

27^{Years} AIDS Community Resources



Viewpoint

By Michael Crinnin
Executive Director



As summer was winding down, the Governor signed into law the *Dignity For All Students Act*. While its provisions are many, it is essentially an anti-bullying piece of legislation that, as indicated, excludes no students from the protection of law, in the face of verbal and physical harassment/violence. Some anti-bullying legislation across the country, as it turns out, goes out of its way *not* to include students who identify as gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered (GLBT) – an omission particularly heinous and agenda driven, as a disproportionate number of GLBT kids are the object of persistent and pervasive bullying during the course of their school day/careers.

This gubernatorial signature was, of course, good news, but left me in a state more 'fatigued' than pleased. On that same day I was notified that one of our *Teen AIDS Task Force (TATF)* members had committed suicide. He was a popular long-term participant, well known and well liked; smiling engaged photos of him abound on his Facebook page. Staff who worked with him were inconsolable. As it happens, he had 'come out' as gay near the end of the last school year, and quickly found himself the object of the aforementioned harassment.

I'm in no position to tell you that one thing led to the other, but I'm pretty confident the abuse he suffered at school was, at the very least, painful, frightening, isolating, and discouraging.

We are not accustomed to teens in our programs committing suicide. We figure, naively in this case, that if young people are involved in one of our programs they're pretty much 'home-safe' - connected positively with

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

How can we ever say thank you? a young mother asked as she inspected lovely gifts to her children from total strangers. Read her Story on page 4...



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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Executive Director

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AIDS Hotline
1.888.475.AIDS (2437)

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
34 Wright Avenue
Auburn, NY 13021
315.282.0005 • Fax 315.282.0002

ACR in Oswego
10 George St.
Oswego, NY 13126
315.343.7778 • Fax 315.343.4663

Newsletter Editor
Jean Kessner

Jazzing up street outreach

ACR's Safety First Outreach Team was in familiar territory – Syracuse neighborhoods – but with a jazzy new way to meet people and spread the HIV prevention message. The team took the Safety First mobile unit to four “Jazz in the City” concerts in different sections of Syracuse during August. “It was a wonderful way to get out, meet people, enjoy music, and get the job done,” said Layonda Smith-Reyes, supervisor of ACR's new Women's Initiative. Layonda was busy recruiting women for *Time Out! For Me*, a six-session intervention designed to reduce women's risk for the acquisition of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. “Jazz in the City” delivered – she has a waiting list of 50 names.

Outreach team members, who specialize in working with substance users, say they also had expanded opportunities to interact with people they hadn't previously met. They made good contacts and engaged concert-goers in conversations about safety and harm reduction.

AIDS Community Resources was a proud sponsor of “Jazz in the City.” “With great music and food (both plentiful and free) what better way to reach people who could benefit from our prevention information?” said ACR Executive Director, Michael Crinnin. “People are out in their neighborhoods, often the same neighborhoods we visit weekly, having a good time and open to our message – magic.”

If you would like to know more about Time Out! For Me in Syracuse or Utica, call 800.475.2430.



ACR's GET TESTED banner hangs alongside those of other “Jazz in the City” sponsors.



Larry Luttinger, Executive Director, CNY Jazz Arts Foundation with ACR Executive Director, Michael Crinnin. ACR joined a number of other community organizations sponsoring Jazz in the City 2010.



Layonda Smith-Reyes, Women's Initiative Supervisor, left, enjoys the music and interaction with the public. To her right is Prevention Outreach Specialist Tara Brown.

OUR MISSION

The Mission of AIDS Community Resources is three-fold:

- To prevent the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases;
- To provide support services to those who are living with HIV/AIDS; and
- To promote sexual literacy and improved medical outcomes.

an informed and caring adult educator and with a similarly supportive and informed peer group. The forces working against GLBTQ kids feeling 'ok' about themselves however, are far more pervasive and unrelenting.

