



# 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



September 2007

# Viewpoint

by Michael Crinnin

A couple of folks sent me the notice of Governor Spitzer's refusal to accept Federal funding for 'abstinence only' sex education programs, suggesting I might want to comment on his decision. Allow me...

In case you missed the announcement, the NY State Dept of Health cancelled all existing Federal abstinence-only sex education contracts set to begin Oct.1st: the plan being a redirecting of existing State funds to programs that offer comprehensive sex education. With this decision, New York joins a growing list of States who see no value in programs that restrict sex education messages to only promoting abstinence.

In other words the State will support programs that do teach abstinence, but these will be programs that also include a much broader promotion of sexual health information, encouraging wise and safe decision making when it comes to sexual activity. (Trust me, in our experience, if teens are not already engaging in sexual behavior they are definitely considering it. One need only go into a student assembly – something we've done – and ask how many have friends who are having sex: a sea of hands wave back at you...!).

Reflecting on our peer driven, Teen AIDS Task Force initiative (based in high schools, middle schools and 'alternative-to-school' programs), it is not unusual for parents and educators to be uncertain, critical, and confused about TATF's perspective. We clearly state that our educational presentations to students will be abstinence based, but will not be abstinence only.... For some reason however (weird synaptic firings in the brain...?) this takes numerous repetitions and explanations... ACR and its TATF Program are not 'anti' abstinence! We are however pro 'all the facts to keep you healthy'. We view abstinence as one significant piece of the comprehensive sex education picture/puzzle.

While I'm at it, we are not in the business of promoting teen sexual activity. We do however acknowledge its reality and want to make sure that no young person will jeopardize his or her health should they make choices other than abstinence.

Do I think it's a good move on the Governor's part? Absolutely. Few gestures send a clearer message in our culture than turning down money. People sit up and take notice when a cashed strapped State says "No thanks" to nice new notes...

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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

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Jean Kessner

# Giving Love and Comfort

by Laurel Hammond-Owens

I was first introduced to AIDS Community Resources back in 1991, when the Agency went by the name AIDS Task Force (ATF) of Central New York. My brother, young, vibrant, and loved more than I could ever tell you, informed me that he was HIV positive. He did not live locally, and shortly after telling my sisters and me about his diagnosis, he flew back home to Seattle. I was devastated to say the least. I called ATF and asked for information about AIDS because I needed to know as much as I could about his prognosis. At the time, they



Tom and Laurel

offered a "Family, Partners & Friends" support group for those affected by this debilitating and ultimately deadly virus. I told my sisters and my parents about it, but no one wanted to talk about it amongst ourselves, let alone with strangers, so I started attending meetings on my own. I cannot even begin to tell you how much those meetings came to mean to me. Being brought up in an old school Catholic family – the shame and embarrassment that my birth family felt over my brothers' diagnosis was crushing me. To finally be among people who not only had the same questions, fears and pain that I felt – but to also be able to talk freely and comfortably about myself, my brother and everything that I was trying to deal with was exactly what I so desperately needed at the time! I did not feel so alone

with my grief and my fear anymore – there were others going through the same thing – and we were all there for each other.

Fast-forward 15 years later and I am back at the agency, completing an internship for my Human Services degree. The AIDS Task Force of 1991 showed me that I

had so much in common with others in my community and it gave me support at a time when I needed it the most. AIDS Community Resources of 2007 has shown me the caring, committed professionals who serve this community on a daily basis and has helped to educate me

– not only about AIDS – but also about the people it serves. None of us will ever know when or why we may need the services of a community agency, but knowing that it is there when we do need it is both comforting and beneficial to all.

I do not get to volunteer very often, working and raising a family. However, it is so important to me to do what I can

*"I did not feel so alone with my grief and fear anymore."*

when I can to help this particular agency and all of the good that it does in our community. Human Service Agencies have taken a hard hit over the past 6

years and we all need to pitch in a little more if we want to make a difference – in both our own little piece of the world and within ourselves. The old adage really is true – it IS so much better to give than to receive!

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Despite its cost to the State, from all angles it's the right thing to do. The decision to interrupt programs that teach only one part of a strategy to keep teens safe and healthy is based on common sense, consistent data, and compassion for the welfare of young people. Study after study concludes that when it comes to teen sexual experimentation the 'abstinence only' message does not work. "Just say no to drugs" was/is a painful example of another dogmatic message failing to change behavior.

