

AAHP
AIDS Activist History Project

Interview Transcript 2015.005

Interviewee:	Kim Bernard
Interviewers:	Alexis Shotwell & Gary Kinsman
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Persons present: Kim Bernard – KB
Gary Kinsman – GK
Alexis Shotwell – AS

[START OF TRANSCRIPT]

AS: It's August 5th 2015 and we're talking with Kim Bernard.

GK: The question we usually start off is what is your first memory of hearing about AIDS?

KB: Well, my first memory of hearing about AIDS was through the media. At the time, I started to work for the Nova Scotia Persons With AIDS Coalition. That is what it was called back then. There was a lot of information on the news about AIDS in Africa and I remember having mixed feelings about why was the focus so much on Africa? I didn't know what was going on. I started to hear rumours about a monkey that bit somebody in Africa and it just sounded weird. I really didn't put much energy into what I was hearing, but I do remember hearing different stories about AIDS. The other thing I heard a lot about was the fact that it was a big issue in the gay community and it was mainly focused on gay men. What I was hearing kind of piqued my interest particularly because some of the conversations were about AIDS originating in Africa.

GK: Right. Do you think that that had an impact on people in the Black or Nova Scotian-African community, this association with Africa and AIDS?

KB: Yes. I believe it did. I didn't probably notice how much until I started working for the AIDS Coalition. I do remember people talking about it in the community. People were saying, why are they blaming AIDS on Black people in Africa and what is this about a monkey that bit somebody in Africa and that's how it spread? I remember feeling the wrath of racism and prejudice that was associated with that. People were talking without any knowledge or research, but that's what we were hearing. I remember the Black community being highly upset that it was somehow associated with blame in our community. This was indicative of the racism that happens here in Nova Scotia and globally. So yes, I do remember people having their backs up about that.

AS: Yes. In other places the Haitian community gets very targeted, there is intense racism toward the Haitian community. In Nova Scotia... I was here from 1989. I don't remember this specifically anti-Black racism articulated against Haitians being so strong. Do you remember anything about that?

KB: I don't remember any of that. I don't think it was strong. I don't think there was a lot of migration of African people coming to Halifax around that time as compared to now. What I do remember is the indigenous Black people felt it here. It was very taboo to talk about AIDS in our community, and then you add the stigma on top of it. It basically made our community not want to associate with it because of that. We had to think about it because of the fact that there was so

much in the media about how it started in Africa. I remember that was a message that carried through the work that I did. I remember it having an impact.

GK: Part of it is the big Haitian community in Canada, is in Montreal, right? And, there would have been a smaller Haitian community in Toronto, but there was a lot of initial organizing because Haitians per se were included in the prohibition of being able to give blood by the Red Cross. And that organized very clear racism towards Haitians.

KB: Absolutely. That's right. I could see that happening. I didn't see it much here, but I could see that because I know that there's a large population of Haitians in Montreal.

GK: So, initially people hear about AIDS and it's a health problem, a medical problem, but you must have started to hear about people doing things about it – like, forms of organizing or activism around it.

KB: Yes, primarily in the gay community. That's why people were saying it's a gay disease. If it wasn't a black disease, it was a gay disease, right? So, I saw most of the activism happening in the gay community particularly when I went to work for the Coalition. I was very pleased when the Coalition was thinking about the Black Outreach Project, which we'll talk more about.

GK: So what were people saying about AIDS in the African Nova Scotian community?

KB: Okay, I remember people were starting to think about it and talk about it, but I don't think they were really making a connection with it for some reason, until the Black Outreach Project came along and raised some awareness.

GK: We'll get to the Black Outreach Project in a moment, but you must have had a number of experiences that you brought with you when you got involved with the Black Outreach Project from whatever you've been involved in.

KB: Here's the interesting thing.... I love to tell this story when I talk about when I started with the Coalition. I had absolutely no experience in doing AIDS education work. None. What I did have was a very strong connection to the Black/ African Nova Scotian community and I had a background in doing a lot of activist work in different areas in the general community.

AS: What were you working on?

KB: I was doing work with youth around that time with the Cultural Awareness Youth Group in the schools. I was helping to organize, you know, protesting around issues of race. I was actually the director at one point. I remember there was a lot of racism happening with Black young people getting into the bar scene and being questioned at the door. We organized a protest around that, which was motivated, directed and led by the Cultural Awareness Youth Group. I was also at that time involved with an educational organization called ACEP -- the African Canadian Education Project. I sat on a lot of volunteer boards concerned about injustice in our community. I came to the job with a lot of activism experience. I believe the Coalition thought they could educate me

about AIDS. They needed someone who knew how to manoeuvre themselves around the community and who knew the Black community well. They needed to know who are the people that have the connections, who are the people that can get this project up and running – and who can give me the support that I need to do the work.

AS: That's a lot of experience!

KB: I had community development and outreach experience. What I had was a really good relationship to the community. Also, I had a good relationship not just with my Black community, but I had a good relationship with the women's community resulting from my involvement in *Four the Moment*.

AS: Can you say a little bit about Four the Moment?

KB: Sure. Four the Moment was a women's acapella singing group that sang for nineteen years and was internationally acclaimed. The music that we sang was about social justice issues, women's issues, racism. My sister, Delvina, who did most of the writing for the group, wrote most of the songs. We were very inspired by *Sweet Honey and the Rock*, and that's how we kind of got started, we saw them as an inspiration. The group's origin came out of a performance by my sister Delvina Bernard and her friend Jackie Barkley. They were asked to sing at a Anti Ku Klux Klan rally in the early 80's and they sang Bob Marley's song "Get up Stand up" and were then asked to perform at a concert to support abortion rights at a local pub called "Gingers". That is when I got involved. My sister, Delvina asked me if I could sing with her and Jackie because they wanted to perform a Sweet Honey and the Rock song called Joanne Little. The song had 4-part harmony so we asked our cousin Deanna to help us out. A CBC producer was in the audience. He asked us if we were interested in coming into the studio to sing a few songs, to make a demo. Of course, we only had one song, so we had to practice more songs. We had to learn three songs for the demo. The CBC producer said "we need a name for your group". I believe I was the one that said, "Oh, just put anything down for the moment," and then somebody said, "Oh, for the moment! That'd be cool! For the moment," and but we spelled it F.O.U.R. because there were four of us. The group always sang songs that focused on social injustice, women's issues and other issues. So from my experience in the singing group and my connections to different walks of life and communities at that time, it helped me make the decision to take on the position at the Coalition.

