



AIDS Community Resources

A Multicultural AIDS Service Agency

Celebrating 24 Years of a Community Responding to AIDS

SERVING CAYUGA, HERKIMER, JEFFERSON, LEWIS, MADISON, ONEIDA, ONONDAGA, OSWEGO, ST. LAWRENCE COUNTIES

July/August 2007



Viewpoint

by Michael Crinnin

Summertime and the livin' is.... restricted, as it turns out. Who would have guessed? But isn't that always the case...? We're forever hearing how young people feel/believe they are invulnerable – as though those of us more 'mature' have learned the opposite...?! Not from where I'm sitting - and I'm doing a bit more of that lately. Sigh...

As Jean Kessner so eloquently related to our readership in last month's issue, I recently met with what turned out to be more than a minor mishap, some railroad tracks while out training for the upcoming Empire State AIDS Ride. Alas I have joined, early on (from my perspective anyways), the soon to be legion, 'baby boomers' who will incorporate all manner of mechanical joint replacements into aging infrastructures.

I now sport, on my right side, the latest in ceramic and titanium hips. Looks like I will not be seeing the seat of a road bike any time soon – for the rest of this season anyway: restricted.

Funny this concept of 'restriction' – kinda brings a bit of the rebel in one, don't you think? As soon as the doctor told me what I couldn't do ("Forget running – for good...") I started thinking about what I could pursue. To that end, as my birthday approached, I told my siblings they could all chip in and get me a pair of roller blades (for use next summer, I thought...). From my perspective this

seemed a sensible alternative to running: aerobic without the joint jarring aspects of running. One of my sisters however, had a slightly different take on matters. Upon hearing my request, she deadpanned, "Why don't we just get him a noose?" Perspective is everything...

So I've learned time and again over the years here. I've witnessed 'restriction' in the extreme, and I've just as often witnessed a matching resourcefulness: the power and perspective of viewing that 'glass as half full'. I watched this perspective capitalize on the body's amazing drive to thrive – regardless of the often-staggering odds.

I know folks who were, years ago, told, "Get Hospice...". Some now run marathons; some do the aforementioned (560 mile) Empire State ADS Ride; and some, less dramatically, but with no less effort and endurance, are back to work and/or have given birth and are raising strong and healthy children. Not everybody and surely not all the time; but enough to make you sit up and take notice – more than enough to put a mechanical hip in perspective, and to keep one committed to widening that gap between HIV/AIDS and premature death.

Eager to or not, I've had a lot of time to think – or

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AIDS COMMUNITY RESOURCES

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

MICHAEL CRINNIN
Executive Director

ANDREW LONDON
Chairperson

LAURA MURGIA
Vice-Chairperson

JERENA BARKINS
Secretary

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ALLEN DITCH
OLIVIA FRIED

CAROLE JESIOLOWSKI
BARBARA JOHNSON
SUZANNE KONDRÁ-DEFURIA
GREG VICTORY

ACR in Syracuse
627 W. Genesee St.
Syracuse, NY 13204
(315) 475-2430
800-475-2430
Fax (315) 472-6515

ACR in Utica
401 Columbia St.
Utica, NY 13502
(315) 793-0661
Fax (315) 735-9551

ACR in Watertown
230 Franklin St.
Watertown, NY 13601
(315) 785-8222
Fax (315) 836-0033

ACR in Canton
9 Miner St.
Canton, NY 13617
(315) 386-4493
Fax (315) 386-2530

ACR in Auburn
17 E. Genesee St.
Auburn, NY 13021
(315) 253-9795
Fax (315) 253-3255

ACR in Oswego
10 George St.
Oswego, NY 13126
(315) 343-7778
Fax (315) 343-4663

Newsletter Editor:
Jean Kessner

Goodbye, Jo-Anne

"They're both going to cry," the Development Director predicted as we decorated the big conference room for Jo-Anne Balestra's retirement party. He was referring to the guest of honor and her boss, Michael Crinnin, who had worked together for nearly 18 years. Jo-Anne was on the job five months before Michael signed on as Executive Director.

After Michael broke his hip, Jo-Anne delayed her retirement and volunteered to work three days a week until he returned. Just a few days out of the hospital, Michael (looking a little pale) made it to Jo-Anne's party and managed to say his public goodbyes with dry eyes. "Jo-Anne is a major part of AIDS Community Resources' institutional memory," Michael said. "She came when there were just 9 employees in one small office in Syracuse, and she's going

out when we have 68 employees in 6 offices."

It is impossible to explain how integral Jo-Anne has been to every aspect of AIDS Community Resources operations. When she started, the annual budget was \$300,000. In 2007, the budget is more than \$3 million. She has literally overseen the growth and development of the internal workings of AIDS Community Resources and has kept it running smoothly all these years. When she retired it was to happy things: grandchildren, winters in Florida, and more time with her husband, Tony. We celebrate that.