I can't get through a drive to the office these days without hearing some 'Christian' conservative or Tea Party spokesperson decry the immorality of 'gay marriage' or listening to John McCain vow to keep "Don't Ask Don't Tell" from even being debated on the Senate floor...! "What's it like for a kid", I wonder, "as s/he watches the news with his/her parents and/or listens to the radio while being driven to the mall/school – especially a GLBT kid...? What's it like to know a career in the military is not the cards for you – no matter your patriotism, or in the church, or the Boy Scouts...?! What's it like when the 'good news' is that there are occasional pockets of respite for you in a culture where your worth – your right to be - are routinely and publicly discussed and challenged – in the name of decency – in the name of God – in the name of "unit cohesiveness and military preparedness...?"

Oh yeah, then there is the daily, 'in your face'/Facebook bullying at school...

That feeling of 'bill-signing-fatigue': maybe it was a cover for the deep sadness and tears I know are buried somewhere...? Maybe it was about having to face, again and again, how powerful the forces of intentional ignorance and hate remain...? Maybe it was from a long bout of 'What if's': what if the bill had been signed last year- or 5 years ago...? What if his school had a clearly articulated and strictly enforced anti bullying policy...? What if his school and our community proudly celebrated his self-discovery and 'diversity'? What if there was never a need for laws to protect kids in school from hate words and actions...?"

My immediate/spontaneous 'fatigued' thought of, "Rest in peace", in the face of such a tormented choice, was only half the prayer worth uttering... and so I add, "May those of us living forfeit a bit of our own comfort until dignity for all students/young people is the norm and not just the law. Amen."

Michael L.



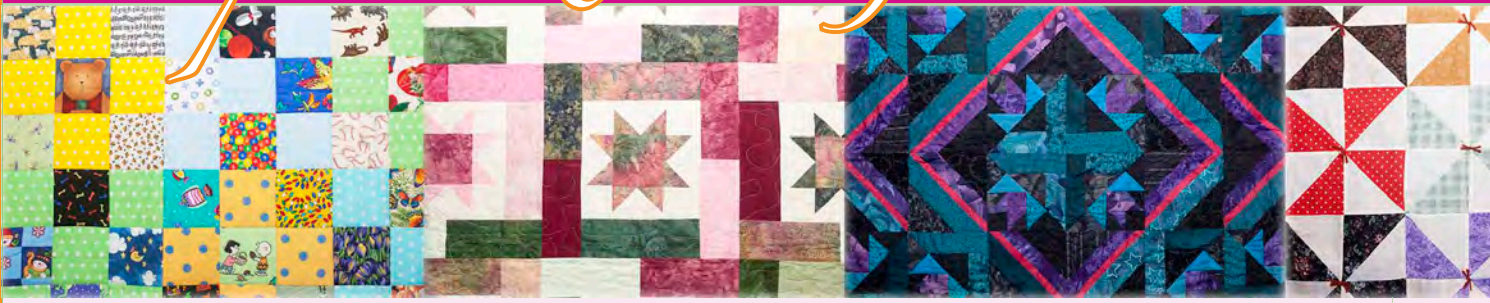
ACR notes passing of two clients

To help refute the public perception that AIDS has been tamed, we make note now of the passing of two of those under our care. Strict confidentiality laws stay in force even after death, so we don't share the usual information, like full names, dates of birth, and survivors left behind. But we know their names, and their stories, and news of their passing hits hard.

Steven, a 55-year-old Cayuga County resident, was serious about getting healthy and staying healthy. He was making great strides in the months before he passed away in bringing his viral load numbers down. Steven never failed to greet his case manager with an exuberant welcome and enthusiastically told everyone that angels had sent him to AIDS Community Resources. His case manager describes him as a Southern Gentleman who always took time to write her thank you notes expressing his appreciation for her work and that of ACR. He died unexpectedly.

