Staff here at the Q Center have experienced a jump in calls, triggered by a recent piece in the NY Times (close on the heels of the Caitlyn Jenner publicity), featuring one of our transgender Q youth, chronicling her story of transition to a young woman. The Supreme Court’s decision, soon thereafter, regarding gay marriage amidst gay pride celebrations, has only added to the visibility, viability, and conversation about, ‘all things LGBT’.

The aforementioned Times’ story, appeared both online and in print (as well as in the Syracuse Post Standard): serious press, coupled, as I see it, with serious courage on the part of the young person in question, not to mention her family.

There’s power in a person’s story. All the talking (holier-than-thou) heads in the world can’t drown out the truth of someone’s personal journey. Your story is your story: whether anyone else likes it or not is irrelevant to the truth of the unique experiences that have shaped your life. God knows there are plenty out there who would have us believe otherwise: who work overtime to substitute dogma and rhetoric for story.

Predictably, amidst all the positive conversations and public celebrations of injustices overturned, there has been the backlash from those whose mission it is to corral and limit, ‘the truth’ as they decree it - hoarders of ideology clothed as truth, with bombast fit only for (bad) reality TV, but infuriatingly managing prime-time exposure, and claiming God as their sponsor...

I say, thank God for the stories; I say thank God for the people who courageously share their stories – especially the young who take tremendous leaps of faith to put themselves out in the public forum, all the while hoping, and praying and believing that the...

Continued on Page 3

The amazingly talented Syracuse Elks Pride Drum Line wowed the crowd at the 23rd Annual AIDS Walk/Run. They are Southside Syracuse youth from five to college-age and ready to rock the world. Read more on the AIDS Walk/Run on page 5...
Utica Block Party: fun way to learn life lessons

June 19, 2015 Utica ~ With a little help from some friendly firefighters, ACR Health held an informative, fun, and very well attended summer kickoff event at Plymouth Bethesda Cornerstone Community Church to dispense life saving information to youth. In the midst of a dunking booth, food vendors, DJ Chemical Kane, a graffiti artist, and an ice cream truck, were ACR health educators sharing information about syringe exchange as well as other harm reduction education to 161 youth and community members.

Each information table had a series of quizzes and interactive activities focused around harm-reduction or sexual risk reduction on such topics as Syringe Exchange, Hepatitis C, or HIV. While receiving important health information at each table the youth and community members earned raffle tickets for each mini-lesson they participated in. At the end prizes were given: a mountain bike, an 8” tablet, two $75 gift cards, and the art piece that was created on-site.

“It was fabulous weather,” said ACR Health Assistant Director of Youth Services Nicole Deveny. “The community really came out to support and engage with ACR Health staff, volunteers and peers.”

The Firefighters of UFD 7 helped us clean out and fill our dunking booth with water which was a big hit with the kids!! Left to right: E. Springer, Lt. D. Meyers, D. Devins, and P. Blanco

Paint the Town RED
Groundswell of support to #endAIDS by 2020

A crowd of reporters and elected leaders helped ACR Health kick off its 5th annual Paint the Town Red HIV awareness campaign to end AIDS in New York by 2020.

May 26, 2015, Downtown Syracuse - From front, left: Health Commissioner Dr. Indu Gupta, Dr. Elizabeth Reddy, Medical Director of Upstate Medical University’s Designated AIDS Center, NYS Senator Dave Valesky, ACR Health Executive Director Michael Crinnin, and Syracuse Common Council President Van Robinson, share duties in the annual painting of the red stripe down the middle of Salina Street, kicking off twelve days of public awareness about HIV/AIDS. Follow our progress on social media #endAIDS.

Our Mission...

ACR Health is a multi-program human services provider committed to eliminating health disparities and inequality throughout the Central, Northern, and Mohawk Valley regions of New York State.
truth of their story can withstand the inevitable howling winds of hateful pronouncements and condemnations. I say thank God that other struggling young people have these stories to relate to - role models, “profiles in courage”, to sustain them, to light a way out of isolation and fear. Being whole, being genuine, being consistently and openly who you are at your core has never been for the faint of heart: it takes a village, especially for the young, especially for the young who find themselves outside the norm. None of us does it alone.

