New funding for fundamental program

ACR Health has received a significant boost in housing appropriations, bringing total housing spending for this fiscal year to $1.4 million dollars. ACR Health has offered HOPWA (Housing Opportunities for Persons With AIDS) since 2001; this year we will be able to assist 250 individuals.

Housing IS HIV HealthCare

It is impossible to overstate the importance of stable housing for people living with HIV/AIDS. They are much more likely to access health services, attend primary care visits, receive ongoing care, and have their HIV under control, like HOPWA client Linda Moore…

Linda Moore started doing crack cocaine when she was 21 years old, a decision she now deeply regrets, but owns. As her drug use escalated, her undiagnosed schizophrenia took firm hold, and her relationships – with family, with community, with reality – fell away. Her mother gave her travel money to leave their home in South Carolina. She ran out of cash when she reached Syracuse, and stayed.

“I was homeless for 23 years and I would do anything to get drugs. I was a prostitute. That’s how I got HIV. I was arrested and incarcerated over and over.”

She put an infant daughter up for adoption. That was the right thing for her child, but has left Linda with longing and regret. “I put my drugs before my child,” she said, listing the self-induced losses of her life, “and I haven’t seen my mother in 25 years.”

Linda’s road to redemption started in 2011 when she was jailed at the Justice Center on charges of welfare fraud. She was sentenced to five years felony probation and assigned a probation officer who got her into drug treatment, then a halfway house, which paved the way for permanent housing through HOPWA.

To qualify for HOPWA, an individual must be HIV positive and meet income requirements. For a single individual like Linda, that amounts to making less than $22,000 a year. “Stable Housing provides Linda and other HOPWA recipients a framework for better health and a better quality of life,” said Senior Housing Subsidy Specialist, Kerry Bequer. “Individuals who are not faced with housing vulnerability are much better equipped to adhere to their medical regimens, manage their conditions, and achieve viral suppression. Without a predictable living situation, individuals are less likely to seek medical care and more likely to engage in risky behaviors, possibly putting themselves and others at risk.”

“HOPWA makes me accountable. I have to check in or my rent is lost.”

Linda said HOPWA is a miracle in her life, that she would not have a home or have her HIV under control without it. “HOPWA makes me accountable. I have to check in or my rent is lost.”

Continued on page 3
May 31, 2016, Clinton Square ~ New York State AIDS Institute Director Dan O’Connell proclaimed “We’ve got HIV on the run,” as he opened the 6th Annual Paint the Town RED press event in downtown Syracuse. His assessment about HIV was in response to a question about the statewide quest to End the AIDS Epidemic by 2020 (ETE). ETE’s goal is to lower new annual HIV infections to 750 statewide by the end of 2020. O’Connell says, judging on progress during Year One, we’re on target to meet that goal.

O’Connell, who was instrumental in convincing Governor Cuomo that New York could End AIDS by 2020, praised ACR Health for Central New York’s results. One important measure of success is in the number of HIV+ people who are “vira lly suppressed,” meaning that their HIV is non-detectable; making it less likely they can spread HIV. Statewide, New York’s rate of viral suppression has increased this year from 63% to 68%. In ACR Health’s territory, the rate is an impressive 72%.

Another ETE strategy is to identify the estimated 300 people in this area who have HIV but don’t know it. Health officials estimate that there are 2,400 HIV infected people in the Syracuse Ryan White Region; 88% of them (2,100) have been identified. How do we locate the undiagnosed 300?

The only way to find them is test by test. ACR Health conducted nearly 1,600 HIV tests last year, up 118%, and offers free confidential HIV tests to everyone, with walk-in testing at ACR Health offices during business hours.

Syracuse Officials Paul Driscoll, Commissioner of Neighborhood and Business Development, and Common Council president Van Robinson read a proclamation naming Paint the Town RED to draw attention to the fight to End AIDS by 2020.

