

POSITIVE VOICES-DECEMBER 2009

Your Newsletter by Positive People for Positive People

ONE YEAR ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

I CAN SAY THIS!! IT NEVER IS BORING

John Barry

Firstly, a big thank you goes out to everyone reading this newsletter. Your support and encouragement has been crucial and invaluable to me in learning the many things expected of an Executive Director in the last 20 months. The honesty and willingness to share your thoughts that so many of you have shown has helped me and certainly moved the Southern Tier AIDS Program forward as an organization. I have been especially impressed with the evolution of the Consumer Advisory Committee as a group that provides input on STAP programming, a venue to share information on important programs like the Home Energy Assistance Program, publish a newsletter and provide a forum for HIV+ people to support one another. I feel as though the CAC is an entity unto itself and am sure that whether STAP existed or not, the CAC would go on performing these important functions in our community. The idea has been brought forward that we should have CAC's throughout the Southern Tier. I agree and we are encouraging interested parties to do just that.

STAP is not going anywhere, but things have certainly become more challenging of late. As many of you already know, STAP's funding was cut by 13.5% last year and the governor is negotiating as we speak to cut more from the state budget to meet a 3+ billion deficit. The good news is that whatever cuts are proposed by the governor and passed by the legislature we have already begun planning how best to handle them while preserving program integrity. My hope is that whatever changes are necessary to meet our new financial realities we can make these changes in a way that the people we serve will not notice a difference. Preserving client services was a priority in planning how to absorb the last round of cuts and it will remain a priority whatever awaits us in the future.

It is the day before Thanksgiving as I write this and the next time we blink our eyes the holidays will be fully upon us. I like to reflect at this time of year on what has happened in the past year and would encourage you all to do the same. Often in these quiet moments we experience clarity and I would ask that if you have ideas for how we can conduct our business more efficiently or provide a more quality service you share them with us. Talk to your case manager, Wendy, Michelle, Gayle or myself. Your ideas are crucial to the success of the agency and I am always available to hear your thoughts or concerns.

Thank you for putting your faith in us and allowing us to work with you. We look upon it as a privilege and a serious responsibility. Be well and live fully.

From the Director of Client Services

I am pleased to announce we have several new staff joining our Client Services team. I would like to take a moment to briefly introduce our newest staff members to you, and share a little bit about their professional experiences that helped prepare them for their career at STAP:

Some of you may remember, Juan Rios, who was a Case Manager Technician (CMT) in our Johnson City office almost a year ago. Juan took some time off to pursue his hairdressing career, but just couldn't stay away. He has returned to STAP's Client Services staff and will be picking up where he left off, replacing Jen Brown as the CMT in Johnson City. In addition to having worked at STAP for a year, Juan has worked at Fairview Recovery Services as a Program Aide for 2 years and at New Horizon's Inpatient Detox as a Resident Assistant for 6 months. Juan started with STAP on November 3, 2009.

Jennifer McKenzie will be joining the staff as a case manager serving Broome and Chenango counties. Jen recently worked at the Mental Health Association of the Southern Tier for almost 5 years as the Assistant Director to Advocacy and Peer Education. She has an Associate's degree in Criminal Justice.

Terri Shields joins us from the Binghamton YWCA where she worked for almost 5 years as a case manager and Program Coordinator for YWRAP and the Emergency Housing Program. She has an Associate's degree in Human Services. Terri will be working primarily in the Broome county area.

Elizabeth (Beth) Pittman will be replacing Jim Jelliff as the CMT in the Ithaca office. (Jim will be transferring to the Elmira office full-time- he was previously shared between both Ithaca and Elmira.) Beth has 17 years of experience working in Nursing Facilities, including United Methodist Homes in Norwich and Beech Tree Care Center in Ithaca. Her last position was held at UMH was the Director of Recreation. She has lived in the Ithaca area for the last 7 years and is very familiar with community resources.

Jen, Terry and Beth started on November 23 and will spend their first two weeks learning their new responsibilities and meeting clients.

On another note, STAP hosted its 9th Annual Client Holiday Dinner on November 17th at Trinity Memorial Church. Approximately 99 clients, staff, volunteers, family members and friends were in attendance. Folks enjoyed a delightful dinner prepared by staff, giveaways, as well as a brief performance by EPAC's Black Shoes, lead by STAP's own Volunteer Coordinator, Candace Phelan. I would like to thank all of those who helped out at the dinner as well as those who came to enjoy the festivities.

