April 2015

We just lost a staff member, Dale Woolson, to an untimely and unexpected death (pg. 6): always a shock; always a flashpoint for all involved. It just so happened I was away for a few days at a Benedictine monastery when I heard the news, an ideal setting to reflect, not only on the person, but on loss, acceptance and death’s inevitability.

The premature death of someone should come as no shock to anyone who has worked here for any length of time: the agency stands on the shoulders of the many, ‘too young lost to AIDS’, who, volunteering here, threw their heart and soul into preventing further infections and supporting others who were becoming infected: burning fiercely until the end.

The truth is, it is always a shock: the brighter the light the greater the shock – the deeper the sadness. Dale was no flash in the pan, her light more illuminating than blinding. Her touch was gentle and humorous; her gaze/attention was with you 100% whenever you had the fortune to cross her path. You never had the sense that Dale lived any part of her life with, ‘dukes up’. To the contrary, you always felt welcomed into her sphere. She was ideally suited for her job working with incarcerated men. They knew instinctively they could trust her intentions and her message.

Dale loved her job and was not shy about letting people know. She found her niche: a happy marriage, as it turned out, for both Dale and the incarcerated men she worked with. Guests of the NYS correctional system are easy targets for disregard and discrimination, which made them all the more precious to Dale. Her genuine warmth and easy wit touched hearts in a system designed to deprive inmates of both. I know there will be many ‘tough guys’ who will grieve at the news of her passing.

A few days after her death, Dale’s spouse asked to address the entire staff as they gathered for our monthly staff meeting. It was an unusual request that caught me off guard, anxious, I’m sure, about the emotions it might unleash (control issues rising…). It was also a request I could not imagine turning down.

Besides the re-iteration of how much Dale valued her job and loved her fellow co-workers, her spouse made a final ringing challenge to us all by simply sharing her assessment that Dale’s primary legacy, and driving ethic, was her belief in, and practice of, forgiveness. Dale, she said, was not encumbered by resentments and past injustices: she was free to move through her life with love and acceptance in the midst of any and all she encountered.

I found myself a bit startled. I wasn’t ready for a challenge to take up the serious task of being ‘all forgiving all the time’. Grieving comes naturally and has an element of self-satisfaction; living a life characterized by forgiveness comes naturally to very few, and requires a

Continued on Page 3

Possible, if we adopt a “revolutionary” approach. See more on page 5.
ACR Health elects two to Board of Directors

ACR Health has elected Dr. Cynthia Morrow and Shannon O’Connor, Esq. to its Board of Directors.

Cynthia Morrow, MD, MPH is Professor of Practice in the Public Administration and International Affairs in the Maxwell School at Syracuse University. She holds a joint appointment as assistant professor in the Department of Public health at Upstate. Dr. Morrow previously served as Commissioner of Health of Onondaga County.

“I am thankful for the opportunity to join the Board of ACR Health. With its dedication to provide a broad range of services to help improve the health of the community, ACR Health has emerged as a leading public health agency, not only in Onondaga, but in many other counties throughout New York,” said Dr. Morrow. “I look forward to working with the remarkable people at ACR Health who are devoted to ‘keeping the community informed and healthy!’”

Shannon O’Connor, Esq., is an Assistant Corporation Counsel in the City of Syracuse Law Department, where she represents and defends the City and its officials in litigation brought in federal and state court. Prior to her law career, Ms. O’Connor worked with HIV positive and at-risk individuals in Buffalo, New York and the District of Columbia.

“I have always had an interest in public health and particularly HIV work,” Ms. O’Connor said. “I have spent several years working on the frontlines of the HIV/AIDS issue. My experience has included direct client service, but also program development and implementation along with review of existing programs.”

Morrow and O’Connor join ACR Health Board members Suzanne Kondra-DeFuria, Chair, Andrew London, Vice Chair, Anthony Adornato, Secretary, M. Paul Mahalick, Treasurer, Jerena Barkins, David Reed, Kim J. Rieppel, and Patrick Quigley.

