

# POSITIVE VOICES-NOVEMBER 2010

Your Newsletter by Positive People for Positive People

## FROM THE DIRECTOR OF CLIENT SERVICES

Just a reminder that our Annual Client Holiday Dinner is quickly approaching. The Dinner will be held at Trinity Memorial Church located at 44 Main Street in Binghamton, NY across from the High School on Tuesday, November 9<sup>th</sup> at 5PM. This year's dinner will include a scrumptious meal prepared by our staff, entertainment, prizes and giveaways, so please consider joining us for these wonderful Holiday festivities. The event is free for all, and you are welcome to bring your family!

I would also like to take this opportunity to tell you about some staffing and program changes.

Shannon Sprague, case manager in Tompkins county, has accepted a position with the Ivy Clinic in Elmira. While we will certainly miss her at STAP, we will still be working with her through the clinic and are grateful for that. Please wish Shannon Luck in her new position.

Kelly Conroy started as our new Medical Advocacy Coordinator in mid-October. Kelly has experience as a Licensed Practical Nurse, as well as both the counseling and mental health fields. As the Medical Advocacy Coordinator she will assist clients with understanding lab results, researching and discussing treatment options. During one-on-one sessions with the Medical Advocate, clients can learn more about HIV, address personal concerns regarding disease progression and develop tools to become more involved in their own disease management with their doctor. Each new STAP client is referred to the Medical Advocate upon intake, as well as clients considering a new treatment regime, or struggling with side-effects of current cocktails.

Clients that are interested in advanced education and volunteer opportunities may meet with the Medical Advocate staff on-going to develop medical goals, assess their readiness to participate in treatment or enroll in the C.H.O.I.C.E.S. program (Chosing Healthy Options and Improving Clients Empowerment Skills.) C.H.O.I.C.E.S is a self-paced series of basic and advanced educational HIV related modules that assist persons with HIV in the development of a comprehensive understanding of the disease. The program is designed to offer participants the opportunity to learn more about HIV, its impact on the body, and the many healthy options available to combat HIV and the side effects of medications.

There are six (6) required modules including:

- \* HIV 101(Transmission, Life Cycle and Disease Progression)
- \* Adherence and Resistance

- \* Medications (Classes, Actions, Overview, Side Effects and Management)
- \* Immune System
- \* Understanding Your Labs Overview
- \* Secondary Prevention

There are also several optional modules including:

- \* Advanced Understanding Your Labs
- \* Dental Care & Oral Concerns
- \* Anatomy Overview
- \* Sleep (Importance, Healing, Techniques, Medications)
- \* Nutrition (My Pyramid, HIV+ Nutrition, Vitamins & Minerals)
- \* Hepatitis B & C (Transmission, Concerns & Treatment)
- \* Smoking Cessation & Lung Health
- \* Alcohol & Drug Use
- \* Cholesterol & Heart Health
- \* Exercise
- \* Diabetes (Medical Complications, Management, Diet)
- \* Kidney & Liver Health
- \* Health Concerns for Men and Women
- \* Mental Health & Stress Management

Individuals can choose to complete a single module or enroll to take a series of modules and participate in the program. Program completion is not required. Participants must complete all six required modules and 4 optional modules to "graduate" from the program. However, HIV+ individuals interested in becoming a peer mentor must "graduate" to be eligible to become a Peer Mentor and work with other STAP clients to share what they have learned and to be a source of support for other people who are living with HIV/AIDS. STAP is planning to revitalize their Peer Mentor Program by Spring of 2011, and be able to offer those newly diagnosed with HIV additional support through a positive-peer. Kelly Conroy will be providing these services in Broome, Delaware and Otsego counties, while James Elrod will continue to provide services in Chemung, Tompkins, Tioga, Cortland and Chenango counties. If you are interested in enrolling in this exciting new program please contact your case manager or your local Medical Advocate.

