



25 Years  
AIDS Community Resources

# NYS Health: Needle Programs help prevent HIV

## Preventing the spread of HIV... Syringe vouchers now available

*As of 2004, injection drug use accounted for about one-fifth of all HIV infections and most hepatitis C infections in the United States. Injection drug users (IDUs) become infected and transmit the viruses to others through sharing contaminated syringes and other drug injection equipment and through high-risk sexual behaviors. Women who become infected with HIV through sharing needles or having sex with an infected IDU can also transmit the virus to their babies before or during birth or through breastfeeding. Centers for Disease Control, December 2005*

It took four years of hard work before AIDS Community Resources (ACR) and the New York State Department of Health were able to establish a Syringe Voucher Program. The most difficult barrier to overcome was finding a pharmacy willing to participate. In Syracuse only one, Harvey's Pharmacy at 833 East Genesee Street, signed on to help. "The voucher program is going smoothly," said pharmacist Gary Brothers. "Frankly, I'm delighted." ACR's HIV prevention team and other community providers distribute vouchers in targeted Syracuse neighborhoods to anyone seeking clean syringes.

Continued on page 6

Serving  
Cayuga,  
Herkimer,  
Jefferson,  
Lewis,  
Madison,  
Oneida,  
Onondaga,  
Oswego,  
St. Lawrence  
Counties



Harvey's Pharmacy



### On the road again...

the Safety First Outreach van has served us well. Beginning on page 4, see how our new van takes HIV prevention to a whole new level.

# AIDS COMMUNITY RESOURCES

is a not-for-profit, community-based organization, supported by both public and private funds, bringing information, education, direct services, referrals, and advocacy to everyone in our nine-county region who needs help with HIV/AIDS.

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**Newsletter Editor**  
Jean Kessner

## AIDS Community Resources 1983 - 2008

# Losing My Brother

On October 30, 2008, AIDS Community Resources will observe its 25th anniversary at an evening event honoring individuals and corporations in our nine county service area whose contributions help keep ACR vital and strong. Since 1981, AIDS has changed from a disease that meant certain death to a disease that, with medication and dedication, can be managed.

While preparing for this special anniversary we invited people to share their stories about AIDS and AIDS Community Resources. This offering from Patty Nolan struck our hearts and reminds us that, while we have accomplished much, we have work left to do.



As a student nurse in 1983, Patty Nolan helped care for "Jim" whose AIDS had left him blind, covered with open sores and in extreme pain. Jim was one of the first to die of AIDS in Onondaga County. Twenty-five years later her brother suffered a similar fate. Following is an excerpt of Patty's letter to ACR in recognition of its 25th anniversary.

“Despite my begging, my praying, my bargaining with God for a miraculous cure, Pete died, at the age of 44, of complications from the AIDS virus on February 18th, 2008. No-one deserves this awful fate. Jim didn't deserve it in 1983, and Pete didn't deserve it in 2008, 25 years later. The journey has gone on far too long. Such a cloud continues to hover over all of us while the horrible effects of AIDS remain an unfortunate on-going reality in our present-day world.

In the midst of it all, AIDS Community Resources has been a tireless force of angelic proportions in the fight against AIDS. How fitting that this be a recognition of ACR's "25th" anniversary—traditionally known as the "Silver" anniversary. This wonderful agency has provided those affected by "the dark cloud of AIDS," with a proverbial "Silver Lining"; a "Silver Lining" filled with love and compassion, tenacity and hope—a "Silver lining;" of seemingly unlimited proportion.

May YOUR profound 25-year journey, ACR, lead quickly to a path ending with the beautiful resolution of a cure for AIDS. ”

*You are cordially invited to join us beginning at 5:30 p.m.  
Thursday, October 30th  
Lake Shore Yacht and Country Club  
6777 Lakeshore Road, Cicero*

*RSVP to 800.475.2430 by Thursday, October 23  
Tickets are \$50 - Patron Tickets \$100*

# In the North Country... doctor fights for TAP

There is only one doctor in the North Country who regularly treats AIDS patients. When she learned that AIDS Institute had cut funding for ACR's Treatment Adherence Program (TAP) and awarded funding for a new TAP program to University Hospital in Syracuse, Dr. Marylene Duah set out on a campaign to change the state's mind. If the TAP cuts hold, North Country HIV/AIDS patients would have to travel to Syracuse instead of seeing a doctor in Watertown.