From our STAP family to yours...“Have a wonderful and Safe Holiday Season!”

Gayle

AGING AND HIV FROM THE MEDICAL ADVOCATE

About 29% of all people with AIDS in the United States are age 50 or over. In 2001, this proportion was 17%. In some cities, as many as 37% of people with AIDS are in this age group. The number of older people diagnosed with AIDS is increasing. About half of the older people with AIDS have been infected for one year or less. (It is important to note that most of these numbers are based on information from 33 states in the US.)

The first studies of HIV in older people were done before strong anti-HIV drugs were available. Most of them showed that older people got sicker and died faster than younger people. This was thought to be due to the weaker immune systems of older people. Also, older people usually have more health problems besides HIV. More recent research shows that *older people respond well to antiretroviral treatment*. Most older patients, unless they are drug users or have mental health problems, take their medications more regularly than younger patients.

CD4 cell levels do not recover as quickly in older patients as in younger patients. Unfortunately, we don't have good information on older people because they were usually not included in clinical trials of new drugs. Treatment side effects may not be any more frequent in older people. However, *changes caused by aging can resemble or worsen treatment side effects*. For example, older age is a major risk factor for heart disease and for increasing fat in the abdomen. Some older people without HIV lose fat that looks similar to the changes caused by lipodystrophy. Recent research suggests that many of the health problems of older people may progress faster in people with HIV.

As people age, they develop health issues that continue for the rest of their lives. These can include *heart disease, depression, osteoporosis, high blood pressure, kidney problems, arthritis, diabetes, Alzheimer's disease and various forms of cancer*. Older people often take many different medications to deal with their health problems. This can make it more difficult for a doctor to choose anti-HIV drugs because of interactions with other medications.

Older people may have more problems with thinking and remembering than younger people. These symptoms can be the same as HIV-related mental health problems. These problems, sometimes called dementia, are less severe than they were before the use of strong anti-HIV drugs. *It is difficult to know what is causing mental health problems in older people with HIV*. Is it normal aging, or is it HIV disease? Research studies have linked both age and higher viral load to mental health problems. Rates of depression and substance use haven't been well studied in older people. However, these problems may be related to HIV disease, aging, or both. They need to be diagnosed and treated correctly.

Older people have to deal with other health issues. These can complicate the selection of anti-HIV medications. They can also be confused with some of the side effects of HIV drugs. HIV drugs work about as well in older people, although their CD4 cell counts may be lower. Also, older people may be better about taking their medications than younger people.

Next month, look for more specific information on health issues affecting older adults living with HIV/AIDS and what you can do to prevent or minimize them. In the meantime, here are a few Internet resources to check out:

National Association on HIV Over Fifty: www.hivoverfifty.org

HIV Wisdom for Older Women: www.hivwisdom.org

The Body: search "aging" on www.thebody.com

WORLD AIDS DAY EVENT

John Barry

The Southern Tier AIDS Program will be celebrating World AIDS Day this year by turning our gaze outward and considering the impact HIV and AIDS has had worldwide. In that spirit we have chosen to raise awareness of the impact of HIV not just in this country, but in Africa and specifically Kenya. We are partnering with the Jifahamu Kenya Foundation and selling jewelry made by Jifahamu clients to raise money for their mission of HIV testing, peer education and care of HIV orphans in Nairobi and the surrounding rural areas. All proceeds of the event will go to the Jifahamu Kenya Foundation. We hope that you are able to join us for this celebration of life that will include African drumming, an art exhibition and the jewelry sales. Refreshments will be available at no cost to those attending. The 2009 World AIDS Day Event will be held on Friday, December 4 from 6 PM – 9 PM at Binghamton University in the Downtown Center Atrium.

FROM THE CONSUMER ADVISORY COMMITTEE/CAC

This issue represents the One Year Anniversary of our newsletter for you, Positive Voices. We hope that the issues bring valuable and practical information to you each month. What is missing, though, are voices from counties outside of Broome, who want to share their stories, successes with treatment, dating, heartache and survival living with HIV/AIDS. We would like to encourage you to contact us at anytime with any idea for education, medical information, suggestions about articles or anything else you would like to see as Positive Voices continues to grow. You can contact Brian Wieder at wiedersf@aol.com or my calling 607-724-1272. Please feel free to leave a message.

