A lot of hoopla regarding the mayor of Ithaca suggesting, as one part of a comprehensive approach, the opening of a safe supervised site for injection drug users, where they can receive clean syringes and, then and there, inject themselves with heroin or the substance of their choice. I like hoopla: might as well get it all out on the table and let everyone have their say...

There is a sea change underway of understanding heroin addiction – one long overdue. For decades we have demonized “the addict,” with all manner of ‘low-life’ criminal stereotypes: I saw the movies growing up… and I felt completely assured I had never known – nor would I ever know - a ‘junkie’.

Lifted out of my ignorance, yet again, by my job… Since the earliest days of the AIDS epidemic, HIV was known to be transmitted through the sharing of infected syringes, and at any given time, upwards of 20% of the people we served indicated their route of HIV transmission was an infected needle. It was only however, with the initiation of our syringe exchange program three years ago, that we began to realize the scope of heroin use in our region. In the past we had only worked with injection drug users who were HIV+, now we were seeing anyone who wanted a clean syringe, and they came in what seemed like droves, to both our mobile van and our two fixed sites… It was a clear case of, “build it and they will come…”

‘They’ were young and white and suburban and rural and educated and employed, right along with people of color, the poor, the under-educated, urban dwellers, and unemployed: actually more of the former, which in large part accounts for all of the attention now being focused on what is nationally recognized, and can only be called, an epidemic of heroin addiction.

Another reflection altogether…

Back to the Ithaca proposal: during a recent staff meeting it became apparent there was not 100% enthusiasm for this new idea/strategy. I was surprised, and then not. ‘Knee jerk’ unexplored notions/beliefs I can relate to: I’ve had them/I have them.

I thought back to the early days of the AIDS epidemic and the outcry against offering condoms to teens in school, or anywhere for that matter: “Promoting sexual activity!!!!” was the hue and cry we faced by the mere mention of condoms as a precaution against HIV, much less handing them out…! Few adults wanted to acknowledge that teens were sexually active and would continue to be, regardless of the availability of condoms.

We would often address school assemblies and ask students to raise their hands if any of their friends were sexually active: a sea of hands shot up as teachers and administrators blanched. The big people had a knee jerk reaction to the juxtaposition/notion of ‘condoms and kids’, calling out for, ‘exploration’.

Continued on Page 3
Sled for RED Returns.
Happy Winter!

People don’t notice whether it’s winter or summer when they’re happy!

Sled for RED, ACR Health’s mid-winter outdoor sledding derby, caught a break in the weather this year. Warm temperatures kept things balmy, but the ski slopes were white with machine-made snow, though lined on both sides by green grass. The event was the same laughter fueled sled-to-sled competition with hilarious costumes and spicy rivalry between veteran teams as always, just a warmer Sled for RED and a little easier on the extremities.

The 6th Annual Sled for RED cardboard sledding derby hit the slopes at Four Seasons Golf & Ski Center in Fayetteville, followed by the Tubing Party and Food and Drink Sampling in a heated tent, to raise funds to support ACR Youth Programs.

“Sled for RED is a perfect opportunity for Central New York to get out and get moving – all while supporting our community,” said Development Director, Carrie Portzline-Large. Sled for RED proceeds fill the gaps left when government funding runs out, but we still have work to do. “We reached almost 7,000 youth last year through programming that helps them live healthier, smarter, and safer lives. Without events like Sled for RED, that wouldn’t have been possible.”

All money raised at Sled for RED helps ACR Health educate young people about how to stay safe from HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases and supports the overall mission of ACR Health in Central New York.

Results
Fastest Sled - Great Broads
Top Fundraiser – Great Broads
Best Sled – Team 955
Loudest Cheer Team – The Trojan Men
Best Costume – Q By Doos

ACR Health would like to thank its Sled for RED sponsors:
95X, Bells Brewery, Four Seasons Golf and Ski Center, Fox 68, and ServPro.

Our Mission:
ACR Health is a progressive human services provider committed to eliminating health disparities and inequality throughout the Central, Northern, and Mohawk Valley regions of New York State.