Youth workers out there, you need to back me up on this.... If you want to fast track young people to rebellion, all adults in authority have to do is rely on the tried and true, "Off limits to you", proclamation. The plans to circumvent such decrees are under way before the next breath is taken.

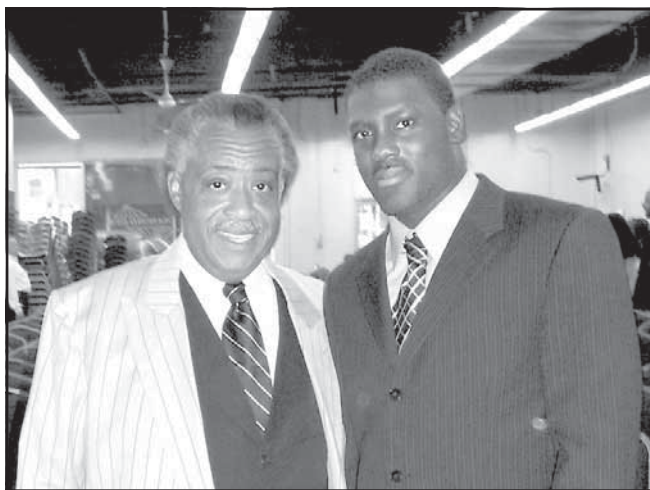
Young people are often impulsive but they're not stupid. They know when someone is

trying to sell them a bill of goods. They want straight forward information and discussion with adults, especially with those adults who control important aspects of their lives (teachers and parents), and especially if they sense prohibitions are on the way. In too many homes and classrooms such frank discussion never happens. We see the results in teen pregnancies and rising STD rates.

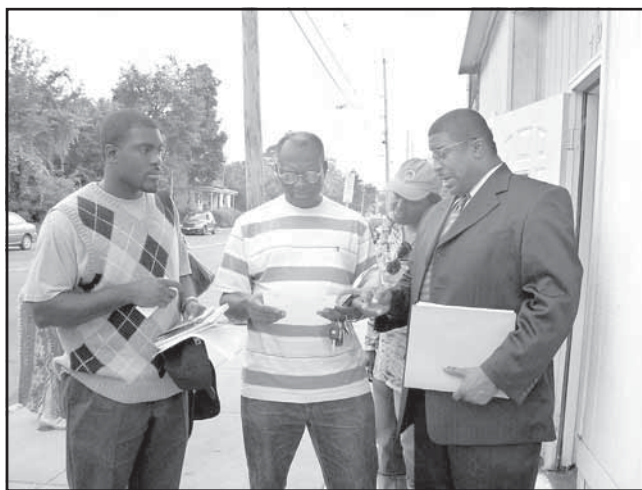
Let's be grateful that New York State has put aside money for principle. Every now and then government gives us something to be proud of. This is one of those times.... I keep thinking about all those waving hands....

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## *Keep an Eye on Chris!*



*August 18, 2007, Harlem: ACR's Communities of Color Coordinator Christopher Doctor meets with The Reverend Al Sharpton at National Action Network headquarters. Doctor was attending NAN's New York State conference to network with Clergy throughout the state.*



*September 8, 2007, Syracuse: Doctor putting his new knowledge to work at a meeting of the Central New York chapter of the National Action Network. Christopher Doctor photographed with Greg Egbuna of the Dunbar Center and Walt Dixie, local NAN leader.*

National Action Network (NAN) is a social and activist-oriented organization that was conceived with a focus on action. With the word "National" representing the scope of our activities, and "Network" reflecting the methodology of expansion, the National Action Network is based in New York City, with 35 national chapters within the United States.

## Mohawk Valley: United in Faith and Wellness



HIV has become a powerful threat to minority communities. The HOPE Alliance of AIDS Community Resources is responding in the Mohawk Valley with events like "United in Faith and Wellness" held on September 8th at the Radisson in Utica. Nearly 100 Mohawk Valley residents turned out to hear Marlene Taylor, a physician's assistant who specializes in treating AIDS patients at North General Hospital in Harlem.

