

AIDS Coalition *of Nova Scotia*



2019-2020

***“Totally OutRight
was life-changing for me”***

- participant from May 2019 program offering



In memory of those we lost in 2019-2020

Natasha



Report from the Chair

Well, here we are again! Another year of challenges lies behind us, but with many more on the way as the world continues to adjust to COVID-19 and the global pandemic. Around the world, people have been forced to adapt in this new world, and ACNS has been no different. Take this new form of venue for our AGM as a perfect example. Thank you all for joining us virtually. We recognize this causes extra challenges for some of our members, and we appreciate you working with us as we continue to serve all of our members in the best way we can.

Just as we looked forward to finishing the year with our BMO-sponsored *Bid for Life*, we made the difficult decision to postpone and eventually cancel the event for this year due to COVID-19 pandemic. It was not an easy decision for us, but ultimately it was necessary to ensure the safety of our staff, members, sponsors, and event attendees. A big thank you to all of our sponsors, who showed tremendous flexibility and generosity during this difficult time. We truly could not do it without each and every one of you!

For many years, we have talked about the need to adapt and strive to decrease our reliance on government funding. This year is no different. Although it is not an easy task, the board and staff remain dedicated to making this happen. As we welcomed Chris Aucoin as our new Executive Director, we also recognized we handed him a tough situation, made even more difficult in the world with COVID-19. Chris has worked diligently at opening up new funding avenues for ACNS, and I trust he will continue to be successful with his focus and dedication moving forward.

I would be remiss if I did not use our AGM as a recruiting opportunity! We are always on the lookout for new board members, particularly those that add to our diverse experiences and perspectives. The upcoming year for the Board at ACNS will be one of focus, determination, and planning. I have full faith in our existing team to make this a success, however I encourage you to get involved as well! Feel free to reach out to any of our board members or staff at any time if you are interested in getting more involved!

As always, a big thank you to our staff and board for all of your hard work over the past year. In addition, we are eternally grateful for the hard work and dedication of our volunteers, our sponsors, and our partners. You all continue to inspire me with your ability to keep moving forward, no matter how difficult the road becomes. We will get through this; we will persevere!

Dave St. Laurent
Chair, Board of Directors

Report from the Executive Director

It has been a year of staff transitions. Dena Simon retired in mid-December and I moved into the Executive Director position. Gary Dart joined ACNS in mid-December, taking over my former role as *Gay Men's Health Coordinator*. In February, Lori O'Brien took a leave of absence in *Support & Programs Services* to complete her Master of Social Work program and Shannon Hardy joined us on an interim basis to fill Lori's spot till late summer.

Despite those staff transitions the ongoing support and program work of ACNS has been going well. Our programs have had strong uptake and excellent evaluations from those benefitting. This includes:

- our support work for those living with HIV;
- our trauma-informed professional training program on working with vulnerable populations (PLHAs, and those communities at risk for HIV); and
- our offerings of sexual health leadership training and harm reduction education programs for members of high risk communities.

Reading through the departmental reports shows just how busy we have been and the impact ACNS has had on our community.

Fiscal 2019-2020 was a bit of a mixed bag. While we continue to work at keeping costs down, planned fundraising for 2019-2020 did not meet our goals. The primary factor here was with the COVID-19 pandemic we were forced to cancel our main annual fundraiser – the *BMO Bid for Life* event. Even before that we were still working to re-establish an expanded fundraising mix to meet our needs – and that will continue to be a work in progress.

A year ago Dena reported about the 2018 spike in HIV diagnoses in the NS. While formal figures for 2019 have not yet been released, we know from internal sources that the pattern of new diagnoses in NS has returned to its pre-2018 norm regarding numbers and composition. Regular update meetings with provincial officials had continued up until COVID-19. We hope that once the pandemic subsides we will be able to resume those regular discussions.

This year we also had planned to continue moving forward with the strategic planning process announced in last year's Annual Report. With Dena's announced retirement, it was decided to press pause on the membership consultations to allow the new Executive Director to get grounded first, and then... Expect to hear more about that as soon as the COVID pandemic sufficiently eases up; it's just a delay, not a cancellation.