Our Vision:
A community where every person has the opportunity to achieve optimal health and equality.

Our Values:
Human Dignity
Integrity • Empowerment
Health • Teamwork
So just as 30+ years ago it was taboo to promote condom use (versus total abstinence), especially to teens, despite the overwhelming health benefits of condom use, today we are up against another strongly held taboo against promoting any action that might make ‘shooting drugs’ seem normative/caring, despite the health benefits, in this case, of eliminating overdose deaths with the availability of the aforementioned supervised setting.

I happen to believe in this approach, but I believe more insistently that we need to explore our beliefs – need to ‘mix it up’ and share our thoughts, our politics, our fears and cautions, and come to a renewed understanding that questions the junkie reels of the past, images that still play at the edge of our consciousness, and do little to help those who live with addiction.

In the long run, hoopla helps; you can quote me…

“we need to explore our beliefs – need to ‘mix it up’ and share our thoughts”

Lanika Mabrey, ACR Health’s Prevention Health Advocate, is a woman on a mission to bring HIV awareness into mainstream African American life. Mabrey slipped HIV prevention information seamlessly into “Black Love Matters,” a fun Friday night event at Syracuse’s B & B Lounge geared for young people who like to go out and have a good time. Lanika meets people in their own comfortable space; educates them about HIV/AIDS which has claimed so many African-American lives; and enlists them in the New York State effort to End the AIDS Epidemic by 2020.

“It’s certainly possible to end AIDS,” Mabrey said, “but African Americans have to take HIV prevention to heart.”

National Black HIV Awareness Day

- Black Americans account for 44% of all new HIV infections – but are just 12% of the population.
- There are 34,850 Black New Yorkers living with HIV/AIDS – the highest number in any state in the United States.
- Of HIV positive people served by ACR Health, 43% are African-American.

Lanika with B & B Lounge owner Billy Denham, Sr. at “Black Love Matters” held Friday, February 5, 2016 on National Black HIV Awareness Day. The event featured live music by World Be Free. Sponsored by ACR Health’s Communities of Color initiative and Upstate Medical University, Black Love Matters offers free and confidential HIV and STD testing; an activity involving wristbands that simulates HIV infections; and education about National Black HIV Awareness Day. Some representatives from “HIV Stops with Me” will come by to share their stories and hand out poster from the campaign.
Preliminary data from the New York State Department of Health shows that 21 Oneida County residents were newly diagnosed with HIV in 2015-2016. This is a significant increase. In the four previous years, the average number of new diagnoses annually in Oneida County was 12.

The newly identified HIV cases included 12 men and 9 women with an age range of 17-57 years. Notably, seven were women under the age of 25. On average women and girls represent 20% of all new HIV infections. The new Oneida County statistics were more than double that rate for women and girls.

State health department staff are completing follow-up with partners of persons who were newly diagnosed to encourage them to receive testing for HIV and other sexually transmitted conditions and also working to ensure all newly diagnosed persons are linked to care and offered treatment.

National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day

News of the spike in new HIV cases renewed urgency of mission as ACR Health convened a National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day event at the Radisson in Utica with a focus to curb HIV infections in women and girls.

Event organizer Johanna Johnson, ACR Prevention Health Advocate (standing at right in red dress) was delighted about high participation rate at the Utica event, saying, “The speakers were amazing, the personal testimonies were deep and moving.”

ACR Health’s Safety First Outreach encourages women and teenage girls in the Mohawk Valley to learn about the risks of HIV/AIDS and take action to protect their health, including getting tested for HIV and taking prevention medication. ACR Health is a source of information and youth friendly services that provides comprehensive sexual health education and safer sex supplies, as well as access to HIV/HCV/STD testing and screening. ACR Health links adult clients with other prevention services, such as PrEP, a once daily pill that prevents HIV.