Mary Doody is currently recruiting Mohawk Valley volunteers for a variety of jobs at the 17th Annual AIDS Hike for Life which will be held Saturday, April 25th at Hamilton College. Interested? Call Mary at 793.0661 or email her: volunteer@ACRHealth.org.
SUNY Upstate Medical Students Raise Money for Q Center

The inaugural “drag show” hosted by Upstate’s Campus Activities Governing Board and the LGBT student organization was such a success, it likely will return next year. The show featured about a dozen Upstate students performing musical numbers in drag, as well as Aggy Dune and Darienne Lake, who donated their time. It raised $1,570 for the Q Center at ACR Health, which provides a safe place for LGBTQ youth and their allies.

“It pushed people out of their comfort zones,” said MacKenzie Hall, one of the second-year medical student organizers and performers. “The money we raised was good, but we brought awareness. A lot of people didn’t know the Q Center existed.”

Max Norris, president of the campus LGBT club, also performed. For students, the show provided “a stance in solidarity and community,” Max said. “A lot of youth can feel uncomfortable and stay in the closet. On stage in drag, people put themselves in an uncomfortable position.”

Macy VanArman said hosting the show on a medical school campus was significant. Prevailing societal views on gender identification caused at least one of the performers some pre-show unease, she said. “This is nothing compared to what the LGBT community faces,” Macy said. “As future physicians, we need to be aware of the spectrum of gender and orientation. However you identify, it should not have an impact on how you are treated. If we’re aware of the spectrum, we can be better doctors.”

In addition to the importance of raising awareness, the student organizers agreed, the show also was a lot of fun. See you next year!
Kristen Newton, Ombudsman:
“We are not related to any health insurance companies. We are not trying to sell you anything. We do not care whether you enroll in any particular managed care plan or not; we only want to help you make the decisions that are right for you.”

Angela Mathews, Ombudsman:
“We can answer your questions related to Medicare, Medicaid, long-term care (for example, your home care or nursing home care), and your managed care plan. We can help you solve problems with your managed care plan or providers like doctors, hospitals, and pharmacies. For example, we can help you complain or appeal.”

ACR Health has a staff of 18 serving our nine-county services area that enroll individuals and family in private health insurance, Child Health Plus, and Medicaid. George Deveny, our man in Lewis and Herkimer Counties, has a lot of geography to cover.

Herkimer County, New York State’s second-largest county is well known for its scenic beauty, productive agriculture, and rich history. For many residents, it is a period of great transition, as they deal with a changing economy and worker layoffs. Recently, the county-owned nursing home closed, terminating all its employees. There also was a layoff of the entire third shift, and a workforce reduction of managerial employees at the county’s largest employer, Remington Arms. Because of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and the New York State of Health insurance marketplace, retired and displaced workers have more health insurance options moving forward.

I navigated an enrollment for a married couple from Herkimer County, who had a combined annual household income of $28,000. The husband retired at 62, took his Social Security benefits and had a pension from his employer, for a combined total of $22,000. The wife worked as a waitress, earning $6,000 a year.

The husband’s employer offered them COBRA upon the husband’s retirement to continue insurance coverage. The Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA) health benefit provisions require group health plans to provide a temporary continuation of group health coverage. Sometimes, COBRA can be very expensive, and in this case would have cost them more than $600 per month, each!

The couple scheduled an enrollment with me at Catholic Charities in Ilion, and was able to enroll in a Family Plan through the New York State of Health, and were determined eligible for an Advance Premium Tax Credit and Cost-Sharing Reduction, which brought their premium for a Silver Level plan down to $265 per month, covering both of them!

George Deveny
Support Services Navigator - Herkimer/Lewis Counties

To learn more about health insurance options, call ACR Health at 800.475.2430 and ask for a Navigator in your county.

A new Advocacy program from ACR Health

Older and vulnerable New Yorkers have a new layer of help and protection from ACR Health’s Managed Long Term Care Ombudsman Program. The Ombudsman program is an effective resource for older adults and persons with disabilities who live in nursing homes, assisted living and other licensed adult care homes. Ombudsmen help residents understand and exercise their rights to good care in an environment that promotes and protects their dignity and quality of life.