Teresa Wage-Harrington has accepted the position of Housing Specialist. Teresa has been a case manager with STAP for over two years and has an excellent understanding of Housing resources and STAP's Housing programs. Teresa will be providing Housing services in Chemung, Tompkins, Tioga, Cortland and Chenango counties. Housing Coordinator, Loren Couch will continue to provide housing services in Broome, Delaware and Otsego counties. Housing services have changed in the past few months due to funding and client need. The following services are available:

**Housing Opportunities for People With AIDS (HOPWA):**

- Long-Term Rental Assistance (Waiting List),
- Emergency Rental Assistance (Must be in arrears)
- Emergency Mortgage Assistance (Must be in arrears)
- Emergency Utility Assistance (Must be in arrears)

**AI Housing Case Management Program:**

- Goal Setting
- Housing Referrals and Placement Assistance
- Security Deposit/First/Last Assistance
- Moving Truck/Labor Assistance
- Lease Negotiation/Advocacy

Please note that you **MUST** meet eligibility criteria and be enrolled in the AI Housing program to receive any services or financial assistance from the program. HOPWA no longer provides security deposits in "crisis" situations. All moves must be approved and planned to be eligible for financial assistance with moving trucks, laborers, and security deposits. Individuals requiring assistance that are not eligible for the AI Housing Program will be referred to other community resources or case management services. To apply for any of these housing services, please contact your case manager, or if you do not have a case manager you may contact the Housing staff directly.

Those are all of the updates for this issue. Stay tuned for more updates in future issues of Positive Voices...

Happy Holidays, Gayle

**FROM THE VOLUNTEER DEPARTMENT**

Candace found this information about the Clemens Theatre located on Grey Street in Elmira, Thursday November 18, 2010 at 10:00am, there is a free music performance. You may call the Box Office: 607-734-8191 or 1-800-724-0159 for more information.

## HIV/AIDS and Dental Health

We are all probably guilty of taking our teeth for granted—until we hear the dentist say, “These are going to have to come out.” It’s normal to be discouraged by that kind of news, but there are things that you can do *before* you hear those words to make sure that your pearly whites are happy campers! This article is adapted from one of STAP’s CHOICES program presentations and discusses why oral health care is important to people living with HIV/AIDS, causes and types of oral diseases, and tips for maintaining good oral health. Why is Oral Health Important? You may not realize that the health of your teeth, gums, and mouth affects your whole body. Oral health problems can strain your immune system and may be a sign that your immune system is changing or weakening. You may need to see your physician, as well as a dentist, to address any problems related to oral health. Ideally, your dentist and physician should work together to make sure you get the treatment(s) you need. Oral health care is an important part of your HIV care. The presence of oral diseases can lead to an increased risk of heart disease, lung disease, or stroke.

### Types of Oral Health Problems

Most everyone knows about plaque and cavities, but there are other problems with teeth and gums that can occur over time, or more quickly. Examples of oral health issues besides cavities include gum disease and infections and sores inside the mouth, such as thrush, canker or cold sores, and fever blisters. Plaque is a sticky, colorless deposit of bacteria that is constantly building up on teeth. Plaque begins forming on teeth 4 to 12 hours after brushing, which is why it is so important to brush at least twice daily and floss daily. Plaque that is not removed by regular brushing and flossing can harden into unsightly tartar (also called calculus). This crusty deposit can only be removed by a dentist. Cavities (caries) are a soft spot or small hole in your tooth. They are caused by plaque. Cleaning your teeth regularly helps prevent cavities by getting rid of the plaque.

Gum disease is an infection of your gums and the bone that holds your teeth in your mouth. Normal gum tissue is pink, firm and doesn’t bleed during brushing and flossing.

Signs of gum disease include red or swollen gums, gums that bleed when you brush or floss your teeth, or that pull away from your teeth. Loose teeth, if not treated, may shift or get so loose they may need to be removed. Because of their weakened immune systems, people with AIDS are more likely to have some kinds of sores and infections inside their mouths, including on the tongue and lips. Some infections are rare and can only be found by your dentist; others are more common and have symptoms you can feel or see.

Thrush is the most common fungal infection associated with HIV/AIDS. It may be an indication of immune system deterioration. As HIV progresses and the immune system becomes more compromised, the incidence and severity of thrush increases. There are three types, which can all be present in the same individual. Thrush can progress into the opportunistic infection Pneumocystis Carinii Pneumonia (PCP). If not treated, some forms can spread down your throat, requiring more complex treatment and possible hospitalization. Treatment options for thrush include prescription mouth rinses, pills or lozenges.

