Two years ago Thomas Edmunds’ sense of security suddenly vanished. His mother, who had always been supportive and loving to her son, married a man who rejected Thomas because he was gay. Within no time, Thomas was homeless.

“My step-dad convinced my mom to kick me out of the house and I had no place to go,” said Thomas. He bounced around, bunking with friends and cousins who would let him stay for a while. He took out student loans to enroll in Mohawk Valley Community College and live in a dorm; but he eventually ran out of money and options.

Last July his mother died and Thomas was devastated. He wanted to be anywhere but where he was and set out to walk from Utica to some distant city. Along the way, he encountered a train conductor who gave him a free ticket to Syracuse. ‘‘He said, I can’t get you to any of those other cities, but I can get you to Syracuse.’’ Wasn’t that nice? I’m not used to people being nice to me.”

In Syracuse, Thomas, now 20, soon landed at the Rescue Mission, and in that one move set his life on a different trajectory. ACR Health has an agreement with shelters like the Rescue Mission to take in homeless LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning) young people and find them permanent housing.

The target population for the “Rapid ReHousing” grant from Onondaga County is LGBTQ individuals aged 18-24. Studies estimate that 40% of all homeless youth identify as LGBTQ. The grant provides $147,000 a year to provide rent and pays the salary of a case manager.

“We have enough funding to place 12 young people, and Thomas is number 2,” said Tyler Gilyard, Youth Services Housing Care Manager. Tyler located an apartment for Thomas and, with money from ACR Health’s Holiday Angel fund, bought a mattress and box springs. That bed sets on a frame on the floor of Thomas’ bedroom and is the only furniture in the apartment, but to him, he’s surrounded by luxury.

Tyler’s work now is to help Thomas become self sufficient. He’s planning to enroll in cosmetology school through BOCES and is in workforce readiness training in preparation for a job that will see him through to independence. It’s up to Tyler and Thomas to put together the grants, the gifts, and the loans to make it all work.

“His life was full of loss and loneliness but Thomas always manages to see the good in people and in his own situation,” said Tyler. “I know he’ll make it - he’s working hard and he has a fantastic attitude.”

Thomas, and all youth assisted through the Rapid ReHousing grant, receives up to 24 months of assistance in the form of rent and the guidance of Case Manager Tyler. When Thomas cycles off the program – that will leave a space for a new young homeless person to be helped.

“I know he’ll make it - he’s working hard and he has a fantastic attitude.”

Continued on page 3
ACR Health Hotline 1.888.475.2437
ACR Health in Syracuse Main Office 627 W. Genesee Street Syracuse, New York 13204 315.475.2430  •  800.475.2430 Fax 315.472.6515
990 James Street – 2nd floor Syracuse, NY 13203 315.475.2430
Q Center 617 West Genesee Street Syracuse, New York 13204 315.701.2431
Syringe Exchange 637 West Genesee Street Syracuse New York, 13204 315.475.2430  •  800.475.2430
ACR Health in Utica 287 Genesee Street - 2nd Floor Utica, New York 13501 315.793.0661  •  Fax 315.735.9551
ACR Health in Watertown 120 Washington Street - Suite 302 Watertown, New York 13601 315.785.8222  •  Fax 315.836.0033
ACR Health in Canton 101 Main Street - 3rd floor Canton, New York 13617 315.386.4493  •  Fax 315.386.2530
ACR Health in Auburn 34 Wright Avenue, Suite 5 Auburn, New York 13021 315.252.0005  •  Fax 315.252.0002
ACR Health in Oswego 10 George Street Oswego, New York 13126 315.475.2430  •  Fax 315.342.9813
Newsletter Editor Jean Kessner

Fast & Furious

News out of Washington is coming so fast and furious, it is hard to keep up, but ignoring the news is not an option for anyone concerned about affordable healthcare! It is imperative that we all pay attention and speak up for our beliefs.

