

February 2007

Communication from the Board of Directors of HALCO

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

Change. Change is inevitable. Sometimes it can be anticipated and accomplished in a planned manner. Sometimes it can't be anticipated. Even then, it can be absorbed with little or no disruption. Other times, it cannot be anticipated and is so far-reaching in nature that it is fundamentally transforming. For the first time in eleven years, it is this last type of change which HALCO has experienced during the last three months.

First, Catharine Allan, our Community Legal Worker, made a critical life decision for herself. She chose to take a job in government service much closer to her home. By doing so, she avoids a long commute and gives herself much more time to devote to her family life. We value her contribution and we will miss her. We wish her the very best in all she does in the future.

Next, Rick Lobodzinski made the very personal decision to step back from the rigours of his position as Office Manager. Fortunately for us, Rick decided to remain with us as our Receptionist. It will be Rick's friendly voice and smile that will continue to greet you when you first make contact with HALCO.

Even for those of us who knew or suspected, the possibility that for personal reasons Ruth Carey was seriously considering a career change was a proposition that was difficult to absorb. The right opportunity arose and Ruth accepted an appointment to the new Landlord and Tenant Board. This was the last change in sequence to confront HALCO and clearly a fundamental one. For over ten years, Ruth has been the face, voice and guiding spirit of HALCO. We recognized immediately that it would be a daunting task to replace Ruth. We decided to not even try. Ruth will be sorely missed, and she has our very best wishes for her future.

It was apparent that this much change occurring all at once could be severely disruptive and could have disastrously affected the delivery of services to our clients. We were fortunate to secure the services of Bruce Best to act as our Interim Executive Director. Bruce has ably helped us to avoid any serious disruption to our essential services. We are deeply indebted to him for his effective assistance and to the Clinic Resource Office for generously allowing him to take on this role.

As important to our continuing ability to deliver effective service during this difficult period has been the unquestioning commitment of our continuing staff. Renée Lang, John Nelson, Janet Jin and Rick have all delivered when it counted. As well, our dedicated Board acted in concert to ensure that we moved to address these circumstances as calmly and expeditiously as possible.

Unexpectedly confronted with so much change all at once, we decided to seize it as an opportunity. The opportunity we see is not to be better, as we were already delivering the best service possible by all measurable standards. Instead, we decided to regenerate and reorganize ourselves, and provide a fresh take and approach to the services we provide to people living with HIV. To this end, we set the objective goal of finding the very best people to fill the available positions. We have effectively accomplished this goal. We did not settle for anyone but the best.

Jill McNall is our new Community Legal Worker. Jill comes to us with more than 20 years of experience in the clinic system. Jill's warmth and enthusiasm, and depth and breadth of experience, will only serve to enhance the services we deliver.

Bill Merryweather is our new Office Manager. Bill's accumulated experience was gained in the health and private sectors. Bill brings additional insight with his experience in the AIDS service field and his current active involvement with Fife House. Bill's knowledge and calm demeanour will ensure the stability of HALCO's operations as the base for the services we provide.

Ryan Peck is our new Executive Director. Some of you will remember Ryan from his year of articles here, and the two years he spent on contract as a lawyer with HALCO. Others of you will know Ryan from the years he has spent gaining experience in the Legal Aid system both on the clinic side and as duty counsel. Ryan's energy and confidence will be invaluable assets to HALCO. We look forward to his leadership as we generate a fresh vision for HALCO's future.

We enthusiastically welcome Ryan, Bill and Jill to the HALCO fold. Under Ryan's directorship, Renée, John, Jill, Janet, Bill and Rick collectively are the realization of the achievement of our goal of having the very best people to provide the very best service HALCO can offer to our clients.

The extensive change we have undergone will obviously require an on-going period of transition. We look to you for your patience and understanding during this period until our transformation is completed. We give you our commitment to complete our transformation as quickly as we can.

There is no more appropriate way to end this communication than to share with you Ruth Carey's parting words to the Board of Directors:

I would like to take this opportunity to say goodbye. It has been a great privilege to serve as the Clinic's Executive Director, and I suspect that I will never do anything quite as meaningful or important in the entire remainder of my career. Certainly, I doubt if I will see anything ever again that could compare with the amazing courage and perseverance displayed to me continuously by people living with HIV. There is a great deal more that needs to be done, that I wish I could have done, and it is my sincere wish that my leaving will give the clinic an opportunity to be even more productive and successful. I wish you all the best and I will think of you often.

We look forward to doing more.

Yours truly,  
HALCO - HIV & AIDS Legal Clinic (Ontario)

Robert Watkin, Chair  
Board of Directors  
HALCO - HIV & AIDS Legal Clinic (Ontario)