Chris Aucoin
Executive Director

Report from Program and Support Services

Highlights

- Provided almost 1,300 one-on-one support sessions to PHAs throughout Nova Scotia
- Provided over 600 support sessions to people living with and/or affected by HIV/AIDS
- Provided over 200 referrals to programs, health services, community organizations, and government services for people living with HIV/AIDS
- Distributed \$2032 worth of hygiene items through our Making Ends Meet program and approximately \$2000 worth of food via our drop-in program
- Provided over a thousand free condoms and lubricant packages to PHAs
- Provided over \$1500 in telephone and television service for several PHAs while they were in the hospital
- Distributed 400 copies of our quarterly newsletter - Positive Dispatch - to PHAs, members, supporters and community partners
- Attended many community events and established new partnerships with organizations
- Sent out questionnaires to PHAs for program feedback
- 124 Complimentary and Alternative Therapy Session (CATS) program appointments for massage or osteopathy
- Served on 8 community-based committees and working groups to ensure the needs of PHAs and those most at risk are reflected when addressing healthy public policy, and guiding community-based research and training

Programs

The CATS program is thriving - despite ACNS's volunteer massage therapist of twenty years Alexandra Lynch retiring in the fall of 2019. There are now two registered massage therapists, Vicky Legge and Jacob Voye, who both started in the fall. There is also a new osteopath, Sarah Taggart added to the team along with osteopath Martha Faron, who has been with ACNS for three years. Having four practitioners allows for sixteen appointments per month in which PLHAs can receive massage and osteopathy treatments, leading to increased accessibility to the program and improvements in mental and physical health. We are thrilled that this valuable program has seen a seamless transition after Alexandra's departure.

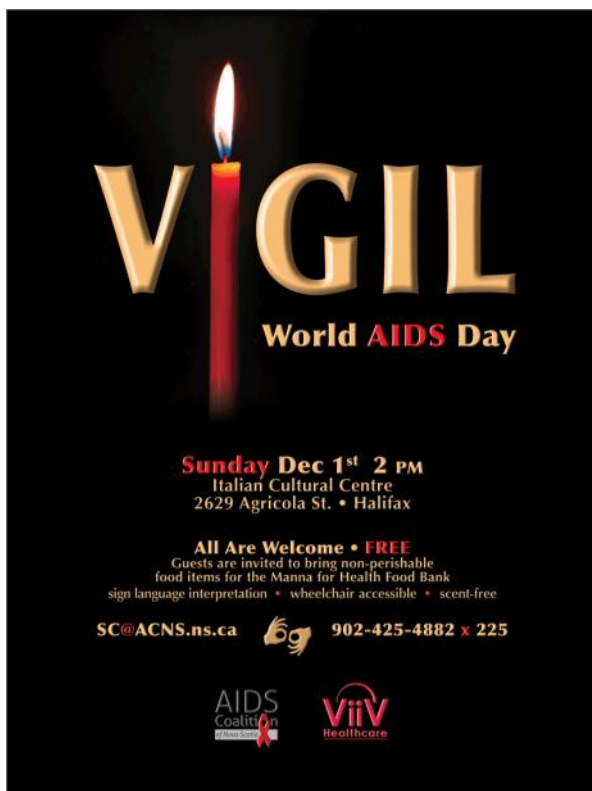
The Positive Gay Men's Group has continued and, at the request of participants, it is now held every second month rather than every month. Poz Guys saw a significant turnout at the Christmas iteration. Clients say they are really enjoying the opportunity to meet every couple of months. Based on feedback from our two focus groups held in 2018, clients showed

interest in a PLHA Yoga program. We created a five-week yoga pilot program for PLHA clients at the ACNS office. At first, it was intended only for positive women. However, it became clear that most of our female clients could not find the time to participate, due to conflicting schedules with school or work. It was then opened to all PLHAs yet still had lower turnout than hoped. Those who did participate said the classes boosted their confidence and self-esteem.

Like the Christmas Hamper program, the Easter Hamper was a huge success. With funding from a grant from ViiV we were able to provide gifts for five families. This included household items and cooking utensils for the parents, toys for the children, clothing, chocolates, and much more. Recipients said that the assistance they received from ACNS for Christmas and Easter “really helps out during those painful events.”