A beautiful vase for a beautiful lady.



Michael and Jo-Anne in the early days.



No tears here. Both Jo-Anne and Michael had a rollicking good time!

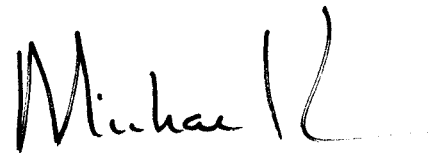
Continued from page 1

perhaps better said, to let thoughts and images surface. I now take long walks instead of quick runs. I find myself ambling (albeit with a slight limp...) along groomed paths – not whipping along on two rigid rubber tires dodging potholes, traffic, and train tracks. The distractions are few and, despite the inevitable physical discomfort of ‘rehabilitation’, the conditions are ripe for broader ‘appreciations’....

Gratitude, odd as it may seem, is often my companion – the perspective of my new restriction: not what I would have imagined. I would have preferred arriving at this state of being with considerably less drama, inconvenience, and pain, but there it is: grateful to be alive, grateful to have yet another chance to live life more fully, grateful for the wealth of others that have peopled my life

(and continue to do so) – people past and present who have set the bar high in terms of personal example and generosity.

Summertime, and the livin’ is full of possibility, depending on your perspective – restrictions or no. Might be a good time to tap into your ‘inner rebel’ and push the boundary of life’s possibilities, while you’re still around to enjoy a little mischief. Just beware of railroad tracks!



Volunteer Buddies Needed

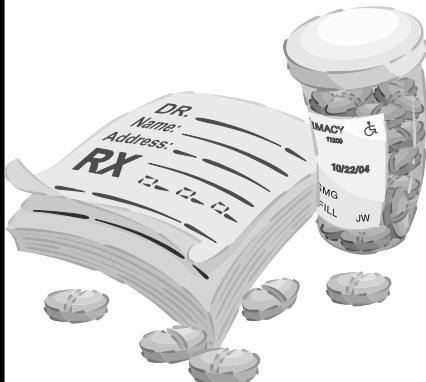
Funding source changes have created an increased need for volunteers to fill the gap.

People living with HIV/AIDS need transportation assistance getting medications and groceries plus some socialization.



Interested?

**Come to a Volunteer Orientation in Syracuse on August 6th
11:45 AM to 3:30 PM or August 25th 8:15 AM to Noon.**



- Learn about all the volunteer opportunities at AIDS Community Resources and hear more about being a Buddy Volunteer for a person living with HIV/AIDS.
- Refreshments provided.
- All Volunteers welcome. This is a great opportunity to get updated, too.
- People 55+ can become members of RSVP (Retired & Senior Volunteer Program) and get assistance with partial mileage reimbursement to a volunteer site (i.e. ACR) as well as supplemental liability insurance if transporting a client and on the job accident insurance. It's an opportunity to join hundreds of seniors across the country making a difference.

Please Call 475-2430 to RSVP

The Condom Conundrum

AIDS Community Resources now has six dynamic, professionally produced television public service announcements (PSAs) that promote condom use. We would like them to be seen by a wide audience, but getting a condom commercial on the air – even if you have the money to pay for airtime – can be tough: last month CBS and Fox television networks refused to air commercials for Trojan condoms. ABC and CBS agreed to air the commercials, but affiliates in some U.S. cities chose not to air them. Apparently, some people still have a lot invested in spreading the abstinence-only message. They are oblivious to the safety message, “use a condom every time.”

Well, that’s our message and our six PSAs are very effective. They are in English with Spanish sub-titles or in Spanish with English sub-titles. Each PSA targets a specific audience at high risk of HIV infection: young African American males; young African American females; young Latinas; young Latinos; men who have sex with men (MSM); and African American MSM.

The PSAs were created by Syracuse University film students studying Short Form Production with Professor Larry Elin and advertising design students studying with advertising professionals and faculty members Peter VonDerLinn and Donna Korff.



The guy on the left is a symbolic HIV virus, tracking down the man he had infected the night before, warning him to wear condoms and not spread the virus to anyone else.

Bars are a great place for hooking up. Is that person you’re interested in HIV positive? The only way to protect yourself is to use a condom every time.



Syracuse University Stomp group inspires young African American women to be assertive and insist on a condom every time.



The arm seen lifting weights withers over the course of 30 seconds. Students used three different actors to show how HIV shrinks muscles.



A young African American man practices safety in every area of his life: wearing goggles while sharpening tools, wearing a helmet while on a motorcycle, and wearing a condom for safer sex.