Two of the calls we received after the Times article were from other parts of the country: Chicago and Los Angeles respectively – stunned callers that (little old…) Syracuse had such a place as the Q Center, along with youth that were coming to terms as transgender and acting on it – publicly!!?! Yep, we do…

The Q Center is the repository of a growing body of stories, and often the first forum for the telling: stories from the city, stories from the suburbs, stories from hamlets surrounded by farmland - universal stories of hope, transformation, and of truth setting young people free. I thank the Times; I think they’ll be back: we’ve got more stories; we’ve got more truths; we’ve got more power: besting bombast any day…!

---

**National HIV Testing Day**

Do your part to #endAIDS by 2020

Get tested for free at ACR Health

Prevention teams from ACR Health hit the streets of Syracuse, Utica, and Watertown to observe National HIV Testing Day on Friday, June 26, 2015. They report having a great turnout as dozens responded to the offer of free HIV tests by coming to our offices and neighborhood locations throughout our nine-county service area.

National HIV Testing Day promotes the importance of testing in detecting, treating, and preventing human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection. HIV testing is the essential entry point to a continuum of prevention, health care, and social services that improve the quality of life and the length of survival for persons with HIV, all of which are available through ACR Health. Recent findings show significantly greater health benefits for persons who start antiretroviral therapy earlier. Persons with HIV who receive appropriate treatment, monitoring, and health care also reduce their chances of transmitting HIV to others. The key to HIV treatment, care, and prevention is learning one’s status through testing.

ACR Health prevention staff and volunteers posed in front of the Safety First Outreach mobile unit before heading out to conduct HIV tests on National HIV Testing Day. Top row from left: Marlo, Ian, Elizabeth, Demetria, Daniel, Denise, Rod, Tally; center row: Nicole, John, Tyler, Sara, Drew; front Ilko.

At ACR Health, HIV testing is available year round and always free. Call 800.475.2430 to make an appointment or testing@ACRHealth.org.
At the request of the New York State Department of Health, ACR Health will expand Safety First Syringe Exchange (SEP) services to the North Country. More than 1,300 individuals are enrolled in Syracuse and Utica SEP programs. The SEP provides new sterile syringes and other safer injection supplies to people who use injection drugs. SEP also provides safe disposal of used syringes. North Country will make the third Syringe Exchange Program for ACR Health.

SEP is able to reach so many people through “peers,” volunteers who formerly used injection drugs and who understand the culture of injection drug use. One of SEP’s most successful peers is Keith.

Every time the Syracuse Syringe Exchange mobile unit heads out to its post at Dudley and Fitch Streets, Keith Henderson is on board. He is dedicated to helping the people he encounters in whatever way they need help. “I see me in them. I didn’t know how bad it was at the time, but now I know the degradation, the embarrassment I should have been feeling. I didn’t see any of that when I was using.”

Keith started sniffing heroin when he was 12 years old. By the time he was 17, he began using needles – sharing them if that was the only option available. For the next 22 years he injected heroin, with occasional unsuccessful attempts to quit. “It was an uphill battle for me. I had people who cared about me and I tried to stop for them. What finally worked was caring enough about me to do it for me.”

Today, at age 49, Keith has been free from heroin for more than a decade. He is comfortable going back into the culture he left in order to develop relationships with the people he enrolls in SEP. Keith says he is far beyond the point of being tempted by that old life, but he’s determined to help those still caught up in it to be as safe as they possibly can. “I wish they had programs like this when I was using. I wouldn’t have HIV and I’d be a lot healthier now.”

Because of syringe exchange programs across the state, New York has seen a dramatic decrease in the spread of HIV among injection drug users.

In 1990

54% of injection drug users were infected with HIV.