In Onondaga County, 43-year-old Steven had recently returned to AIDS Community Resources after years away. For some time he had stopped taking his medications and otherwise being careful about his health. Beginning this past April, he turned a corner, returned to case management, and worked hard to recover from heart complications due to his HIV. "Determination to get better is key, and he was very engaged," said his Case Manager, Joe Abbott. But, weighing less than a hundred pounds, Steven failed to negotiate the long road back to health. He was found dead in his apartment in June.

Towpath Quilt Guild donates



The 112 members of the Towpath Quilt Guild invested countless hours in a wonderful, creative, and generous undertaking that has left AIDS Community Resources awestruck. The Guild's enterprise began last January when it designated ACR as recipient for its 2010 Service Project. Individual members promptly set out to design, create, and perfect a total of 100 quilts to be used as gifts for ACR consumers and their families.

The results were absolutely stunning. "Anyone can buy a blanket, and we are always grateful," said Alissa Viscome, Director of Support Services, "but to receive a one-of-a-kind gift made just for you is the kind of special thing that seldom happens for our families." Service Project Co-Chair Angela Maroun says quilts are like loving arms surrounding someone as they take a nap or slide into a warm comfortable sleep. "We know that your families can be stressed."

The first of the quilts were delivered to the home of Shannon Brown and her six children. Their Utica apartment was clean, but sparsely furnished. The youngest children were curious about the blankets stacked on the kitchen table, but hung back shyly before reaching out to touch the handmade blankets decorated with cartoon characters, lady bugs, lambs, and baseballs. Smiling slightly, the children couldn't quite believe these pretty things were something they could keep.



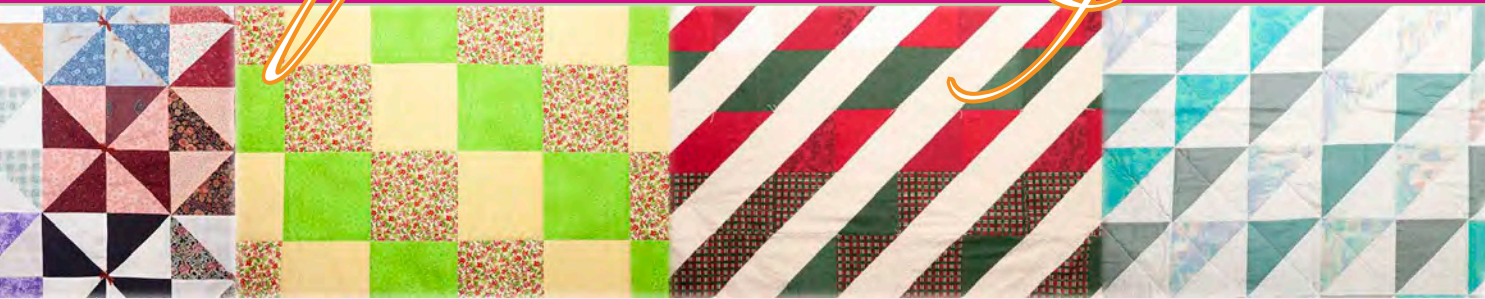
6-year-old Michael selected a quilt with a sports theme.



5-year-old Nevaeh chose a soft and cuddly quilt.



100 quilts to ACR families



Their mother Shannon is a strong woman who never asks for anything, yet is immensely appreciative when anything good comes her way. Earlier this year she started on HIV medication and has struggled on many levels - emotionally, financially, and physically with HIV, but she "keeps it together," her case manager says, "for her children."

Sitting quietly on the sofa, 6-year-old Michael snuggled in his chosen baseball quilt as Nevaeh leaned against her mom. "How can we ever thank you," Shannon asked. "These are so beautiful and my children need them so much. How can we thank you?"

It had been a very good day; exactly the kind of day the Guild hoped for last winter when the project started.