ACR Health would like to thank CareNet, Center for Family and Life Recovery, Insight House, Johnson Park, Milestones, Planned Parenthood, Resource Center of Independent Living, SUNY DAC, Women’s Employment Resource Center, and YWCA Mohawk Valley for their collaboration in presenting Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day. Special thanks to Bite Bakery and Holland Farms for supplying refreshments and to Avon, Hair Connection, NYR Organics, Pampered Chef, and Plexis for prizes.
The Q Center at ACR Health has long-standing ties with the young, gay, at-risk population in Central New York. Because of these ties, the New York State Department of Health AIDS Institute has awarded ACR Health a first-ever $150,000 grant to target gay youth 13-24 to combat new HIV infections.

At a March 3, 2016 press conference, ACR Health announced a new program that will greatly increase our ability to reach gay youth with access to HIV/STD testing and other prevention services like PReP (a daily drug with a 99% rate of preventing HIV infections in at-risk individuals).

Our high-impact strategy was developed using focus groups held in late July 2015, with input from young people we serve - youth peers, Youth Advisory Board members, and ongoing client surveys.

This grant will serve 150 young gay men through testing for HIV, Hepatitis, and STDs; provide youth friendly services and safe space; use a positive youth development approach; employ new media and social networks; provide comprehensive sexual health education and safer sex supplies, as well as access to HIV/HCV/STD testing and screening; link clients with other prevention services, such as PrEP.

Allowing underage at-risk youth to use of PrEP will require a change in New York State law which prevents treatment of HIV or receiving medication which prevents HIV infection for underage teens without parental consent. Governor Cuomo has proposed much needed changes to state law that would help us and other healthcare providers reach even more young people and, if passed, will allow underage teens to have access to these resources without parental consent. Many at risk youth do not live at home and parental consent is not an option. This legislation would allow those individuals to receive the care they need to treat or to prevent HIV.
ACR Health, in collaboration with the Rescue Mission, has received a groundbreaking grant to provide housing in Onondaga County for homeless youth ages 18-24, with a focus on helping those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning. Research indicates that LGBTQ youth are at greater risk of homelessness than their heterosexual peers; represent up to 40% of all homeless youth; and are more likely to leave home as the result of physical abuse, often because of conflicts with parents about sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.

There’s a significant issue of homelessness for youth who participate in Q Center programs, according to ACR Health Director of Youth Services, Marissa Rice, who says as many as 25% of youth who come to Q Center support groups are homeless, perhaps as many as 30 at any given time.

“This grant will help a minimum of 12 homeless youths receive housing subsidies for a year and provide for at least one face-to-face monthly meeting with a Care Manager.”

The $146,000 grant is a significant first step toward addressing a much larger problem. In fiscal year 2014, the Rescue Mission provided emergency shelter housing 269 18-24 year olds and 104 of those young people were ages 18-21.

Open Enrollment Update: 2016

In the two and a half years that ACR Health has offered Navigator Service to our nine county region, our Health Insurance Programs have served more than 19,000 consumers.

Of these, 15,139 have completed applications for health insurance. Open enrollment for 2016 coverage began on November 1, 2015 and ended on January 31, 2016. Navigators saw 3,800 individuals, and completed more than 3,000 applications.

An overwhelming number of people have enrolled in the new Essential Plan. This plan is designed for individuals with lower incomes who may not be able to afford health insurance. It is either free or $20 depending on how much they make per year. We have seen many returning clients qualify for this plan, as well as many younger people. Additionally, individuals who may work in the service industry such as waiters or hair stylists often qualify for the Essential Plan.

Open insurance enrollment is now closed, but Medicaid, Child Health Plus, and the Essential plan have no open enrollment - you can enroll at any time. If your circumstances change or if you need a healthcare advocate, call 800.475.2430 and ask to speak to a Navigator.
Central New York’s most celebrated beauty salons competed head to head at the BLOWOUT 2016 Fantasy Hair Show on the Main Stage at the Landmark Theater in downtown Syracuse on Sunday, February 21. Professional hair and makeup artists created fantasy hairstyles and sent their models strutting across the main stage, competing for cash, prizes, and bragging rights.

“Once Upon a Time” was this year’s BLOWOUT theme. Stylists competed for recognition as BLOWOUT Champ for overall look, best makeup, best presentation, and 1st and 2nd runners up. Guest host, Michael Benny did play by play from the catwalk.