In 2012

the prevalence rate for HIV in the same group was just 3%
Beaver Lake Nature Center, June 7, 2015 ~

There was increased excitement in the air at the 23rd Annual AIDS Walk/Run at the prospect that New York could bring about the end of AIDS by 2020. New York is investing millions of dollars in programs, outreach, and testing. ACR Health has responded by increasing HIV testing, expanding Care Management, facilitating access to medication that prevents the spread of HIV, and expanding the range and scope of the Syringe Exchange Program to add focus on injection drug users under age 29.

“Ending the AIDS epidemic will increase health and quality of life for Central New Yorkers and save millions of dollars in healthcare costs,” said ACR Health Development Director Carrie Portzline-Large. “Hundreds of supporters here today are helping keep our youth free of HIV, and that’s where the fight against AIDS is won.” All of the funds raised at the 23rd Annual AIDS Walk/Run support a wide variety of targeted prevention and sexual health services for youth and emergency client needs.

The 23rd Annual AIDS Walk/Run would not have been possible without our sponsors:

- Empower Federal Credit Union
- M&T Bank
- W.B. Mason
- Cathy J. Berry & Associates
- Wegmans
- Honda City
- Kinney Drug Foundation
- Baldwinsville Kiwanis Club
- DJ Puff Advisors
- Liverpool Elks
- Marny & Company
- Pharm Blue
- Quest Diagnostics
- Advanced Business Systems
- ARC of Onondaga
- Berkshire Bank Foundation
- Excellus BlueCross BlueShield
- Fidelis Care
- Oneida Savings
- Syracuse Orthopedic Specialists
- Walmart

Media Sponsors:

- Fox 68 WSYT
- HOT 107.9 Syracuse
- My 43 WNYS

Special thanks to Beaver Lake Nature Center, Starbucks, and Tim Hortons.

Team Stumblers - Top individuals fundraiser Chuck Simpson, middle row, 2nd from right, behind Chuck and to his left is 3rd highest fundraiser, Mark MacBain

Wilpower! – 2nd highest individual fundraiser Bill Louer, back row, 2nd from right

Team COEd - 3rd highest fundraising team

Liverpool CrusAIders - top youth fundraiser Dajer Davis, center with plaque

Most Creative Team: Liverpool CrusAIders

Team with most Members: Greg’s Rainbow

Top Youth Fundraiser: Dajer Davis (Liverpool High School) $830

Top Youth Team: Liverpool High School - $3,295

2nd Place Youth Team: West Hill High School - $1,200

Top Corporate Team: BNY Mellon - $14,167

2nd Place: Old Navy - $5,960

3rd Place: Starbucks Fayetteville - $5,390

Top Individual Fundraiser: Chuck Simpson - $13,000

2nd Highest: Bill Louer - $7,017

3rd Highest: Mark MacBain - $4,000

Top Community Team: Team Stumblers - $29,706

2nd Place: Wilpower - $14,856

3rd Place: Team COEd - $9,454
In the Mohawk Valley
United Way expands funding for ACR Health

United Way of the Valley and Greater Utica has granted ACR Health its first funding source ever for Narcan training, a drug that reverses the effects of opioid overdoses. ACR Health has been conducting these training sessions without a funding stream for more than a year, and has trained more than 500 residents on how to use Narcan when needed.* United Way’s $15,000 grant will offset the cost of this life-saving training, as well as help to fund the Safety First Syringe Exchange Program, which opened in Utica last October.

Additionally, ACR Health received $39,625 from United Way for youth programming – the Adolescent Health Initiative and LGBTQ services. ACR Health Youth Services reach more than 1,200 Mohawk Valley youth per year. They teach health classes in schools, and such curricula as ‘Becoming a Responsible Teen,’ and ‘Why Try?’ a dropout prevention course.

“United Way and ACR Health both seek to identify the unmet needs in our communities and respond. Comprehensive sexual health and safety services for all youth, including LGBTQ youth, are services we excel at in the Mohawk Valley,” said ACR Health Deputy Executive Director, Wil Murtaugh. “Partnering with United Way, ACR Health is most comfortable working to eliminate health disparities and inequality wherever we encounter it.”