As part of our ongoing community education programs this year, we will be having a special guest speaker at the Tuesday, December 8th CAC meeting at 6:00 after the Friends Dinner at Trinity Church. Michael White, from Social Security, will be speaking on applying for disability, the process used to determine eligibility, denials and how to appeal those denials, and also talk about returning to work issues. He will also answer questions you may have. I'm sure he won't be able to answer specific questions about your own case, but will be able to give general information about the processes and criteria used in making any determinations. Please let me know if you plan on attending, so that I can give him a rough number on how many people to expect so that he has enough handouts for everyone. You can reach (Becky) at 648-2504 -- it's OK to leave messages on the phone.

Also, due to popular demand, on Tuesday, December 22 at 6:00 after the Friends Dinner, Carleen Rogers will be coming to talk about HEAP and take applications. She is the supervisor of the HEAP unit for Broome County has been extremely helpful and very user friendly in answering questions and taking applications in the past. Since HEAP changes every year, she has the most recent updated information on the topic. There have been people in the past who assumed that they would not be eligible, when they were indeed eligible for a benefit. Information that needs to be provided in order for her to process an application are: proof of residence, proof that the heating bill is in your name, and proof of income. You don't have to have everything with you when you come, she will give you a list of the information you need to provide in order for your application to complete. This is a much easier process than having to go to DSS to apply. Those of you living in other counties, might be able to get someone to come to you if you have a space for a meeting, since Carleen can only issue Broome County benefits.

INTRODUCING OUR NEWEST FEATURE "ASK THE PHARMACIST"

My name is Karen Conn and I am a pharmacist at the Medicine Shoppe in Binghamton. As a new element of your newsletter we are creating an "ask the pharmacist" feature each month. I will be writing a short article detailing a relevant new drug, new information about a disease state, or anything else in the health care world that may interest you. Please let me know if there is something that interests you that I can write about. In addition to the information that I provide, I would love to answer any of your questions, as well. You can forward those questions to me through STAP or e-mail me directly at 1517@medicineshoppe.com. I can include your question in the next months article (because if you are wondering about it, probably someone else is too), or I can contact you directly, if you prefer.

As an introduction, I have been a pharmacist for 17 years, graduating from the University at Buffalo. I have lived on the South Side of Binghamton my entire life and I reside there now with my husband and two children. I enjoy retail pharmacy immensely. I know that people can go to any pharmacy and get their prescriptions, but I hope to make their experience a little bit nicer when they come to us. Understanding your medicines, why you are taking them, and what you can expect from them can make all the difference. I am excited about our new venture, watch for us next month.

POSITIVE CONNECTIONS PARTY AND CELEBRATION

Sponsored by Positive Connections and STAP ON SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13th from 1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. at the FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH PARISH HOUSE on 64 CHESTNUT STREET, ONEONTA. A Feast of Turkey and Ham and all the trimmings. You are welcome to bring a dish to pass and please bring a beverage to share. FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH IS HAVING A FREE CHRISTMAS CONCERT at 3 p.m. A concert of music, singing and bells to celebrate Christmas. THE CONCERT IS FREE, but TICKETS ARE REQUIRED. If you are interested in attending the concert, please mention it when you RSVP for the party.

ON-GOING MEETINGS AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

JOIN CONSUMER ADVISORY COMMITTEE [CAC] MEETINGS

The STAP Consumer Advisory Committee is a committee facilitated by and made up of consumers (STAP clients) who welcome other consumers and their significant others, caretakers and family members to join them on the second Tuesday of each month. This collaborative effort provides a confidential space for clients to make recommendations regarding STAP client services and other programs in a non-judgmental environment.

The meetings are held following the Friends Dinner at 6:15 at Trinity Memorial Church (on the corner of Main & Oak Streets) in downtown Binghamton. Call 1-800-333-0892 for directions or more details. If you cannot attend these meetings, mail your opinions or suggestions to STAP, 122 Baldwin Street, Johnson City, 13790, Attention CAC. CAC is encouraging consumers in other counties to organize monthly meetings in their area. Contact your case manager or Brian Wieder at 607-724-1272 to discuss developing CAC in your community.

THE DRAGON SLAYERS

Hepatitis C and Co-Infection Support Group. Meetings at 6:00 – 7:00PM on alternate Tuesdays at Trinity M, 44 Main Street, Oak Street Entrance in Binghamton. For information, call (607) 798-1706.