**You can view them
by going to our Web site...**

www.aidscommunityresources.com

THE BACK STORY

Last semester, AIDS Community Resources acted as a “client” for marketing and media students at Syracuse University. Six groups of students were assigned to write commercials for us; another six groups were to videotape and edit the commercials. Overwhelmed and delighted by the substantial opportunity being presented to us, Michael Crinnin and I met film professor Larry Elin at Starbucks near campus to discuss possible topics for the six commercials. Promote HIV testing? That would be good – but it was overdone. Not enough edge to it. Promote condom use? Dicier topic (especially with the new dominance of ‘abstinence only’) but was it doable? Larry Elin was game for the challenge. It’s important, he said. It would save lives, Michael said. My sister died of AIDS, Larry said.

His face was so despondent that I did what I normally do when I feel someone is upset about a topic – I changed the subject. Michael told me later that I should have let Larry talk about his sister. He wouldn’t have brought it up if he didn’t want to talk about it, he said. I couldn’t face the pain, I replied.

When our commercials were finished, Michael and I made a lunch date with Larry, this time to talk specifically about his sister. “Mary was sweet, innocent, loving, and spiritual. She was a saint, and then this happened to her.” She was Larry’s next-older sibling in a family of nine children born and raised in Orchard Park near Buffalo. After graduating from high school, Mary entered a convent, became a nun, and remained for 22 years. At age 40, she ventured back out into the world. “Within a year she married a man who infected her with HIV,” Larry told us. “He was the first man she had ever loved.”

At AIDS Community Resources we hear versions of that story with some regularity: a woman’s husband has sex with a man or woman outside the relationship, or shares needles with other drug users, becomes infected with HIV, and then infects his wife through unprotected sex. Larry did not know if his sister’s husband was aware that he had AIDS when he passed on the disease. “The story is devastating enough as it is,” he said.

Over the course of her illness, Mary both soared spiritually and suffered mightily. The husband who infected her with AIDS had also been physically and verbally abusive. They parted ways and throughout her struggle with AIDS, perhaps because of it, Mary grew in holiness and humility. “She did

wonderful things with her life during her illness. She really got in touch with her spirituality – what we call the meaning of life. The dark night of the soul.”

She married again, a wonderful man who cared for Mary as AIDS took its toll. The physical challenges were immense; she died in 2004.

Mary had been protective of her privacy; even her obituary made no mention of AIDS, so Larry had to brood for a while over whether he would let me write this story and if I could use her name. In the end, he considered hers a cautionary tale worthy of a larger audience; a whisper of sanity in the noisy world of new love and blind trust.

AIDS Community Resources’ condom commercials were not his first HIV prevention project. Larry’s work in the Syracuse University classroom often reflects his concern about AIDS. Larry designed a CD ROM game for a Syracuse agency to teach youngsters how to stay safe from HIV. He’s thinking about updating it and making it more widely available.

Mary is never far from Larry’s thoughts. The sadness is visible on his face when he talks about her. But the love is visible as well, and the urgency he feels to spread a message in Mary’s honor about safety, honesty, and love.

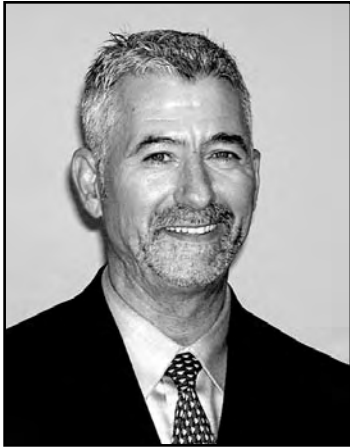


SU Professor Larry Elin

“She did wonderful things with her life during her illness. She really got in touch with her spirituality.”

Jean Kessner

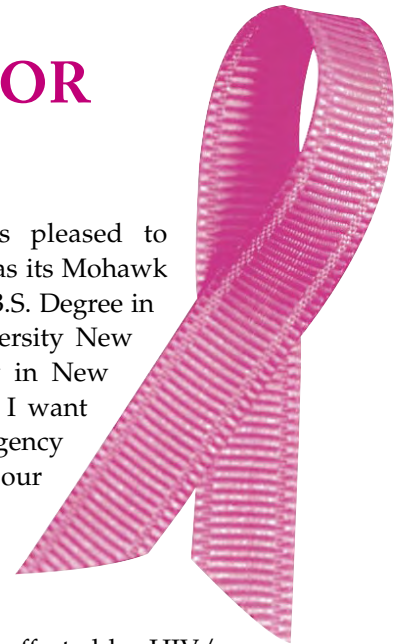
AIDS COMMUNITY RESOURCES NAMES NEW REGIONAL DIRECTOR



*David Podos, Mohawk Valley
Regional Director for AIDS
Community Resources.*

AIDS Community Resources (ACR) is pleased to announce the appointment of David Podos as its Mohawk Valley Regional Director. Mr. Podos has a B.S. Degree in Human Resources Management from University New School for Management and Urban Policy in New York City. "As the new Regional Director I want to raise public awareness about what this agency does," Podos said, "and the importance of our work here in the Mohawk Valley region."