Onondaga County Health Commissioner Dr. Indu Gupta joined O’Connell and elected officials Paint the Town RED to draw attention to the fight to End AIDS by 2020.

ACR Health Executive Director Wil Murtaugh used his chance with the paint roller to invite the public to the 24th Annual AIDS Walk/Run. “ACR Health is fully committed to ending the AIDS epidemic. This is a fight we have engaged in for 33 years. There is no way that we will let AIDS beat us.”
Continued from page 1

Two years ago, Linda found employment at a fast food restaurant on Erie Boulevard. It was her first job in 25 years. She was surprised when she got the offer, for she had been completely honest about her criminal background and former drug use. She makes $9.75 an hour and works 25 to 30 hours a week. She undergoes regular drug screenings which she always passes.

Because of stable housing, Linda has become disciplined in her medication regimen. Her HIV is now undetectable, and her schizophrenia, which had been a major contributing factor during her drug addiction and homelessness, is controlled. She’s saving money for a bus ticket to South Carolina to see her mother.

PEP in the Pharmacy:
An Obtainable Stop to HIV

Governor Cuomo has announced new measures to meet his 2014 aggressive goal of ending AIDS in New York State by the year 2020. Through targeted strategies, reducing the number of new HIV infections from 3,000 to 750 per year will be considered a success.

An exciting portion of the new bill is the allowance of the emergency medication ‘PEP’ to be dispensed by a registered pharmacist. PEP, or post-exposure prophylaxis, is utilized within 72 hours after an individual takes part in a high risk behavior, including unprotected sex with an HIV positive partner or the sharing of needles. The medication can prevent the replication and spread of HIV, even after exposure to the virus. Not intended for long term use, PEP is taken after a onetime event, if the patient feels they may have been infected. The regimen is a combination of either 2 or 3 antiretroviral drugs that is dispensed and used for 28 days. If taken every day, HIV transmission is prevented in 81% of cases.

Currently, this medication can be dispensed to the public, but only through an emergency room visit. This new bill would allow a registered pharmacist to dispense PEP to any patients requesting it, similar to the Plan-B One Step emergency contraception. The aim of this strategy is to encourage patients who believe they have been exposed to HIV to receive the treatment they may need if it can be dispensed quickly and discretely. There is a certain stigma surrounding going to an emergency room for possible HIV infections, especially if the causative action was illicit drug use. Financially, “non-emergency emergency room visits” costs the nation billions of dollars a year. Dispensing a medication like PEP in a pharmacy, as opposed to the emergency room, can save a lot of money over time. Pharmacists are also able to efficiently coordinate follow up appointments and HIV testing with the patients before dispensing the medication to encourage patient compliance and safety.

The impact of this change remains to be seen. After Plan-B became over the counter in 2006, 11% of women surveyed by the National Survey of Family Growth, from 2006 to 2010, said they had used the Plan-B pill, up from only 4% in 2002. A common trend might be observed through the similar handling of post-exposure prophylaxis which would only lead to a drop in the incidence rates of new HIV cases. Through a pharmacist driven administering of PEP, and the other strategies outlined by Governor Cuomo, ending AIDS in New York State is a feasible goal. The true impact of this bill will only be recognized when we reach the year 2020.

by Matthew Crough, Student, Albany College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences
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When the United Way of Central New York asked Mary Doody to nominate someone for an Exceptional Volunteer of the Year award, the first person she thought of was Mike Kyle-Ducharme, the reliable master strategist of AIDS Walk/Runs since they started in 1993.

Mike tried a variety of volunteer positions until he found his niche as a member of the ACR Special Events Committee. It was there he found he could make his most profound impact in HIV/AIDS, health disparities, and inequalities.