AS: It sounds like your orientation toward social justice, was just part of your life and being.

KB: Yes and it still is. It was easy for me to transition into the job at the Coalition. Yes, it was good experience.

AS: And so, when did you start with the Coalition?

KB: I think it was 1991. The interesting thing about when I started at the Coalition – I tell this story all the time - I remember walking in and I was the only heterosexual person, the only Black person and the only woman in there. There I was working with all these men, and we learned a lot about each other. It was amazing, because, you know, men will be men whether they're gay men

or not. And so they were making these women jokes every once in a while, and I'd be like, "Guys, guys!" Like, "I'm here." Like, "Seriously? "We are all learning from each other here!" [laughs] So, they would catch themselves and we'd kind of laugh at it. I was working with all these gay men, and here's this project that nobody really knew what they wanted to do with, but they were great. I have to say, they were very supportive, helping me out as much as they can, but every once in a while I had to check 'em. I had to check 'em on a few things, but that was okay. I learned so much about gay and lesbian culture at that time, but it was easy, because Four the Moment was well supported by the gay and lesbian community. I was used to being in those communities of people, so it was easy for me to walk into the Coalition and feel quite confident that I was the only Black person, woman and heterosexual in there. The guys took me to Reflections and Rumors for the drag shows. We were blending cultures and we were learning so much about each other. The guys were learning about the Black community. There was education on both ends and it was respectful of one another.

Jane Allen came on board. Jane was a lesbian woman, so I was like, "Okay, good! I've got a little company. Got another woman in here," but I have to tell you ... I can't say a bad thing about my experience at the Coalition in terms of my relationships with the people there. There were always those teachable moments of racism, but that's my everyday experience. We respected similarities and differences. Often times I would say to the guys, even though there are similarities, the Black community is a bit different because our skin colour impacts us, but you can walk through this world and nobody would ever know if you are gay or lesbian unless you self identify. And so sometimes I had to make that distinction. And so I was always teaching and they were always teaching me. I have to say that it was good in that sense.

GK: Maybe just to step back for a moment, do you have any ideas why they wanted to set up a Black Outreach Project and hire someone like you? Where did that come from for them?

KB: From what I remember, they saw a gap and realized they couldn't do it themselves. So, they figured they needed to hire somebody from the Black community. They didn't know the community so they had to hire somebody to get in there and do the work. They figured we'll just let that person take the lead, and we will provide as much support as we can. I believe that the Coalition saw that there was nothing being done in the Black community around HIV and AIDS education, awareness, information and that there was no support for people that have identified as being HIV-positive. I do commend them for recognizing that as a problem in our community and a gap. Then they got a grant to hire somebody. It's a typical thing, you only have one person, so when you only have one person trying to cover all of the Atlantic provinces. That can be challenging.

AS: And, it was supposed to be the whole...

KB: And that was really it. So, here I was hired in this position, but there was nobody else to work with me. So, I'm the only person that is supposed to be representing the Black community and to provide awareness, information, and support services. And so it was a...

AS: No problem! [laughter]

KB: Thank you! I got this, right? [laughter] Really, I'm thinking, are you kidding me? So, I just kind of rolled with it, because there was not much I could do. So, that's when I developed the board of the Outreach Project, which was made up of people from the community.

AS: How many people were on that board?

KB: I'm trying to think... I want to say probably about ten.

AS: Oh, that's big.

KB: Yes, it was a good size. I mean they did not all show up for the meetings all the time, but that's normal. That's community work, right? [laughter] I mean don't quote me on that, but I'm thinking about ten. Did you guys have any information from the Coalition? Did they have anything? They must have some stuff there.

GK: Part of the problem is, of course, the merger, right? So, we have not been able, up to this point, to access the archival holdings of the Nova Scotia AIDS Coalition.

KB: Yeah, I left everything there. There's a whole lot of stuff that I left there, and I was very organized. I'm not trying to pat myself on the back, but seriously. So, that's why I said, do you have any of this information, because...

GK: We have bits and pieces just because I collected some material when I was in Nova Scotia. That's where some of the information came from that informed questions here, but we need to get a lot more. If you do actually have access to materials it would be great.

KB: Yes. And so there was a question that triggered all this. You guys asked me a question.

GK: I asked you a question about why you thought the PWA Coalition wanted to set the Black Outreach Project up.

KB: Yes. That's right. I thought that was a good idea that they hired somebody, but I was the only one doing it, of course. So, that presented itself with a bit of a challenge, because they sent me everywhere. I was the only one representing Black people around HIV and AIDS education work, so I kind of became what the Black community called, the ambassador of HIV and AIDS in the community. [laughter] Everything that had to do with HIV/AIDS, they would call me. It was a bit of a challenge, because I was travelling the Atlantic Provinces and they sent me to places locally, nationally and internationally. I was trying to represent our community as much as I could around what's happening with HIV/AIDS. I did hire summer students for two years and they were great. That worked for me. One of them ended up continuing to run the project after I left around 1994.

AS: Oh, cool!

KB: Her name is Deena Noseworthy.

AS: Is she still around?