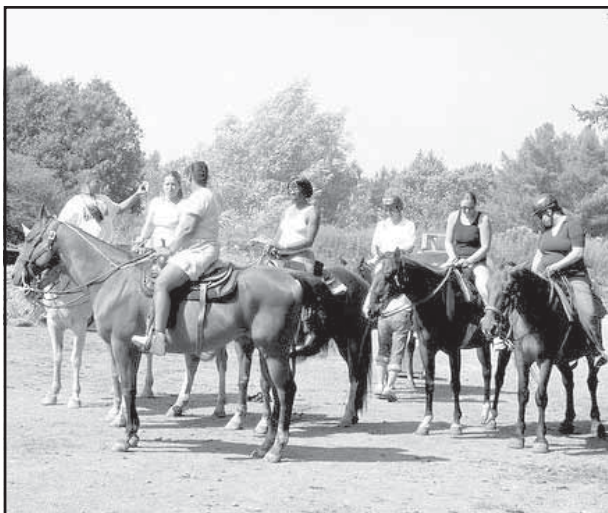
Many diseases disproportionately affect communities of color and HIV/AIDS has a particularly devastating effect. At every stage – from HIV diagnosis through the death of persons with AIDS – the hardest-hit racial or ethnic group is African Americans. **Although Black teens (aged 13-19) represent less than 16% of U.S. teenagers, they account for 69% of new AIDS cases in teens in 2004.** Overall, one half of the estimated new numbers of HIV/AIDS diagnoses in the United States in 2004 were for African Americans.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic is a serious threat to the Hispanic community. In addition to being a population seriously affected by HIV, Hispanics continue to face challenges in accessing health care, prevention services, and treatment. In 2005, Latinos represented 14% of the U.S. population and 19% of all new HIV/AIDS cases. Today, there are about 1.2 million people living with HIV/AIDS in the U.S. and 200,000 of them are Latinos.



Speaker Marlene Taylor with ACR's Director of Prevention Services Wenona Wake.

## City Meets Country



Whoa, Nellie! They had a blast, returned safe, sound, and stiff...much to the relief of their colleagues at AIDS Community Resources' annual staff picnic at Highland Forest. If you haven't been to Highland Forest, Onondaga County's oldest park, you should give it a try. In addition to many outdoor trails and options, it has a wonderful meeting facility.

## Old Navy Goes to School



ACR's Carrie Large and Jennifer Kostine of Old Navy.

Thank you, Old Navy at Carousel and DeWitt, for helping AIDS Community Resources see to the school needs of children whose families are affected by HIV/AIDS. Ask any parent – school supplies cost money, and money is often tight for our clients. We help with the big things – medical care, medications, housing...but school supplies and other quality of life materials for school-age children are not part of our support.

Old Navy prides itself on providing the latest fashions at great prices for the whole family. AIDS Community Resources' consumers and staff are grateful for the boxes of backpacks, notebooks, pens, pencils, crayons and paper products for our clients' children. Thank you for your generosity!

# Mission Accomplished!!!

They trained hard and worked hard to raise the \$3,500 entry fee; now, 9 members of the ACR Spokes are basking in the glory of successfully bicycling 560 miles across New York State in one week, ending August 18th. The Empire State AIDS Ride began in Niagara Falls and ended at Battery Park in New York City. The proceeds (more than \$248,000) will be divided among selected AIDS agencies.

“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,” said Carrie Large of AIDS Community Resources’ Development Department. ACR uses the funds for youth HIV prevention and education programs and for emergency client needs in 9 counties in the Central, Northern, and Mohawk Valley regions of New York.

ACR Spokes team members are a diverse bunch: a college professor, an engineer, a physical therapist, a public relations professional, and a Starbucks store manager.



*The Team: Roger Hughes, Don Hughes, Adam Peruta, Julie Randall, Tristan Borland, Mary Doody, Stacey Portzline, Cecilia Doody, Sheri Owens.*



*Roger Hughes from Brooklyn stepped up to ride for Michael Crimmin who broke his hip while training for ESAR.*



*Mary and Cecilia under a biker’s favorite sign. Downhill!*



*Don Hughes relaxing at lunch break.*



*Not only did Sheri bike all day, she does laundry all night!*



*Enjoying the view.*



*Stacey and Tristan.*



*Carrie and Cari on “Red Day”*



*Julie Randall and Adam Peruta in Battery Park*



*All riders in Empire State AIDS Ride 5 – What a crew!*

# *Safety on the Go!*

## *...riding with the Safety First van*

Risky behavior has a way of moving around and Harm Reduction Specialists have to be on the go if they want to communicate with the people involved in injection drug use.

