

# Telling it like it is

## A report on the results of BCPWA's End HIV Stigma campaign

by **Melissa Davis**

**In** February 2006, the BCPWA Society received the 2006 - 2007 BC Association of Broadcasters' Humanity Award, based on an earlier proposal to launch an advertising and awareness campaign to expose the issue of HIV stigma. The award consisted of widespread broadcast media exposure, with a commercial value of \$3 million. Cossette Communications, in conjunction with local production company Steam Films, agreed to produce, pro bono, a series of radio and television commercials for the campaign.

BCPWA's provincial campaign to end HIV stigma ran from July 1, 2006 - June 30, 2007 and included two TV and radio commercials; a website, [www.endHIVstigma.ca](http://www.endHIVstigma.ca); and a toll-free phone line for British Columbians seeking additional information, support, and referrals. A series of four issue-related fact sheets were also developed and distributed.

Throughout the campaign, BCPWA received considerable praise from the AIDS community, public health organizations, advocacy groups, PWAs, and many other citizens for our bold response to a 25-year social problem. We also received some critical feedback for the provocative approach and language used in our campaign advertisements.

At the conclusion of the campaign, a detailed report was prepared, analyzing community response and feedback received through email communications, online feedback surveys, and telephone calls.

Over the year, BCPWA received 43 emails in response to the campaign. Email respondents were roughly evenly divided in their impressions. Nineteen emails clearly endorsed the campaign. Another 17 emails criticized the creative approach used. And a further seven emails could not be classified as either positive or negative; most of these communications sought additional information about HIV, the campaign, or requests for print materials.

The End HIV Stigma website received 9,168 unique visits along with 97 online feedback surveys completed. Among online survey respondents, the overall approval rating for both commercials was 53 percent. A smaller proportion (42 percent) of individuals expressed disapproval, while 3 percent and 2 percent of respondents respectively indicated a neutral opinion or didn't answer the question. Interestingly, 70 percent of survey respondents indicated that the website was a very effective informational resource.

Both original and edited versions of the campaign commercials were uploaded to YouTube. Although the ads registered only a modest number of views (4,600 - 6,700), all four

versions received scores of 4½ stars out of 5—an approval rating of 90 percent.

Out of 36 calls received to the toll-free campaign phone line, response was mixed. While no calls specifically registered praise for the advertisements, 12 callers phoned for further information, referrals, support, and DVD copies of the commercials for educational purposes. Fourteen callers registered complaints about the ads. An additional 10 calls were chronic or problem callers.

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Were our efforts ultimately successful? We think so. The strong reactions—positive and critical—from the campaign advertisements attracted media attention, spurred dialogue in communities and among families, and drew nearly 10,000 new people to our campaign website. And we did something else, something especially powerful: we got under people's skin. We exposed them, repeatedly over the year, to a depiction of unsavoury and offensive behaviour.

We didn't paint a pretty picture. We reminded some people of others. We reminded some of themselves. We demonstrated—unapologetically—the indisputable ugliness of stigma, prejudice, and discrimination. And we made people reflect: *It's time to change the way we think about HIV and AIDS.*

A copy of the complete campaign report is located on BCPWA's website. ☺



**Melissa Davis** was BCPWA's acting director of communications from April 2006 - July 2007.