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The Community Liaison Officer,
Christopher Park, can be reached at:
THE 12TH WORLD AIDS CONFERENCE
94, rue des Eaux-Vives
1207 Geneva
Switzerland
Tel : +41 22 737 33 44
Fax : +41 22 700 33 11
e-mail: park@aids98.ch

COMMUNITY UPDATES



HERE is an update on several main features of activities that will target Community participants this summer in Geneva.

COMMUNITY RENDEZ-VOUS

The Community Rendez-Vous will be a forum for community exchange and skills development. It will begin on Friday, June 26 in the late afternoon with a retrospective plenary looking back to Vancouver 1996 followed by a community reception. Saturday, June 27 will be a full day consisting of regional and subregional meetings, followed by targeted network meetings on community-based research, human rights, sex work, migration and a joint GNP+/ICW meeting. There will also be Skills Building sessions on treatments activism and computer use. A plenary summary session including community resolutions will take place in the early evening of Thursday, July 2. The main focus of the Community Rendez-Vous will be on communication and mechanisms for better networking.

Registration for the CRV will be offered to all community-based scholarship recipients. There will also be registration (up to 200 people) at Palexpo on June 26 for other community-based delegates who are attending the Conference through other means of support. There will be an overall limit of 200 people from each of the 5 regions of the world.

There will also be alternative meetings preceding the Conference, including a Prevention Symposium, a Nurses' Satellite, a Treatments Activist Training workshop, and various commercial satellites.

COMMUNITY SYMPOSIA

In the evening (from 5:30pm – 8pm) of each of Monday 29 June, Tuesday 30 June and Wednesday 1 July, there will be four or five community-led symposia. These will deal with a number of issues related to community action and HIV/AIDS. The formats for these symposia will vary according to issues, but will focus on interactive exchange including case studies, demonstrations, and workshops.

Topics include strategic lobbying; developing national and international networks; human rights and AIDS; long-term survivors; treatment access

by the South for the South; role of HIV+ people in prevention; sex work; alternative and traditional therapies; religion and HIV (how believers are addressing HIV/AIDS within their religious bodies, and lessons to use); and AIDS and media responsibility.

ORIENTATION SESSIONS

Orientation sessions to help delegates, especially newcomers to large international AIDS conferences, will take place in the morning and early afternoon of Sunday 28 June.

These will be offered in English, French and Spanish and will be approximately an hour in length. They will cover three aspects: making sense of the Conference programme; making sense of the Conference Centre; and making sense of Conference language.

SKILLS BUILDING

Over the past few years, the Skills Building programme has become an increasingly important component of the programmes at international AIDS conferences. Skills Building programmes offer capacity building in key content areas and complement the scientific sessions.

Skills Building sessions are aimed principally at delegates from the South; poverty and working in resource-poor settings will be addressed in all content areas. Eighteen topic areas have been identified and grouped under five headings: developing/implementing prevention strategies; programme and organisational development; care and treatment of HIV; policy and advocacy; information and communications technology. Specific workshop titles and descriptions will be available by April 15th.

The Skills Building workshops conducted during the course of the Conference will be made up of six to seven workshops offered simultaneously during two time periods (from 11:00 AM to 2:30 PM and 3:00 PM to 6:30 PM) on Monday 29 June, Tuesday 30 June and Wednesday 1 July, and one time period (from 11:00 AM to 2:30 PM)

on Thursday 2 July. In addition, a few skills building sessions will be offered during the Community Rendez-Vous (Friday 26 June to Saturday 27 June and Friday 3 July). Most skills building sessions will be conducted in English, though some of the workshops will be offered entirely in French or Spanish, and/or targeted to participants working in a specific geographic region.

Visit the community page of the Conference Web site (<http://www.aids98.ch>) in mid-April for an update on the Skills Building Programme.

CHILD CARE

Child care will be available for Conference delegates. A special request needs to be made on the registration form or be received at Congrex by May 1, 1998. Please note the child's age and special needs, if any. Basic child care will be free of charge but parents should supply basic needs such as nappies, a change of clothes, etc. and provide for any special dietary requirements.

