Record Enrollment
Syringe Exchange

Every week, 25-30 new people walk through the doors of ACR Health Syringe Exchange Program (SEP) offices and enroll to receive clean, sterile syringes free of charge. In June, SEP enrollments passed the 2,000 mark, totaling 2,081, and growing daily.

SEP has syringes for every use, including injection of insulin, hormones, or steroids and banned substances like heroin or cocaine. “That’s who we are trying to reach,” said Erin Bortel, Director of Prevention Services, “people who can’t access syringes without a prescription, but cannot live their lives without them, so they share needles – and share dangerous diseases in the process.”

Sharing syringes and other equipment for drug injection is a well known route of transmission for HIV and Hepatitis C. Since the AIDS epidemic began, injection drug use has directly and indirectly accounted for more than one-third (36%) of AIDS cases in the United States. Syringe exchanges are public health initiatives designed to stop the spread of HIV and hepatitis.

In addition to preventing the spread of infectious diseases, using a clean syringe every time you inject can help prevent damage to veins, prevent formation of abscesses, and blood clots. Used needles are blunt and can damage skin and veins at the injection site.

SEP Team works to establish trust

Belinda Felder has been with SEP since it opened in 2012. Over five years, Felder says she has seen healthy young individuals “worn down to the lowest level possible” and she has known more than a few who have overdosed and died. She worries most about the young people. “They are not afraid to try anything. They get instant gratification when they shoot heroin directly into their veins and they are always chasing that first high. They can never catch it.”

Felder knows that for every client she serves, there are others she will never meet. Public health research indicates only 25% of injection drug users within a given community where a SEP is located will choose to access that service. “People learn to trust us, and when they are ready to try treatment, they ask us for help. We can open doors and help them get on their way.” In June, 37 injection drug users asked for help getting into a substance treatment program. “Everyone who walks through the door feels welcome here, and knows that we’re invested in keeping them healthy.”

“Everyone who walks through the door feels welcome here, and knows that we’re invested in keeping them healthy.”

Continued on page 3
A Safe Space

Violent episodes have destroyed all semblance of summer peacefulness. Before the murder of five police officers in Dallas, and the deaths of two African American men at the hands of police in Louisiana and Minnesota, there was the mass murder of 49 individuals at a gay nightclub in Orlando. The FBI reports that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people are more likely to be the targets of hate crimes than any other minority group.

ACR Health has always been considered a safe space for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people – safe because people are free to express themselves here and not be judged. We are comfortable with the label and public in our defense of LGBTQ rights.

In 2006 we established a bricks and mortar safe space - the Q Center in Syracuse for LGBTQ youth – and guaranteed a permanent nurturing space for young people who are often alienated from their families or bullied at school. Over the years we’ve established Q Centers in Syracuse, Utica, and Watertown and helped hundreds of youth on their way to successful adult lives, having learned to be comfortable in their own skin, and confident that there’s a place for them in the world.

Of all the fearfulness unleashed by the killings in Orlando, perhaps the most disconcerting is the return of the original fear of LGBTQ youth - that there is no safe place, not really, and there never will be. We were rocked by the mass murder at Pulse in Orlando, by the anger and hate of it, and the anxiety that spread outwards from it, but we are not defeated.

As national attention is focused now on police accountability and interracial relationships, as well it should be, ACR Health stands strong in re-establishing the inner calm and safety of youth at our Q Centers. We will stay open and proactively work to stay safe and accessible.

Now is the time to get involved. Now is the time to help us keep our doors open and our programming strong. Please join us Sunday, August 28, at the Bubble Blast Run at the Great New York State Fair to show your support for LGBTQ Youth programs and services.

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.
‘A PLEDGE FOR PURPOSE’

KICK OFF WITH KINKY BOOTS To Benefit Q Center Utica

Broadway Theatre League of Utica announced new charity fund “Broadway Utica Cares All – A Pledge for Purpose” that will partner with the six-time Tony Award-winning hit show KINKY BOOTS. Broadway Utica and KINKY BOOTS will host the inaugural gala during its first performance on Tuesday September 6th at the Stanley Theatre. A portion of the monies generated will be gifted to ACR Health’s ‘the Q center’ for LGBTQ Youth located in the Mohawk Valley.

The charity gala will include a red carpet walk up Genesee Street to the Stanley Theatre, a performance by the 2013 Tony Award Winner for Best Musical KINKY BOOTS, and a private after party to meet and mingle with the stars of the show.