AIDS Community Resources is a not-for-profit, community-based organization providing prevention, education, and support services to those infected with and affected by HIV/AIDS in the Central, Northern, and Mohawk Valley regions of New York State. The Mohawk Valley office is located at 401 Columbia Street in Utica.



Mohawk Valley residents wholeheartedly support many good causes and events. They have been very generous with AIDS Community Resources at the AIDS Hike For Life, held at the end of April each year at Hamilton College in Clinton. This past April, the AIDS Hike For Life raised \$61,000 dollars, setting a new record for the event.

A life resident of Utica, Mr. Podos acknowledged that his hometown has undergone many changes over the years. "I'm amazed at how generous the people of this area are; even faced with an economy that has seen its own share of ups and downs."

Much of ACR's work is paid for through fundraising dollars. The Teen AIDS Task Force, a school based HIV prevention education program with 18 chapters in the Mohawk Valley, benefits most from events like the AIDS Hike For Life.

David Podos replaces Wenona Wake as Regional Director, following Ms. Wake's promotion to ACR's agency-wide Director of Prevention Services.

From July 2005 – June 2006, ACR provided support services to a combination of 1119 HIV positive clients and their families in its nine county service area. 10,739 individuals were reached through prevention and education services.



AIDS Community Resources

A Multicultural AIDS Service Agency

ACR SPOKES TEAM PROFILES: *ADAM PERUTA AND JULIE RANDALL*

Adam Peruta saw the Empire State AIDS Ride poster hanging in a Syracuse University gym. "It jumped out to me because it seemed like such a crazy thing to do. Who would want to ride 560 miles?" As it turned out, Adam did, and he persuaded his girlfriend, Julie Randall, to ride with him.

Last year Julie raised \$2,900 for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. She is no stranger to raising money for a good cause, and she's no stranger to exercise. Last year she participated in Team in Training and completed an Olympic distance triathlon. "My toughest ride was the cycling leg of the Cazenovia Triathlon," Julie said. "While it was only 14 miles, it was a very hilly and almost an incline the entire distance. My quads were burning the whole time and I didn't think it was ever going to end!"

Adam rode in the Ride for the Rescue. It was a great course and for a good cause but a tough ride. "I was doing the 40 mile route and it rained most of the time. I also had a pretty bad crash and 2 flat tires. I didn't quite cross the finish line. I made it 38.5 miles - I had them haul me in because my bike was in shambles!"

Adam just bought that bike in March,



Julie Randall is a Physical Therapist at Mary Lou Corcoran Physical Therapy in Fayetteville. Adam Peruta is an Adjunct Professor at Syracuse University teaching website design, ecommerce and graphic design. He also has his own business consulting with companies and helping them with their interactive marketing.

so he's new to cycling. However, he ran a marathon and a few half marathons last year, so he's in shape. His biggest adjustment to biking turns out not to be the flat tires, not even riding in the rain - it's the outfit. "I still can't get used to the tight cycling shorts. They just aren't my style!"

Adam and Julie are both athletic, but say they never compete against each other - a good addition for our team in the Empire State AIDS Ride, the ACR Spokes, where teamwork is

everything. "Sixteen brave souls signed on for the ride. Michael Crinnin's injury, along with a few other complications has reduced the field, but we're all set to go August 12th," said Carrie Large of ACR's

Development Department. "Our riders have taken on a big physical and financial challenge. I can't begin to put into words how proud I am of them and how grateful we are for their help."

To Adam, biking 560 miles seems unbelievable, but it's unbelievable as well that New York State leads the nation in new HIV infections. "These families need many things and we want to help raise money to provide these needs," said Adam.



"It jumped out to me because it seemed like such a crazy thing to do. Who would want to ride 560 miles?"

THE HEART



CLIENT SUPPORT SERVICES

SUPPORT SERVICES TEAM

CASE MANAGER: the team leader. The case manager works with clients to identify needs and to help connect them to needed services, such as benefits, housing, utilities, medical and transportation.

CASE MANAGEMENT TECHNICIAN: can accompany clients to medical, housing, or social services appointments and help answer questions.

COMMUNITY FOLLOW-UP WORKER: assists the case manager in keeping case files and benefits current.

TREATMENT ADHERENCE SPECIALIST: works with clients to develop a plan to help them take medications on time.