Mike quickly became the go to guy for all things in course logistics at all AIDS Walk/Runs and other fundraising events throughout our nine counties. He has mapped and remapped, reviewed the courses for safety, set up, coordinated volunteers, and involved his employer, his friends, and family. As the Course Logistics Coordinator, he has not missed an AIDS Walk/Run since the beginning, coordinating 24 AIDS Walk/Runs in Syracuse, 18 in Utica, 16 in Watertown, 3 Bubble Blast Runs, and 5 Sled for REDs. That’s 66 events and counting! Mike has helped ACR raise almost $4 million in the process.

“Mike is better than the U.S Postal Service - no matter the weather: rain, sleet, sweltering heat or snow, he is there! Always making sure each event runs smoothly, each participant is safe and everyone has fun,” said Mary Doody, ACR Health Director of Volunteer Services. “Mike is an avid supporter of the Adolescent Health Initiative and filling client emergency needs. He has impacted many lives.”

The AIDS Walk/Run collected $125,001 on the day of the event, which has grown to $130,365 in the days since. Other results:

**Top Male Runners**
1 – Michael Dee – 38:23
2 – Raymond Clark – 41:03
3 – Adam Mazzoni – 41:13

**Top Female Runners**
1 – Bethany Titus – 45:22
2 – Heather Lacey – 51:34
3 – Emily Stokes-Rees – 54:17

The 24th Annual AIDS Walk/Run would not have been possible without our **Sprinter Sponsor**, Empower Federal Credit Union; and **Runner Sponsors**: Bristol-Myers Squibb, Gilead Science, and M&T Bank; **Jogger Sponsors**: Cathy J. Berry MD & Associates, Noble Health Services, Kinney Drugs Foundation, WB Mason, and Wegmans; **Walker Sponsors**: Brown & Brown, Century Heating & Cooling, Quest Diagnostics, and White Deer Run Treatment Network; **Friend Sponsors**: ARC of Onondaga, Bousquet Holstein, and Community Bank, Geddes Federal Savings, N.A. **Media Sponsors**: Fox 68 WSYT, HOT 107.9 Syracuse, Syracuse New Times, and My 43 WNYS. **In-Kind Sponsors**: Jet Blue, Lamar Advertising, Outback Steakhouse Clay, Ommegang Brewery, Saranac, and Starbucks. Special thanks to Beaver Lake Nature Center.
NEW Leadership at ACR Health

ACR Health has promoted two veteran managers to top leadership posts. Carrie Portzline-Large has been appointed Deputy Executive Director of Operations and Jeanette O’Connor-Shanley has been named Deputy Executive Director of Programs to help lead ACR Health’s growing and diversifying list of services.

As Deputy Executive Director of Programs, Jeanette O’Connor-Shanley will provide direction and support to directors of Support Services, HIV Services, Health Homes, Prevention, Youth, Insurance Services, and QA/QI.

O’Connor-Shanley has more than 20 years experience in the not-for-profit sector and before coming to ACR Health, served as Program Director for REACH CNY Inc., where she was lead trainer on more than thirty curricula from various New York State Department of Health training contracts.

In her four years as the Director of Support Services at ACR Health, O’Connor-Shanley has obtained and implemented 13 additional contracts and programs in Support Services, increasing the agency budget by $6 million.

As Deputy Executive Director of Operations, Carrie Portzline-Large will supervise daily operations of ACR Health, providing direction and support to directors of Development, Public Relations, Volunteer Services, Information Technology, Data, Facilities, and ancillary services.

Portzline-Large came to ACR Health as a Care Manager in 2003, and then transitioned to the Development Department. In 2009 she became the Director of Development and created innovative and successful revenue generating initiatives in addition to sustaining the highly successful AIDS Walk/Runs. Portzline-Large has maintained a successful balance between dedication to ACR Health’s mission and sound business management.

The appointments were made by ACR Health Executive Director Wil Murtaugh.

Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for youth ages 10-19

Q Center Youth Advocate for Suicide Prevention Laws

May 23, 2016 – Q Center youth joined dozens of advocates from across the state to lobby lawmakers to pass suicide prevention laws. Youth Suicide is a major preventable public health problem in New York.

