sometimes do more than they are able – perhaps out of a feeling of responsibility. When people volunteer and provide good work they might be asked to contribute more hours because they are valuable and willing.

Develop clear boundaries for yourself, taking into consideration how much time you are willing to offer and are able to commit.

Chart the week.

In the following table jot down how many hours you think you could offer on any given day.

You do not have to fill in time for each day. Be clear about what you think you are willing and able to offer.

This can serve as a guide for you when you start working. You might also want to offer time on weekends – whatever works for you is okay.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

NRG = Energy

Energy is another thing to consider. Along with time commitment it takes energy – physical, mental and emotional - when doing any work with agencies.

Consider how much energy you can expend in the work you want to do.

Intellectual work can sometimes be more tiring than physical labour.

Consider for yourself:

- I can lift five lbs. easily ___yes ___no
- I can walk 5 blocks without getting tired ___yes ___no
- I can walk 3 flights of stairs without needing to rest ___yes ___no
- I can sit for one hour without needing to stand up ___yes ___no
- I can focus on a task for 30 minutes without being distracted. ___yes ___no
- I can listen to someone talk about their issues for 30 minutes ___yes ___no
- I can listen to someone's issues without getting emotionally involved ___yes ___no
- I can stay focussed in a meeting for 1 hour ___yes ___no

SELF CARE

Part of finding balance between life and work is the concept of self care. Looking after ourselves ensures that we don't burnout and can carry on with the work. Self care can be anything from working on art to fixing cars to meditation. There is no right or wrong way to take care of yourself.

In what ways do you care for your self?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> walk my dog | <input type="checkbox"/> pray, meditate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> listen to music | <input type="checkbox"/> play music |
| <input type="checkbox"/> cook good food | <input type="checkbox"/> paint, draw, make art |
| <input type="checkbox"/> play with my children | <input type="checkbox"/> rearrange my furniture |
| <input type="checkbox"/> go for a run | <input type="checkbox"/> play on the computer
(internet, games, etc) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> workout at the gym | <input type="checkbox"/> go dancing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> read | <input type="checkbox"/> go shopping |
| <input type="checkbox"/> watch TV | <input type="checkbox"/> have coffee with friends |
| <input type="checkbox"/> practice yoga | <input type="checkbox"/> chat on the phone |
| <input type="checkbox"/> go to the movies | |

ONE FOOT FORWARD

Can you add to this list?...

As long as you are doing something for yourself that feels good for you – it's a good thing.

Every day try to have some "me" time. It's not selfish, it's self-preservation. YOU are more important than any agency or work on the planet.

What are my options for getting involved?

We can't begin to tell you all the options that are open to you. You are the only person who can figure that out, but when you're thinking about the open doors, remember that you need to keep your mind open as well.

Fear

For people living on a pension, disability plan or provincial benefits, there is a very real fear of losing those benefits when considering a return to work.

What if I get sick and have to stop working?

What if my employer finds out I'm HIV positive and fires me?

What if I get hired and then laid off?

What if working part-time affects my medical coverage?

What if...?

We have to be honest with ourselves about our fears and how paid employment will affect our income. If you are considering a return to work, talk with your social worker, disability insurance worker or pension plan representative: then decide what's best for you.

Prepare yourself by having all the facts first.

Employment and Persons with Disabilities

From community to community and province to province the ways in which people with disabilities are encouraged to enter or re-enter employment vary.

For many people with disabilities, full-time work is more than they can manage. A part-time position may be one answer while self-employment is another option.

Some provinces will allow people living with disabilities and receiving benefits to earn a certain amount of money before deductions. Most provinces will have employment programming that is geared toward people with disabilities, such as training opportunities that build skills and self-esteem, and that offer the tools necessary to plan for employment and all that it entails.

Disability Resource Groups

There are also community based groups that work specifically with people with disabilities to assist them in making informed decisions about employment options, training and education, and voluntary work.

Some larger organizations may have programs for PLWHIV/AIDS, but many may not. You can call a disability resource group and ask about how they would provide services and programs for people with HIV before you get involved.

You can also contact groups if you have a particular disability, such as trouble walking, and find out how groups can assist with specific issues that may affect you.