COMMUNITY VILLAGE

The Community Village will be the central location for NGO and community activity. It will contain the NGO booths and a special area illustrating the Swiss Response to HIV. It will also be the focal point for the Electronic Talking Tree, the 12th World AIDS Conference's message and programme services. The Internet Café will be housed here. Special lounge areas for informal exchange and session overflow viewing will be part of the Village. Just to one side will be a lounge area for PWAs, which will provide basic nourishment needs for diverse medication regimens and a space for rest and relaxation. Through the PWA lounge, delegates can get assistance in readjusting their medication schedules over time zones. Information to this effect will be available on the Conference Web site in April. An area for cultural responses to HIV/AIDS will be accessed through the Village.

The Conference Centre, Palexpo, will be non-smoking.

*All of you are more interested in Geneva 98 than we thought!!
We have received over 7,500 abstracts - about 350 will be selected for oral presentations, and a further 3,000 for poster presentations.
Over 3,500 individuals have applied for scholarship support.*



LEPONENT

WELCOME TO GENEVA

On behalf of the local organisers, I wish to express a warm welcome to incoming delegates. We shall do our best to make your stay in Geneva enjoyable and memorable. We also wish you a bon voyage for your trip to Geneva. À bientôt !

Claire Torracinta-Pache
Chair, Local Community Committee

THE PLACE

Geneva is situated in a temperate zone of the Northern Hemisphere in Europe, which means that winter temperatures rarely fall below 0°C and in summer, the average daytime temperature is 25 °C. While most cities in Southern Europe are suffering from summer heatwaves, Geneva usually manages to stay pleasantly cool, thanks to breezes blowing over the lake. Conference participants from tropical or sub-tropical areas might find that evening temperatures are cool: do think of bringing one or two articles of warm clothing (a sweater or a windcheater should do) and remember that electric/electronic appliances in Europe run on 220 volts. A comfortable pair of walking shoes will also be handy for walks through town, or between sessions at Palexpo.

THE PEOPLE

Geneva has always been a French-speaking city with an openness to the rest of the world which means that many people understand at least one other language, usually English, Italian or German. Some people also speak Spanish, and Portuguese, especially in the service industry. Many people from the service industry (police, customs, hotel personnel, etc.) will also take part in training before the Conference and, as such, will be sensitive to the needs of the HIV/AIDS community. The Swiss have a reputation for cleanliness and order which Geneva tries hard to live up to. Geneva is a very tolerant and open city, but excessively rowdy or disorderly behaviour is, of course, frowned upon.

NEW FACES AT THE SECRETARIAT

As the Conference approaches, our busy Community staff is getting even busier. Two new colleagues are helping us to deal with important Community Aspects: Skills Building and Culture.

MARY MYAYA was hired in January 1998 as Skills Building Co-ordinator. She comes from the Pacific Northwest of the USA and has worked many years in Southern Africa as a Public Health Educator in HIV/AIDS. Her grassroots knowledge of this field, and her extensive training experience, have enabled her to develop keen insights on what the needs are in developing a Community-based response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic and who can best impart this kind of knowledge.

MICHAEL HAUSERMANN also began working with our team, as Cultural Programme Co-ordinator, in November 1997. He was the director of the Swiss AIDS Federation between 1990 and 1995, and has spent the past years working on the relationship between sexuality, health and spirituality. He brings to the Community team his sense of leadership, organisation and vision. These qualities will be of great help in organising cultural and leisure activities that will promote interaction between Conference participants and the people of the Geneva area.



OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

Like in most Western European cities, and despite Geneva's small size, it is relatively easy to find evening diversions. The Pâquis area, near the Cornavin train station, is Geneva's red-light district. There are also many lively bars, sex-shops and restaurants in this part of town. Police, in general, tolerate the individual use of cannabis, however possession and dealing of hard drugs are not tolerated and could be severely punished. There is an accessible needle exchange in town. We will be informing Conference participants on arrival of schedules for substance users support groups.

As for the queer/lesbian/bisexual/transgender/gay scene, there are nightclubs, parties, bars and cruising areas throughout the city. More precise information on this will be widely distributed among Conference participants in June, with the help of Geneva's local gay group, Dialogai.

GENEVA ON A SHOESTRING

In summertime, Geneva is one of the most popular European tourist destinations. Busloads of visitors from around the world come to stroll on the lakeside, admire the flowerbeds and the Jet d'eau, and the Alps towering in the distance. Geneva also has the reputation of being one of the world's most expensive places to visit. This reputation is partially justified. The Swiss enjoy a very high standard of living and consequently the cost of living may seem exorbitant for people, especially from resource-poor areas.