Youth lobbyists had fifty appointments with state legislators and delivered packets to every representative. Among laws they are seeking are measures that equip educators with the skills and confidence to recognize signs of suicidal tendency and to have an action plan in place.
Life After Heroin

23-year-old Marie Jorgensen is back where she started five years ago – enrolled in college, working a part time job, living at home with her parents in suburban Syracuse. She has circled back to this good life from a detour that began her first semester at Syracuse University when she was having trouble fitting in and finding new friends.

“I guess I was just socially awkward, but I didn’t have any friends, and I desperately wanted friends,” said Marie. She and her boyfriend had already been experimenting with drugs by the time he brought a new substance into the mix: heroin. “We just got deeper into drugs and eventually started sniffing heroin. It was about a year before we tried needles.”

With needles, the highs got better, but everything else got worse. Marie focused only on heroin. She was failing school, her parents kicked her out of the house, and she was arrested four or five times for shoplifting.

Margaret Errico, Supervisor of ACR Health’s Syringe Exchange, remembers Marie as a very smart girl who, unexpectedly, seemed to be a bit of a nerd; and her boyfriend? Well, he was a real character. “They were engaging and open and honest with us about their circumstances,” Errico said. The ‘circumstances’ involved burglary, pawn shops, and stints in jail. “Marie was brave and strong, owning up to the facts of her life. I’ve always known she was going to make it.”

Marie’s luck changed with her fifth arrest, though she didn’t realize it at the time. She was given the option of going to drug court or going to jail. She went into treatment. “But it wasn’t just about avoiding jail after a while. I realized that I wanted a better life – like the old life I had.”

Marie’s recovery took her to a halfway house in Utica where she connected with Johanna Johnson from ACR Health’s Women’s Program and became a peer/volunteer, working with individuals who used injection drugs. “Marie is an amazing young woman with a zest for life,” said Johnson. “She works so hard every day to reach her goals, and to follow her dreams.”

She has moved back into her parents’ home, re-enrolled at SU, and is working part-time – just like old times. Marie finally found the niche she was looking for in college, having someone to connect with, by volunteering with ACR in Syracuse. “I like to help people who are struggling.”

The boyfriend is gone and so are the drugs – and the social awkwardness. Marie has abandoned all substances – no alcohol, no cigarettes, no experimentation. “I’m living proof that you can overcome drug addiction and turn your life around.”

More than 2,000 people have enrolled in ACR Health Syringe Exchange Program. If you know someone who needs a supply of clean needles, please call 800.475.2430 or SEP@ACRHealth.org

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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

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: ACRHealth.org/events

October 16, 2016 - Sunday
17th Annual First Frost AIDS Walk/Run 5K
1:00 p.m. Thompson Park Zoo, and Conservatory, Watertown.
Sign up as an individual or a team. ACRHealth.org/events
Together we can #endAIDS.

December 1, 2016 - Thursday
World AIDS Day
Remembrance service at 7:30 a.m. at LeMoyne College’s Panasci Chapel.

December 2016
Holiday Angels
Join us as we brighten the holiday season for those affected by chronic diseases (including HIV/AIDS) by providing needed items as gifts for ACR Health clients.
Call 800.475.2430 for more information.

Volunteer Opportunities at Q Centers
ACR Health is looking for volunteers to assist with programming at its Q Centers in Syracuse, Utica, and Watertown. Interested persons must complete an application, attend volunteer orientation and HIV training. Q Center volunteers undergo reference and background checks. To fill out application and for more information:
Volunteer@ACRHealth.org or 800.475.2430.

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

Q Center Syracuse
617 West Genesee Street
Call 315.701.2431 or QCenter@ACRHealth.org

Q Center Utica/Mohawk Valley/Little Falls
Call 315.793.0661 ext. 133 or GLBTQYouth@ACRHealth.org

Q Center Watertown
Call 315.785.8222 ext. 164 or HDavis@ACRHealth.org

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