The Ombudsman advocates for residents by investigating and resolving complaints made by or on behalf of residents; promoting the development of resident and family councils; and informing government agencies, providers and the general public about issues and concerns impacting residents of long-term care facilities.

To receive services you must be on Medicaid and need long term care services for 120 or more days in a calendar year. Ombudsman services are completely free and confidential.

For questions and further information, call 800.475.2430 and ask for Kristin Newton (x 437), or Angela Matthews (x 154).
A Strategy to End AIDS

New York State has made a long-term commitment to end AIDS by 2020. Ending the AIDS Epidemic plan would bring new annual HIV infections from a historic high of 3,000 to fewer than 750 by 2020.

“Their pill” is an effective AIDS drug called Truvada that has been shown in clinical tests to reduce the chances of becoming infected with HIV by up to 92% when taken daily. Truvada will not be used to replace safe sex practices, but used in addition to condoms to provide greater protection. PrEP gives greater “peace of mind” to HIV discordant couples.

New York State Department of Health will accomplish this by implementing three steps:

- Test to find out who has HIV;
- Get them into care and keep them there; and
- Expand access to the HIV prevention treatment PrEP.

In this third of three installments about ending AIDS, we tell you about a new approach to prevent new infections - Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP), which some are calling revolutionary. PrEP is a once-daily medication that reduces the risk of becoming infected with HIV.

Nicky Jennings’ job as Education Specialist at SUNY Upstate Designated AIDS Clinic is to keep high-risk HIV negative individuals from becoming infected with HIV. A person is high risk if, for example, their sexual partner is HIV positive; if they have unprotected sex with multiple partners whose status is unknown; or if they use injection drugs and share needles.

“PrEP can reduce the chances of becoming HIV positive by up to 92%”

“PrEP can reduce the chances of becoming HIV positive by up to 92%”

Anyone who thinks that PrEP could be helpful to them can contact Nicky directly by email jenningn@upstate.edu or call 315.464.7539.

To be tested for HIV please email testing@ACRHealth.org or call 800.475.2430.

If you are HIV+ and need support to stay healthy, email CareManagement@ACRHealth.org or call 800.475.2430.
On the morning of April 2, 2015 the email to all employees read: “We are saddened by the news that our beloved Dale Woolson suddenly passed away last night peacefully in her home.”

Dale was Supervisor of the Criminal Justice Initiative (CJI) and the Testing Services in the Prevention Department. Dale’s efforts to get the CJI Program into prisons were not without push-back. CJI provides comprehensive HIV, STD, and Hepatitis C prevention programs for inmates, and works individually with HIV+ inmates to develop transitional plans for health care, risk reduction, and services upon their release from prison. Guided by Dale, CJI served thousands housed in eight New York State Department of Corrections facilities in the Watertown and Elmira HUBS.

Dale’s ability and persistence is what has made the CJI program the success that it continues to be. Her outstanding diligence in getting inmates tested allows ACR Health’s name to remain on their minds when seeking access to the linkage-to-care services they need when they are ready to leave. Her desire to have the Prevention Team as testers is still in the works, as she believed we all needed to be client-ready, in order to give them our best every day.

The CJI Team, The Prevention Team, and all of ACR Health will miss Dale Woolson deeply, personally, and professionally.

Elizabeth Wright, CJI

Many fun ways to support ACR Health

ACR Health is pleased to be among 21 nonprofit organizations involved in Utica’s 2015 Boilermaker Charity Bib Program. ACR Health has been gifted with 20 bibs for this year’s Boilermaker. This is the third straight year we have participated in the bib program, allowing us to fundraise a total of $22,500. Thank you, Boilermaker!

There is still time to register to run with Tim or walk in the 17th Annual AIDS Hike for Life to be held SATURDAY, April 25 at Hamilton College. Visit AIDSwalkCNY.com for more information or to sign up.

You can get a bib for the sold-out Boilermaker by signing up at crowdrise.com/acrhealth and committing to fundraise $500 or more. Questions? Call Melissa Swald Camman at 793.0661.
If you see this symbol in the window of a bar in the Mohawk Valley, you’ll know that employees there have been trained to spot and appropriately respond to incidents of sexual harassment and sexual assault.

