

One Foot Forward

A GIPA Training Toolkit

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

MODULE

6

.....WHAT ABOUT ME?

CANADIAN
AIDS
SOCIETY



SOCIÉTÉ
CANADIENNE
DU SIDA



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Working together for a healthier world™

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So...you want to get involved...you want to help out, but don't know where to start.

This module will give you the opportunity to take a good look at yourself and to help you determine your background, your level of energy, your values and beliefs, your interests and more.

We'll be encouraging you to complete short exercises that may show you ways to become more involved in your community. We'll also make suggestions about areas of work that might interest you.

There are many possibilities.

"Every individual has a place to fill in the world and is important, in some respect, whether he chooses to be so or not."

– Nathaniel Hawthorne

WHAT INTERESTS ME?

There are many potential areas in which you can work. Start with what interests you to lead you toward those activities for which you're best suited.

Things that interest me

- news and politics
- writing
- researching
- policies/by-laws, etc.
- legal issues & HIV
- public speaking

- HIV treatment issues
- health care (in general and related to HIV/HCV)
- physical fitness & HIV/HCV
- nutrition & HIV/HCV

"Individuals, not stations, ornament society."

– Rt. Hon. William Ewart Gladstone

Things that interest me (Continued)

- peer support (mental, emotional spiritual)

- women's health
- HIV & pregnancy
- children & HIV

- HIV+ gay/bi men's issues
- gay/bi men's social support

- Aboriginal people with HIV/HCV
- on/off reserve issues
- Aboriginal people social support

- social activism/social justice
- political activism
- HIV activism
- stigma & discrimination & HIV

- trans persons' & HIV
- trans persons' social support

- IDU safer injecting
- IDU & HIV treatments
- IDU programs and services
- sex trade workers' issues

- housing issues for PLWHIV/AIDS
- mental illness and HIV

- employment issues for PLWHIV/AIDS
- return to work issues for PLWHIV/AIDS
- CPP & other insurance programs for PLWHIV/AIDS

All of the above topics deal with some practical and not-so-practical aspects of HIV and the work of agencies and their boards.

Some areas are “cross-overs,” which are closely linked to other areas. For example, an interest in policies and in activism can be paired or an interest in women and Aboriginal issues can prepare you for work involving Aboriginal women and children.

Think about the topics or areas that you find the most interesting and keep those foremost in your mind – you’ll build up as you go along.

ACTIVISM

Some PLWHIV/AIDS are interested in activism. Activism comes in many forms. It can be as simple as writing letters and attending meetings with decision-makers, to public events, such as marches or protests.

In the early days of AIDS, there were many activists stirring things up: the government was not paying attention to AIDS and those who were living and dying of the disease. AIDS was about the “4H club,” as it was called: homos, hookers, haemophiliacs and Haitians.

In North America, most people with HIV were gay men, and society saw these men as expendable. Some even believed that HIV was a punishment from God.

Activism was very political and involved effigy-burning, marches, protests and other forms of acting up. With the advent of improved medications, the level and types of activism have changed. More work is done behind-the-scenes through meeting with politicians and decision-makers and letter writing campaigns, for example.

Being involved as an activist is very personal. You need to follow your heart and find the voice most comfortable for you.

WHAT DO I THINK IS FUN?

- music (listening/playing)
- writing (creative writing, poetry)
- art (drawing/cartooning, sculpting, painting)
- being physically active (sports, working out)
- dance
- social gatherings with people over coffee/tea, for example
- social activities of any kind
- talking with others about my story (my WHOLE life)
- listening to other people tell their story
- cooking
- going for walks with others
- making people laugh
- organizing parties/social events
- attending spiritual services (of any kind)

These are creative aspects of who you are. Interests and hobbies can be transferred to other areas. For example:

Art: poster making, supporting programs/activism by creating visual images, working with youth

Social skills: helping with focus groups, committees, gathering information, learning to build effective services

Cooking: helping people learn to eat well on a limited income

Music: social support for people with HIV – music is a creative healing art process and brings people together, especially for “jam” sessions

Dance/Physical activity: health promotion, illness prevention, social support

Spirituality: deeper meaning for PLWHIV/AIDS -- a growing area of interest for many PLWHIV/AIDS from all religious/spiritual affiliations

Organization: a useful skill in event-planning and many related areas, including fundraising, social events and volunteer recognition

Making people laugh: What can we say -- perhaps this is one of the most valuable skills on the planet!