"When police find out about high drug use areas, places where sex workers hang out, they move in," said HIV Prevention Specialist Karen Loftin. "And then the people involved move out to set up shop someplace else." Her job is to find them.

AIDS Community Resources' peer-based street outreach program, "Safety First", engages those involved in risky behaviors to try to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. Locating the target population of injection drug users,

substance abusers, and sex workers can be tricky. "It's not just the police," said Loftin. "The weather modifies behavior patterns too. What goes in the summer can be mighty inconvenient in the winter."

This fall, Karen and other HIV Prevention Specialists at AIDS Community Resources will conduct community mapping projects in both Utica and Syracuse. They will go door to door asking residents about what is happening in their neighborhoods. "We are not there

to judge neighborhoods, or to judge anyone in them. We are there to keep people from becoming infected with HIV and to help start them on the path to healthy habits."

The "Safety First" van is on the street five days a week, both in Utica and Syracuse. A team of prevention educators, transitional case managers, and harm reduction specialists and peers are there to offer risk reduction supplies, like condoms for safer sex and bleach kits to clean needles. HIV counseling and testing are conducted on site. Their task can be dangerous, but Karen and



*People of all ages are attracted to the Safety First van. This young man came with his father. Karen has a coloring book for him.*

peer volunteers are careful not to put themselves or their clients in harm's way. There are many victims of the streets, and Karen says she never underestimates the potential for harm. Neither does she underestimate the good work they can do. "I trust people, and that can be a bad thing. I also trust that people can change. We help them get to the safest place possible, and if they can't stop using, maybe they can stop using so much, and that's heading the right direction."

*"We are there to keep people from becoming infected with HIV and to start them on the path to healthy habits."*

# The First Positive

"My throat was dry," Betty said, "and it was hard to keep my composure." Betty Cummings, a Transitional Case Manager (TCM) at AIDS Community Resources, recalled the day in early September when she administered a test for HIV and the result was positive. "It was a first for me and it really sunk in about what we do."

As a TCM, Betty goes into neighborhoods with the "Safety First" Outreach van and works with active substance users to decrease their risk of becoming infected. Sometimes it can take months of effort on her part before a person is willing to take an HIV test. The young man who recently tested positive had waited a long time building up the nerve to learn his HIV status.

Before the test Betty was aware she needed to make a crucial assessment of the young man's mindset. If the preliminary results are positive, how will he react? Is he a suicide risk? Will he return home to a violent and angry response from his family? Will he use alcohol or drugs to cope? How, Betty wondered, could a person ever predict how one is going to react to a life-altering diagnosis? "I myself would probably faint," she admitted.

After years of waiting, the test itself was quick – a swab of the upper and lower gums and a wait of about twenty minutes. Betty used the time to learn more about any risks the young man



*Betty Cummings, Transitional Case Manager.*

takes. Is he an injection drug user? If so, she shows him how to use bleach to clean his needles. Does he use condoms when he has sexual intercourse? She explains how condoms can prevent the spread of HIV and explains how to use them properly.

Betty had been behind closed doors with the man for about twenty minutes, counseling and listening while the swab processed in the solution.

She checked the results. "It's a preliminary positive," she said. (A second swab is taken to be sent to a laboratory to confirm the preliminary diagnosis.) He didn't visibly react to the news. He just sat there, relieved in a way, Betty thought. At last he had an answer.

Betty called the following day to go over the resources available to him. She set up an appointment with AIDS Community Resources'

HIV+ Support Services. She gathered names of his sexual partners for the past ten years, as required by the state. With every word she let him know she was there for him.

As the mother of four and grandmother of seven, Betty knows a lot about human behavior. She's learning more each day as a TCM. "Preaching doesn't get you where you need to be. You can't demand change; you just need to keep supporting and working with people until they are ready to take that big step for themselves, and that starts with finding out if they have HIV."

*"You just need to keep supporting and working with people until they are ready to take that big step for themselves."*



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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| <b>Or:</b><br>information@aidscommunityresources.com |  |   |

**UPCOMING EVENTS**

**October 14, 2007**

**8<sup>th</sup> Annual First Frost AIDS Walk** – a 5K fundraising walk at New York State Zoo at Thompson Park in Watertown.  
www.AIDSwalkcny.com

**October 26, 2007**

**Hope for the Future** - AIDS prevention training for African American faith-based organizations.  
cdoctor@aidscommunityresources.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