The annual Holiday Open House was held on Dec 17 where there was some friendly competition with a baking contest. PLHAs and community partners joined us to celebrate.

Two churches contributed items toward this year's Christmas Hamper program, Rockingham United Church and St. James Anglican Church. Lori went to Rockingham in December to speak to the congregation about what ACNS does and the value of the hamper program. The congregation raised \$650 for ACNS and purchased and donated many items toward our Christmas and Making Ends Meet hygiene programs. These donations along with our grant from ViiV made the annual program a huge success. Gifts were provided to seven families, twenty-one people total, including warm blankets, toys for the children, winter clothing, chocolates and much more.

A poster for World AIDS Day. At the top, a lit red candle is positioned between the letters 'V' and 'I' of the word 'VIGIL' in large, gold, 3D block letters. Below 'VIGIL', the words 'World AIDS Day' are written in a smaller, red, sans-serif font. The background is black. In the center, the date and time 'Sunday Dec 1st 2 PM' are written in red, followed by the location 'Italian Cultural Centre' and '2629 Agricola St. • Halifax' in white. Below this, the text 'All Are Welcome • FREE' is in red, followed by a paragraph in white: 'Guests are invited to bring non-perishable food items for the Manna for Health Food Bank'. Below that, in red, are the symbols for sign language interpretation, wheelchair accessibility, and scent-free. At the bottom, the contact information 'SC@ACNS.ns.ca' is in white, followed by a red and white logo, and the phone number '902-425-4882 x 225' in red. At the very bottom, there are two logos: 'AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia' and 'ViiV Healthcare'.



Rene, Daryl, Anthony, Doug and our *Affordable Eats* instructor Phillip Joy in the kitchen.

Our pilot of the Affordable Eats program is all wrapped up. While attendance was not what we had hoped, feedback from those who were there has been very good. As a follow-up to the program we'll work towards completing

our *Affordable Eats Cookbook* of healthy and economical recipes to make available to clients. The recipes will include ingredient pricing for easy budget planning. The nutrition workshop and cooking classes were lead by long-time local academic and nutritionist Phillip Joy, and were supported by project partners prideHealth and Healing Our Nations.

AIDS Awareness Week / World AIDS Day Vigil

The World AIDS Day Vigil was held on Dec 1 at the Italian Cultural Center in Halifax. This year's guest speaker was long-time activist and artist Jim MacSwaine. The event also featured the singer Ross Stewart Rankin, The Women Next Door choir and Halifax Gay Men's Chorus. There were approximately 100 people in attendance - the highest attendance in five years. The vigil was covered by news media: some parts were aired on television, journalism students from King's College wrote about the event, and Dena was interviewed by Global. The event went smoothly and some attendees said it was their favourite Vigil so far.

HIV/AIDS Awareness Week was very busy. ACNS participated in the Voices for World AIDS Day media campaign run by CANFAR (Canadian Foundation for AIDS Research). This entailed social media posts containing messages regarding testing, stigma, U=U, PrEP, and more. The campaign posts received enormous attention and there were over 1 million impressions on social media.

Advocacy

Advocating for better policies affecting our clients continues to be a priority. Greater financial and other supports leads to better outcomes and opportunities for PLHAs, therefore advocacy around these issues will continue. This work is carried out by ongoing participation in seven community groups

involving main issues impacting PLHAs who access our services, including advocacy around poverty, access to affordable housing, addiction and mental health services, and issues surrounding the Dept. of Community Services (DCS).

Advocacy efforts from 2019 for people receiving provincial disability benefits were successful and took effect in 2020. These include an increased amount of money each month and being able to keep a greater portion of income earned if they were able to work

Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC)

In the spring of 2019 ACNS piloted a new harm reduction program targeting youth-at risk. The Street Smarts program seeks to increase knowledge and reduce risky behaviours to prevent HIV and Hepatitis C transmission by addressing ways to be safer when using drugs, and how to have safer sex.

Using

feedback from

the pilot the

revised

program was

offered Early

December to

12

participants;

revisions

based on

lessons

learned and

feedback from the program are ongoing.