Again, there are a lot of other things that people find fun and enjoyable. Those are the things that will help carry you mentally, spiritually and emotionally through the work.

WHAT AM I GOOD AT? (Don't be shy! Toot your own horn!)

You have many skills that you can apply to different areas of work in your community. The list below is just a start. Think about things you've done in the past that you now feel proud of.

- computer skills
- writing skills
- bilingualism (speaking and writing in English and French)
- writing/speaking a language other than French or English
- graphics skills
- typing/keyboarding
- organizational skills
- planning skills
- thinking of different ways to do things
- keeping others on track/on time
- keeping myself on track/on time
- making a point clearly
- understanding other people's ideas and opinions
- listening
- drafting media releases/ developing contacts
- making people laugh
- making people think
- asking the right questions

Skills are the practical aspects of the work we do.

Your skill set, whether computer skills, planning skills or keeping others on track/on time, assists in figuring out what job you are best suited for.

Committees, boards, office work and support work all involve different skill sets and these skills can be used in any number of ways.

Knowing what your skill sets are can help you sell your ability within an agency.

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

The things we know how to do well generally involve transferable skills. Transferable skills are skills that don't, at first glance, seem to apply to other areas, but if we explore them further, it's obvious that we can use them in many different ways.

Example #1: Parenting. Child-rearing is challenging work. We often think that raising children involves love, care and attention. But let's pull apart some of what a parent does and see which skills are transferable to other work.

You teach your children. This involves educating, being patient and understanding the steps of a skill or activity. These skills can be applied to helping teach new volunteers.

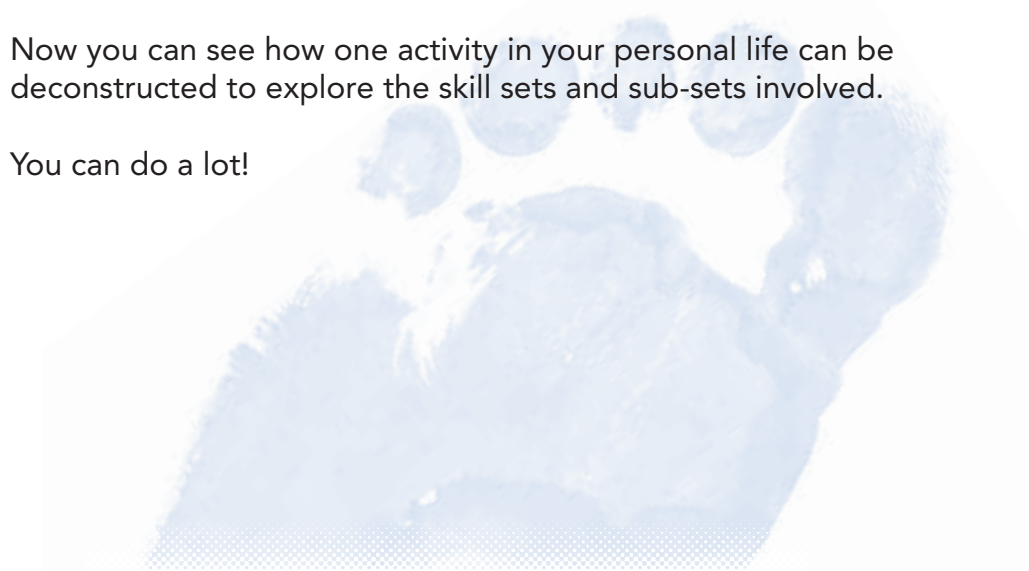
You ensure your children are involved in activities at school and outside of school. This requires organizing, planning, implementing and budgeting. These skills can be applied to helping organize events and fundraising.

Example #2: Gardening. Gardens require tending, but more is involved...