KB: She's in Atlanta, Georgia. You can get in touch with her there, because she might have some insight after... I left in '94. I recommended to them that they hire Deena, and they hired her. I believe she ran it for two years after that, and at that time she was doing a train the trainer program, because the plan would have been to have other people trained to do the work. I'm pretty sure she ran the train the trainer program for two years. I would say the project lasted about maybe six years.

AS: Pretty amazing.

KB: Yes. I think about six years.

GK: I think the final report is in 1998.

KB: Yeah. There you go.

GK: Was there someone named Brian Walker?

KB: Brian Walker and Deena Noseworthy.

AS: They were the students.

KB: They were the two students, and they were the ones that worked with me on the needs assessment.

AS: Well, I want to hear more about the needs assessment and how that came about.

KB: Yes. I said to myself, "Okay, how am I going to approach this work?" The Coalition was kind of leaving it up to me. They basically said, "Okay, here's what we have in terms of support. Here's what you need to know about HIV and AIDS education. The Coalition trained me in AIDS 101. I knew the basics - how you get it, how you transmit it etc. I was now equipped with the AIDS information I needed to inform the community. So, then my thought was, how do I start this work? The community didn't know the project exists. I don't know what the community needs around doing this work. So, that's when I approached Robert and said, "I think I need to do a needs assessment." I don't know where we are getting the money. I ended up doing a province-wide community needs assessment with two summer students, Deena and Brian. So, the three of us travelled around the province and did focus groups.

AS: Wow.

KB: I have that report with me.

AS: Cool.

GK: I've seen a reference to it. I've never seen it.

KB: You've never seen it. Okay... I brought a bag of goodies. So, [here's the major report.](#)

GK: Wow.

KB: I brought a bag of goodies; I told you. Right? And this is the stuff that I told you I saw, those files.

GK: Right.

KB: The AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia. Now we're in AIDS Coalition Nova Scotia. This is the African Canadian Education Project... This is the Black Outreach Project letterhead...

AS: Wow. Cool.

KB: I know, right? This is probably photocopied. I don't know, this is a report... Let me show you... So, this here is the report.

AS: Wow.

KB: That is the report that came out of...

GK: You were going around the province?

KB: That was what came out of that.

GK: That's great. So, you had meetings in various communities?

KB: Yes. And that report tells it all. So, it tells you exactly how we got the focus groups up and running, who we made contact with in those communities. There was a lot of work that had to be done. We had to figure out where we were going, who to contact, did we have the budget to travel, stay in hotels; provide refreshments for the focus groups...so much to consider. We just drove around the province and did these focus groups.

AS: And how did you set them up?

KB: We had to figure out where we were going to go across the province. Once we figured that out we had to make some calls to key people in the community. We then made contact with those people and they were the ones that organized the focus groups for us. When we went to the communities the key contact had everything set up. We would go in, do our focus group in community halls, church halls, wherever they were set up. It was really good, and people talked.

AS: And people would come out. Like, how many people would come?

KB: It was different for every focus group. The numbers would fluctuate. We always had enough people to do a focus group, though. They came out because I think people wanted to talk about it, because nobody was talking about it. And so people came out and it was fun and it was informative. I remember we would have an information session first to give them a little bit of information before we did the focus group about HIV and AIDS. That would kind of raise question for discussion. We always provided food because we knew it would get people to come out for the sessions. The work was very rewarding. We enjoyed it. We felt we were getting somewhere. We really did and so we did the need assessment. I don't remember how long it took...

GK: 1993, it comes out.

KB: Yes. It came out in 1993, so I'm probably thinking that if I started there in 1991, it probably was a year. I started the job in May of 1991, which means that I probably had students for the summer. They were both going to Dalhousie. I might have had them that summer. I knew Deena already, but I didn't know Brian. And then from there, maybe we went around the province probably in the fall. I'm thinking maybe in the fall, and then maybe after that we did the needs assessment report. After we did the needs assessment, we knew we had something to work with to provide education, information and support to the community. I'm not clear what happened after that, but I do remember that this report was very useful particularly for me when I traveled. I was able to talk about the needs of the Black community and why the education and support was so important.

AS: And what they did know...

KB: So, that's when it became really clear to me that I was providing information, education, awareness and support. I was able to take the information gathered and share it with the general community as well. We would set up information booths when we did outreach at youth events, family events etc. We had Black Outreach Project T-shirts and gave out condoms. We were active and present at community events. People would call us and say, "Can you guys come and have a booth up and provide some information?" I remember us doing a lot of that. And, Brian and Deena were still involved, because I remember I got another grant, and they were working with me during the school year. I remember trying to provide education to the African United Baptist Association – that was a big issue. We really fought to put ourselves on the agenda for the African United Baptist Association annual convention, which represents all the churches across the province. It was a big deal for us to be a part of the convention. In the church, this is the moral issue, right? We got on the agenda because we sought out the more progressive pastors and ministers to help us out. The agenda was tight that year and everything was running late but we managed to provide a short but powerful presentation. We were just happy that we made it on the agenda. This was a breakthrough for the project and the Black community.

AS: Yes, but it had at least been raised.

KB: It was raised.

AS: And people heard it.

KB: Yes, I think the needs assessment report had an impact on the community, for sure. I believe it did. There was a lot done with the Black Outreach Project. It was one of those projects that was very unique, because nobody else was doing it. It's the one piece of work in our community that people can say, "Well yeah, we did have an AIDS project at one point, but whatever happened to that project? Why don't we have anything now?" And it's true, because there's not much. I did something after that, and this is what came out of that. I've written papers at school. This is one paper I did at school. I went back to school and did a Masters in Social Work and did more research papers on HIV/AIDS in the Black community. This is something that I was involved with – the [*National HIV AIDS Strategy for Black Canadian Africans*](#). Are you aware of this one?

GK: No.