Also in the spring, ACNS in partnership with PEI's PEERS Alliance, launched the pilot of a five-week blended-learning Trauma-Informed Care training program for service providers in Charlottetown and Halifax. The program consists of weekly four weekly webinars and a full-day in-person session during the final week. The first offering of the program was held in fall 2019 and had forty participants - the maximum possible. There were twenty-five service providers from Halifax and fifteen from Charlottetown. Based on attendance and participant feedback, the program was a huge success. The program will be edited based on feedback and lessons learned, and will be reoffered over the next two years.

Lori O'Brien + Shannon Hardy
Support and Program Services Coordinators

Report from Gay Men's Health Programs

Totally OUTright 2019

In April we completed our follow-up evaluation survey to measure reported behaviour change in participants resulting from the May 2018 program offering. This anonymous online survey was completed by all but two attendees from 2018, and the results are VERY solid: all subjects who completed the survey reported multiple ways their HIV/STBBI risk management behaviour has improved. Further evidence of how valuable this program is.

*"For my part, I fully enjoyed and benefitted from the program ... Not only have many of my misconceptions about HIV and sexual health been shattered, but Totally OutRight has also already sparked a shocking amount of personal growth within me. This will sound like an exaggeration, but it's not: **Totally OutRight was life-changing for me.**"*

- 27 year old participant from May 2019 program offering

Our latest offering of *Totally OUTright* ran May 3-8, 2019, at the University of King's College. We had five PEI participants from our partner PEERS Alliance and eleven from ACNS (there were several last-minute cancellations), and a total of 17 presenters over five days. Again prideHealth sponsored the Friday *Meet & Greet* reception before the conference got underway, and once again Garry Williams joined us on the Sunday evening to perform excerpts from his new, and now award-winning, musical *Kamp* which had its world premiere last fall at Neptune Theatre; selling out and garnering rave reviews. Participants also had a very engaged site- visit to local sex-positive shop Venus Envy hosted by long-time program supporter and shop owner Marshall Hayward.

Totally OUTright 30+ Survey / Program Plans

Looking forward, *Totally OUTright* in 2020 is planned to be an adapted program for an older audience of men 30+. This version of the program will be shorter in length: 3 days instead of 5.

To help guide that adaption we launched an online survey at our booth at *Halifax Pride 2019* that continued into the fall. The survey targets men 30 and over to gather their input to inform the changes in content, schedule, length of program, etc. To promote that survey we pulled together a BIG BASKET give-away valued at over \$400. Our survey got a great response of 249 responses!

Halifax Pride 2019

In addition to the Pride booth promoting our *Totally OUTright* 30+ survey, the Gay Men's Health Coordinator was also part of two 2SLGBTQ+ lunch-time

health panels during Halifax Pride. The first was organized by prideHealth and held at the New Infirmary Hospital and addressed 2SLGBTQ+ cultural competency for health service providers. The second was a Halifax Pride event in the Paul O'Regan Hall of the Halifax Central Library where the focus was on 2SLGBTQ+ community health resources.

CATIE Blended Learning

ACNS partnered with prideHealth in promoting CATIE's blended learning program for service providers: *Preventing the Sexual Transmission of HIV*. This five-week program ran the month of September with four online modules followed by the full-day in-person session in Halifax on September 30, and at which the Gay Men's Health Coordinator presented on the epidemiological history of HIV in NS.

Slay Stigma Tour

ACNS had a booth on Oct 29 at the Halifax stop of the POZITIVITY tour, and also held a food-drive and 50/50 draw in support of the *Manna for Health Food Bank*. The turnout for the event was well below what was expected, however the crowd was enthusiastic, and I was given the opportunity to speak about ACNS's work generally, and our AIDS Awareness Week U=U event in particular, in addition to flogging 50/50 tickets!

U=U Undetectable = Untransmittable

With the final PARTNER study results being published in *The Lancet*, the U=U wave gained even more momentum. CATIE launched a Canada-wide U=U campaign with materials in fall 2019, and ACNS organized a U=U public information session for AIDS Awareness Week.


