



# VHA Voice

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## VHA at Toronto Pride Parade

**Have you ever wanted to march down the streets of Toronto? This is your chance!**

The 38th Annual Pride Parade is happening on June 24, starting at Bloor/Church, extending south on Yonge, and ending at Dundas Square and this year, VHA is getting in on the action!

Join Team VHA as we march in the parade to present VHA's support of the LGBTQ2S community.

**When:** Sunday, June 24, 2018  
(Exact time to be announced on our Eventbrite page and over email)

**Where:** Toronto, Ontario  
(Exact location to be announced on our Eventbrite page and over email)

**Who:** VHA clients and their friends / family + VHA employees

**RSVP:** [bit.ly/VHAVoicePride18](http://bit.ly/VHAVoicePride18)

If you'd like to participate, please be sure to register yourself, your friends and family online now so we can order you a limited edition VHA Pride Day t-shirt (while supplies last) to wear during the parade!



## Meet one of VHA's Client Partners: LeZlie Lee Kam



LeZlie Lee Kam became a client partner with VHA two years ago. She is widely known as the “proud brown, Trini, Carib, callaloo, differently-abled, queer dyke elder.” In her late 40s, LeZlie was ravaged by psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis, and had to go through four months of physical rehabilitation. Her differently-abled body now gets great support from her walker, “Iris,” and her cane, “Hugo.” LeZlie sits on both VHA’s Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans Queer (LGBTQ) committee and Client and Carer Advisory Council. Her personal life stories and contributions have made a huge impact on our LGBTQ community and have inspired many of the changes at VHA by creating more awareness about interactions between home care providers and clients of diverse identities. We sat down with LeZlie to hear about her experience as a client partner and what she hopes to achieve by sharing her unique viewpoint.

### How did you become connected with VHA?

I became connected with VHA through The 519 – an LGBTQ community centre in Toronto. When VHA decided to start educating their staff on LGBTQ they went to the 519 and I am a volunteer trainer there.

I was the only queer senior working with the 519 who has had home care. VHA really liked my style of presenting and they asked me if I would like to be part of the LGBTQ working group. I agreed. They also asked if I'd like to sit on the Client and Carer Advisory Council and I said yes.

Many of us queer seniors start going back into the closet when we start receiving home care because we have to choose whether we want to be our whole selves and experience homophobia, or hide in the closet and get the kind of health care that we need. I was so impressed with the fact that VHA is the only home care association that I know of that has taken the initiative to do this work. In fact, I always said, “When I receive home care again it will have to be with VHA.” Other organizations are sadly lacking in LGBTQ awareness of any kind.

### What other volunteer work do you do?

At Bridgepoint Active Healthcare, I do manicures and work the reception desk twice a week. I've been volunteering there for six years. By doing manicures I establish a close relationship with the ladies. And five of them came to me and whispered that they were not straight. They were between the ages of 75 and 92.



**“I AM A PROUD BROWN, TRINI, CARIB, CALLALOO, DIFFERENTLY- ABLED, QUEER DYKE ELDER. FIERCE! TENACIOUS! PERSISTENT!”**

Here you are at that age, in a facility with no control over your life anymore, and you're in the closet. They were in the closet their whole life. I asked them, “How come you're telling me this?” And they said because you made us feel safe. They would all talk about their special friends and how their family would not understand. I'm thinking at 92, it doesn't matter whether your family understands it or not, but unfortunately at that age the family has so much control over who is in your life. Then I was given this opportunity to work with PSWs at VHA. They have a lot of power to change and improve the lives of queer seniors and that's why I'm doing what I do with VHA.

### What are your goals in volunteering for VHA?

I would like to eventually reach a place where queer seniors no longer have to hide from who they are. When a PSW goes to a client's home and the client doesn't feel safe with their identity, they begin hiding things and parts of their lives. My goal is to reach a point where we don't have to hide.

I started working with VHA in September 2016, and I have worked with at least 500 VHA staff already. I come in during the workshops and I do a 20-minute presentation of my lived experience. When I first started doing the workshops, I'd ask the group, “How many of you work with LGBTQ clients?” and no one would put their hand up. But now, because they know what signs to look for, just about every single PSW is working with LGBTQ clients.

### What has your experience been like with working on VHA committees?

When I'm asked for my advice, I see things happening in action usually within a matter of months if not weeks. I'm a person of action. This is why I like working with VHA, because I see things happening immediately.