Beginning April 1, YWCA Mohawk Valley, in collaboration with ACR Health, implemented its Safer Bars Program, which is available to train staff at local alcohol-serving establishments. YWCA Mohawk Valley Executive Director, Natalie Brown, said these establishments provide a great venue for addressing sexual assault prevention for a variety of reasons. “They are social gathering places where alcohol is readily available, and though many people are able to safely enjoy themselves, sexual aggressors may use these types of environments as a ‘staging ground’ for selecting, isolating, and even incapacitating their target.”

Director of Prevention Services at ACR Health, Erin Bortel, said, “For 30 years ACR Health has promoted sexual and ‘substance’ literacy in the name of disease prevention and health promotion. As I reflect upon our work with women, we can’t ignore the impact sexual violence and trauma has on them and their health. We are a firm supporter of the Safe Bars Initiative and we welcome the opportunity to partner with such a reputable organization, the YWCA of the Mohawk Valley.”

ACR Health and YWCA Mohawk Valley collaborate to promote safety

On March 2, on its Annual Day of Thanks, United Way of the Valley and Greater Utica visited ACR Health to thank employees for 100% participation in United Way giving. Every year United Way spends an entire day JUST THANKING our area’s donors and volunteers. They make phone calls, send post cards and emails and visit about 10 (out of 170) stellar companies, with a thank you basket and some balloons. ACR Health-Mohawk Valley was one of the companies that were chosen to be thanked this year! Great Job ACR Health!!!!

To which ACR Health added a “Thank you right back!” for helping to fund our youth programming in the Mohawk Valley.

April 1, 2015, Utica ~ Announcing the Safer Bars campaign: from left, Randy André, Assistant Prevention Director, ACR Health; Erin Bortel, Prevention Director ACR Health; YWCA Director Natalie Brown; Melissa Loiacano, YWCA Community Educator; Johanna Johnson, Women’s Program, ACR Health. Safer Bars is based on Collection Actions for Safe Spaces (CASS) and Defend Yourself Projects, which has been implemented in Washington D.C. YWCA Mohawk Valley’s Preventative Education Department, along with ACR Health, is tailoring the Safer Bars program to identify the issues, needs, and perceptions of sexual harassment and assault amongst the Mohawk Valley’s drinking-age populace.
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:

[Social media icons]

UPCOMING EVENTS

April 19, 2015
Beer Bingo
Dinosaur Barbeque 6:00 p.m. Play Bingo to win great prizes while enjoying a bucket of beverages! Tickets online for $20. ACRHealth.org

Saturday, April 25, 2015
17th Annual AIDS Hike for Life with Bubbles!
5K fundraising walk and timed run at 11:00 a.m. at Hamilton College. Something new this year – optional BUBBLES courtesy of the Bubble Blast Run! AIDSwalkCNY.com

May 8, 2015
Red Solo Cup Party
5:00 - 9:00 p.m. Toby Keith’s I Love This Bar and Grill Tickets $15 and $50. ACRHealth.org

May 15, 2015
Bowling Party
7:00-10:00 p.m. Bowl Mor Lanes, 201 Highland Avenue, E. Syracuse $20 for bowling, shoes, pizza, and soda

May 21, 2015
Celebrity Bartending
Syracuse Suds Factory, 320 Clinton Street, Syracuse. 5:00-9:00 p.m.

May 30, 2015
Volley for Dough
Volleyball tournament, Cheap Seats Sports Bar 6 Hillside Avenue, Oswego. Call Margi: 343.4676

June 7, 2015
23rd Annual AIDS Walk/Run
10:00 a.m. 5K fundraising walk, 10K timed run at Beaver Lake Nature Center. AIDSwalkCNY.com

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 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 Groups
Information: 315.701.2422

Utica LGBTQ Youth Groups
Information: 315.701.2422 or glbtqyouth@ACRHealth.org

Watertown Area Gay Youth
Information: 315.386.4493 x 151

This newsletter is printed with soy ink.

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