Derek Clark, Broadway Utica’s executive director, said “To have KINKY BOOTS as our partner for the very first ‘A Pledge for Purpose’ event is bigger and better than I ever expected. “I am proud to choose ‘the Q center’ as the recipient of the community’s generosity for this event. We need to find it in our hearts to do what we can do to increase awareness, provide compassion, support, and a safe space for our LGBTQ youth and their allies. We are bridging KINKY BOOTS heart-warming message of tolerance and inspiration with a real cause in our community.”

The KINKY BOOTS company stated “We are excited to be the first partners of Broadway Utica’s ‘A Pledge for Purpose’ charity event. We believe our show’s message of being true to yourself and accepting others for who they are mirrors Broadway Utica’s support for ‘the Q center’, the LGBTQ youth of Utica and their allies.”

The KINKY BOOTS charity event tickets are on sale now in groups of 4, 6, & 10 at various pricing levels. Please contact the Broadway Utica offices at 315-724-7196 to purchase your tickets and say you want to support the Q Center through “BROADWAY UTICA CARES ALL ~ A PLEDGE FOR PURPOSE”.

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ACR Health Syringe Exchanges

Syracuse – 637 West Genesee Street
Office Hours: Monday - Friday: 9:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
Tuesday & Thursday: 1:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Outreach Van:

Dudley & Fitch Streets in Syracuse
Monday, Wednesday, Friday: 2:30 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Utica - 287 Genesee Street
Office Hours: Tuesday & Friday: 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m., 1:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Thursday: 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

Syringes are available by special arrangement throughout Central, Northern, and Mohawk Valley regions of New York State. If you know someone who is interested in accessing clean syringes or getting into substance treatment, call 800.475.2430 or SEP@ACRHealth.org.
Tracking HIV test by test

People who have HIV but don’t know it are primarily the ones who spread it. Health officials estimate that there are 2,400 HIV infected people in the Syracuse Ryan White Region. 88% of the individuals, or 2,100, have been identified. ACR Health must locate the undiagnosed 300 through increased HIV testing.

ACR Health, with major support from United Way of Central New York and United Way of the Valley & Greater Utica Area, conducted a record 81 HIV tests during National HIV Testing Day on Monday, June 27, 2016 at Billings Park in downtown Syracuse and in the Community Garden on Genesee Street in Utica.

The Syracuse testing event offered free Dinosaur Bar-B-Que, giveaways, and raffles for a bicycle, Visa gift cards, Dave and Busters gift cards, and other prizes. With support from our funders, ACR Health provided 250 free lunches to community members in Syracuse, along with protein-rich snacks, free drinks, and abundant educational materials about how to lower your risk of getting HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

The testing event in Utica ran 10:00 a.m.-3:30 p.m. and offered free Smokey Bones Bar-B-Que, giveaways, snacks, and prizes. The theme of the event was “Create the Conversation, Break the Stigma #endAIDS.” The first step, of course, is to be tested and learn your status.

Overall, 81 individuals participated in HIV Testing in one day! Each participant walked away with an ACR Health branded Cinch Sacks or gift bags full of educational literature, ACR Health brochures, safer sex kits and other ACR Health items.

ACR Health is fully engaged in New York’s three point strategy to bring about the End of AIDS by 2020.

1) Test to identify persons with HIV who remain undiagnosed*

2) Link and retain HIV positive persons in healthcare and services to keep them healthy and to prevent further transmission; and

3) Promote prevention through PrEP, syringe exchange, and other prevention programs.

According to the CDC, one in seven HIV positive people in the United States are infected with HIV do not know it. National HIV Testing Day is designated to encourage people to learn their HIV status.
Wendy Allen’s sister, Linda Storrings (on right), had a fabulous time at the Bubble Blast Run in 2014. “She never missed an opportunity to enjoy life and have fun,” Wendy said, “so it was a perfect day.”

Linda had just received her second breast cancer diagnosis. Knowing that her sister loved to have fun, and knowing that her sister especially loved the Great New York State Fair, Wendy persuaded Linda to do the Bubble Blast Run. “She was thrilled by the bubbles. I pushed her wheel chair through every stream or puddle of bubbles she could find,” said Wendy. “When we were finished we were drenched in foam and still ready to have fun.” So, they dried off, changed clothes, and spent the day wheeling around the fairgrounds taking it all in. Bubble Blast entry fees include a ticket to the Fair.