# VHA Celebrates our 2018 Heart of Home Care Winners!

VHA honoured caregiving heroes who won this year's **Heart of Home Care Awards** with a day out in Toronto. The awards program, now in its 13th year, recognizes the extraordinary efforts of a friend or family member who has gone above and beyond the call of duty to provide a loved one who is disabled, elderly, or chronically ill with the support needed to live at home with more independence. Our winners were treated to a special luncheon, a musical performance by Ania Soul, and an inspiring presentation by Manjusha Pawagi, author of *Love and Laughter in the Time of Chemotherapy*.

Read the stories of our amazing winners and watch their videos online at: [bit.ly/2018HeartVideos](https://bit.ly/2018HeartVideos)



## Zulfikar Alladina - Caregiver to an Adult Winner

Zulfikar (Zul) had an ideal relationship with his father, Sultan. An émigré from Tanzania, Sultan was a spiritual leader who radiated positivity and the two often went swimming and attended Mosque together in the afternoons. Sultan lost his left leg in 2008 due to complications from diabetes and when he lost his right leg in 2012, Zul became his full-time caregiver. "He [was] very consistent, very patient, passionate, loving and caring," says Allaine Anne Ariate, Sultan's personal support worker and Zul's nominator. Allaine noted that even though Zul suffers from severe back pain caused by a 2010 car accident, he helped his father with all of his activities of daily living without complaint. "He never thinks about himself and his own happiness. I see the unconditional love."



## Taylor Allen - Young Caregiver Winner

Taylor is not your typical 15-year-old girl. The grade 10 student is an artist, an elite bowler, a volunteer, an A-student and an indispensable support to her mother in the care of her brother, Alex, who has severe autism. When Taylor isn't winning medals with Team Canada's 10-pin bowling team, she is helping Alex with his meals, his bedtime routine and supporting him to build life skills. "Without Taylor to help me with Alex I don't know where I would be or, for that matter, where Alex would be," says Lisa Knechtel, Taylor's mom and nominator. "She taught Alex to walk, to crawl, and many more things. He looks up to her." Taylor enjoys the bond she shares with her brother, and as she prepares for the chance to represent Canada again in 2019/20 international competitions, Alex will surely be her biggest cheerleader.



## Madolina Sasa - Caregiver to a Child Winner

Madolina moved to Canada from her native Sudan to escape the war-torn region. In the midst of adapting to her new country with her family, she gave birth to her third child—a beautiful girl who was immediately diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy. When Madolina saw the happiness her daughter's very survival brought to the people around her, she named her Joy and vowed to make this positivity her own life mantra. Now 17, Joy is non-verbal and uses a wheelchair, and Madolina has been true to her vow. "Madolina has a great smile and laugh, and is a wonderful role model for others. You will never hear her complain about her challenging life," says her nominator Samantha Jani.

*The Heart of Home Care Awards event would not be possible without our sponsors:*

*PACE Consulting, Teak Printing, BDO IT Solutions Canada, Big Red Oak, and Home & LongTerm Care Magazine.*



Manjusha speaks to the crowd



Taylor accepts her award



The crowd at Heart of Home Care



Madolina dances to celebrate her win



Ania Soul sings on stage

## Sue Tiffin - Caregiver to a Child Winner

Sue Tiffin was selected as a winner in our 2018 Caregiver to a Child category. Unfortunately, due to her daughter Harper's fragile condition, she was unable to attend the ceremony. We would still like to congratulate Sue on her amazing job as a mother and share some words from her about her story:

So complicated is our life as parents - one of us a student, one of us a full-time worker - in a very rural spot that we are unable to break away from hectic days to celebrate with such an amazing group of people, and honour our roles as caregivers.

It was such a surprise to hear that my husband, quite the caregiver himself, had nominated me for a Heart of Home Care Award. Caring for our sweet kid, who was born with Angelman Syndrome and has complex care needs, certainly brings many challenges to our daily lives, but ...our life is certainly filled with joy and just plain fun, too.

Thank you so much for acknowledging all of us. Reaching out to caregivers helps bring some unexpected light into days that might be filled with isolation and worry... and so much paperwork! Our world only becomes better when we take a moment to see each other - whether we are the caregiver or the cared for - and I'm so grateful to be in such good company with others who love so intensely.