KB: A woman named Dionne came to Halifax and I got involved in doing work with the Black community here for that report. I also worked with a woman from Halifax Sexual Health Centre, formerly Planned Parenthood, on a project on assessing HIV prevention and needs of diverse communities of women. We did focus groups in the Halifax surrounding area.

GK: Do you have any idea when that would have been?

KB: I really can't remember exactly when it was. I would say maybe between 2003 and 2005 possibly.

GK: Was it Dionne Falconer?

KB: That's it.

GK: Yes, she's the other person along with Doug Stewart that we want to interview in Toronto.

KB: Okay. Good. Her and I did some work together. I helped her do some work on the "Nova Scotia Framework for Action on HIV" ... It says rationale for the project. "Assessing the HIV prevention needs of African-Nova Scotian Women. Very few women from African-Nova Scotian communities getting tested." This was around testing... "Health Canada reports HIV rates on the rise for women who have sex with men." And then, "the Nova Scotia Framework for Action on HIV and AIDS recommends more initiative in the African-Nova Scotian communities." This is something that I did. "To identify the objectives of the project." Phase one was research. Focus groups, again. Yes. I did focus groups in Halifax and Dartmouth. This project was with Anita Keeping.

GK: Okay. That's a person from the Planned Parenthood.

KB: Yes. She's not working there anymore, but I have her contact information. Her and I did this, and she has the report.

AS: So, these quotes came out of...

KB: Those quotes came out of it.

AS: That's great.

KB: Yes. Those quotes actually came out of the research we did. The focus groups we did. And this is around women and some of the results came out about church involvement, issues with men, condom use, stigma, gossip, a need for relevant information, issues with race... And these are some of the comments. Church involvement. Is that the same thing you have?

AS: No. This is different, but there are similar headings.

KB: That's right, because I think what I probably did was combine the information to produce a power point presentation

AS: Yeah. This is great. Here this person says, "We may have nothing in the Atlantic provinces, except for the time we had the Black Outreach Project, and that was covering all the Atlantic provinces. You know what I mean? So, we had nothing."

KB: So, you guys can use any of this information if you need to.

AS: Thanks.

GK: One thing that's just come up here is that you have a list there of advisory board people.

KB: Okay. Yes.

GK: It sounds like that they first set up the advisory board and then the idea for the needs assessment comes.

KB: Right. Exactly, it was called the Black Outreach Project Advisory Board.

GK: So, Lorne Izzard was on it.

KB: Yes, Lorne was on it. Wilson ... Is Wilson still around?

GK: Wilson Hodder?

KB: He didn't pass, did he?

GK: Yes in 2000.

KB: He did!

GK: Yes.

KB: Yes, I remember that.

GK: A long time ago.

KB: Who was his partner, again? It was Wilson and his partner, and they were both...

GK: His partner Terry Martin died first, and then there was the big struggle over survivor's benefits.

KB: *Oh*, was it?

GK: Yes.

KB: Yes, I remember those two were so good together.

GK: Was it Joan Jones?

KB: Joan Jones was on the board. My sister Sherry Bernard was on it, Joan Jones daughter Tracey Jones, Lorne Izzard, Lynette Mensa and Miles States. There are probably others I'm leaving out.

GK: Okay.

KB: Yes. Here's an article on Kimberly. What happened to her case, again? Does that sound familiar? I don't even remember that case.

AS: I don't remember.

KB: There's a case study in here, right?

AS: We can learn about it!

KB: I tell ya! So, yeah... That's right! We administered a survey, questionnaire at the AUBA [African United Baptist Association] convention. See. "African United Baptist Association Survey Questionnaire." We did a questionnaire as part of our presentation. That was a big thing.. Look at one of the questions: "Where did AIDS originate? (a) monkeys; (b) unknown; (c) Africa; (d) Haiti." That's what we were talking about.. Yeah, it is quite interesting. That's all the stats that came out of it.

GK: That's a really important report.

KB: Exactly.

GK: Maybe to come back to the Black Outreach Project, you leave in 1994 – and we can talk about that in a second – but did you have a sense of what the major problems were? I mean there’s obviously lack of awareness, lack of knowledge, but were there particular barriers or obstacles that African Nova Scotians were facing in terms of getting access to information, services or treatment? Because you obviously must have had some interaction with HIV-positive people from the community, too. Right?

KB: Not very many, because there were not many people that were self-identifying. A few came forward wanting to volunteer or be a part of the program, or needing support for their HIV-positive status. There were rumours in the community about who was positive or not. I remember family members coming home to pass away supposedly due to stroke, heart attacks etc. People would say that they had AIDS and died of AIDS complications. These rumours continued throughout the project. I believe that still happens. I think there has been some progressive thinking around that, but the opinions are so deep rooted in the church and the old school pastors and ministers lack of progressive thinking. It is different now. I think there are ministers in the church that would be open to supporting AIDS education efforts. Some of the pastors are younger and more contemporary. There are still so many people that believe that you can get AIDS from sharing drinks, utensils, saliva. I don’t know how much work you have to do to convince people of that, but you just need to make people aware.

Unfortunately, the funding ran out for the project so there was a little bit of a gap before we got more funding to continue. The project lost momentum. The work was just getting started with the Black Outreach Project. I was raising awareness, getting Black people involved and thinking about the issue. The project had the potential to progress into something more than what it was but you know how grants work, once the funding runs out, what happens? When the project lost it’s funding, the work fell underneath the radar. If the project was up and running now, I think there would be young people that would be really interested in being involved - having the desire to learn and desire to do that kind of work. And so in terms of the barriers, I think one of the barriers is always around race. This always becomes a barrier for us. The funders are mostly white, don’t recognize the importance of this work in our community and I believe they see the disease as mostly affecting the gay community. And I think because it may be still seen as a gay issue, that’s where some of the money will probably go. AIDS work seems to always falls underneath the radar. I think that it’s sad, because there’s more work to be done in our community. I mean the whole issue of condom use needs more education. I currently work with a women’s program called Womens Unlimited and I do a workshop on women’s sexual health. Women still need to be educated on being more assertive with their partners about condom use and how to protect themselves from STD’s, which are now called STI’s.

