

June 2020

Serving
Cayuga, Herkimer, Jefferson,
Lewis, Madison, Oneida, Onondaga,
Oswego, and St. Lawrence Counties

PHYSICAL BARRIERS WON'T STOP US FROM SUPPORTING YOU **CORONAVIRUS, SOCIAL DISTANCING, AND ACR HEALTH**

Insurance Enrollment Skyrockets

Having health insurance is never more crucial than during a global pandemic, yet many people are in need of help due being furloughed or laid off.

New York State has created a special open enrollment period due to this crisis that extends until at least June 15th. Our health insurance navigators are ready and able to take appointments over the phone to get people covered. So far, we have sign up over 1,150 individuals during the special enrollment period.

Sexual Health

We know people still need access to safer sex options! We are sending out FREE kits for anyone who thinks they will need them. Kits include a variety of external and internal condoms and lube. They can be ordered online or by contacting our staff. We supplied 32 people just in April with a safer sex kit.

We are also mailing out free at-home HIV tests to people who need them. One of the most important pillars of ending the HIV epidemic is making sure people know their status. Clients can call or email our staff to talk about their own personal risks and develop strategies to stay safe. In the first two weeks of this initiative, we were able to send at-home tests to nine people.



Jesuit Volunteer Corps member
Jumel Villacarlos prepares pantry
orders for socially distant pick-ups.

Emergency Client Needs

ACR Health's Food Pantry has been busier than ever. Providing nutrition, personal care items, laundry care and cleaning supplies, our pantry has seen an increase of requests by over 1,300% since the month of March due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thanks to a generous grant of \$5,000 from the John Ben Snow Foundation, we are able to meet the increasing need for food and essential items like personal care items and cleaning supplies to those in dire need. This funding also made it possible for us to purchase personal protective equipment for staff to safely distribute pantry items, and for clients' personal protection as well.

In addition to this support, our Food Pantry has received generous support from the Food Bank of Central New York; the Human Services Leadership Council; The Central New York Community Foundation's COVID-19 Community Support

Fund - \$16,000; The Northern New York Community Foundation's COVID-19 Community Support Fund - \$1000; The Community Foundation of Herkimer and Oneida Counties and United Way of the Valley and Greater Utica Area's Mohawk Valley COVID-19 Response Fund - \$12,296. These contributions have allowed access to support for people throughout our service area.

Many thanks for a grant of \$5,000 from The Women's Fund of Central New York. Our female clients will have access to essential personal hygiene products, laundry care, personal care items, and personal protective equipment. While the support of these organizations has done wonders for our pantry and clients, we know that our community is hurting. We need to make sure that no one is forced to decide between a meal or bill. Consider making a gift at ACRHealth.org or contact us to learn how you can donate items.

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Interested in serving on our Board?
Contact us at (315) 475-2430.

ACR HEALTH HOTLINE
800.475.2430

Syracuse Offices:

- 627 West Genesee Street
- 990 James Street, 2nd floor
- The Q Center
835 Hiawatha Blvd West
- Syracuse Syringe Exchange
637 West Genesee Street

Utica Office, Q Center, and Syringe Exchange:

- 287 Genesee Street, 2nd floor

Watertown Offices:

- 120 Washington Street, 3rd floor
- Watertown Syringe Exchange:
135 Franklin Street

Canton Office:

- 101 Main Street, 3rd floor

NEWSLETTER EDITOR
Will Sudderth



WE'RE STILL *Open!*

It's hard to believe how quickly our world has changed in recent months. Most of our staff, like many of you, are working from home as we work collectively to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus. While many aspects of life have come to a pause, what has not gone away are the needs of our community and the urgency with which we need to act.

Isolation has been difficult for all of us. It is harder still for queer youth who may not feel comfortable at home and can't be with their peers. It is challenging for someone who uses substances when they can't see healthcare providers face to face to check in and talk about their needs.

This is why I am so proud of our team at ACR Health for stepping up and finding creative solutions to help our community. Our clinic in Syracuse is able to continue seeing new and existing patients using telemedicine, personal protective equipment, and a drive to be the support our clients need now more than ever. Our Q Center leaders are finding ways to connect with youth online, creating virtual meetings through video conferencing and daily check-ins to remind kids that we care, that our community is still here to support them.

Even with social distancing, we see the coronavirus continue to spread – but it's not the only one. That's why we are doing everything we can to stop the spread of STDs and HIV. We have created FREE mail order Safer Sex Kits that people can request online. We have also begun sending free at-home HIV testing kits to people who need one. But it's not as simple as putting a box in the mail. Our staff connect with clients to make sure they have the education and support to stay healthy.

It has never been more vital for our community to come together and support each other. Isolation can be dangerous for anyone, so we stay open to connect everyone.



All hands on deck! Wil helps organize our diaper orders for clients - 13,840 to be exact! 146 children throughout ACR Health's area received nearly 100 diapers each.

I am thrilled to say that the 28th Annual AIDS Walk/Run is still on – this year we are going VIRTUAL! The reason this Walk began was to support our community when they needed us, and I feel the spirit of that even more today. Go online to sign up, start fundraising, and get ready to walk or run from your own backyard, neighborhood, or kitchen counter in one giant video conference! Our doors are open – we need your help to keep it that way.