Mouth sores include canker sores and cold sores (fever blisters). They are common and are found in people who do not have HIV. HIV-positive people may have larger, more painful sores that take much longer to heal. If a sore lasts more than 7-10 days, see a dentist. The most common types of Oral Ulcers are herpes simplex ulcers and aphthous ulcers (canker sores). Ulcers may develop as a result of other Opportunistic Infections, such as cytomegalovirus (CMV), histoplasmosis, herpes zoster, and lymphoma. With treatment, most resolve in a short time. Herpes simplex causes both primary (first) and recurrent (reoccurring) disease. Recurrent herpes may involve the lips or the intraoral (within the mouth) mucosa (lining of the mouth). To reduce the pain of mouth sores and ulcers, avoid acidic foods, Orange juice, tomatoes, and spicy foods. You may need over-the-counter or prescription medications.

Oral cancer and tobacco are very closely related. Tobacco use is known as a major risk factor for oral and other cancers. Smokers are 6 times more likely to develop some form of cancer in the oral cavity than nonsmokers. Pipe and cigar smokers are at increased risk of cancers in the lungs, oral cavity, and lips. Cigar smoking can lead to tooth loss, jaw bone loss, and other diseases of the mouth. Chewing tobacco and snuff can cause cancer in the cheek, gums, and lips. Symptoms of oral cancer include any unusual sore, spot, patch, or lump that does not go away in two weeks; a lump or swelling in your neck or under your jaw; red or white patches or ulcers that do not heal in 2 weeks; a lump or overgrowth of tissue anywhere in your mouth; pain when you chew; difficulty swallowing; a hoarse voice or sore throat that doesn't go away; numbness in your face or tongue; a change in the color or size of a mole or freckle on your face; or a change in the way your teeth fit together. Any of these types of problems should be checked by your dentist as soon as possible.

### Caring For Your Mouth

Brushing your teeth regularly (at least twice a day) is the first step in maintaining your oral health. Tooth brushing tips include: brush your teeth after every meal; use a soft bristle toothbrush; use toothpaste with fluoride; change your toothbrush every 1-2 months (sooner if the bristles look frayed or worn, or if you have been ill). Flossing cleans parts of your teeth that your toothbrush can't reach. Flossing daily removes plaque and food particles between teeth and below the gum line. If you have trouble handling floss, ask your dentist about a floss holder or other cleaning aids.

## Facts About Dentures

Dentures are the solution of last resort. Your natural teeth can help you retain bone in your jaw and act as support for other fixed or removable appliances (fixed bridge, removable partial denture). Although dentures may look like your natural teeth, they cannot work like them. They are not as comfortable, nor can they perform like real teeth, even after you become adjusted. If you already have dentures, here are some tips on how to care for them. Take your dentures out of your mouth at least once a day. Store them in water or denture cleaning solution in a covered container at night. Change the water or solution daily and wash the container. Dentures need to be cleaned thoroughly with a denture brush twice a day, just like real teeth. Brush and massage the tissues in your mouth (gums) to clean away debris; this helps to maintain good circulation in your gums.

Avoid using powdered household cleaners or bleach to clean dentures. Dentures are delicate and can break if dropped; stand over a folded towel or a basin of water when handling them. Never place dentures in hot water, or let them dry out, because they could warp or lose their shape.

## Summing It Up

Finally, don't forget to perform a mouth self-exam at least once a month for signs of infections and sores. Look closely inside your mouth and check the following areas: tongue (top and bottom), lips, gums, cheeks, and the roof of your mouth. It is recommended that you see your dentist every six months for a checkup, even if your teeth feel fine. Your dentist can find and fix cavities before they cause you pain, find and treat early signs of gum disease before it becomes serious, and check for mouth infections, sores and cancer, so you should go even if you do not have teeth.