Quilting is about giving and companionship, says Guild Service Project Chair, Jane Tracy. "The artistry is as much in the conversation and friendship as it is in the final product." She described her fellow quilters as the friendliest and most loving women she has ever met. "I don't think anyone ever comes to this group and goes home lonely."

"I feel remarkably like Shannon Brown's children," said ACR's Alissa Viscome. "The Guild could have selected anyone, and they chose us." AIDS isn't a warm and fuzzy diagnosis; people who have it are often stigmatized and rejected. When the Towpath Quilt Guild chose ACR families it was like being "surrounded by loving arms."



Jane Tracy, Towpath Quilt Guild 2010 Service Project Chair, Alissa Viscome ACR Director of Support Services, Angela Maroun, 2010 Service Project Co-Chair.



Shannon Brown, center, with Nevaeh, left, and Michael. Shannon's six children were among the first to receive quilts from the Towpath Quilt Guild.

AIDS Community Resources will distribute the majority of the quilts as Holiday Angel gifts in December.



Sign up today for the **First Frost AIDS Walk/Run!**



ACR Development Associate Justin Lynch, St Lawrence University, class of 2008, has embraced the First Frost AIDS Walk/Run as his special project. Justin held a contest on Facebook to get people talking about the North Country fundraiser for AIDS Community Resources. Social media is a great way to get people to interact with our agency. "Not just for the fun stuff, like the First Frost," Justin said, "but for important information about how to stay safe from HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. We're the experts!"

Become a fan of AIDS Community Resources on **facebook** and register online today at www.AIDSwalkC-NY.com for the First Frost AIDS Walk/Run to be held October 17, 2010 at the New York State Zoo Thompson Park in Watertown. See you there!



New Q Center program to reach school dropouts and homeless youth

"New Horizons" is a new, Q Center initiative to reach lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) young people ages 14-19 who are no longer regularly attending school, who may be at high risk for dropping out of school, or who are not consistently living in their family home, may be at risk for homelessness or who have been living in institutional settings.

"The Q Center's existing Youth Group is geared toward helping teens navigate their home and school relationships," said Q Center Director Dr. Elizabeth Payne. "For kids who have already dropped out or who are already on the street, they need opportunities and support to set new goals for themselves and to move forward in a productive way toward adulthood. New Horizons will provide these young people with that support."

New Horizons will be tailored to the needs of the youth who attend. It will include drop-in hours every Wednesday 3:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. to use the cyber-center and receive adult support, as well as a youth group that will meet on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of the month, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Life skills, health information, education and job support, social opportunities, an evening meal, support for developing a healthy LGBTQ identity, GED preparation and HIV testing will be provided through the program. For more information about the program, contact the Q Center @ ACR 315-701-2431.



Though LGBTQ young people comprise only 10% of the adolescent population, nationally they account for 42% of homeless youth and are more than three times as likely as their heterosexual peers to have dropped out of school.

ACR mourns the passing of a true friend

Longtime supporter and member of the AIDS Community Resources family, 42-year-old Alan P. Nower of Earlville, NY passed away on Thursday, July 8, 2010. Mr. Nower was often the top individual fundraiser at the AIDS Hike for Life, collecting thousands of dollars to help people of the Mohawk Valley educate and protect themselves from HIV and AIDS. The money raised also helps ACR improve the quality of life of many living with the illness. In interviews with Mohawk Valley news organizations, Mr. Nower talked about the AIDS Hike for Life as a wonderful place for people who care about HIV/AIDS to support the cause. He was one of many who walked in memory of friends, relatives, or co-workers who died from AIDS.



April, 25, 2010, Clinton ~ Alan Nower, top individual fundraiser for the AIDS Hike for Life, and his sister Cynthia Lewis.

New at ACR: Women's Advocates

In July, we told you about ACR's new Women's Initiative - a New York State Department of Health program to reduce HIV and other sexually transmitted infections in women in the Central, Northern, and Mohawk Valley regions of New York State. Now, meet the Women's Advocates.