HARM REDUCTION SPECIALIST: Alcohol, nicotine, and recreational drug use, can harm overall health as well as a body's ability to live with HIV. If clients are currently using any of these substances – and are not ready to stop using – the harm reduction specialist works with them to help find ways to reduce the harm – and can offer support to help clients get to a place where they are ready to reduce or eliminate substance use. Clients set their own pace.

THE CLIENT: is expected to actively participate in the development of a personal service plan; to stay in contact with their case manager as soon as possible of changes in situations such as income, address, telephone number, household composition, and the receipt of services or benefits from other sources; maintain Medicaid certification if the client is receiving services through the Comprehensive Medicaid Case Management program; work with the client's case manager and other support staff in a mutually respectful manner.

AIDS Community Resources offers a comprehensive array of support services for HIV+ consumers, families, and their partners. Bilingual services, offered in English and Spanish are provided at no cost to consumers.

ACR's dedicated case management team is highly knowledgeable in all areas of access to care. Case managers work one-to-one with HIV+ consumers to identify needs and link them with services: Primary Medical Care, Substance Abuse Treatment, Financial Benefits, Housing, Legal Assistance, Treatment Adherence, and Transportation.

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

Our clients are treated with dignity and respect. All information is confidential and services are provided in strict accordance with NYS HIV Confidentiality Law. They receive services in a reasonable and timely manner.

Servicios Bilingües de Manejo de Casos

AIDS Community Resources está comprometida a ayudar a los individuos que viven con el virus del VIH y SIDA, a sus familias, sus seres queridos y amigos. Trabajando por usted para identificar sus necesidades. El dedicado equipo de trabajadores de ACR proveerá continuo apoyo facilitando el acceso a los servicios que son específicos para usted, como: Cuidado de la Salud, Beneficios del gobierno, Servicios Médicos, asistencia de Vivienda, Transporte, Tratamiento, Adherencia y apoyo para el SIDA, referidos a Consejería de Salud mental, a Consejería de apoyo para Recuperación de Adicción, y apoyo social.

El equipo bilingüe de ACR es altamente conocedor en todas las áreas para la adquisición de cuidado. Con compromiso y sensibilidad, ellos trabajarán con usted, y su familia para identificar sus necesidades, dirigiéndolo a obtener servicios que usted necesita.

ACR ofrece servicios sin costo y completamente confidenciales.

OF AIDS COMMUNITY RESOURCES

ALISSA JEFFERSON VISCOME DIRECTOR OF SUPPORT SERVICES

Alissa Jefferson came to AIDS Community Resources in 2003 as a Case Manager in Oswego County. It was there she developed part of her credo about the public perception of AIDS: people in rural areas think AIDS is a big city problem; white, heterosexual couples often assume they are exempt; and New York State was very wise when it mandated HIV tests for pregnant women.

"Over the course of three years in Oswego, I served 24 clients," she said recently from behind her desk as Director of Support Services. "All of them were white, 75% of them were women, and most had no idea they were infected. Many of the women learned they were HIV positive because of the mandatory screening."

After her promotion, Alissa's "day" often extends into the evening as she supervises the work of 17 support services staff in 6 offices spread over 9 counties and annually serving 416 clients as well as their families. Despite long hours (and her recent marriage), Alissa Viscome said overseeing the work of others is easier than being a Case Manager. "Working with clients is the most difficult part of all of our jobs," she said and sighed. "And it is the most rewarding."

Keeping clients' lives stable and their health under control can be a juggling act for Case Managers, but it is vital work and a central part of the strategy to control the spread of HIV/AIDS. "We can have everything running smoothly and then things can change at the

drop of a hat," said Viscome. "Substance use is the hardest thing. Often clients want to move forward, but they just can't. They fall off the wagon, burn all their bridges, lose all their money, and then need help restoring balance."

There is no archetype for AIDS Community Resources' clients, and no blueprint for how to resolve their outstanding issues. Some clients struggle with one or more back-breaking issues: poverty, lack of housing, abandonment by friends or family once their HIV status is known, or drug and alcohol addiction. Other clients take to the HIV+ regimen with determination and self-control. All of them manage to find a place in a Case Manager's heart.

"The hardest part is when you lose a client, even if their behavior contributed to their death. You always think 'What if I tried harder?' And their families are left behind with regrets of their own. 'I never told him I loved him.' 'I am so sorry I threw him out of the house when I found out he had HIV.'"

AIDS Community Resources' role is to support those with HIV/AIDS; to keep them on their medications and in stable housing; to teach them how to prevent the spread of HIV to their loved ones; to transition them to a substance abuse-free life – one that lasts as long as possible. It's a strong testimony to the work of Alissa Viscome and her team that more than a quarter of our HIV+ clients are now over the age of 50.



Alissa and Josh Viscome.

SPANISH ONLY? NO PROBLEM.

