HQ
Toronto

A Lifetime of Advocacy and a Legacy for Tomorrow

John and Arnold are leaving a legacy gift to HQ and making history, carrying forward a spirit of generosity they shared throughout a partnership of more than 50 years, until Arnold sadly passed away in 2024.

Through their legacy commitment to HQ, they are the founding members of the HQ Legacy Circle, a new community of supporters helping ensure that affirming, accessible care remains available for generations to come.



For John and Arnold, the decision to leave a legacy gift grew naturally from the lives they lived and the community they helped shape.

Arnold grew up in Philadelphia and John in London, England, at a time when being openly gay meant navigating a very different world.

“The government said we were criminals, the church said we were sinners, and the medical professionals said we were sick,” John recalls.

Both men were open about their sexual orientation even then. After training as a social worker, John moved to Philadelphia in his twenties, eager to see more of the world. Three months later, he met Arnold.

Eventually, the two made Toronto home. Here, John’s work as a social worker became increasingly connected to advocacy for the 2SLGBTQ+ community. Following Toronto’s 1981 bathhouse raids, he helped establish the Toronto Counselling Centre for Lesbians and Gays, now known as David Kelley Services.

Then came the AIDS epidemic.

At the time, there was no effective treatment. Stigma was enormous, fear was intense, and misinformation was rampant.

John, who speaks openly about living with HIV as a way of challenging stigma, remembers those years as a time when community care was anything but abstract. He and Arnold, alongside friends and other community members, cared for people with AIDS when many others would not. They sat at bedsides, cooked meals, cleaned apartments, fed cats, reached out to estranged families and buried loved ones.

They carried one another through the epidemic.

When we asked John about Arnold, he described an open, warm, funny, kind and generous man. Arnold had an encyclopedic knowledge of the things that fascinated him — antique silver, music and opera, plants and gardening among them — and brought that curiosity to countless conversations.

Above all, John says, Arnold wanted to help others, particularly those less fortunate than himself.

A hairdresser by profession, Arnold volunteered for many years in the barbershop at the Toronto People With AIDS Foundation. People came to him for a haircut, but the experience was about much more than that. Arnold helped people feel cared for, listened to and good about themselves.

That same belief in care, dignity and community continued to shape John's work.

Years later, he became part of the early conversations that led to the vision for a health hub designed around the real lives of gay, bi, queer, trans and non-binary people — a place where people could receive sexual and mental health services in a safe, warm, welcoming and culturally relevant environment, and speak honestly about their health without embarrassment, shame or fear of judgement.



That vision became HQ, where John served as one of the founding co-chairs of the Board.

Today, walking through HQ carries deep meaning for John and, he believes, would have for Arnold too.

He sees a warm, welcoming place where people can recognize themselves in the staff and volunteers, the services they receive and the art on the walls. In many ways, it represents a world that would have been difficult for his younger self to imagine.

John knows that this progress did not happen on its own. It was built slowly, through advocacy, community and people caring for one another.

For John, legacy giving is not about wealth or leaving behind a grand gesture. It is simply another way to support something you believe in. Family and friends can still come first, he says, while a portion of an estate, whatever amount feels meaningful, can help an organization continue its work far into the future.

After a lifetime of advocacy, and a life shared with Arnold that was grounded in kindness and community, John sees their gift as a continuation of that same spirit.

"My generation helped us survive," he says. "I hope our legacy is that we can help the next generation thrive."