AS: When I was teaching in Sudbury, which is a heavy-Catholic area, I would be teaching these sex and sexuality classes, and a good number of my young women students would be like, “Oh no. I don’t have to worry about it because I don’t have sex.” Then, we’d talk a little bit more and it would turn out that they were not having vaginal sex; they were having anal sex without condoms, and it didn’t count, right? [laughter]

KB: Exactly. See what I'm saying? *I know*. I'm telling you. I do a condom demonstration and I also do a dental dam demonstration. I tell the women that the dental dams are not just used by women who have sex with other women. I let them know that men that have oral sex with women can also use the dental dams. I would say to them, "Well, you know, it's not just about lesbian women using the dental dams." I said, "You know, really, it's not just lesbian women that are having oral sex." Right? So, anyway... I'm trying to educate them and they were like, "I don't want to use that rubber," "They were keeping it real and so was I. And they're like, "No, I don't want to use that rubber. I can't imagine that! I don't get no feeling from that." That's the kind of stuff they'll say, and I'll say honestly, "You'll be getting more feelings from something else if you get an STD." Well, they call them STIs now. The good thing about doing the women's sexual health workshop is that the women had lots of questions, especially around STIs.

AS: One of my experiences earlier, in the '90s, was that there was more practice. Did you find working in the community that people would change their practices or talk about taking on more safer sex practices? How did the education go when you were doing it?

KB: I think they were very excited to get condoms, in particular, because condoms are expensive, and so they appreciated that. They thought it was good information and education for themselves or their kids. They thought that there were things that they didn't know and so it raised lots of awareness. You could just see the light bulb moments go off, and they would say, "Oh well, no, I didn't know that. Oh, now I know I can't get it this way." And so, I think people were very receptive to the information, very engaged. They had lots of questions, talked about having conversations with their partners about safer sex practices. I think the project did its job in raising awareness and helping the community see that we are not immune.

AS: Right. And, did more Black Nova Scotians start coming to the PWA Coalition space and meetings and participating, or did it remain that the Coalition space was pretty white?

KB: No unfortunately, we did not get Black Nova Scotians coming into the Coalition. It was not a place that Black people saw themselves. There were no PWAs coming forward. I believe there were people that came forward to do the train the trainer. There were some volunteers that came forward. I know a lot of people that have left here and went to Toronto to come out as being gay because our community's too small. It's unfortunate that they feel like they can't be themselves here, but I think that's happening in a lot of communities, not just ours.

AS: And, they don't need to sacrifice themselves, do they? So, we've been talking a lot about the thinking and talking about sexual practices. Was there any talk about injection drug use or other forms of being safer? Did you do needle exchange stuff as part of the Black Outreach Project?

KB: I know we had some connection to Stepping Stone. I don't think Direction 180 was around then.

GK: I don't think so either.

KB: But there was a needle exchange program that was around then. I just don't remember what it was called.

AS: We talked yesterday to Tuma Young, who was doing the needle...

KB: Yes. Tuma was around when I was doing the Black Outreach Project.

AS: And I was looking forward to talking to you too, and thinking a lot about just the way that systemic racism shapes both the state's response to creating a crisis out of an illness, and individual people's responses. So, one of the things that Tuma was saying was that the provincial health folks would be like, "Yeah, we don't do First Nations stuff. That's not our mandate. That's a federal issue." Right? So, then structurally it's not part of the work. And so I was thinking that's a really specific form of anti-native racism that creates the conditions in which more people get sick and die. I don't know if you have an analysis of it or thoughts on it, but were there structural things that made it more difficult to do work in Black community? Do you know what I'm asking?

KB: Structural things from the province, or...?

AS: Either from the state or from the way that the Coalition was organized...

KB: Besides the Black Outreach Project Advisory board, the Coalition structure was all white. The municipal, provincial and federal government funded projects were primarily initiated by white organizations that were interested in doing work in our community. They would often not give the Black or First Nations community funding to implement their own projects. Most of these projects had no sustainability, like the Black Outreach Project. They were band aid approaches to help the community get started, but there was no thought into long term planning. It is classic structural racism that happens all the time in our community.

GK: When the 1993 provincial AIDS strategy came down there was no mention of particular needs or concerns in the Black community. And Brian Walker actually spoke at the Media Conference around that.

KB: Oh, did he?

GK: Yes, because I wrote this article and he's quoted in it.

AS: You wrote it?

GK: Yes. "Provincial AIDS strategy fails to deliver," but it says, "Brian Walker of the Black Outreach Project of the PWA Coalition stated at the press conference that the strategy was insulting to Black Nova Scotians and did not address their needs at all."

KB: No. I believe that. I remember the AIDS strategy. It didn't.

AS: The provincial?

KB: The provincial AIDS strategy. Yes. It didn't address our needs. The Black Outreach Project felt very isolated. I remember spending a lot of time trying to put us on the radar. It was exhausting because I would go places, get up and present and people wouldn't have a clue that there was anything even happening around HIV/AIDS in our community. I was always the one putting us on the agenda. Another barrier of concern is when I would go to the general PWA Coalition meetings to give a report to the board I felt like, even though the Black Outreach Project was there, it still never felt like we were part of the Coalitions work.

AS: Even though they were funding it and had initiated it...

KB: Yes, I always felt like I was putting things on the agenda. Now I know it was about white privilege...something that was foreign to me at that time. It always feels like a struggle when you're up against systems that are all white that don't understand the issues in the Black Community. That's probably why after four years; I said I couldn't do this work anymore. The clients/PWA's weren't the problem. It is the system and the people in it that don't get it that burns you out.