The turnout for this event was light, however we had excellent presentations by Dr. Lisa Barret (on the science) and NS Legal Aid lawyer Lee Seshagiri (on HIV criminalization changes in light of research), and a very engaged audience. Healing Our Nation's Dave Miller and Chris Aucoin spoke as HIV+ first-voice panellists for the Q&A. In advance of this session ACNS added a U=U page to our web site. This event was organized in partnership with the Halifax Central Library, the ID Clinic, Legal AID NS, the NS Advisory Commission on AIDS, Healing Our Nations, and supported by ViiV Healthcare.

Sex Now Survey 2018-2019 / 2020

The long-promised online version of this national survey for gay/bi/MSM finally launched in fall 2019. Vancouver's CBRC providing ACNS with a \$500 advertising budget for social/sexual media ad buys to promote the survey in local markets. This is a continuation of the same research survey for which

Chris Aucoin + Garry Dart
Gay Men's Health Coordinators

**UNDETECTABLE =
UNTRANSMITTABLE**



U = U

A Public Information Session

If you are HIV+, on effective treatment and maintain an Undetectable viral load, then it is impossible to pass HIV on to your sexual partners (the HIV is Untransmittable). This presentation will briefly review the decade of scientific research proving U=U, and explore the health, social and legal implications.

- wheelchair accessible
- scent-free (please, no scented personal care products)
- sign language interpretation



For info: GMHC@acns.ns.ca
or www.tinyurl.com/UequalsU-Halifax

Presented by the **AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia** in partnership with **Healing Our Nations**, **Legal Aid Nova Scotia**, the **ID Clinic**, the **Nova Scotia Advisory Commission on AIDS**, and the **Halifax Central Public Library**. Supported by **ViV Healthcare**.



Report from Operations

In the words of H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*: "We should strive to welcome change and challenges, because they are what help us grow... We need to constantly be challenging ourselves in order to strengthen our character and increase our intelligence." This past fiscal year saw a great deal of staff turn-over, our continued attempts to work within the significant drop in funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada, and a catastrophic viral pandemic. We have had our share of change and challenges. It has been rough. The changes are reflected in our financial statements.

Through all of that, we have survived and will continue to survive – and hopefully we will also "grow". We see what is happening and we are responding. Financial management remains at the forefront as we work to reduce expenses and access alternate funding sources and assistance programs. Through our continued creativity, fiscal management is being sustained as a concentration. We responded quickly and efficiently to COVID-19 and continue to do so.

One challenge that we will soon be able to overcome is technology. Computers and other technologies are an integral part of our lives, especially so in the business world. Our newest computers were seven years old; they have a life cycle of five years. We were able to access funding to allow us to replace our computers. This will allow us to be more proficient and maintain connection with funders, donors, community groups, volunteers and those we serve. We are most grateful to our volunteers who lead our successes. Their resolution, gifts of time, energy and enthusiasm are integral our achievements. Thank you - all of you - for all your hard work and continued dedication.

Our audit this year was conducted by the firm of Baker Tilly Nova Scotia with Katie Gordon, Senior Staff Accountant. Her hard work was compounded by our having to scramble to connect and manage the audit electronically. We thank Katie for her patience and all of her help.

Ned MacInnis
Program Support



Report from Fund Development

The unforeseen events of 2019-2020 hugely impacted ACNS's fund-raising plans. The change in Executive Director led to new efforts to seek out funds from foundations being put on hold. Then the COVID-19 pandemic shutting everything down a week before the 2020 *BMO Bid for Life* was a major blow. That loss came a few short weeks before the end of the fiscal year. This left no time to adjust the budget to offset the loss of income. COVID even interfered with our plans for Easter Hampers!

The fund-raising year started off well enough. As we do each year ACNS participated in the Halifax Pride Parade in 2019 and hosted our on-site Pride Barbeque fundraiser at the parade marshalling grounds. Through a Canada Summer Jobs grant we hired back Emily Miller, who had been our 2019 CO-OP student doing last year's 'Bid' to organize both – and both were a huge success! As he does each year our 'Barbeque Man', volunteer Daryl Mombourquette, staffed the grills as he had for many years with the AIDS Walk Barbeques. Proceeds from the Pride Barbeque are directed to support programs and services.