Martha Rodriguez is Case Manager. Noemi De La Cruz is a Case Management Technician. Together they advocate, support, and help remove hurdles for Spanish speaking consumers of AIDS Community Resources.

MARTHA: The language barrier is huge. I have experienced many instances where a consumer needs assistance to communicate with a psychiatrist, mental health counselor or physician, the consumer does not speak English and I must be there to interpret. I realize that there is not enough privacy for the consumer, but the hospitals have not enough bilingual/bicultural health and mental health professionals and the consumers wants me there to help.

NOEMI: Bilingual case management is important since the highest rate of new infections is in the communities of color - African-Americans and Latinos. Some Latinos are more comfortable speaking in Spanish even if they do understand English. When they are given the option to speak in either language and still be completely understood, it brings them to a new comfort level.

MARTHA: Most of the time I wear many hats. I provide support and advocacy for all my consumers; I assist monolingual consumers in translating and interpreting services as needed. My clients and I develop a service plan based on their own needs and when they follow the plan it makes a big difference in their lives.

NOEMI: We help our consumers find the route to the solution to their needs. For example if the client does not have income we help them apply for public assistance and/or social security and advocate to help them get approved for these benefits.

MARTHA: The Latino community is growing as well as their needs and as Service Providers we need to be more sensitive to diversity. I question the lack of support that the non-English speaking community faces. It is my hope that Service Providers acknowledge the need for more bilingual/bicultural professionals to assist our community at large.

NOEMI: It's very difficult since after receiving an HIV+ diagnosis many people have trouble dealing with their changed circumstances. It's hard to find support if they cannot speak the same language. It's hard to communicate that they are having issues dealing with the diagnosis if there is a language barrier.

MARTHA: I have been in situations where the consumer is unable to communicate with physicians. When you are in a country that is not yours with a different culture, an unknown language, and so sick that it is difficult to think about what is wrong, where do you start with a doctor? As their Case Manager I become their voices and inform their physicians what is wrong.

NOEMI: I like being a source of support for the clients. Many of our clients do not have a support system at home and they look to us to help them. For most people we are the bright lights at the end of a dark tunnel.

MARTHA: It is difficult to say why I love to help people, but being Latina, bilingual and having good people skills it is my duty to make a difference helping our community members in need.





TAKING PRIDE

Behavior change isn't easy, but in June it can be fun. GLBT/MSM Coordinator Bob Forbes is a Behavioral Change Specialist tasked with convincing MSM to use condoms at every sexual encounter. That message is delivered in June through Pride Festivals and Parades in Syracuse and Utica.

HIV transmission patterns have changed over time. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation 65% of new HIV infections in 1985 were in men who have sex with men. Because of education and increased condom use that dropped to 43% in 2005. In recent years, the number of HIV infections in young MSM is creeping back up and Behavioral Change Specialists like Bob are redoubling their efforts.

June was a month of celebrations for the GLBT programs at AIDS Community Resources. CONNECT



CONNECT friends and supporters with the PRIDE float in downtown Syracuse parade.

and Utica ACR programs participated in Mohawk Valley Pride on June 2nd. The following weekend, Q Center and CONNECT were both present at CNY Pride festival and parade in Syracuse.

CONNECT's Brother 2 Brother group hosted a community Pride Sizzler at X Bar on Sunday June 10th. The event Featured DJ Show Case and lots of great food prepared by members of the Brothers group. This was the first event for the Brother 2 Brother group and it will definitely not be the last. Brother 2 Brother is steadily building trust within the community about the program. Many of the brothers feel the need for a safe space to be real about themselves and impact they can have on reaching others African American MSM.

The Brother 2 Brother group is a group on African Americans that identify as Gay Bi or DL who are building a safer community with awareness, education and reaching out to members of their community. Brother 2 Brother Group meets at least twice a month. Get CONNECTed with the Brothers at brthrs2brthrsgrp@yahoo.com.

Bob Forbes



June 10th, Syracuse: Some members of Brother 2 Brother along with their supporters at the Pride Sizzler at X Bar.

THE POSTER CHILD

The focus of the photograph is a trim woman with curly blond hair, exuding confidence as she strolls about campus. From her picture on the University College recruitment poster, AIDS Community Resources' new Administrative Assistant Deborah Scott looks more

like a regular student than one returning to school after many years away. Part of her confidence came when one of her biggest apprehensions about returning to school – disparity of age and life experience - turned out to be a major advantage, not a disadvantage while in class with younger students.



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college's transfer day.

Deborah L. Scott's degree is a Bachelor of Professional Studies in Organizational Leadership. Study focused on the development of tools and skills required of leaders in a professional and changing work environment. Photograph by John Dowling.