AS: Yes.

KB: I'll take the clients any day.

AS: Clients or bureaucracy...

KB: The Clients, for sure.

And so the problem with most people is that they don't think outside the box. You have to look at ways to do things differently especially if you're talking about going into communities to work with different populations of people. For example, you can't expect Black people to always be the ones to raise the issues around racism. I got burnt out from being the only person that was doing just that. That kind of thinking drives me crazy and it presents barriers from getting the work done.

GK: So, part of what you're describing is, even though the PWA Coalition was really good in recognizing this gap and the need for this project, it never really transformed itself so that it could, as a group, deal with this.

KB: No. It didn't.

GK: So, there's a problem there.

KB: That's systemic racism.

AS: Yes.

GK: Yes.

KB: Right? Know what I mean?

GK: I agree.

KB: It's the people that are in the organization. There are probably individuals in the system that gets the point but when the whole system is racist, it becomes an institutional/systemic issue. It is difficult to see change.

AS: Yeah, it's the classic diversity move, where you just section it off and you say, "This is the one person who's going to do the diversity work and they happen to be the Black woman."

KB: Yes. That's right.

AS: "It's just an accident that way, but we're really working on it. She's working on it."

KB: *Exactly!*

GK: And make it feel like the organization...

KB: And I can't believe this stuff is still happening in the 21st century. It's crazy. It just frustrates me. I'm like, are you kidding me? We're in the 21st century! When are people going to start seeing things differently? I recently did a presentation at an annual social work camp called, "Health and healing: Coming face to face with white privilege." During my presentation, someone mentioned the "nigger" word referring to the fact that when they moved to Halifax, they were told that there were a lot of "niggers" here. After I heard the word "nigger", I didn't hear anything else she said. I was offended. It didn't matter how she was using the word, hearing it had a negative connotation, demeaning. I was sick. I felt isolated because I knew at that moment that no one in the room had my back. Interesting so, I was there to do a presentation on white privilege and it showed its ugly face within the first hour of the presentation. That was hard to hear and deal with, believe me.

AS: What did the rest of the room do?

KB: Nothing!

AS: Wow.

KB: What was really upsetting was that the social worker that contracted me to do the presentation encouraged me to do it on White Privilege because she thought; social workers need to start having conversations about this. She is married to a Black man. We have history together of doing collaboration work when she was an active member of the Metro Coalition for a Non-

Racist Society. I expected her to at least support me when the word was mentioned. I got nothing from her. It was very hurtful and disappointing. Black people are always asking white people to be allies. This was her chance and she didn't take it. Gary, do you remember when the Metro Coalition was around?

GK: I don't recognize it.

AS: I remember that.

KB: Okay. So, the Metro Coalition used to be around years ago and one of their mandates was to go into the community and teach white people about white privilege. So when this same social worker addresses an issue with a woman in the room that was using the language of 'non-white,' people, she says, "Well, I don't think we should use the language of non-white," and I'm thinking, "You brought *that* up and didn't address the fact that the word "nigger" was mentioned in the room?"

AS: *That's* what you're going to pick on?

KB: This is it! Are you kidding me? I get an email from this same woman with an apology. The email mentioned that the woman that said the "nigger" word has mental health issues etc. If you knew that, why didn't you talk to her before she came into my workshop if you thought that she was a loose cannon? So, now you're not concerned about how that situation impacted me. You're concerned about her?

AS: Well, also, this whole behaviour is basically about trying to get your forgiveness for her racism.

KB: Yes. Exactly. Thank you.

AS: It would be great if there were some white person, who was going to be able to make an impression, you know?

KB: In her last email, she tells me that the committee has five hundred dollars that they want to donate on my behalf to the incident that happened in South Carolina when a white young man shot eight Black people in a Black Church. My thought was, why don't you make the donation directly and say "I was at a presentation on white privilege when this happened, and as part of our contribution – because we know that Kim was feeling pretty upset, but she did this workshop anyway – we want to give this on behalf of Kim and the Black community in N.S." Why do you need me to take that on... again, so frustrating!

AS: Easy.

GK: Right.

AS: It's true! It's the patterns that get set up that... It's really grim, right? It's just really grim that you're doing this work twenty years ago and it's the same patterns.

KB: Yes, the same stuff.

AS: Yes.

KB: Yes, right. Same stuff. And I remember hearing comments when I was doing the AIDS work like, "Didn't AIDS come from Africa?" I remember it used to make me cringe every time I used to hear it. Then, I'd be in a position where I had to do this mini-education, which came back to race over and over and over again. And so, yeah, there are barriers. Yes. I can say that there are. As much as I commend those guys for their work, I still don't know if they actually got it. You know, when it comes right down to it. I think that they did a lot of work to support it on paper, but I know the board of the Coalition was all white and then you had the advisory board, which was all Black. I don't believe they ever got it.

AS: Yes.

GK: You may have some more questions, too, but just to come back to the Black Outreach Project ...

KB: Sure.

GK: I only have limited archival material that I've been able to find, which informs some of the questions I wrote, but I did come across something you wrote in the *PWA Coalition Newsletter* about condom distribution during Black History Month in February 1993.

KB: Oh my god! Are you serious? Well, I've got to see this! Can you get me a copy of that?

GK: I can scan that and send it to you, or I can photocopy it and give it to you here.

KB: Yes! What did I say?

GK: Well, it's about condom distribution, which I thought was pretty neat, and doing displays like you were describing at different community events, but you do refer there to Afrocentric condoms.

KB: *Yes!* We had them.

GK: Could you tell... me, I just don't know anything, right?