BLOWOUT has been named the Outstanding Fundraising Event of 2016 by BizEventz.

“BLOWOUT is a great team building challenge and an opportunity for stylists to be as inventive as their dreams allow,” said Maureen Harrington O’Neill, ACR Health Associate Development Director for the Q Center. “That’s what we want for our Q Center youth - life dreams - and fundraisers like BLOWOUT help make that happen.”

BLOWOUT raised $6,303 - proceeds that benefit programming for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth and their allies who use the Q Center at ACR Health, and for emergency client needs.

ACR Health would like to thank Attilio’s, Endeavour Entertainment, Karin Jean Total Body Waxing, Life of Reilley, Ormond Entertainment, Paparazzi Day Spa, and Sweet on Chocolate for their support of BLOWOUT 2016. BLOWOUT featured the entertainment of Mrs. Virginia Ham.
ACR Health 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.

ACR Health is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

April 3, 2016 – Sunday
French Toast
11:30-1:30 All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church, Outer Gotham Street, Watertown. Tickets $7. Proceeds to benefit Q Center Youth Programs.

April 9, 2016 – Saturday
5th Annual Strike It Out Bowling Fundraiser
6:30-9:30 Bowl Mor Lanes, 201 Highland Avenue, East Syracuse. $20, includes bowling shoes, pizza, and soda. Support Team Stumblers!

April 17, 2016 – Sunday
Cocktails and Canvases
1:00-4:00 p.m. Coleman’s Corner, Watertown NY. $40. Pre-registration required. 475.2430 x 155 for more information.

April 17, 2016 – Sunday
Beer Bingo
Support Team Stumblers! Dinosaur Barbeque 6:00 p.m. Play Bingo to win great prizes while enjoying a bucket of beverages! Tickets online for $20. ACRHealth.org/events

April 24, 2016 – Sunday
18th Annual AIDS Hike for Life
5K fundraising walk and timed run at 11:00 a.m. at Hamilton College. ACRHealth.org/events

May 7, 2016 – Saturday
Laverne Cox – Ain’t I a Woman
8:00 p.m. Jefferson Community College, McVean Gym. $10 for general public; students free. More at http://acrhealth.org/events/upcoming-events

June 5, 2016 – Sunday
24th Annual AIDS Walk/Run
5K walk and 10K timed run at 10:00 a.m. at Beaver Lake Nature Center. ACRHealth.org/events

August 28, 2016 – Sunday
Bubble Blast Run at the Great New York State Fair
At 10:00 a.m. Sunday, a bubbly fun run through the grounds of the New York State Fair. For registration information: events@ACRHealth.org

Marketing Opportunities Available
ACR Health has numerous fundraising and educational events in nine New York counties: Cayuga, Herkimer, Jefferson, Lewis, Madison, Oneida, Onondaga, Oswego, and St. Lawrence. Sponsorship of ACR Health’s special events offers a marketing opportunity guaranteed to introduce thousands of area residents to your business all while publicizing your support of a good cause. Call Carrie Portzline-Large at 800.475.2430 or email events@ACRHealth.org to learn more.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION FORUMS

Forums provide HIV education to community members and those interested in becoming volunteers. Events are held monthly in Syracuse and Utica. Call 800.475.2430 to sign up.

LGBTQ YOUTH SUPPORT GROUPS

ACR Health has numerous programs for LGBTQ youth, including support group meetings in Syracuse, Utica, Watertown, and the Mohawk Valley. Participants are grouped by ages from 8-26.

The Q Center for a full listing

Syracuse youth group meetings are at the Q Center, 617 West Genesee Street
Information: 315.701.2431 or qcenter@ACRHealth.org

Mohawk Valley: LGBTQ Youth Group in Little Falls
Information: 315.793.0661 ext. 133 or glbtqyouth@ACRHealth.org

Utica: The Q2 LGBTQ Youth Groups
Information: 315.793.0661 ext. 133 or glbtqyouth@ACRHealth.org

Watertown: Qbd LGBTQ Youth Group
Information: 315.785.8222 ext. 377

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