"If TAP were gone my patients would feel even more abandoned than they already are," said infectious disease specialist Dr. Duah. "They are sick. It is hard for them to travel." Some of her patients already travel two hours or more from Massena to Watertown for treatment. A trip to Syracuse would take 3-hours, and would be out of the question for most. "How could they make it in the winter?"

Dr. Duah's large caseload includes 65 individuals with HIV/AIDS who live in Jefferson and St. Lawrence counties. Dr. Duah said her burden and her patients' lives eased considerably when, in 2007, AIDS Community Resources posted Mary DeStefano as Treatment Adherence Nurse for Jefferson, St. Lawrence and Lewis counties. "I have never had someone like Mary. She brings her TAP clients to my office for their visits. She is very intense. She keeps them on track with the medicines – with their lives."



“If TAP were gone my patients would feel even more abandoned than they already are.”

Dr. Marylene Duah

Mary DeStefano is registered nurse who came out of retirement to work for ACR part time. "HIV medications are often just the beginning of my work," DeStefano said. "My clients have daily problems to deal with, like enough food or heat or good housing."

ACR Board Chair Laura Murgia said the New York State Department of Health needs to reconsider the TAP cut. "It's one of our programs that worked really well that the state has decided to stop funding! Yes, we all know the rising costs of everything and the state is cutting spending across the board. These cuts may cost people their lives!"



Laura Murgia,  
ACR Board Chair



Mary DeStefano, RN

## Nine county TAP Update ~ September 22, 2008

- University Hospital and AIDS Community Resources are collaborating to provide treatment adherence services to HIV/AIDS clients in Central New York.
- St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Utica has not received funds to continue TAP in the Mohawk Valley. AIDS Institute and ACR are near agreement on a plan to keep TAP in the North Country.

## New Safety First van hits the streets

# Thank you, MAC Global Foundation

AIDS Community Resources learned years ago that the best way to influence behavior was to “meet people where they’re at.” This unofficial slogan of the Safety First Outreach Project came into use in 2000 when ACR acquired a van that allowed HIV Prevention Specialists to go to targeted neighborhoods and share HIV prevention messages that were difficult to deliver in other ways. The audience for this outreach could be injection drug users, sex workers, and others who engaged in behaviors that put them at risk of acquiring HIV. The van was a major step forward for ACR prevention programming, and has served us well, but it is worn out and not as useful as it used to be.

Thanks to a generous grant from MAC Global Foundation, the outreach team can now assist those at highest risk for HIV and STDs to gain access to testing on the spot.

“Far and away the biggest advantage it offers is testing,” said Karen Loftin, who leads the Syracuse Safety First Team. “Previously, people would make appointments to test later but often didn’t follow through – maybe it’s transportation, child care – cold feet? This way we can test when the inspiration first strikes.”

The new van is equipped with a refrigerator to store HIV test kits. It offers privacy that allows lifesaving counseling and testing. This second generation Safety First van is more like a mobile clinical unit, with more space to work with clients in a relaxed, professional atmosphere. “It’s something they only have in the big cities,” said Loftin. “What this says to people is we care enough about you to bring you these services, to be able to test you and get you the answer you need today.”

MAC Global Foundation’s \$49,990 grant paid a significant portion of the cost of a new and improved Safety First van. HIV testing and STD screening is now being offered in the heart of Syracuse communities where it is most needed.

Karen Loftin,  
HIV Prevention Specialist,  
educating about HIV at Columbus Circle



The Safety First Health Outreach Project is a community-centered, street-based comprehensive program that provides bilingual HIV prevention services in the inner-city areas of Syracuse and Utica. The goal is to reduce HIV infections in those at highest risk of infection.