KB: We did! I went to a conference, maybe in Toronto? They had these Afrocentric condoms that Black people could relate to. They had the African colours on the condom package, I think. Yes. I do remember those. And I do remember us distributing them and they were very accepted by the

Black community. My gosh! You're bringing up some good stuff now, but did you have a question around that?

GK: No. Just whether you had any memories or reflections on that – doing stuff during Black History Month. Obviously, it was something that the Black Outreach Project did, which sounds really pretty neat.

KB: "Eight to ten displays for the month's activities." My goodness!

AS: That's a lot.

KB: *I know!* "Culturally specific materials and information." Yeah, "Black Outreach Project also passed out the Afrocentric condoms, posters and information for..."

GK: I think this mentioned a couple other people's names.

KB: We did. "600 to 800 condoms and unexpectedly raised approximately \$50,000 in donations for the project." Didn't expect that!

AS: Wow.

KB: When I say us, I mean the Black Outreach Project team of volunteers and grant employees that assisted me in the summer months with phase one - doing the needs assessment. They had creative ideas and their enthusiasm was beneficial to our efforts during Black History Month. We unfortunately lost our brother Arthur Ash to AIDS during my time with the Black Outreach Project."

GK: Can you tell us about Arthur Ash?

KB: Arthur Ash was a well-known tennis player. It was clear he died of AIDS. Also at the time, Magic Johnson came out and said he was HIV positive.

GK: Right.

KB: That was a big and bold move for Magic. I remember that was a big issue in terms of somebody with that high profile who actually admitted that he was HIV-positive. He also talked about his sexual promiscuity, which he believed was the way he contracted it ... What does CAE stand for?

GK: I don't know.

KB: Community AIDS Educator. That's it. That was my position – Community AIDS Educator.

AS: Yes, that's an acronym we don't actually use anymore.

KB: *Yes!* That was it. That was my job, and BOP was Black Outreach Project. Isn't that funny?

GK: And that's something by Jane...

KB: Yes! And this is a newsletter.

GK: Yeah, that's [the PWA Coalition Newsletter](#).

KB: Where did you find that?

GK: I was around in '93, I must have picked it up somewhere and put it somewhere and I eventually found it. I found that, because the place we have in the Annapolis Valley; it was in a storage box there.

KB: I even like the name, "Preserving our heritage, protecting our future." Pretty cool back then, wasn't it?

AS: Yes! [laughter]

GK: You probably wrote the headline, too!

KB: I think I probably did! I definitely want a copy of that.

GK: Yes, for sure. So, that was one question – when you were involved in the PWA Coalition, did you have any connections with the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power group that was around here for a while?

KB: What is the AIDS Coalition...?

GK: ...to Unleash Power.

AS: The ACT UP group.

KB: I think so, but I don't know in what capacity.

AS: They organized some demonstrations. There were a couple that were in response to the provincial strategy. There was one that we've heard of where they led a donkey. They had a die-in right near the Public Gardens and they led this donkey down Spring Garden Road. You don't have any memory of that, do you?

KB: I don't!

GK: I think it might have been before...

AS: It might have been a bit earlier.

KB: Was it?

GK: I think it was 1990.

AS: It might have been 1990.

KB: Right.

GK: I think it's maybe a little bit before your time.

AS: They baked a cake in the shape of an eye that was like, 'keeping an eye on you.'
[laughter]

KB: I don't know if we had very much involvement with them, but I do remember ACT UP.

AS: That they existed.

KB: Yes. I do remember them existing.

AS: They seem so far, from the people we've talked to, to have been more... Like, all of the people we've talked to who were involved were white people – many of them white, gay men.

KB: Yes. Exactly.

GK: But, a lot more women than in the PWA Coalition, a lot more lesbians from what I can figure out.

KB: Yes.

GK: Like, Brenda Barnes and a whole bunch of people.

KB: Oh, right! Yes. That's right. I remember Brenda.

GK: Brenda is in Whitehorse.

KB: Is she?

GK: Yes. We're going to try and figure out how to interview her somehow.

KB: That's really good! You should talk to her and you should interview Deena, too. I will give you Deena's number.

GK: That would be great.

KB: She could fill in some of these gaps. She might remember stuff I don't.

GK: She'd be actually really useful, especially from 94 on.

KB: That's right.

GK: So, you leave the position of being the Coordinator of the Black Outreach Project in '94. Do you have any remaining connection with it?

KB: No. I don't.

GK: Okay. Basically, from '93 to '95 they're in the process of merging.

KB: Yes.

GK: Because of the funding questions, right?

KB: That's right. And, if anything, I might have been in to support Deena after she took over.

GK: And in the report that you have a copy of – that Robert got for us – from the Nova Scotia AIDS Coalition, fairly early on when the PWA Coalition people still had some influence there.

GK: They merged, but they still had influence there. Sylvia Hamilton apparently writes the last report on the Black Outreach Project as an evaluation. Does that name mean anything?

KB: Yes, Sylvia Hamilton. She's a filmmaker here in Halifax. She might have been contracted to just write the report. I don't know.

GK: That might be the case. There's only a little more. The remaining questions are the ones we ask everyone, so if you have other questions you want to bring up.

AS: We're trying to talk to everyone we can who was involved, but also we're trying to capture any memories that folks want to share of people who died. want to remember. We're going to have a page that's memorials. Like, little snippets of people that we would have loved to talk to if we could have. So, if there's anyone you wanted to remember, and say their name or say something about them.

KB: Yes, Graham Cook. Graham was very courageous. He was involved with the Black Outreach Project as a volunteer. He had a strong, yet quiet presence. He was honoured for his ability to "Stand in his Truth" about his HIV status and being gay regardless of what the community thought of him. He had a friendly spirit, always gave a big hug when you saw him. If he were still with us, he would be a strong advocate for Black gay rights and PWA's. He is truly missed by his loving family and friends.

AS: Good. Thank you.

KB: You're welcome.