Thank you,

Wil Murtaugh

Our Mission:

To create healthy communities by opening doors to services that enhance the wellbeing of all.

Our Vision:

A community in which every person has the opportunity to achieve optimal health and equality.

Our Values:

Commitment to Excellence
Respect for People & Community
Wellbeing
Integrity
Empowerment
Teamwork

Creating Community During Quarantine

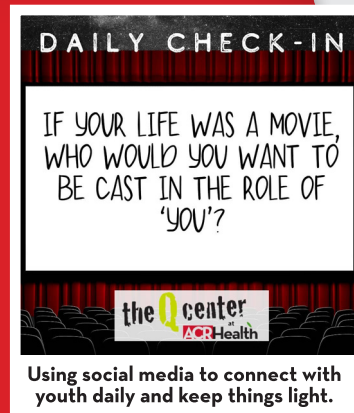
Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning youth do not have it easy. Oftentimes these youth rely to an extraordinary extent on their network of friends and mentors, like at The Q Center. Not every home is a safe space for LGBTQ kids, making isolation and lockdown even more difficult.

Fortunately, our Q Centers have started hosting online Zoom group meetings for youth and allies. They have held two meetings a week since mid-March, with anywhere from 10-15 youth that participate in each call.

"Youth are worried and concerned about managing schoolwork from home, which many are having trouble with work piling up. Other's feel disconnected and are starting to get bored. We are working on ideas in how to shake up the Virtual experience for the youth and keep things light," says Hilary Avallone, one of our Q Center Coordinators.

"For some of the youth, groups are a place to escape for an hour."

While the support of these organizations has done wonders for our pantry and clients, we know that our community is hurting. We need to make sure that no one is forced to decide between a meal or bill. Consider making a gift at ACRHealth.org or contact us to learn how you can donate items.



CLIENT STORY: DIABETES PREVENTION PROGRAM

When you hear "ACR Health", what comes to mind? Providing HIV tests to the community. Youth groups at The Q Center. Maybe Narcan training or our syringe exchange program?

These are all vital aspects of our work. But what happens after the HIV test? What if a youth needs more than just a group meeting? We know that helping people achieve optimal health is never a one-off fix, and our clients' lives are complicated.

That is what Care Management is designed for. Care management can range from scheduling transportation to doctors' appointments to housing negotiations and rental assistance. One of our newer programs designed to help clients is our Diabetes Prevention Program.

The National Diabetes Prevention Program—or DPP—was created to address the increasing burden of prediabetes and type 2 diabetes in the United States.

One such participant is Gertrude. Gertrude first got connected to ACR Health not for care management, but for a referral to a substance use recovery program.

Gertrude had 30+ years of alcohol dependency and substance use. She drank to cope with difficult relationships, starting from a young age stemming from abuse. One turning point for Gertrude was when she found out she was HIV-positive. She began to make changes in her physical relationships to keep herself and others healthier. "I realized I was worth more than just a body," she says.

After 30 days in recovery, then 60, she realized she wanted to get healthier in other parts of her life too. That was when she connected with ACR Health's nutrition and diabetes prevention programs.

"Practically everyone in my family is diabetic or pre-diabetic. ACR Health has caring facilitators who helped change eating habits and challenge us to be transparent with our goals." Gertrude went on to say some ways she changed her behavior is by avoiding processed meats and, more importantly, reading the labels of food items.

"I started eating right. I feel better about myself. The program has been one of the main reasons for my change [to sobriety]. I was grateful and I still am today.

Diabetes might not be the first thing that comes to mind when you think of ACR Health. Our clients need more than quick tests and limited evaluations. They need care. To "create healthy communities for all" we need to have comprehensive plans to deal with complicated problems.

Now, Gertrude has been sober for more than a year and is more equipped than ever to make healthier choices. Before the coronavirus cut the school year short, she filled her time working in schools with first graders.

When asked why she wanted to share her experiences, she says, "The stigma of HIV and substance use breaks my heart. It can happen to anyone. I disclose my status because people can hear it and say 'hey, that's my story too'".

"I realized I was worth more than just a body"

"The stigma of HIV and substance use breaks my heart. It can happen to anyone."

NEW OBSTACLES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST SUBSTANCE USE

People battling with substance use disorders already feel on the fringe, isolated, and are at-risk for health issues. Now, in the age of COVID-19 and social distancing, it is more important than ever to continue working with clients to help them.

This is why we have made it a priority to keep our Medical Clinic open. With telemedicine, social distancing protocols, and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), we have been able to continue working with clients who need access to medically assisted treatment. We have even been able to accept some new clients.

We have already seen one spike in overdoses in the Utica area since the beginning of the coronavirus. From the end of March to the end of April, there were at least 39 overdoses, including seven deaths – five of which occurred in just one week. This is tragic news, and cements our resolve to be there for our clients.

One of our greatest tools in battling substance use is making sure people have access to Narcan and know how to use it to stop an overdose. This is why one of our first initiatives when we moved to remote work was setting up weekly video conferences to continue our Narcan trainings. Once trained, individuals can go to local pharmacies to collect or replenish their Narcan, empowering them to save a life.