Here are some tips to get by during your stay in Geneva without having to spend excessive amounts of money.

The currency in Switzerland is the Swiss franc. At the time of publication, one Swiss franc was worth 1.45 US dollars. Exchange offices (Bureaux de change) are widely available throughout town, especially around the Cornavin train station and may offer more interesting rates than banks. Off-hour exchange is available in the Geneva Airport train station and Geneva Main Station.

FOOD

Restaurants can be prohibitively expensive, even if many of them offer lunchtime deals of complete meals for ca. 15 francs. Fast-food chains will serve meals around 12 francs. The cost of food in supermarkets and shops can also be surprisingly high, but the quality of produce is usually excellent and Switzerland is well known for its dairy products and chocolate.

THE LCC

In 1996, a team of local Community representatives returned from Vancouver full of enthusiasm and ideas. This team has grown into the Local Community Committee, an important element that voices local and regional concerns in Conference planning.

Along with the other members of the LCC, the LCC Chair, **Claire TORRACINTA-PACHE** also sits on the Community Planning Committee. Claire has recently interrupted a political career as representative to Geneva's legislature. While still active in her former occupation, she marshalled Geneva's many public and private resources to help make the 12th World AIDS Conference an event worthy of her city and canton.

Dominique ROULIN coordinates the **AIDS ministry** of the National Protestant Church of Geneva. She has been a never-failing source of inspiration and comfort to many PWAs and their loved ones. She is also a prominent

Conference delegates might find it more economical to buy bread and cheeses, sandwiches, yogurts, fruit, and pack lunches for Palexpo. There will be no lunch hour break in the Conference programme. A range of catering services will be available throughout the day at Palexpo and plans are being made to inform Conference delegates, on arrival, of economical alternatives to restaurants in the evenings.

TRANSIT

The Geneva public transport (TPG) system of distinctive orange trams, trolleys and buses is very well developed. A 60-minute ticket on the urban zones will cost 2.20 francs (at bus stops) and strip cards (at TPG agencies or newsagents) offer a slightly cheaper alternative. Registration fees will include a transportation pass from Sunday, June 28th to Friday, July 3rd. Travel to cities around Geneva is fast and efficient. A train station serves the Conference site.

ACCOMMODATION

One of the prides of Geneva is its number of quality hotels. Many of these are in the luxury class, but a range of prices is available for different standards. A cheap hotel can cost between 80 and 150 francs a night. We encourage Community participants who have not asked for accommodation to book hotel rooms as soon as possible: space will be at a premium when the Conference's 10'000 delegates arrive in Geneva and many of the hotels are booking up fast. Please let the Secretariat know if your efforts to find accommodation in Geneva are unsuccessful.

HIV/AIDS activist in Switzerland, beyond the spiritual and pastoral concerns of her profession. Her sensitivity to differences in faith will be a great asset to organising Geneva 98's interfaith service, as people of different beliefs gather to celebrate lives lived and to be lived.

In 1992, **PVA-Genève** (the French acronym for People Living With HIV/AIDS) was founded as the cantonal organisation of positive people. It provides support and resources and space for meetings and activities oriented to people living with HIV/AIDS. Its presence on the LCC is a sign of the concern showed by Genevan PWAs for the greater involvement of PWAs worldwide in decisions which affect the quality of their lives. PVA-Genève's representative to the LCC is **ZOY**, an artist and activist.

Dialogai, the Genevan gay group and a prevention partner of the Swiss AIDS federation, also sits on the LCC. Dialogai's representative to the LCC is **Michel MAX**. He has coordinated a great deal of effective and compelling HIV prevention work towards gay men, and ensu-

THE SCHOLARSHIP TEAM

One of the most important aspects of implementing the Geneva principle is to ensure that the 12th World AIDS Conference is accessible to delegates coming from resource-poor environments. At the Geneva Secretariat, the Scholarship Department's job is to receive and process scholarship applications from around the world and to evaluate them according to rigorous criteria established by a Scholarship Working Group. These criteria take into consideration both individual specificities and candidates potential to participate in the Geneva 98 experience and carry it back to their community and their work.