Look around your community for resources that will help you decide how to approach work, whether paid or volunteer.

Paid Work

Sometimes, this seems scary for PLWHIV/AIDS. In the earlier days, people were often told to leave work, make arrangements and prepare to die.

With better medications, that changed dramatically. Now people are entering and re-entering the workforce after years of absence.

Some people decide to be open and tell potential employers about their HIV status or about their health issues. The decision to tell an employer or coworkers about your HIV status is completely up to you.

You also need to consider the amount of income you'll need to get by. A minimum wage job may not be enough to cover your monthly expenses, and if you are receiving benefits or income assistance, you may lose all or part of it. Examine this carefully, but don't let it sway you from doing what you want to do.

ONE FOOT FORWARD

Here's a table you can use to add up your monthly costs and figure out how much you need to survive:

Item	Amount
Rent/mortgage	
Food	
Utilities	
Personal items (clothes, hygiene, etc)	
Vehicle (gas, insurance, maintenance)	
Bus fare (or bus pass)	
Entertainment	
Medical insurance	
Other medical expenses	
Vitamins and other supplements	
Other	
Total	

This will give you a general idea of your expenses. The total represents the wage you will need to make to meet all of your expenses.

Résumés

When working on your résumé, you need to think about your skills and not your sero-status. Unless you experience recurring illness you are as fit to work as the next person.

Preparing a résumé is an art. If you know someone who can assist you, by all means, ask for help. Wording on a résumé paints a clear picture of your experience and abilities that will help you "sell" yourself to an employer.

You can find résumé templates in some word processing programs and online as well.

Letters of Reference

Getting reference letters and having a current list of three people who can provide references is very helpful for you and a potential employer. Even if you are thinking of different volunteer work, you can get a letter of reference about your skills and abilities in your current work.

You can ask your immediate supervisor, or another appropriate person, for a letter of reference.

If you want to list people on your résumé, call them first and get their permission as well as their contact information. Some people will write “references on request” on their résumé. However, many employers would prefer to have reference contacts readily available. It may be wiser to include your references and reference letters with your résumé.

Benefits

Many but not all employers may offer benefits packages for workers. However, many insurance companies through which benefits are offered will not insure PLWHIV/AIDS.

Those companies that do cover PLWHIV/AIDS may have higher premiums. For an AIDS organization it is essential that all employees be covered by whatever benefits plan they subscribe to. For other employers it is a matter of capacity to pay premiums. You will need to do your homework on benefits packages and how your HIV status may affect your access to those benefits.

Reasonable Accommodation

All employers are expected to provide reasonable accommodation for employees. This means that where a person has specific needs (e.g. a blind employee who requires a brail keyboard); the employer should accommodate that person’s need to enable the employee to adequately and efficiently complete their work.

If you are a person with specific physical needs, including reduced hours of work, your employer is responsible for accommodating those needs in a reasonable manner. However, where a person’s functioning at work continues to require increasingly complex accommodations it may not be considered reasonable for the employer.

Ask about accommodation policies where you work. Accommodation policies apply to both paid and volunteer employees.

ONE FOOT FORWARD

If you're fired...

People who are employed have rights. If you have been fired from a position the employer must state the reasons for the firing. You have the option to challenge a firing if you believe the reasons are not grounded in the truth.

If you believe you have been fired because of your HIV status, you can fight this under the Human Rights Code. If you believe that you have been fired unjustly for any reason you can fight those reasons with Employment Insurance Canada, as well as provincial Human Rights Commissions and Ombudsman offices.

If you are laid off, you have the right to apply for Employment Insurance benefits as do all workers. Seasonal employment often means a period of lay-off at some point in the year.

Consider your options and understand your rights and responsibilities as an employee and the responsibilities and rights of your employer.

Online Employment Services

You can also check out employment agencies and employment search engines online for tips and hints as well as jobs that are posted in your area.

Popular online employment services include www.servicecanada.ca, Monster.ca, Eluta.ca and Workopolis.ca, but there are others. On these sites you can register, post your résumé, search for work in your area and sometimes submit résumés to a potential employer directly by email.