In January I wrote about my grave concern for the fate of Affordable Care Act (ACA) which Republicans promised to repeal and replace. Now it turns out that getting rid of the Affordable Care Act is just the starting point; Republicans also want to cut Medicaid, which covers 73 million Americans, most of them low-income children, pregnant women, the disabled, and the elderly. (Many ACR Health clients rely on Medicaid for their medical coverage.)

Republicans have also set their sights on Medicare, the government-run health system for people age 65 and older and the disabled. House Speaker Paul Ryan wants to privatize Medicare, or phase it out, depending on how you want to look at it. According to the Washington Post, Ryan has made clear that as part of the legislative agenda Republicans have planned for Trump’s first months in office, he plans to begin the Medicare phaseout he has long advocated. He seems to want to package it together with the repeal of the Affordable Care Act.

On the campaign trail, the new president repeatedly said that he would protect Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. However, in office, he has chosen as his Health and Human Services Secretary, Tom Price, a leading proponent of changes to Medicare. Back in 2009, Price said, “Nothing has had a greater negative effect on the delivery of health care than the federal government’s intrusion into medicine through Medicare.” Price also wants to raise the age of eligibility and use vouchers in place of direct payment to health care provider.

Drew Altman, the chief executive of the Kaiser Family Foundation, warns that proposals in Washington would “amount to a fundamental rewriting of the health care role of the federal government. They would end the entitlement nature of Medicaid and Medicare, cap future increases in federal health spending, and shift much more of the risk for health costs in the future to the states and consumers.”

My worries about the ACA remain at the highest level and I now am paying close attention to Medicaid and Medicare. The healthcare system we depend upon is under attack. No matter how fast and furious the news comes at you, please pay close attention and let your elected representatives know how you feel. Your health and welfare depend on it.

- In the North Country: Congresswoman Elise Stefanik at 315.782.3150.
- In the Mohawk Valley: Congresswoman Claudia Tenney at 888.216.0048.
- In Central New York, call Congressman John Katko at 315.423.5657.
- U.S. Senator Charles Schumer - 315.423.5471
- U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand - 315.448.0470
“You can live in this city and never know that there are young homeless people... I’m just glad we’re here to help,”

Youth Services Director Marissa Rice has long experience with youth in similar situations to Thomas. The Rapid ReHousing grant is a godsend, she said, “Because it is the first time we can actually help them.” The apartments are not furnished; there is no grant money to purchase the necessities; the fact that Thomas has a bed to sleep on is the exception. “When you see a young person, what do you see them doing?” asks Rice. “They are texting their friends - maybe watching TV. These youth have a roof over their heads, but they have nothing else.”

Thomas is grateful for the roof - and he’s working diligently on the rest.

A t every fundraising event ACR Health states that the proceeds are used for youth prevention programs and emergency client needs. Thomas’s story is just one example of “emergency client needs.”

If you would like to help us, call 800.475.2430 or give online at ACRHealth.org/donate. Thank you.

ACR Health Relocates Flooded Office Space

ACR Health “Annex” offices at 835 West Genesee Street suffered catastrophic flood and sewer damages late last year, forcing permanent closure of that office and relocation to 990 James Street, second floor (at the corner of James and Oak Streets). The James Street space contains offices for specialized Support Services and Insurance Programs which had previously been housed at 835 West Genesee Street; as well as staff for OASAS (Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services). Telephone, fax numbers, and email addresses remain the same.