AIDS risk spreading to all populations

Women account for 27% of HIV cases overall, but comprise nearly half, 47%, of AIDS Community Resources consumers. According to the New York State Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control:

- New York has 22,532 women/girls living with AIDS - the highest of any state.
- Nationally, 27% of all HIV infections are in women, yet 66% of AIDS cases are in Black women, yet they represent only 12% of the overall population.
- HIV was the third leading cause of death of Black women ages 25-44 (2006).

ACR's Women's Advocates, pictured right to left: **Layonda Smith-Reyes**, right, Women's Initiative Supervisor, is a 2nd Lieutenant in the United States Army Reserve, 344th Combat Hospital and has a Masters of Professional Studies (Human Resources) from Stony Brook University. Bilingual in Spanish, her civilian work experience includes program management with the Arc Oneida-Lewis NYSARC Chapter.

Megan Lee, Women's Advocate for Syracuse, spent time in Haiti addressing issues of domestic violence and economic opportunity. Megan also participated in delivering health services and encouraging HIV/AIDS testing for pregnant women in the remote areas of Haiti through a mobile unit. She speaks some French and Haitian Creole and has degrees in Anthropology and English.

Jennifer Bahr, Women's Advocate for Watertown, comes to ACR from The Salvation Army where she was a Mental Health Resident Manager at a 15-bed shelter. She has world wide experience working with homeless women, many with substance abuse and infectious diseases such as HIV and hepatitis; directing the care of people with mental illness and children with autism. As a DC-3 Pilot she delivered food, clothing, and medicine to children, adolescents, and adults. She is presently studying for a degree in Human Services at Columbia College.

Michelle Murray, Women's Advocate for Utica, has two Masters Degrees: in Science, Education Administration and Policy Studies; and in Arts in Women's Studies from the State University of New York University at Albany. In her work with Rape Crisis Services, she provided crisis counseling, legal and personal advocacy, and education to victims of sexual and physical violence often from disclosure through prosecution.



627 West Genesee Street
Syracuse, New York 13204

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:
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UPCOMING EVENTS

October 17, 2010

11th Annual First Frost AIDS Walk/Run
5K fundraising walk and 5K timed run at Thompson Park in Watertown. www.AIDSwalkCNY.com

October 28, 2010

9th Annual "A Time to Remember" Conversations of Color
A fundraising cocktail party and art auction at Stanley Center for the Arts, 261 Genesee Street, Utica. \$50 per person or \$75 for two. 800.475.2430 to reserve.

November 17, 2010

ACR Holiday Open House
4:30 – 6:30 p.m., 627 West Genesee Street, Syracuse

December 1, 2010

World AIDS Day
Remembrance service at 7:30 a.m. at LeMoyn College's Panasci Chapel.

November - December 2010

Holiday Angels
Join us as we brighten the holiday season for those affected by HIV and AIDS by providing needed items for our clients. Call 800.475.2430 for more information.

November - December 2010

2010 Commemorative Holiday Ornament
Collector's Edition with a 24 kt gold finish titled "Sometimes life needs a little push," a stunning design of a child's sled with gifts on board. Call 800.475.2430.

Follow us on:



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.
 - TRANSYOUTH [ages 14-24]: 1st Wednesday, 5:30-7:30 p.m.
 - STEPPIN' OUT [ages 19-22]: Thursdays, 7:00-9:00 p.m.
 - NEW HORIZONS [ages 14-19]: 2nd & 4th Wednesdays, 6:00-8:00 p.m.
 - CONVERSATIONS OF COLOR [ages 19-22]: 3rd Wednesday, 4:00-6:00 p.m.
- For location and further information: qccenter@AIDSCommunityResources.com

UTICA LGBTQ YOUTH GROUP:

Thursdays 6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.
For locations and further information, contact Mary Doody at 315.701.2422
glbtqyouth@AIDSCommunityResources.com

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