*To sign up for Narcan training call 800.475.2430 or Narcan@ACRHealth.org.

ACR Health names Regional Manager for the Mohawk Valley

ACR Health has promoted Nicole Deveny to the position of Mohawk Valley Regional Manager/Assistant Director of Youth Services. Ms. Deveny is a magna cum laude graduate of Utica College of Syracuse University and is presently pursuing a graduate degree in Health Care Administration.

Ms. Deveny has been with ACR Health since 2007 and most recently served as Assistant Director of Youth Services, a position she continues to hold. She will continue to provide oversight for all ACR Health youth services staff and activities, as well as provide regional oversight to ACR Health staff, clients, volunteers, interns, and peers in the Mohawk Valley office. Ms. Deveny will network with regional community based organizations to promote ACR Health services and interagency collaboration.

“As ACR Health grows and diversifies in the services we deliver, it is critical that we cultivate and maintain collaborative relationships in the Mohawk Valley,” said ACR Health Executive Director, Michael Crinnin. “Nicole has been with us through our current phase of major growth. She understands the importance of what ACR Health has to offer and is an excellent spokesperson for the agency.”
Critical Funding Re-instated for Safety First Program

ACR Health has been notified that the Safety First Program will receive $150,000 per year for the next five years to engage and retain substance users in services that decrease their risk for HIV, Hepatitis C, and other infectious diseases. To ACR Health Prevention Director Erin Bortel, this is putting state money to work where it is needed most. “The number of people abusing opioids, including heroin, is outpacing the resources available to help them. Now we can work one-on-one with these individuals on making healthy life choices surrounding substance use and sexual behavior.” This program will help people with addictions obtain insurance, medical care, and substance treatment.

Two years ago ACR Health lost funding for this program that enhanced outreach, education, disease screening, and linkage to drug treatment for injection drug users. New York discontinued funding due to federal sequestration. During 2013, the last year of funding, the Safety First “substance” program provided outreach to more than 1,200 individuals in nine counties and helped 80 substance users enter treatment services.

The Safety First Program will begin October 1, 2015 in the Syracuse, Utica, and Watertown offices.

How’s your health, lesbian, gay, bisexual, & transgender New Yorkers?

Often, providers are unfamiliar with the special health care needs of the LGBT consumer. Some consumers have also expressed their fears with regard to sharing details of their lives with their providers, including sexual health habits. Health disparities can affect groups of people based on gender, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, geography, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability or special health care needs. Health disparities occur among groups who have historically experienced trauma, social disadvantage or discrimination. Frequently these populations experience worse health or greater health risks than advantaged social groups.

Make your voice heard! Take the New York LGBT Health survey at www.lgbtsurvey.org to let the state know about your unmet healthcare needs.
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.

Follow us on:

Facebook
Twitter
Pinterest

United Way

UPCOMING EVENTS

August 15, 2015
Volunteers Needed
Make your volunteer hours turn into dollars. Volunteer for Vino and the Beasts and they will make a donation to ACR Health in your honor, while you receive access to the post party and a free T-shirt. Vinoandthebeasts.com/volunteersneeded

August 30, 2015
Bubble Blast Run - The official race of The Great New York State Fair!
9:30 a.m. Navigate a fun, bubbly course through the state fairgrounds. Register at BubbleBlastRun.com. Registration includes admission to the State Fair for the day and a Bubble Blast t-shirt with paid entry.

October 18, 2015
16th Annual First Frost AIDS Walk/Run
1:00 p.m. Thompson Park Zoo and Conservatory, Watertown
Sign up as an individual or team. AIDSwalkCNY.com.
Together we can #endAIDS

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 LBGTQ Youth Groups
Information: 315.793.0661 ext. 133 or glbtqyouth@ACRHealth.org

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

Build a Strong Neighborhood
Want to host a giving party at your house and donate the proceeds to ACR Health? We can help you! Contact us today at 800.475.2430 or events@ACRHealth.org.

This newsletter is printed with soy ink.

If you wish to unsubscribe from this newsletter: information@ACRHealth.org or 800.475.2430.