The new Safety First

# In the Mohawk Valley...

## A Community Foundation Grant for Safety First

Safety First Outreach is a vital part of AIDS Community Resource's work in targeted neighborhoods in Utica as well as Syracuse. The Community Foundation of Herkimer and Oneida Counties, Inc. notified ACR on September 4, 2008 that it has approved a grant for \$29,500 for 50% of the purchase price of a new outreach van. We have been searching for a suitable used van, but The Community Foundation suggested we consider buying a 2008 vehicle. This grant is further endorsement of ACR's HIV prevention work in communities where the risk of HIV infection is high. "A donation like this," said ACR Executive Director, Michael Crinnin, "is a great boost to our efforts and the individuals touched by our services."

The Safety First Outreach initiative in Utica succeeds with help from a team volunteers called Peers. ACR Peers are from the community. They are aware of the prevention needs and the barriers individuals face with accessing services.

Communication is the key. "You just take it slow. You start out by asking if they are familiar with our program," said Shaun Alexander. "Some people walk away, but others want to know more." Alexander is amazed at all the misunderstandings people have about how HIV is transmitted – and how it is not. "Even when they do understand," he said. "They seem to think they are the lucky ones who won't get HIV."

The Utica Safety First Team is led by HIV Prevention Specialist Michael Johnson. "I'm helping people," Johnson said, "and that's what I like most about it. I like helping people get to where they want to be in life."



Shaun Alexander,  
Peer



“ I like helping  
people get to  
where they want  
to be in life. ”

Michael Johnson,  
HIV Prevention Specialist



Utica Safety First van outside Hope House

### Harm Reduction Services

AIDS Community Resources recognizes that drug use exists and the effects of drug use are harmful. We know that drug use will not simply disappear, but the harmful effects can be greatly reduced through effective interventions. The ACR Substance Program provides non-judgmental, comprehensive, prevention services that focus on preventing drug and alcohol related harm for those un-able or unwilling to stop. It is NOT a requirement to be ready to totally abstain from using and/or entering into treatment to participate in counseling.



**Wenona Wake**

Director of Prevention Services



*Continued from page 1*

The vouchers can be redeemed at Harvey's Pharmacy for 10 new syringes, a sharps container which has literature regarding safe disposal, educational materials and additional resources.

The program is part of AIDS Community Resources' "harm reduction approach" to preventing new HIV infections and hepatitis by providing individuals who inject drugs with access to sterile syringes. The injection drug use population needs to have access to new syringes to help stop the spread of disease through sharing of needles. The syringe voucher program is delivered in conjunction with other comprehensive prevention services offered by AIDS Community Resources.

"Let's face it," said Wenona Wake, Director of Prevention Services, "people are going to use drugs and if they don't have new syringes they will reuse syringes and share them, increasing the risk that they will acquire or transmit blood borne diseases like HIV."

ACR takes pride in being a multicultural agency and drug use is a culture. ACR is committed to reaching out to all populations to decrease the infection rates of HIV in our communities. ACR's program provides access to new syringes for those already using drugs. "Numerous studies show that making clean syringes available does not promote drug use," said Wake. "One would have to ask a very simple question: if a non-smoker received a coupon for a free pack of cigarettes would they use the coupon and become a smoker?"

Most drug stores in Syracuse declined to participate in large part because they were reluctant to attract injection drug users to their facilities. Gary Brothers of Harvey's Pharmacy said, "I found that the customers coming in are polite, patient, and no problem to deal with. The voucher program is a success."

At present the Syringe Voucher Program is offered only in Syracuse. If monitoring and evaluation show it to be successful, ACR will look to expand the program to the Utica area.

“Let's face it, people are going to use drugs and if they don't have new syringes they will reuse syringes and share them, increasing the risk that they will acquire...HIV.”

