



**Canadian Working Group on HIV and Rehabilitation**

**Groupe de travail canadien sur le VIH et la réinsertion sociale**

### **Building Bridges to Increase Access to Rehabilitation for People Living with HIV**

The advent of antiretroviral therapy has dramatically increased the life expectancy and quality of life for people living with HIV (PHAs), to the point that HIV is now considered a chronic condition with episodically disabling periods. Compared to the general population, however, PHAs are at a greater risk of developing other chronic conditions, such as renal failure and diabetes among others, at an earlier age. As a result, they may face several challenges in performing daily activities. Occupational Therapists, who are professionals with the knowledge to help people perform activities they need, or want to do on a daily basis, are ideal candidates to support PHAs by offering concrete solutions to the challenges to social participation that they may face. The reality is, however, that access to Occupational Therapy (O.T.) services is limited for PHAs. CWGHR aims to see that change.

In October, CWGHR completed an evaluation of the first year of our O.T. practicum program. The three main goals of this program are: 1) to provide pre-entry-to-practice O.T. students with opportunities to learn about the needs and experiences of people living with HIV; 2) to raise awareness among people living with HIV and service providers in the HIV sector about the role of O.T. in the lives of HIV+ people; and 3) to increase access to O.T. services by people living with HIV. CWGHR's role is to be a catalyst, connecting Canadian universities providing O.T. education and community-based HIV organizations. Nine students were placed in HIV organizations in 2014. The evaluation showed that, as a result of the practicum placement, all students' self-rated knowledge of HIV and the experiences of people living with HIV increased and that staff supervisors reported a better understanding of the role an O.T. can play in the lives of people living with HIV.

CWGHR is currently working towards linking universities and HIV organizations for the 2014/2015 placements. Since September 1<sup>st</sup>, conversations have occurred with 13/14 universities offering O.T. training in Canada and 31 HIV organizations have been contacted with detailed information about what O.T. practicum students can offer them and their clients. Several linkages have been made between universities and community-based organizations, including a new relationship between McGill University and AIDS Community Care Montreal.

For more information on this program, contact Kate Murzin, Aging Initiatives Lead, at [kmurzin@hivandrehab.ca](mailto:kmurzin@hivandrehab.ca)