Landscaping is part of gardening. It involves planning where certain plants will grow, determining which are taller, which are border plants, when certain plants bloom, what colours harmonize well and which conditions are required for specific plants. These skills can be applied to areas of work involving detailed understanding of how different aspects of programs or services come together in the most effective way. The same creativity and imagination involved in developing your landscaping plan is ideal for program development. In both, you have to picture the outcome in your mind before you start.

Now you can see how one activity in your personal life can be deconstructed to explore the skill sets and sub-sets involved.

You can do a lot!



PREVIOUS WORK

Answer the questions below, reflecting on past paid or volunteer work you might have done.

What were the parts of the work you liked the most?

What were the parts you liked the least?

What skills do you think you gained from past work that might be useful to you now?

When you think about getting involved in your agency or other groups, past experience can help you decide what you really want to do, what you want to avoid and areas where you can explore new things.

Always try to consider how skills might be used in different ways. For example, if you were a volunteer receptionist and you received positive feedback on the work you did, you could use those skills working on a hotline, or even working on committees or in public speaking – you have a way with people.

TRIAL AND ERROR

In your work, you may pressure yourself to be perfect from the beginning.

Get over that.

Everyone starting a new job, and even the people who have been doing the same job for years, are always functioning through trial and error. We're afraid to make mistakes because we think we'll let someone down or they might think we aren't capable.

ONE FOOT FORWARD

When we make mistakes, we can acknowledge them, try to figure out what didn't work and try again. Mistakes are a way we can learn. They are opportunities to explore new and different ways to accomplish our goals.

Even Einstein had to make mistakes in order to learn. The important thing is that we try and continue to try. It's when we stop trying that we get stuck and may fear moving forward.

Remember – nothing will ever be perfect.

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 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 to use 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 and respond to the following, as appropriate:

- I can lift five lbs. easily yes no
- I can walk five blocks without getting tired yes no
- I can walk three 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 one hour yes no

ACCOUNTABILITY

Being involved in the work of an agency, whether as a program volunteer, a board member or paid staff person, means being accountable.

You are part of a group of people who are accountable to each other, to the clients or members of the agency, to the community and to the funders, whether government, corporate sponsors or private donors.

Accountability means you and the agency answer to the larger community. It’s about being responsible to others for your actions. And they are accountable to you.

It's about being in relationships. You are in relationships with all the people who have a stake in the issue.

Accountability also means being responsible for reaching your goals and for having clear boundaries about what you will and won't do. It's also about being responsible to your inner self, the part that needs to be looked after.

Consider what being responsible means.

HOW DO I LIKE TO WORK?

Everyone has preferences with respect to how they work and their own personal style in getting the work done. Most people move between styles. We don't all want to just sit, or just move boxes.

Whatever your style and preference, there's always work to be done.

Consider and select the statements that apply to you:

I like to work:

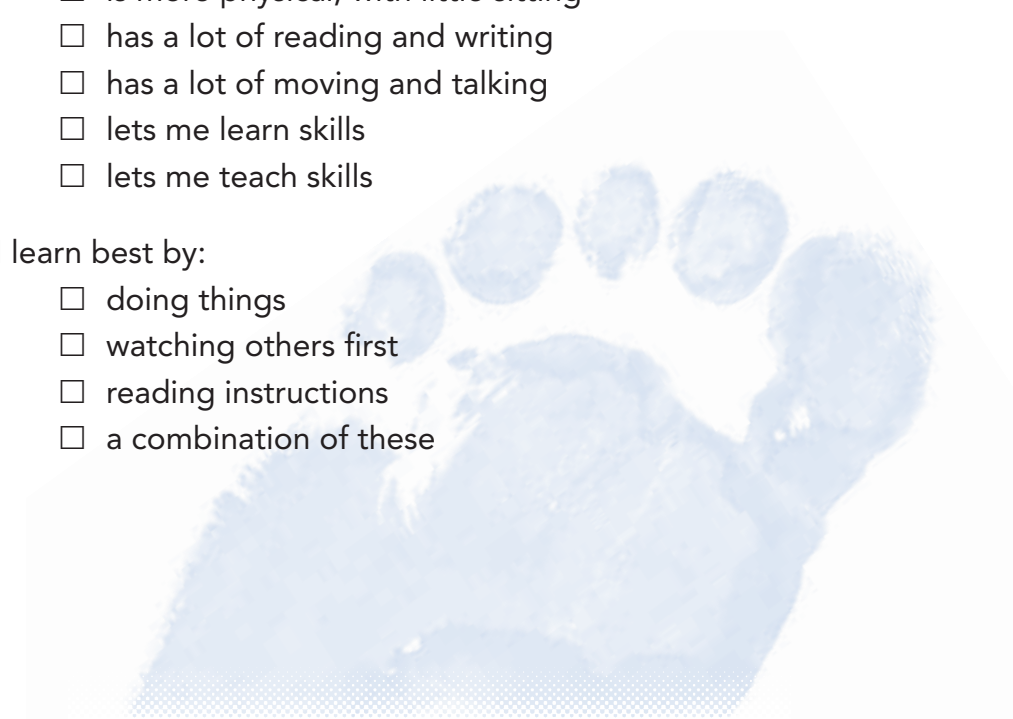
- by myself
- one-on-one
- with groups or teams

I like work that:

- is more cerebral than physical
- is more physical, with little sitting
- has a lot of reading and writing
- has a lot of moving and talking
- lets me learn skills
- lets me teach skills

I learn best by:

- doing things
- watching others first
- reading instructions
- a combination of these



VALUES AND BELIEFS

In order to know how you fit in, you have to make sure that your personal values and beliefs are clear in your mind. You need to make sure that your values and beliefs match the work you want to do.

Sometimes, however, you have negative thoughts that can block you from moving forward. That's okay – it's human. You have to recognize those thoughts as well.

I value:

- honesty in others and myself
- respect from and for others
- clear communication with others
- constructive criticism about how I'm doing
- love and kindness from and for other people
- healthy and productive relationships
- healthy and safe (physically, emotionally, mentally) workplaces
- work that has meaning for myself and for others

I believe that:

- ASOs and peer groups must include PLWHIV/AIDS in all aspects of their work
- I am responsible for what happens to me in my life
- I am responsible for letting others know when I don't understand something
- others are able to be open and honest with me without my getting angry
- I am able to be open and honest with others without their feeling angry
- board work should be inclusive of PLWHIV/AIDS
- board work should be responsive and not reactive
- ASOs and peer groups should be responsive and not reactive
- everyone has only the best intentions

Limiting Thoughts

The ways in which you think about yourself and your abilities might keep you from moving forward. If you can recognize and challenge some of these thoughts, you may be able to work through them to help you move forward.

- I don't have enough education to be on a board of directors
- I don't have a degree, so I can't work for an ASO
- I'm a big fake
- I'm not good enough
- I don't have skills that are worthwhile
- I don't think people would listen to me
- I'm not creative
- I don't have anything worthwhile to contribute

Do you have anything to add to the list?