AS: So, any last things you haven't been able to say while we've been talking.

KB: I don't think there's any more I could say. Yes. [pointing to a document] You can take a look at this one. Will you need this one?

GK: I think that would be actually really interesting.

AS: I think it would be good. It might exist on the Internet, but it would be good.

KB: Yes. That's right. This is a research paper I did during my Masters in Social Work Community Practice class. "Examining HIV prevention and education within the experience of African-Nova Scotians, who have been socially excluded due to racism and social economic prejudice." That's what this paper is about. It could be interesting information that you might want to use in the end.

AS: Yes. Beautiful. That's really important.

KB: For sure, "HIV and substance use." This is a double jeopardy.

AS: Yes.

KB: This is something that I did with a conference that was happening here in Halifax. I presented this paper in collaboration with a woman from the U.S. Do you need any minutes or anything?

AS: Yes!

KB: Yes. Why don't you look through this one, and I'll look through this one. There are two files here. See if there's anything in those files...

AS: Yes, all of this would be great. Yes, notes from board meetings... This would be great, because it might be that the PWA Coalition after the merger still has these things, but if they don't then we can put them up, and we have this archival site online.

KB: Yes. Exactly.

GK: They would be then available to anyone who wanted to look at them.

KB: Sure.

GK: That would be wonderful if we could do that.

KB: Okay. Now, this must have been something Deena was doing because this is what this says... [This is a letter to Karen Hudson](#), who was involved with the African Canadian Education Project, which is the project I was involved with years ago. Okay. “As you may already know, the funding for the Black Outreach Project ran out earlier this year.” This was in June of ‘96. “Although Deena Noseworthy made...” This is a letter from Kirsten Schmidt, who was the Education Coordinator and Lorne from the advisory board. “Although Deena Noseworthy made attempts to get more money to continue doing HIV and AIDS education and support with the Black community, attempts were unsuccessful. The work which Deena, the advisory board, outreach team, and JUKA...” I have no idea who JUKA is, J-U-K-A in big letters. “...have been doing is extremely important. As a result, the AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia with the help of the board outreach team and JUKA are continuing to work with the Black communities on HIV/AIDS and related issues. Kirsten Schmidt is the Educational Coordinator and contact person at the AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia. Kirsten has been involved with HIV and AIDS education for the past seven years. She has experience doing presentations, facilitation work, assisting people with planning or running awareness events, and talking with people one on one, specifically Christian and individuals around the province are trained to do the train the trainer program. Deena’s going to tell you about that. “An African-Nova Scotian response to HIV and AIDS and workshop design to provide individuals in the Black community with skills and resources to do HIV and AIDS education support in their communities.” So, that must be some African name on that project that Deena came up with. “Quarterly, Christian will be sending information packages out, like the one included here, to help keep you up to date on HIV and AIDS education information. In addition, she is available to help with presentations and workshops in the community.” So, maybe she’s one person you need to track down.

AS: Yes.

KB: Christian Schmidt. “We look forward to continuing our work with you, and encourage you to call Christian.” So, Deena would know about Christian Schmidt, and you should probably take that letter when you talk to Deena to trigger her memory.

AS: Yes.

GK: So, this is 1996. This is after the merger, when it’s the AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia.

KB: And Deena must have applied for money and didn’t get it, and Christian must have had all that information for the train the trainer. That’s what I’m thinking.

GK: Yes. So, on the other hand, the final evaluation report is in 1998. It may have been an attempt to try to kick start getting more funding.

KB: Yes. Exactly.

GK: That there were a number of people then around the new AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia that wanted this to somehow continue.

KB: I think so.

GK: So, Kirsten Schmidt, it looks like, was the overall Educational Coordinator for the AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia. So, it's no longer a separate, distinct project.

KB: I wonder if she would know where all that information is.

GK: Yes.

KB: For the train the trainer and all that, because it looked like she was working with Deena.

GK: Yes.

AS: This is great.

GK: This might be really useful to follow up on.

AS: Yes.

GK: But, we definitely need to talk to Deena. That's for sure.

KB: Definitely.

GK: Then, maybe we'd find out more about what happened in this situation.

AS: Yes. Oh, cool look at this! Thank you so much for bringing these things. This is really, really fantastic!

KB: What is that?

AS: [This is a flyer](#).

KB: Oh, yeah! Oh my gosh! Can I see that? I didn't even look at any of this stuff. That's cool. Yes. That's a flyer.

AS: And then there's a [brochure evaluation report](#). You know, it's really so together, right?

KB: Yes. That's Deena's writing.

AS: This is one of these things that when I'm talking to people about it, I'm like, you know, it's so good to actually look at the practicalities of how all this organizing happened, and we can learn so much.

KB: Yes! You're welcome... "Age, racism, Black women in AIDS," all on one flyer.

AS: Yes.

KB: That's all the stuff that we did, I guess. Yes. "The Black community responding to AIDS." It's a good thing I keep everything now.

AS: Yes.

GK: Yes.

KB: Now, this is a report by Val Jackson. ["A Concise Handbook for Immigrant and Women of Colour and HIV."](#) I don't know what this is... I'll put this with the report stuff. This is another report, ["Meeting regarding Magic Johnson, an all-star team visit."](#) Oh, right! We were talking about bringing Magic Johnson here.

AS: That's awesome!

GK: Oh yes.

KB: *Yes!* "Head person. Front seat. Local person for Front Seat, MJ and all-star team." Did they come? "Letter to Magic, opportunity to increase awareness for you... Robert needs letter by..." Unfortunately, he did not come here. "Funding from the Black Outreach Project will be ending March 28th 1996. You've been identified by your community..." This is the training session. We should put that... Look at this, training session outline."

AS: That's great. Okay. Can you commit to not saying anything else interesting?

KB: Yes. [laughter]

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]