Eight months later, in April 2015, Linda passed away. Linda, an architect by training who had lived an energetic and creative life, set a good example for her friends and family. No matter how she felt she had a positive attitude and celebrated life, said Wendy, which is why she takes a team to Bubble Blast each year in her sister’s memory.

The team is called Linda’s Running Stitches, so named because the sisters shared a passion for quilting, and this year Wendy is advertising on Facebook to expand her team, share the memory of her sister, and remind people to have fun and celebrate life while you have it. “What better opportunity to enjoy life than to run through bubbles?”

Bubble Blast Run at the Great New York State Fair is Sunday, August 28, 2016 at 10:00 a.m. Create family memories of your own at the bubbly fun obstacle and foam run through the Great New York State Fair. For registration information: BubbleBlastRun.com

Pride Proms – Come as You Are

In the month of June, Q Centers in Syracuse, Utica, and Watertown held Pride Proms, dress up celebration bashes where Q Center youth and their allies could express themselves – and dress openly as they preferred.

The North Country Pride Prom was June 18th at Maggie’s on the River. The Prom attracted 54 attendees along with 15 volunteers acting as chaperones. “It was really awesome to see so many people come together for the first event of its kind for the Watertown area,” said Youth Services Coordinator, Hilary Davis. “You could feel the enjoyment and enthusiasm in the room as the night went on!”

At the Radisson in Utica, the theme was Black and White 20’s, with 60 guests dancing to the music. “A lot of these youth have never been to a prom. This was a perfect chance for them to be who they really are,” said Prevention Health Advocate Johanna Johnson, who acted as chaperone.

At Crowne Plaza Hotel in Syracuse, the theme was Candy Land and the place was packed. Speach Family Candy Shoppe provided a candy bar for the event; music, dancing, and decoration were provided by Q Center & ACR Health staff members. Youth had a chance to get reduced ticket prices through volunteer work.
ACR Health’s Q Centers in Syracuse, Utica, and Watertown depend widely on the generosity and support of people like Georgina. Georgina witnessed the dedication of the staff and volunteers when she visited the Q Center in an effort to get involved in her new community. She saw how ACR Health opens its arms without judgment and treats lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth with respect and dignity. To learn more about our Q Centers and to get involved, contact Maureen O’Neill at moneill@ACRHealth.org.

Georgina Hegney has embraced Q Center Mohawk Valley with open arms. She’d just discovered it recently, while exploring the Utica area to learn about people, places, and the causes they care about, necessary research for her new job as an Episcopal priest who will lead a local church beginning in September.

“When people find themselves pushed to the margins, I am more than willing to meet them there on the margins; to broaden my embrace to include them inside our circle, so they are no longer on the margins.”

Georgina supported the Q Center team “Pride Vibe” at the AIDS Hike for Life, and later donated $1,000 to help four staff members attend the Philadelphia Trans Health Conference in June where they underwent an intense education about empowering trans people about health and well-being.

Generally, Georgina says she gives – spiritually and financially – where she sees a need. “Some people are hurt, neglected, and lost.” She calls it her “baptismal covenant’ to respect the dignity of every human being.”

Un-pampered Kids – CNY’s Diaper Need

What does $100 per month buy? A fancy dinner for two, or the newest Nike shoes every 30 days? $100 per month is also the average cost of a child’s diapers. This cost poses an enormous burden to our local community, when in cities like Syracuse 1 in 2 children live in poverty. Living at or below the poverty line creates impossible choices for parents: does money go to food? Medicine? Rent? School fees?

Diapers, which are not covered under SNAP benefits (food stamps), become a luxury. This situation has many effects on children – diaper rashes, lack of sleep, and an inability to enter daycare programs. Thankfully, a new organization is working to address this need: the Central New York Diaper Bank. The CNY Diaper Bank’s aim is to collect and redistribute diapers to nonprofits in CNY.

If you would like to aid parents in our community, please visit cnydiaperbank.org or contact Andrew Lynch at ACR Health (315-475-2430).
Potent New Drug on Scene?