We were also successful in once again obtaining a grant from ViiV Healthcare to support the programs and services offered by ACNS to people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS. While the Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness provides funding for staff, there is no funding to run actual programs. The grant from ViiV funded the Making Ends Meet program, Drop-In Food program, Poz Guys, Christmas and Easter Hampers for families with young children, the AIDS Day Vigil, etc.

Those Easter and Christmas Hampers would be harder to do without bunnies and elves! RBC has a community program where employees volunteer their time at charities and a grant is provided to the charity. ACNS gets much-

needed volunteer work and some funds as well. (MAC Cosmetics has a similar program that supports both 'Bid' and our AIDS Vigil each year.) The RBC employees came to the office in December to wrap all the gifts for the Christmas Hampers... Elves. Then in late March, they were scheduled to do the same for the Easter Hampers ... but that too got interrupted by COVID. While we eventually did a simplified Easter Hamper program it was without the magic touch (and festive wrappings) of our volunteer Bunnies this time around!

While we were not able to benefit from holding our *BMO Bid for Life* event, our corporate sponsors agreed to let us keep the remaining portions of their sponsorships, which softened the blow. As well, the vast majority of the donors who provided auction items gave their approval for ACNS to hold onto their items for a future event. We would like to extend our gratitude to all those individual donors. We would especially like to extend our gratitude to: the Bank of Montreal for its continuing sponsorship of *Bid for Life*; to Gilead who had joined the event for the first time as the event Talent Sponsor; and to Docaita Design for the promotional design rebrand.

As was the case in 2019, the majority of the work towards 'Bid' was done by a CO-OP student hired through a supporting grant from the Nova Scotia Department of Advanced Education and Labour. As his predecessor had done before him, Rowan MacArthur did an excellent job organizing the intended *BMO Bid for Life* event and then following up the postponement, which required a fair bit of work on its own. In the absence of an ongoing full time position to do fundraising, we plan to continue making use of CO-OP, Intern and other student-focussed programs moving forward to support fundraising efforts. We hope to build on that over time to get back to a year-round staff person.

Rowan was greatly assisted in his preparations for the 2020 *BMO Bid for Life* event by two amazing volunteers. Anita Keeping has been volunteer extraordinaire with 'Bid' for years now. Also this year Daryl Mombourquette joined the event advance team and gave Anita an enthusiastic run for her money! Both were instrumental in soliciting auction items for what was promising to be the best iteration of this event in years! A huge ACNS thanks to both volunteers! Of course, we had more volunteers lined up to assist with the 'Bid' event itself, including perennial volunteer Bridget Trim, and the staff from MAC Cosmetics who have supported so many ACNS events.

Next time...!

ACNS PRESENTS

BMO Bid for Life

EAT • LAUGH • WIN



FEATURING

Cathy Jones
of This Hour Has 22 Minutes

MARCH 19, 2020

THE ATLANTICA HOTEL

Reception @ 5:30 | Dinner @ 7:00

Games, Silent & Live Auctions

For info or to reserve your tickets
902.425.4882 ext 226 or FUND@acns.ns.ca
or order tickets www.tinyurl.com/Bid4Life-2020

IN SUPPORT OF

**AIDS
Coalition**
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We would like to extend our gratitude to the following funders, sponsors and supporters:

Funders

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Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness

Nova Scotia Department of Community Services

Nova Scotia Department of Advanced Education and Labour

Nova Scotia Government & General Employees Union (NSGEU)

Human Resources & Skills Development Canada

Support Services Sponsor



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Event Sponsors



Our Staff (March 2020)

Chris Aucoin	Executive Director
Garry Dart	Gay Men's Health Coordinator
Shannon Hardy	Support & Program Services Coordinator
Ned MacInnis	Program Support
Rowan MacArthur	Fund Development Coordinator (CO-OP)

Our Staff (September 2020)

Chris Aucoin	Executive Director
Mitch Hill	Gay Men's Health Coordinator (0.6 FTE)
Garry Dart	Gay Men's Health Coordinator (0.2 FTE)
Dylan Samson	Support & Program Services Coordinator
Ned MacInnis	Program Support
Rowan MacArthur	Fund Development Coordinator (Intern)

Our Board

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Marc Charrier	Executive Member
Dave Gaskin	Board Member
Sheena Jamieson	Board Member

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