Support services include:
- Ryan White Case Management/Health Education
- Housing Support Services
- Behavioral Health Education
- Employment Initiative
- Nutrition Health Education and Food and Meal Services
- Medical Transportation Services
- DSRIP Coordination
- Community Health Referral Services

Insurance programs include:
- Health Insurance Navigation/Enrollment
- Managed Long Term Care Ombudsman Program
- Community Health Advocates
- Facilitated Enrollment for Disabled, Aged, and Blind
- The Minority Outreach, Education and Enrollment Program

ACR Health Headquarters remain at 627 West Genesee Street with offices for Case Management, Prevention Services, Development, and Administration.
Erin Bortel, formerly ACR Health’s Director of Prevention Services, has taken the position of Project Coordinator for the New York State Department of Health Office of Drug User Health. This is an exciting opportunity for her, and for ACR Health, as Bortel will build upon the success of ACR Health programs like Syringe Exchange, Narcan Training, and the Safety First Medical Clinic for injection drug users and scale them up to statewide initiatives. We asked Erin to reflect on her four years at ACR Health.

When I came to ACR Health four years ago, neither I nor the organization was prepared for the emerging Opiate Epidemic and how it would disrupt the social fabric of our communities, our workplaces, and our families. We have two choices: either we offer a compassionate response while fighting for easy-to-access, life-saving treatment, or, we continue to allow stigma and judgment to plague our families and neighborhoods. If we revert to the old way of managing addiction, we will continue to lose our friends, our loved ones, and our children.

The Opiate Epidemic presents us with an enormous challenge. In January ACR Health’s Syringe Exchange Program (SEP) broke new ground when client number 2,500* signed up for the service spanning all of our nine counties and beyond, as illustrated in the map compiled by Dessa Bergen-Cico, Associate Professor Department of Public Health, Syracuse University.

As the epidemic spreads, so does the concern by families and loved ones of injection drug users who have come to ACR Health by the hundreds asking to be trained how to use opiate overdose rescue kits (naloxone); there are countless lives saved attributed to those efforts.

ACR Health has experts who know the ins and outs of treatment services in our communities: who has waiting lists, which insurances will be accepted, which programs are better for people with full-time jobs, etc.

We now have a culturally competent medical clinic that was specifically designed to address stigma and to cater to the unique healthcare needs of drug users. With this resource, I’ve seen everything from connections to specialty surgeries to pregnant heroin users getting connected to prenatal care and treatment so they and their children can have a fighting chance.

And yet, it often feels no matter how hard we work, no matter how many overdose prevention trainings we host, or how many collaborations we facilitate, or hours spent with clients, there is still much more to do. Exacerbated by a tenuous political climate, there is a sense of urgency and a call to action that I haven’t experienced before.

It is with this in mind and in the spirit of fearless advocacy that I will move on to a new role as a Project Coordinator for the NYSDOH Office of Drug User Health.

I intend to build upon the success of ACR Health programs and scale them up to statewide initiatives. I have no doubt that ACR Health will continue to role model acceptance and true inclusion for all people. I have no doubt that we will not give up the fight for equality and social justice. While the path ahead appears turbulent for our cause, ACR Health will continue to have nothing but my full-fledged support in everything they do.

Erin Bortel
Erin Bortel, formerly ACR Health’s Director of Prevention Services, has taken the position of Project Coordinator for the New York State Department of Health Office of Drug User Health. This is an exciting opportunity for her, and for ACR Health branching out to offer case management services for other medical problems and chronic conditions because they are just so good at what they do.”

For the past four years, people who have multiple chronic health conditions can receive help from ACR Health’s Care Management program, which previously had served only those with HIV/AIDS. ACR Health integrates and coordinates all primary, acute, behavioral health, and long-term services and supports to treat the whole person.

End AIDS by 2020, New York’s full court press to reduce the number of new HIV infections to fewer than 750 by 2020, reminds O’Connor of the energy created during the “epidemic” days of AIDS. “It reminds me of the Names Project, the construction of a huge AIDS Quilt, which was the product of commitment, persistence, and love. That’s what it will take to end AIDS in three years.”

After New York reaches its goal the hard work of HIV prevention will need to be at full steam. O’Connor warns that the rates that come down can also rise. At the height of the epidemic, NY had 14,000 new HIV infections a year and everyone knew someone who was affected. AIDS was a death sentence and the warning to use a condom was taken seriously. Now, with new HIV cases fewer than 2,500 annually, with medications that hold the virus in check, young people are becoming complacent about condom use.