3653 scholarship applications were received by the deadline. They will all be processed and evaluated before final selection is made in early April. A quick snapshot of the applicant pool follows:

6 regions and 147 countries are represented	
1096 applicants (30.4%)	from Africa
761 applicants (21.1%)	from Asia/Pacific
657 applicants (18.2%)	from Latin America/Caribbean
169 applicants (4.6%)	from Eastern Europe
224 applicants (6.2%)	from Western Europe
746 applicants (20.7%)	from Australia/New Zealand/ Japan/Canada/USA

Of the total applicant pool, 46% are women, 54% are men
Of the 3653 applicants,
25% indicated they were HIV+
39% indicated they were HIV-
18% did not know their status
18% did not respond

Despite the size of the Scholarship Fund, the demand for scholarships is overwhelming. The Conference will be able to assist less than a third of the approximately 3600 applicants. The Scholarship Programme will be allocating 1000 registrations and will supplement approximately 700 of these with full or partial funding to cover travel, accommodation, and per diems. Successful applicants will be notified in April. If you are not granted a Scholarship, or if you have not applied for one from the Scholarship Fund, please remember that you may also explore other ways of funding your trip to Geneva, either with local or international agencies.

Ida GIORDANO is the Co-ordinator the Scholarship Programme. She held the same position at the Vancouver Conference and joined the Geneva Secretariat in

red that Dialogai provides space and resources for social, cultural, political and leisure activities. It is likely that Dialogai's premises will also provide the Conference with one of its most welcoming social venues.

Marc VESIN is the representative of **AIDES** Haute-Savoie on the LCC. Crossing the border is an everyday matter to thousands of commuters in the Greater Geneva area, and the local approach to HIV/AIDS questions often involves input from one of the neighbouring area branches of AIDES, the French national network of AIDS Service organisations. Marc is an activist and speaker on HIV/AIDS issues in French-speaking Switzerland and nearby France.

The **Groupe sida Genève**, Geneva's main ASO, has invested resources and skills in Gene-

August 1997. Ida is responsible for overseeing the entire programme and its organisation. She acquired her experience in Programme Management in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and in her native Canada where she managed Human Resource Development projects for a large international NGO, World University Service of Canada. Ida's job is one of the most demanding ones on the Conference staff but she is an example of good humour, tenacity and resourcefulness in the midst of what often appears to be complete chaos.



Fred McMULLEN (left), Scholarship Programme Assistant, helps her in her work. Fred came to Geneva via Philadelphia and New York, where he acquired a solid background in project management for the advertising industry. In Geneva, Fred began working with a local ASO and joined the Scholarship team in October 1997. His duties involve both helping Ida with administration of the thousands of scholarship applications, and communication with scholarship candidates world-wide.

Receiving a Scholarship means that many candidates will benefit from travel to and from Geneva and lodging while they attend the Conference. **Thomas SCHAFER** is the Scholarship Programme Assistant who is in charge of organising the logistics of this complex task. Thomas is a Swiss national and joined the staff in November 1997. He previously served the International Committee of the Red Cross, as an international travel specialist, and is now working hard to ensure safe flights and adequate accommodation for Community delegates.

A team of hard-working and enthusiastic volunteers from the Geneva area are helping the Scholarship team with the huge numbers of Scholarship applications that have poured in.

va 98 since the very beginning. It is one of the Conference's important local partners and is represented by its legal counsellor, **Florian HÜBNER**. Florian is one of the most dedicated workers on the HIV/AIDS Community scene in Switzerland, particularly in the field of human rights advocacy.

The **Swiss AIDS Federation**, the umbrella organisation of the national ASO network, sits on the LCC and is represented by **Claudio FER-RANTE**. Other LCC members include **Nicole CASTIONI-JACQUET**, who represents **ASPASIE**, the Genevan sex workers organisation, and **Alexander RYS**, a founding member of the now-defunct Swiss PWA organisation **P.W.A-Switzerland** and a committed activist on both national and international levels.

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MEDICAL FACILITIES: AN INTERVIEW WITH PATRIZIO LORENZI

Patrizio Lorenzi is an MD who has been working for some years with Professor Bernard Hirschel's team at the Infectious Diseases Dept. of the Geneva Cantonal and University Hospital (HCUG). His experience and sensitivity as an HIV consultant are among the reasons he was chosen to co-ordinate medical facilities for Conference participants.