The Canadian Working Group on HIV and Rehabilitation (CWGHR: www.hivandrehab.ca) is a group devoted to issues faced by PLWHIV/AIDS who are working, entering or re-entering the work force. They could have information that is useful to you as you make decisions about employment.

Your ASO

You can also keep an eye open for jobs posted at your local ASO or peer agency. While many agencies struggle with low budgets and don't hire often, there may still be opportunities for work.

And remember that while an agency is supportive of PLWHIV/AIDS, they will hire the person who is best for the job and possesses the skills and qualifications they require. You, along with the other candidates, will have to “sell” your skills and abilities

Keep looking for what you want to do and keep trying.

Go back to the Module 6 and review the things you love to do. That may give you a starting point in exploring the type of work that will keep you motivated and interested.

Volunteering in the community

Many cities and some smaller communities may have a Volunteer Bureau. These are umbrella agencies that offer a service for their member groups to post volunteer jobs. Some have websites on which positions may be posted. Others will have postings in their office.

The community is a vibrant and changing place. Volunteers may work with children, seniors, families, homeless persons, religious organizations, hospitals, the arts, libraries, and more.

Think again – what do you love to do?

Explore those options with the volunteer agencies in your community. In most cases, you will have to apply to volunteer. You may be interviewed, screened and trained before beginning the hands on work. Some types of work may require you to have a police records check. If you have a criminal record from the past, it’s a good idea to discuss that with your supervisor. Depending on the severity of the offense, you may be denied work with vulnerable populations.

Increasingly, there are short term projects requiring volunteers with special skills (such as web design). If you are computer literate and have email, there are often volunteer jobs you can do from your home. It’s always good to meet the people you are working for. Go to the organization and get a sense of the people there – you may make a whole new set of friends.

You can search online for national volunteer websites that post volunteer positions for your area. Volweb.ca is a major volunteer website as is charityvillage.ca

ONE FOOT FORWARD

Work and volunteering in an ASO – reality check!

While we may find an ASO supports our individual needs, when we think about working in an ASO it's another thing. We need to understand that our role in the agency will change; and we have to be comfortable with that change, or we need to reconsider whether we want to do the work.

When you are an employee – anywhere – you are accountable to your supervisor and for the work outlined in your job description. Relationships change. Where you may have been primarily a peer to others living with HIV, you may now be thought of as a worker, responsible for assisting those people. People who once supported you, other paid staff, are now your colleagues.

This isn't a "bad" thing – just a different thing. You might need a period of adjustment to get used to new and different relationships and the parameters of your work.

Similarly, volunteering means your role will be different than if you were a person accessing services. Volunteers are employees, just not paid. They have responsibilities and are accountable for their work and their actions. At the same time, volunteers may have some benefits through events and other kinds of recognition, such as holiday parties, gatherings, and support groups for volunteers.

Volunteers also learn skills. The skills you may learn as a volunteer might lead to a paid position in your agency or elsewhere in the community.

It's all something you need to consider.

GIPA and training in your ASO

If we consider GIPA as a basis for how organizations involve people living with HIV, there is a responsibility for the agency to provide training that will assist a person with HIV to gain skills and increase their capacity to work.

While budget considerations for training and education programs may limit the amount of training available, the commitment to build capacity for greater involvement of people living with HIV should be present nonetheless.

STEPPING OUT, GETTING INVOLVED : INTEGRATING YOUTH LIVING WITH HIV

MODULE

9

So...what do you want to be?

The first and last question we ask.

Throughout this module, we've offered you information to help you assess yourself, your agency, your board and your place in all of it.

But this is still a very small part of the potential you have within you.

You have to decide where you want to go. It's an adventure worth taking, and the first step is completely up to YOU.

It starts by putting one foot forward.

ONE FOOT FORWARD

SELF ASSESSMENT

After completing this section I learned:

I still need more information about:

My strongest areas right now are:

My weakest areas right now are:

My next steps will be:

I can complete my next steps by: _____

Circle the number that you think fits.

	Very confident			Need to work on this	
I spent enough time on this section	1	2	3	4	5
I'm using my energy wisely	1	2	3	4	5
I know where to find more information	1	2	3	4	5
I can find a person to help me out	1	2	3	4	5
I know how to apply what I learned	1	2	3	4	5

NOTES

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