Top of the mind issue for O’Connor today is the Affordable Care Act, and its threatened dismantling. “There are things wrong with the Affordable Care Act. I’d be the first to admit it. The real issue is: we need insurance reform more than anything. It’s not that we can’t provide healthcare, in fact we do that very well. Our problem is that the insurance industry is controlling public health.”

O’Connor wants ACR Health to be heard loud and clear about the healthcare needs of our clients and our community; and that we must educate and keep the pressure on until we have health insurance reform that works. She’s energized by the threat to repeal the Affordable Care Act. “You have to remember that I was an AIDS case manager in Washington D.C. during the Bush Administration.” O’Connor says she is ready to educate and advocate for health insurance for all.
There are six major colleges in the Mohawk Valley, and Carolyn DeJohn of Mohawk Valley Community College has a challenge for the other five: Try to take this trophy away from us!

“Us” is Team MVCC, the top college fundraising team in the 2016 AIDS Hike for Life, a group of students and faculty who support ACR Health. DeJohn, MVCC Community Education Coordinator, is laser focused on raising money for the 2017 AIDS Hike for Life, coming up April 23. “We love the AIDS Hike for Life because it is a positive event that increases awareness of HIV among our college youth,” said DeJohn.

The AIDS Hike for Life is a student favorite because they feel they are helping out and they can see the work their donations accomplish in the Mohawk Valley. “The Q Center is a wonderful resource for our LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning) students. They attend activities at the Q Center and volunteer there as well.”

MVCC is very involved in community events: the Cancer Relay, the Heart Walk/Run, the Boilermaker, and the AIDS Hike for Life. We spoke with DeJohn on the day that the Trump Administration wiped out transgender bathroom protections put in place by President Obama. “The AIDS Hike for Life has a very powerful message now, with the political climate as it is. This is a time to be supportive and as vocal as possible. We need to stand in the face of oppression and strongly support LGBTQ rights.”

The 19th Annual AIDS Hike for Life to benefit ACR Health will be held Sunday, April 23, 2017 at Hamilton College in Clinton. Our start time is new this year. Registration begins at noon. The AIDS Hike for Life begins at 1:00 p.m. sharp – rain or shine.

The 5K walk/timed run features awards for top performers. Will MVCC keep the trophy? Minimum $25 to participate; participants encouraged to fundraise more to win awards and great incentives. We’ll help you create a personal fundraising page: ACRHealth.org/events.

BLOWOUT 2017 FreeForm Fantasy Hair with a MISSION!

13 of Central New York’s most acclaimed stylists showcased their creative runways looks at the 6th annual Goldwell NY Blowout held at the historic Landmark Theater.

“We are thrilled that this collaborative fundraiser has become so successful,” said Moe Harrington O’Neill, ACR Health’s Q Center Development Manager. “This unique fundraiser, while competitive, is amazing at raising awareness with salons vying for top awards like the Ally Award, Best makeup and Blowout Champion and is the must get ticket of the year!”

Blowout was hosted by WTVH5 newscaster Michael Benny and was sponsored by Goldwell NY, KJ Total Body Waxing, Paparazzi Day Spa, Laura Brazak Images, Syracuse Woman Magazine, Attilio’s, RAIN Lounge, AK Studio and The Landmark Theater.

Next year’s theme, “Superheroes”!

AIDS Hike for Life Challenge

Carolyn DeJohn

Fringe Salon 2017 Blowout Champion

Best Presentation: Marisa’s Fortress of Beauty

Makeup: Marny & Co.

Ally Award: Hair We Are with Ryan Tamming from Goldwell

Host Michael Benny

Artistry

BEST DECORATED SLED

Flying Toasterman

BEST TEAM COSTUME

Q Center CNY

HIGHEST FUNDRAISER

Living Large - $2,300

MORE AWARDS:

Slowest Sled – Reap Brigade – 54.27 seconds

Loudest Cheer Team – Team EH

Best Wintry Drink – Limp Lizard

$23,242!!!