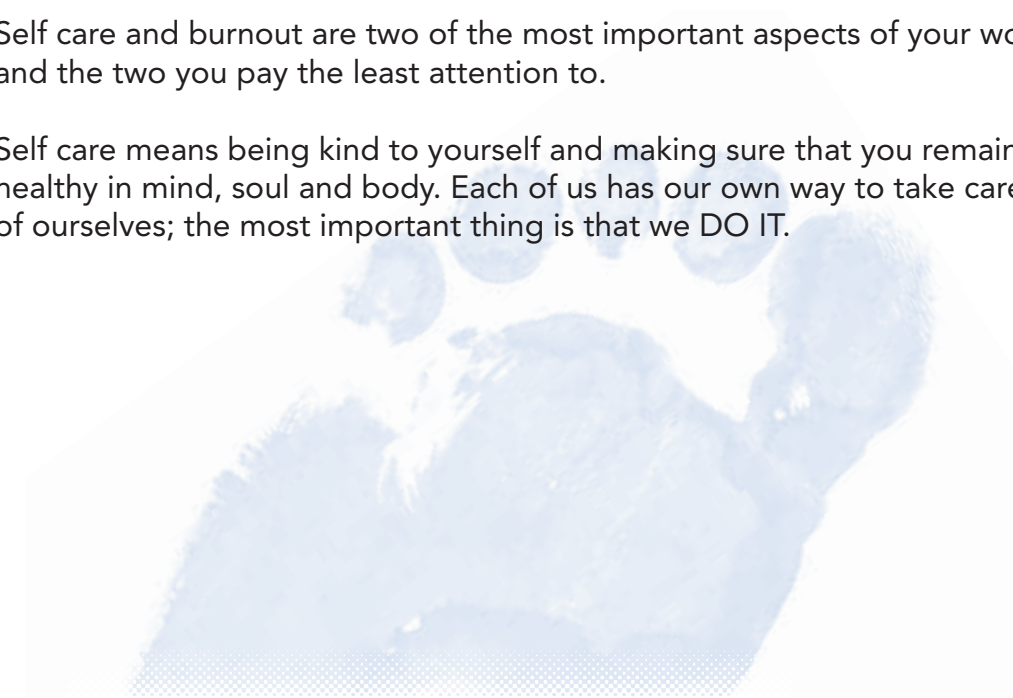
Everyone has negative thoughts about themselves. This exercise is not to highlight that fact, but to encourage you to recognize whether a negative thought is really true or if it's just some old baggage? If you're convinced it's true, can you improve or learn and change? If it's old baggage, leave it at the train station and get on with your life!

We suggest piling that old baggage up and having it hauled away.

SELF CARE AND BURNOUT

Self care and burnout are two of the most important aspects of your work and the two you pay the least attention to.

Self care means being kind to yourself and making sure that you remain healthy in mind, soul and body. Each of us has 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. Burnout, as it's commonly called, simply means you are completely worn out and used up. You have no energy to do the work and you can even lose interest in the things that make you feel good.

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

Everyone experiences burnout 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 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 that 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.

No.

When you get more involved, there may be times when your energy is not high or you are taking on more work than you can manage. It's important to learn that, now and again, you need to say, “No”. It's not because you don't care, but because you need to care for yourself, as well as others and the work.

ONE FOOT FORWARD

In what ways do you care for yourself?

- walk my dog
- listen to music
- cook good food
- play with my children
- go for a run
- work out at the gym
- read
- watch TV
- practice yoga
- go to the movies
- pray, meditate
- play music
- paint, draw, make art
- rearrange my furniture
- play on the computer (internet, games, etc.)
- go dancing
- go shopping
- have coffee with friends
- chat on the phone

Can you add to this list?

As long as you are doing something for yourself that feels good to you, and you're not harming anyone else, 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.

And, if you don't look after yourself, who will?

"Not nations, not armies, have advanced the race; but here and there, in the course of ages, an individual has stood up and cast his shadow over the world."

– Edwin Hubbell Chapin

TERMS IN THIS MODULE

HCV: Hepatitis C virus.

HIV: Human immunodeficiency virus.

Lypodystrophy: “Lypo” means “fat,” “dystrophy” means “distribution.” Lypodystrophy is a side effect of HIV medications that causes fat to be redistributed in the body (e.g., buffalo hump, extended belly). As for “lypoatrophy,” it means a loss of fat. Most people experience lypoatrophy in their face, but some also experience fat loss in their buttocks, arms and legs.

PLWHIV/AIDS: A person living with HIV/AIDS. You will also hear people say “PHA” or “PWA.”

Stigma: A mark of disgrace. Many people with HIV feel the stigma (the mark) of living with the virus, because some people think that having HIV means you had many sex partners or shared and used drugs.

Syndrome: A syndrome is a collection of symptoms or illnesses. AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome – a collection of symptoms and illnesses that are diagnosed after infection with HIV.

SELF ASSESSMENT

After completing this module, 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: _____

Rate the statements below by circling the number that you think fits.

	Very confident			Need to work on this	
I spent enough time on this module.	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