Since restoring service to our Syringe Exchange Program in all three of our major regions, we have seen over 450 clients come to us for fentanyl tests strips, Narcan kits, and returned many used needles.

Just because the coronavirus is dominating headlines does not mean other community issues have gone away. ACR Health's doors remain open for our clients – no matter what!

ACR HEALTH WELCOMES New Finance Director



Ashley Reese
ACR Health Director of Finance

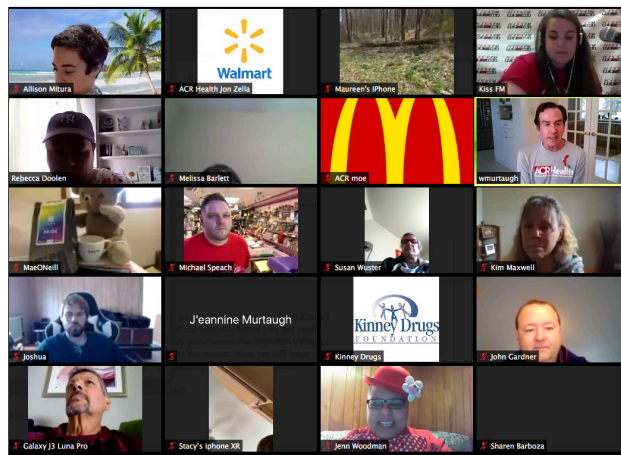
Ashley Reese joins ACR Health as our new Finance Director. Her background includes having worked at a nonprofit legal firm, Highland Hospital, and at a tradeshow booth manufacturing company, all in the Rochester area. She received her Masters in Business Administration from SUNY Oswego in 2013.

Ashley was drawn to ACR Health for the culture of the organization and being able to give back to the community. Moving away from and working outside of the Syracuse region made her realize how much she loves the area.

Though starting work during social distancing has been challenging, Ashley says she has, “gotten great support from the Finance Team, and the whole organization, that has helped me hit the ground running. I’m looking forward to being able to grow professional relationships remotely, and face-to-face when we are all in the office more routinely.”

Ashley enjoys reading, gardening, and 1970’s muscle cars. Her favorite place to vacation is Inlet, in the Adirondacks, and has two family pets, a Bernese Mountain Dog and a Landseer Newfoundland.
Welcome to the team Ashley!

Mohawk Valley Turns Out for The Hike for Life



Hike for Life participants and sponsors logged in to Zoom and celebrated from a safe social distance.

ACR Health's 22nd Annual Hike For Life went virtual on Saturday, April 25th! Participants gathered via Zoom and "hiked" with other participants. Our community partner Northland Communication is a proud sponsor of the virtual Hike for Life.

The Hike for Life raised over \$24,000 to fill the gaps between funded programs and the unmet needs of our community.

"Many of our clients face new hurdles as jobs are laid off and services become more difficult to access. Clients are faced with making hard decisions of 'do I pay rent, or do I put food on the table?' Making sure everyone has access to services is exactly what the Hike for Life supports," said Wil Murtaugh, ACR Health's Executive Director. Over the past 22 years, the Hike for Life has now raised over \$825,000 to benefit ACR Health's efforts in the fight against HIV/AIDS, substance use and poverty, and lead the charge in support of LGBTQ equality in the Mohawk Valley.

ACR Health would like to thank the sponsors of the Virtual Hike For Life who are supporting us through this difficult time: Empower Federal Credit Union, Excellus, Gilead Sciences, Kinney Drug Foundations, McDonald's, Northland Communications, PharmBlue and Stewart Shoppes.

"Lives have been changed – lives have been saved – thanks to this community. We couldn't be more grateful for their support,"

-Wil Murtaugh.

The 28th Annual AIDS Walk/Run Goes VIRTUAL!

Join us to celebrate the 28th AIDS Walk/Run on Sunday, June 7th - this year we're going VIRTUAL and are counting on your support!

Participants will log in to a secure video conference to come together and walk, run, or lounge where ever they are and celebrate our community!

This is a milestone year as we mark the 2020 End the Epidemic initiative by New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo. No matter what happens or how long it takes, we will continue fighting this disease until there is a cure.

The 2020 AIDS Walk/Run gives us a moment to celebrate our triumphs over HIV/AIDS, remember those loved ones lost to the epidemic, and support education to continue the prevention of new HIV infections. Sign up now at ACRHealth.org.





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ACR Health is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

MORE INFO & REGISTER AT ACRHEALTH.ORG/EVENTS



June 7, 2020 - Sunday 28th Annual AIDS Walk/Run

Join us to celebrate the 28th AIDS Walk/Run on Sunday, June 7th - this year we're going VIRTUAL and are counting on your support!



October 25, 2020 - Sunday 21st Annual First Frost Walk

Join us for another year of giving back and supporting our community – rain, shine, or online!

INVEST IN YOUR COMMUNITY. GET INVOLVED TODAY!
ACRHealth.org/events • 315.475.2430

HIV/AIDS

LGBTQ EQUALITY

SUBSTANCE USE

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