"Often," Debbie said, "a professor would ask if the class remembered something from the news and the professor and I would be the only ones old enough to recall." Her life and work experiences were a tremendous benefit, but that is something she says the non-traditional students would kind of keep to themselves. "The worst were the dreaded team projects. Imagine being in a project group of students aged 19 with very limited skills and experiences." Group topics usually reflected their age, and did not hold much interest for the older and wiser Debbie. "I found that either they expected me to take charge and do it all, or they were defensive," she explained. "I managed to make it through my courses being well-liked by the students so I must have done something okay!"

Debbie's dream had always been to attend Syracuse University and earn her Bachelor's Degree. This divorced mother of two understood that to remain competitive in both her prior position (also with a not-for-profit agency), and in the job market, she needed a four year degree. She had earned an AAS in math and science from Cayuga Community College right after high school.

Debbie was very concerned about the cost of attending Syracuse University. "The financial aid director assured me it would work, and it did," Debbie said. "So I was assigned an advisor and in January of 2004 found myself saying, 'wow, I am really here!'" After a couple of semesters of consistent good grades, she received scholarships and grant opportunities. She took six credit hours each semester, including summers, and graduated on May 13th, 2007.

When she started at Syracuse University

Continued on next page

MOHAWK VALLEY HIV TESTING DAY

June 27th was so hot and humid AIDS Community Resources testers and volunteers were surprised when people waited in line to be tested. Why? "Most people said they just wanted to know," said Alexx Plevritis, Transition Case Manager for AIDS Community Resources.

Some people are scared and nervous when they finally decide to get tested. Some have partners who are positive and they know they need to keep close tabs on their health. Others have heard an HIV 101 presentation and something triggered a memory and they realized they need a test.

"I've had people hug me, they were so glad to know their HIV test was negative," said Alexx Plevritis. "I always remind them of the window period." The Centers for Disease Control says it can take as long as three months for the HIV virus to multiply to a level where it can be detected. "Unless a person has

abstained from any risky behavior for the past three months, a negative HIV test is not a clean bill of health. It means that as of 90 days ago, they were HIV negative." If they have doubts, they need to eliminate risks and return later for a new HIV test.



Alexx Plevritis trying to cool off on a hot testing day.

Poster Child *Continued*

Debbie and her two children, Mike and Kim, were all college juniors. Mike has since earned his Bachelor's Degree from Niagara University thanks to a "Green to Gold Scholarship" he was awarded by the US Army. He is married, a 1st Lieutenant and recently returned home from Iraq. He is stationed at Fort Lewis, Washington. Debbie's daughter, Kim, is a graduate student at Syracuse University earning her Master's in Social Work. She has a four year degree in Psychology from Le Moyne College.

While the entire university experience awed and amazed Debbie, the best came last. She was selected the University College 2007 Class Marshal. She was named to the commencement speaker selection committee. She dined with the Deans, fellow Marshals, and Chancellor Cantor. She posed for the poster and other publications that are used to recruit non-traditional students to University College. "As graduation loomed nearer, I was told that I had been selected as an Alumni Scholar in recognition of my GPA of 3.85. And, that I was selected as University College Student Speaker!"

On May 10th, as Marshal, she led the academic procession into Hendrick's Chapel for the convocation. She was seated on stage with the College Deans, the

Chancellor and Vice Chancellor and Provost. "After I gave my speech, I turned around and was surprised to see everyone on their feet! I never expected a standing ovation!! It was very heartwarming and special."

On Commencement Day Debbie found herself choking back tears as she moved her tassel from right to left. It was what she'd been working toward all these years, but leaving a place she loved touched her heart.

Now Debbie sits comfortably at a desk across the hall from AIDS Community Resources' Deputy Executive Director, Rick Priebe. "Deb's skills and experience are a welcome support to the agency's management team," Priebe said. "ACR is fortunate to have found someone of Deb's caliber who can not only assist in the program area, but in the finance and human resources areas as well."

"I like to say that I embraced University College and they embraced me right back," Debbie said, happy to be at an agency that values her newly acquired skills. "To anyone thinking about returning to college to pursue a degree, I say, just do it! Give to and of yourself. Your efforts will come back to you tenfold."

\$500 CLUB SALUTE

AIDS Community Resources raised a record amount of money at its 15th Annual AIDS Walk/Run in June - **\$157,167**. On Saturday, July 28, AIDS Community Resources and Outback Steakhouse in Clay treated the top 63 fundraisers to food and prizes to thank them for a job well done.

The 63 are members of the \$500 Club – people who collected \$500 or more to benefit AIDS Community Resources' work in Central New York. Some fundraisers far exceeded that \$500 threshold. Two teams, for instance, raised more than \$11,000 each.

All of the money raised at the AIDS Walk/Run stays in Central New York where it is used for youth HIV prevention and education programs, and for emergency client services not covered by government funds.