FRIENDS DINNER

Friends meet every Tuesday evening for a time of fellowship and good food. Join us at Trinity Memorial Church (on the corner of Main & Oak Streets) in downtown Binghamton. Doors open at 5PM and dinner is served between 5:30 & 5:45. No charge, just come with a smile and a friendly attitude – ready to meet and greet friends and have a hearty meal. Parking is available on Oak Street behind the Church Annex. Use the Oak Street entrance for the cafeteria. Free bus passes are available for STAP clients! Call your case manager for details. Bus passes available for transportation to/from the Friends Dinner only. For more information call Bill at 607-724-0103.

FREE ANONYMOUS RAPID HIV TESTING

Walk-in Anonymous testing every Monday from 1:00 – 4:30PM and Thursday from 1:00 – 3:00PM at STAP's office, 122 Baldwin Street, Johnson City, NY. For information and other testing times available through the month, please call (607) 798-1706. Confidential Rapid Testing is also available Friday 9AM- Noon & by Appointment.

ONEONTA SOCIAL GROUP

Oneonta Social Group every Saturday at the First Methodist Church, 66 Chestnut Street in the Dolly Room from 12:30PM-1:30PM. HIV/AIDS and affected welcome – Brunch is between 11:30-1PM. This is not an official STAP Group.

ASK THE MEDICAL ADVOCATE

Have general questions or concerns regarding HIV?
Want to better manage side effects of your HIV medications?
Concerned about interactions between your HIV meds and other meds that you take?
Want to better understand the results of your blood work or other lab tests?
Concerned about HIV exposure risks to your negative partner?
Interested in alternative or complementary therapies for HIV?

STAP's Medical Advocate, James Elrod, is available to answer your questions—by phone, email, or in person—you choose! It's a great way to get a direct, individualized answer to your questions. Contact James at (607) 426-9445, or by email: jelrod@stapinc.org

HOPE DISPENSARY OF THE SOUTHERN TIER

The Hope Dispensary of the Southern Tier, a service provided by Lourdes Hospital, is a new program designed to provide medications to those that are uninsured or underinsured and have a limited income. Here is how you qualify:

1. You must have no prescription coverage
2. Have a photo ID or Social Security Card
3. Bring one of any of the following as proof of income: Pay Stubs or Bank Statement, SSI/SSD paperwork or Unemployment or Pink Slip form from employer.
4. Bring proof of residency – one piece of mail with your name and address, such as a phone bill, NYSEG bill or cable bill.
5. Bring the prescription with you

If you need assistance with providing this information to determine eligibility, they have an onsite Social Worker who can help you with the process. There is a monthly income level that you cannot exceed. The information is listed on the next page.

Family Size and Monthly Income

1 = \$1,805	2 = \$2,428
3 = \$3,052	4 = \$3,675
5 = \$4,298	6 = \$4,922
7 = \$5,545	8 = \$6,168

The Hope Dispensary will verify your information onsite and the Social Worker that is present each day they are open will also provide screenings for financial assistance to access 50% discounted up to possibly free healthcare in the Lourdes network. This is great information!!!

Hope Dispensary does not carry all medications. They do cover HIV medication as well as antidepressants. They do not carry any controlled substances or birth control. If they do not have the medication that you need, they have programs developed so that you might qualify for free medication directly from the pharmaceutical corporations. They use medication samples and generic medications. They are located at 477 State Street in Binghamton and their number is 607-584-9376. They are open Monday through Friday from 10AM – 6PM.

New LGBT Information Site Launched

www.asaging.org/larc

The American Society on Aging has created a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Aging Resources Clearinghouse that holds information related to and resources for people aged 50 and older. The site's searchable resources span several categories: education and training; health and mental health; housing and support services; populations and communities; and public policy, advocacy, and legal issues. Also available are annotated listings for service providers, community and professional organizations, information sites, reports and articles, and links for ordering DVDs, books, and other useful products.

PROJECT ATTAIN

The Advanced Technology Training and Information Networking Center holds free classes each month to help people get the training they need to be comfortable using important computer software programs. Call 607-772-4771/www.bul.sunyoc.org. Classes are FREE!!!!

FREE CELL PHONES

There is a government sponsored program available that can provide you with a free cell phone and 68 free minutes per month. Eligibility is based on your participation in one of several State or government programs like PUBLIC HOUSING, FOOD STAMPS, MEDICAID and more. There is also a limit to the amount of income you receive each month. This program is called LifeLine Assistance and you can find out about it through safelink.com or calling 1-800-378-1684. If you need help with the application process, please call your STAP case manager for assistance.