Fastest Finish

Plan A – 12.96 seconds.

Photos courtesy of Frederick Farrar

Sled for RED Raises

Sled for RED is a perfect opportunity for Central New York families to get out and get moving,” said ACR Health Executive Director, Wil Murtaugh. Sled for RED helps ACR Health fill the funding gaps left when government grants run 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 would not have been possible.”

ACR Health would like to thank our sponsors:


7th Annual Sled for RED cardboard sledding derby with its lively costumes and spicy rivalry between veteran and new teams hit the slopes Saturday, February 11, at Four Seasons Golf & Ski Center in Fayetteville. When all the proceeds were in – corporate sponsors, entry fees, Wintry Drink Competition, snow tubing, food, hot chocolate, beer, and wine sampling – $23,242 was raised to support ACR Health’s Adolescent Health Initiative and emergency client services.

“Sled for RED is a perfect opportunity for Central New York families to get out and get moving,” said ACR Health Executive Director, Wil Murtaugh. Sled for RED helps ACR Health fill the funding gaps left when government grants run 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 would not have been possible.”

ACR Health would like to thank our sponsors:

The 7th Annual Sled for RED cardboard sledding derby with its lively costumes and spicy rivalry between veteran and new teams hit the slopes Saturday, February 11, at Four Seasons Golf & Ski Center in Fayetteville. When all the proceeds were in – corporate sponsors, entry fees, Wintry Drink Competition, snow tubing, food, hot chocolate, beer, and wine sampling – $23,242 was raised to support A CR Health’s Adolescent Health Initiative and emergency client services.

“Sled for RED is a perfect opportunity for Central New York families to get out and get moving,” said ACR Health Executive Director, Wil Murtaugh. Sled for RED helps ACR Health fill the funding gaps left when government grants run 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 would not have been possible.”

ACR Health would like to thank our sponsors: 95X, Aloft Hotel, Bell’s Brewery, BNY Mellon, Century Heating & Air Conditioning, Colonial Laundromats, Dave & Buster’s, Empower Federal Credit Union, Four Seasons Golf and Ski Center, Hector Wine Company, Limp Lizard, Noble Health Services, and WSYR NewsChannel9.
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.

Supported by:

Follow us on:

UPCOMING EVENTS

April 15, 2017 – Saturday
Hop, Skip, and Treat
Family Fun event to benefit ACR Health.
Activities including Easter Egg Hunt, Easter Bunny, and baby chicks; 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.
Jefferson County Exhibition Hall.
$5 per child.

April 23, 2017 – Sunday
19th Annual AIDS Hike for Life, a 5K run and walk
The Mohawk Valley’s biggest AIDS fundraiser begins at a new time 1:00 p.m.
Hamilton College in Clinton.
Help End the AIDS Epidemic in NY by 2020.
Register at ACRHealth.org/events

June 4, 2017 – Sunday
25th Annual AIDS Walk/Run -5K Walk and 10K timed Run
Central New York’s oldest and most successful fundraiser begins at 10:00 a.m.
Beaver Lake Nature Center, Baldwinsville.
Register at ACRHealth.org/events.
Help us reach our $250,000 goal and End the AIDS Epidemic in NY by 2020!

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 Central New York
617 West Genesee Street
315.701.2431 or QCcenterCNY@ACRHealth.org

Q Center Mohawk Valley
315.793.0661 x 133 or QCcenterMV@ACRHealth.org

Q Center Northern New York
315.785.8222 x 164 or QCcenterNNY@ACRHealth.org

Ending Youth Homelessness
The ability to purchase beds, furniture and other household items is needed for previously homeless youth! Financial donations are imperative to meet this need. Please donate today at ACRHealth.org or call 800.475.2430.

This newsletter is printed with soy ink.