Greg's Rainbow Team raised more than \$2,500 in the AIDS Walk/Run. The extended family walks in honor of Greg Coughlin who died in 2002 at age 31.



ACR Board President Andrew London, left, and his partner Alan E. Curle, M.D., enjoy the day with ACR \$500 Club members and sponsors.

Carrie Large of ACR with Dave Mevoli Sales Manager of T. J. Sheehan Distributing. "He supports AIDS Community Resources in so many ways: sponsor of the AIDS Walk/Run, raffle prizes, the kick-off and post parties and the fantastic "Meet-n-Greet Dale Earnhardt, Jr." package.



THANK YOU, M&T BANK

M&T Bank gave a great boost to the Teen AIDS Task Force and the young people it serves with a check for \$3,500. Thank you, M&T for this donation and your continued support for AIDS Community Resources.



(left to right) Rick Priebe, ACR Deputy Executive Director; Shawn Dwello, M&T Branch Manager 2100 Park Street; Wenona Wake, Director of Prevention Services; Jodee LaCelle, M&T Vice President, CNY Business & Professional Banking.

AND THE WINNER IS....

Rick Fitzgerald and his wife Tina are the proud owners of two Dale Earnhardt, Jr. Meet and Greet Passes, two NASCAR Nextel Cup at the Glen tickets (August 12th) and two VIP Passes! Fitzgerald is a diehard NASCAR fan. He loves anything with wheels – he's used a wheelchair all his life. The two will be accompanied to Watkins Glen with Jerri, their longtime caregiver.

Donate Your Time

*Just a few hours a week can
make a HUGE difference!*

Immediate Opportunities

- Volunteers are needed to assist staff with **routine filing** as they advocate for those living with HIV and AIDS.
- Volunteers are needed to be the friendly face or voice that greets the public by **answering phones** for a 10 person office and greeting office visitors at AIDS Community Resources in Utica.
- Ease the challenges of every day life for someone living with HIV/AIDS.

Be a Buddy Volunteer:

- Offer some moral and social support.
- Provide transportation to the store to help people stretch their money.
- Be a friend to talk to.
- Flexible hours

- **Requirements:** A commitment to **confidentiality** is a must, completion of a Volunteer Application, Interview, 3 and a 1/2-hour volunteer orientation and office orientation. In addition, Buddy volunteers must have a background check, current driver's license and insurance card on file and complete an additional 2-hour orientation.
- People 55+ can become members of RSVP (Retired & Senior Volunteer Program) and get assistance with partial mileage reimbursement to a volunteer sight (i.e. ACR) as well as supplemental liability insurance if transporting a client and on the job accident insurance. It's an opportunity to join hundreds of seniors across the country making a difference.



For more information and to sign up for training offered once a month,

call 793-0661 or

email rbsmith@aidcommunityresources.com

AIDS Community Resources, Inc.

401 Columbia St.

Utica, New York 13502



AIDS Community Resources
A Multicultural AIDS Service Agency

627 West Genesee Street
Syracuse, New York 13204

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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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**IF YOU WISH TO SUBSCRIBE OR UNSUBSCRIBE FROM THE
ACR NEWSLETTER, CONTACT US AT:**

800.475.2430	Or: mail in the back page of this newsletter to:	AIDS Community Resources 627 West Genesee Street Syracuse, NY 13204
Or: information@aidscommunityresources.com		

UPCOMING EVENTS

August 12 – 18
Empire State AIDS Ride 5 – 560-mile bicycle ride from Niagara Falls to New York City. Join the ACR Spokes Team! Call Carrie at 800.475.2430.

August 21, 2007
CONNECT HIV Testing at Clinton Street Spa, 321 Clinton Street, Syracuse from 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

August 26, 2007
“Drag” out a Cause – a benefit for AIDS Community Resources at 6:00 p.m. at Clueless Night Club, 123 Arsenal Street, Watertown.

October 14, 2007
8th Annual First Frost AIDS Walk – a 5K fundraising walk at New York State Zoo at Thompson Park in Watertown. www.AIDSwalkcny.com

November – December 2007
Holiday Angel Collections

December 1, 2007
World AIDS Day – This year’s theme is Leadership.

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
Transgender (ages 14-24): 1st and 3rd Wednesdays, 5:30 – 7:00
Steppin’ Out (ages 19-22): Thursdays, 7:00-9:00

For location and further information: lgbtqyouthcenter@aidscommunityresources.com

UTICA YOUTH GROUP:

Sundays from 4 p.m. – 6 p.m.

For locations and further information, contact Mary Doody at 800.475.2430.

TREATMENT ADHERENCE GROUPS:

Alternate Tuesdays in Utica; Alternate Wednesdays in Syracuse
800.475.2430