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Signs of change

LIFE: Photo exhibit brings victims of poverty, racism and isolation into focus

By KATHY RUMLESKI, THE LONDON FREE PRESS

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Joe Weis, Kristen Sinclair and Megan Cornwell pose beside a photo of Asunta Yanga. Life size photos of different people will soon be posted all over the city as part of a campaign by the London Intercommunity Health Centre. Weis is a photo subject, Sinclair is the designer and Cornwell is the communications manager of the LIHC. (DEREK RUTTAN, The London Free Press

The smiling faces hide the struggle that led to the beautiful photographs. There's a Sudanese immigrant, now a proud Canadian citizen, who beams. The sign with her photo reads: "I'm helping women find their way in our new community." There's a homeless man asking for understanding. "Don't judge me. Life wasn't always like this," his sign reads. A trio of brothers grin. Their hands are in pockets of baggy pants and they look fashionable and free. "Our potential knows no limits," they say through their sign. These pictures, taken by local photographer Rachel Lincoln, are part of a powerful exhibition called SeeMe, organized by the London InterCommunity Health Centre as part of its year-long 20th anniversary celebrations. Six life-sized images will be unveiled Tuesday at the London Corporate Centre on Dundas St. The exhibition shines a light on individuals impacted by poverty, isolation, language, racism, or the lack of affordable food and housing, organizers at the health centre say. "We want to stimulate the exchange of thoughts and ideas," said Megan Cornwell, communications manager at the centre. "We also know that despite providing service to thousands of Londoners each year for 20 years, most people don't know who we are. This is in large part due to the fact that our clients are primarily individuals who are marginalized. They don't tend to be 'seen' by the broader population." The health centre has produced 24 images and is asking businesses and agencies to consider placing one on their site. Starbucks at Dundas and Richmond streets is displaying one. Joe Weis says he was surprised when the centre asked him to be a model and take part in the photo shoot. But he decided why not? "Not everybody's James Bond or Marilyn Monroe." Weis is a volunteer with the centre. He spends between 20 to 30 hours helping each month, primarily in the community kitchen program. The community gathers for monthly meals and fellowship at the centre's satellite office at Huron St. and Highbury Ave. On Saturday, the

program is offering a special Mother's Day meal. Weis, who is originally from Hungary but has lived many years in London, has been involved in the community kitchen program for three years. He helps with food preparation as well as menu planning and other jobs. "I wouldn't miss it for anything in the world," says Weis, who adds he got his cooking talent from his mother. "Bringing a smile to somebody's face is worth to me the whole effort," he says, citing an example. "This young native boy -- maybe 10 years old -- comes to the door and very politely says, 'Thank you very much, sir. This is the best meal I've ever had.' It makes you feel good. I wouldn't change it for a million dollars." Weis plans to keep volunteering for as long as he can. "I always found the community, a very important part of my life." Asunta Yanga, another model, came from Sudan in 1998 with her husband and baby. She didn't speak any English. Yanga, whose next three children were born in Canada, learned about the centre through another Sudanese woman. She decided to take part in the centre's Women of the World program, which offers leadership and volunteer training. "I built self-confidence," she says. "It changed me a lot. I can do a lot of things. I feel like I'm one of the Canadians now." With renewed self-esteem, Yanga went back to school. She took a personal support worker course in 2007. She now works at a group home. "Life is so hard. It's very hard to get a job if you don't get a good education," she says. "(Now) my life has changed." Yanga leads a Woman of the World group these days and has done volunteer work with the Kidney Foundation of Canada. The centre has a team of people who work with clients, including doctors, nurses, social workers, dieticians, mental health nurses, psychologists, psychiatrists, and community workers. Issues that impact health are also addressed with clients, including income, education, employment, housing, cooking and nutrition, recreation and social supports. "They give you a lot of resources," Yanga says. Along with the photo exhibition, a new website will launch at the same time. The centre's executive director, Michelle Hurtubise, will use this platform to blog about the issues that are preventing clients from enjoying optimal health and wellness. Visit www.lihc.on.ca to read it. Meanwhile, London InterCommunity Health Centre continues to grow. "We will soon be serving clients from outside our traditional geographic area," Cornwell says. "We anticipate that at some point in the future we will have new locations across the city." E-mail kathy.rumleski@sunmedia.ca, read [Kathy's blog](#) or follow [Kathyatlfpress](#) on Twitter. **IF YOU GO**
What: Launch and open house of SeeMe exhibition by the London InterCommunity Health Centre When: Tuesday, 4 to 6 p.m.

Where: TrisaneOne, London Corporate Centre, 343 Dundas St., second floor lounge. The **London InterCommunity Health Centre** has two locations: 659 Dundas St., 519-660-0874 and Unit 7, 1355 Huron St., 519-659-6399.

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