*Continued from page 3*

There are limited resources in the North Country for those living with HIV/AIDS. "The hardest part about treating AIDS patients here is that there are no services," said Dr. Duah. By that she means no psychiatric care, no dedicated AIDS clinic, no support groups and no consistent social work. All of these issues are exacerbated by the North Country's vast size and sparse population. While there are support groups for gay men and for those who are HIV positive, Dr. Duah said, "I have women – middle aged and middle class women who have no one to talk to about their HIV. In fact, most of their families don't know their diagnosis."

Mary DeStefano concentrates on improving health – mental and physical - for her North Country clients. "Everybody knows everybody and nobody wants anyone to know they have HIV," DeStefano said. DeStefano's perception is that larger communities like Syracuse have grown accustomed to AIDS because there's more discussion and education. "People here need more knowledge – more true facts – about HIV/AIDS. That's the only thing that will get rid of the stigma."

# Empire State AIDS Ride update



The ACR Spokes successfully completed the Empire State AIDS Ride. The 560-mile bicycle journey across New York State began in Niagara Falls on August 10th and ended in New York City seven days later.

This year, AIDS Community Resources' Executive Director Michael Crinnin was back on his bicycle. In 2007, Michael broke his hip in a fall from his bicycle while training for the event and couldn't participate. This year, he was eager to ride. "I forgot how hard it was," Crinnin said at the end of the ride. "But I remember the sense of accomplishment – the genuine thrill when we got to Battery Park. It was fantastic!"

ACR Spokes had a team of seven riders this year that raised a total of \$44,594 to support the work of AIDS Community Resources. Bravo!



**Bravo!**  
**Bravo! Bravo!**  
**Bravo!** Bravo!

The ACR Spokes and volunteers  
at the end of the ride in New York City.

## *Volunteers...* one secret of ACR's success

Volunteers are vital to ACR's mission to provide education, prevention, and support services throughout our nine county service area. From "hands on" support for clients, to office assistance, fundraising activities, and street outreach; volunteers enhance our capacity to be a consistent and reliable community resource. "We could not make it without them!" said Volunteer Coordinator, Mary Doody who sets aside at least one day each year to thank volunteers for all they do.





ACR offers its services to anyone without discrimination based on age, race, creed, color, gender, sexual orientation, economic status, political affiliation, marital status, handicapped status, or mode of transmission.

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Or mail in the back of this newsletter to:  
AIDS Community Resources • 627 West Genesee Street, Syracuse, NY 13204

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### October 19, 2008

9th Annual First Frost AIDS Walk/Run – a 5K fundraising walk at Thompson Park Zoo in Watertown. [www.aidswalknyc.com](http://www.aidswalknyc.com)

### October 30, 2008

ACR 25th Anniversary event, 6:00 p.m. at Lake Shore Country Club. 1.800.475.2430

### November - December, 2008

Holiday Angel Collections Call 1.800.475.2430 to sponsor

### December 1, 2008

World AIDS Day

### February 6 – 8, 2009

Heart to Heart Tennis Tournament  
Call 1.800.475.2430 to register your team

### February 7, 2009

Black HIV Awareness Day

## PEER/VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION

Orientation sessions for new peers and volunteers are held twice monthly in both Syracuse and Utica. In Syracuse, call 475.2430. To sign up in Utica, call 793.0661.

## SUPPORT GROUPS

### SYRACUSE YOUTH GROUP MEETINGS:

LGBTQ [ages 13-18]: Tuesdays, 6:30-8:30 p.m.  
TRANSGENDER [ages 14-24]: Wednesdays, 5:30-7:00 p.m.  
STEPPIN' OUT [ages 19-22]: Thursdays, 7:00-9:00 p.m.  
For location and further information: [qcenter@aidcommunityresources.com](mailto:qcenter@aidcommunityresources.com)

### UTICA YOUTH GROUP:

Sundays from 4 p.m. - 6 p.m.  
For locations and further information, contact Mary Doody at 800.475.2430 or [glbtqyouth@aidcommunityresources.com](mailto:glbtqyouth@aidcommunityresources.com)

### TREATMENT ADHERENCE GROUPS:

Alternate Tuesdays in Utica  
Alternate Wednesdays in Syracuse  
800.475.2430 for information