ACR Health issued a Public Health Alert at a press conference on July 21, 2016, regarding W-18, a synthetic opioid that is stronger, cheaper, and deadlier than Fentanyl or heroin. State Health officials warn that W-18 could be on the streets in Central New York and expressed concern that if W-18 overdoses occur, Narcan, as distributed, may not be enough to rescue the person overdosing.

Health officials contacted ACR Health following a meeting of the High Impact Drug Trafficking Areas of New York and New Jersey, a group consisting of Law Enforcement and Health Officials, and alerted ACR Health that W-18 may have arrived in the Central New York area. W-18 was previously found to be in use in the Philadelphia area in early July.

Most importantly, the rescue drug Narcan (naloxone) is not as effective in reviving a person who is overdosing on W-18. The standard protocol ACR Health uses to train and equip individuals with Narcan is 2 doses. Health officials report that at least three intranasal or intramuscular doses may be necessary to rescue someone overdosing on W-18.

ACR Health strongly recommends that anyone injecting W 18 or any opioid substance, do not do it while alone – have someone to help if you overdose. And if you encounter someone overdosing:

- Call 911 immediately – ambulance crews carry naloxone and extra doses man be necessary to save a life
- Naloxone can be purchased without a prescription at pharmacies. If you have been trained to use Narcan and know someone who uses opioids, consider increasing the amount of rescue drug you carry
- New York has a Good Samaritan Law. If you see an overdose, call 911 – you will not be arrested, if you acted to save a life
- ACR Health can help enroll individuals in treatment programs. If you are ready to make a change, let us know and we will help you get into treatment.

Celebrating Peace and Life

In honor of Pride Month, and in light of the tragedy in Orlando, the SKY Armory and The Events Company hosted a fundraiser and celebration of peace and life - the “White Party for Peace” on June 29. 100% of the ticket price and all bar tips made by SKY Armory staff were donated to the rebuild and relocation of Pulse Nightclub and to The Q Center in Syracuse.

July 21, 2016 Syracuse - Joseph Cecile, First Deputy Chief of Syracuse Police, Joseph Cecile, Frank Fowler, Police Chief, Erin Bortel, ACR health Director of Prevention Services, and Wil Murtaugh, Executive Director of ACR Health issue public warning about dangers of W-18.

July 14, 2016 SKY Armory, Syracuse - Surrounded by Sky Armory staff, ACR Health Executive Director, Wil Murtaugh, front row center, accepted one of two checks for $3,500 to the Q Center. The second check goes to Pulse. Front row, far left, is SKY Armory co-owner Nicole Samolis. Her husband, Kevin, is 3rd from right in the first row. Standing in the back row and to the right of Wil is SKY Armory Executive Chef Jason Jessmore whose cousin was formerly employed by Pulse, and who originated the concept of the “White Party for Peace.”
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. A bubbly fun obstacle and foam run through the Great New York State Fair. For registration information: BubbleBlastRun.com

September 6, 2016 - Tuesday
Kinky Boots – six-time Tony-Award winning hit show
“A Pledge for Purpose” to benefit the Q Center Mohawk Valley. 7:30 p.m., Stanley Theatre, Utica. Mention Pledge for Purpose when reserving tickets. 315.724.7196 or broadwayutica.com

September 11, 2016 - Sunday
Beekman 1802 Garden Party
1:00-4:00 P.M. Reality Show Hosts, Josh Kilmer-Purcell and Dr. Brent Ridge of the Beekman 1802 Farm in Sharon Springs host a party to benefit the Q Centers in Syracuse, Utica, and Watertown. To attend or sponsor, call Jack at 793.0661 x 147 or JPflanz@ACRHealth.org

September 25, 2016 - Sunday
Last Bloom Party
Garden Party to benefit the Q Center, beginning at 4:00 p.m. For information or tickets, call Moe at 475.2430 x 706 or events@ACRHealth.org

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. Want to train with a group? Sign up for the Couch to 5K in 5 weeks. To register call Page Fitness 786-8032. Together we can #endAIDS.

October 19, 2016 – Wednesday
Dining Out for Life
Participating Oneida County restaurants will donate a portion of their proceeds for one day to ACR Health to help end AIDS by 2020. Now recruiting volunteer Ambassadors and restaurants. Call Jack 315.793.0061 x 147 or JPflanz@ACRHealth.org

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

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 available at ACR general volunteer orientation and HIV training. Q Center volunteers undergo reference and background checks. For more information Volunteer@ACRHealth.org or 800.475.2430.