What will be the medical facilities on site at Palexpo during the Conference?

A fully-equipped clinic (nurses and doctors from the HCUG HIV Consultation, a stocked pharmacy, blood tests) will be available for all Conference participants. Opening hours will be those of the Conference site. All services rendered at the clinic will be free of charge (consultation and on-the-spot delivery of necessary prescription drugs). There will be no general check-ups at the clinic and no new anti-retroviral therapies will be initiated during the Conference. A nurses station coordinated by Véronique Chappuis will be organised in the PWA lounge, with doctors on call.

What happens in case of a medical emergency?

We will take care of medical emergencies at the clinic (the clinic will be fully equipped, complete with an emergency trolley). Any decision as to a transfer to the hospital will be made on site.

If a Conference participant suddenly begins experiencing HIV-related health complications during the Conference and needs to be admitted to hospital, what will be the treatment options and the follow-up?

The patient will be admitted to Emergency at the HCUG and will be accompanied by a member

of the HIV Consultation team to act as a link. Proper care will then be ensured by the appropriate department. A member of our team will regularly check up on the patient.

Unlike Vancouver 96, there are no general medical insurance provisions in Geneva 98 for Conference participants. What are the provisions to cover medical costs incurred by Conference participants?

We will be working from the principle that all Conference participants will not need financial guarantees to be admitted for hospital care (the Conference badge acts as a guarantee). However, any costs following admission to the hospital will be billed to the patient's private health insurance where possible. If the patient has no health insurance at all the costs will be covered by the HCUG.

What advice would you give Conference participants who will have to clear border facilities with provisions of pharmaceutical drugs (including substitution therapy) or injection material?

Before you leave, make sure your consulting physician gives you a letter in English or in French, certifying in full detail what pharmaceutical products (including substitution

therapies such as methadone) or relevant material you will be carrying on your person. Persons should travel with their prescriptions in case of problems such as lost or stolen medication.

What kind of needle-exchange resources will be available during the Conference for participants needing sterile injection materials?

Sterile injection kits will be available on-site at the Palexpo clinic during the Conference.



Patrizio Lorenzi (left), Véronique Chappuis and Bernard Hirschel, Conference Chair, in front of Geneva's Old Town

CULTURAL PROGRAMME

A Cultural Programme will be set up during the 12th World AIDS Conference. It will attempt to bridge gaps between Conference participants, and gaps between Conference participants and the residents of the Geneva area. In the spirit of "Bridging the Gap", this programme will emphasise the promotion and creation of spaces where people can meet, and present a number of cultural responses to AIDS. In accordance with the Conference theme, priority will be given to artists from resource-poor areas.

The programme is awaiting finalisation. Here are some of its salient points:

ON-SITE AT PALEXPO

- A large open space will be designed to encourage participants to mingle and express emotions, feelings, or just to take a moment's rest away from the madding crowd. This space will house a quilt exhibit and an international graphics design exhibit designed for the Conference.
- Performances by artists from different countries will take place in different Conference locations.
- Priority will be given, according to a variety of means currently under study, to body language and real opportunities to take a break in a natural setting.
- A video room will be available.

IN TOWN

- Two large-scale rituals. In particular, a Quilt ceremony at the opening of the Conference, dedicated to the memory of those who died because of AIDS, and a closing ritual, which will symbolically express the will to Bridge the Gap.
- Different AIDS-related artistic events (an art exhibit, a film festival)
- Conference participants and the Geneva public will be able to follow World Cup soccer matches together.
- Conference participants may also attend events planned before and after the Conference in the Geneva area: The Fête de la Musique ("Music Day", June 21st), the Lesbian and Gay Pride in Lausanne, the Montreux Jazz Festival, etc.
- A number of friendly social venues (parties, cafés, dances) and Geneva's magnificent public parks will offer Conference participants many pleasant ways to complete their leisure schedule.

CLN ELECTRONIC

Don't miss the opportunity to participate in the planned networking sessions of the Community Rendez-Vous. Six topic-related listservers

are now accessible. Join them through the AIDS 98 Web site:
<http://aids98.ch/eservice.html>
or e-mail aids98.community@hivnet.ch.

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