So get out there, brush and floss, and show the world your super smile! :o)

## *A World AIDS Day Event*

To Benefit our Sister Agency: The Jifahamu Kenya Foundation/Friday, December 3, 2010 6-9 PM

Roberson Museum and Science Center

Please join us for an evening of African dance, original artwork by Peter Mwangi and the premier of a STAP documenary featuring the story of our very own Brian Wieder. The jewlrey created by the women of Jifahamu and the original artwork will be for sale. Admission to World AIDS Day events is free. For \$5.00 you can gain admission to the Home for the Holiday's exhibit and tour the mansion. Tickets for WAD events are available at the STAP office or at the door (enter through front door of the museum).

## FROM KAREN AT THE MEDICINE SHOPPE PHARMACY

This month's article will center on a nutritional supplement called Juven. Juven is a nutrition drink that is designed to help fight muscle loss. It contains several key ingredients that are meant to help muscles retain their strength and rebuild. It comes in two flavors orange and grape, and you mix the packets with either fruit juice or water and drink twice a day. How do you know if Juven is something that you need? Juven is for people that lose muscle, even though they eat enough food. Sometimes our bodies break down the proteins in our muscles for fuel, this loss of muscle makes it harder for our bodies to recover from an illness or injury. Maintaining muscle is very important for people living with HIV. In studies done on people taking Juven, not only did their lean muscle and body weight improve, but their CD3 and CD8 T-cell subsets increased and viral load decreased. If you think that you might be a candidate for Juven, talk to your physician. It is covered by New York State ADAP. But remember, Juven is no substitute for a well-balanced, healthy diet, it is just another tool to help you stay healthy.

### Preventing Infections From Pets: A Guide for People With HIV

Many of us have pets (or our pets have us). Whether your pet is a dog, cat, bird, fish, or something a bit more exotic, there is good news for HIVers and their animal friends:

- You do not have to give up your pet.
- Although the risks are low, you can get an infection from pets or other animals. Several simple precautions are all you need to take.
- HIV cannot be spread by, or to, cats, dogs, birds, or other pets.

#### Should I keep my pets?

Yes. Most people with HIV can and should keep their pets. Pets can help you feel psychologically, and even physically, better. For many people, pets are like members of the family. However, you should know the health risks of owning a pet or caring for animals.

#### What kinds of infections could I get from an animal?

Animals can have cryptosporidiosis ("crypto"), toxoplasmosis ("toxo"), Mycobacterium avium complex ("MAC"), and other diseases. These diseases can give you problems like severe diarrhea, brain infections, and skin lesions.

#### What can I do to protect myself from infections spread by animals?

- Always wash your hands well with soap and water after playing with or caring for animals. This is especially important before eating or handling food.
- Feed your pet only pet food or cook all meat thoroughly before giving it to your pet. Don't let your pets drink from toilet bowls or get into garbage. Don't let your pets hunt or eat another animal's stool (droppings).

Don't handle animals that have diarrhea. If the pet's diarrhea lasts for more than 1 or 2 days, have a friend or relative who does not have HIV take your pet to your veterinarian.

- Don't bring home an unhealthy pet. Don't get a pet that is younger than 6 months old – especially if it has diarrhea. If you are not sure about the animal's health, have it checked out by your veterinarian.
- Get regular veterinary check-ups and disease screenings for your pets, especially new animals.
- Don't touch stray animals because you could get scratched or bitten. Stray animals can carry many infections.
- Don't ever touch the stool (droppings) of any animal.
- Ask someone who is not infected with HIV and is not pregnant to change your cat's litter box daily. If you must clean the box yourself, wear vinyl or household cleaning gloves and immediately wash your hands well with soap and water right after changing the litter.
- Have your cat's nails clipped so it can't scratch you. Discuss other ways to prevent scratching with your veterinarian. If you do get scratched or bitten, immediately wash the wounds well with soap and water. You may need to seek medical advice.
- Don't let your pet lick your mouth or any open cuts or wounds you may have. Don't kiss your pet.
- Keep fleas off your pet.
- Avoid reptiles such as snakes, lizards, and turtles. If you touch any reptile, immediately wash your hands well with soap and water.
- Wear vinyl or household cleaning gloves when you clean aquariums or animal cages and wash your hands well right after you finish.
- Avoid exotic pets such as monkeys, and ferrets, or wild animals such as raccoons.

Can someone with HIV give it to his or her pets? No. HIV cannot be spread to, from, or by cats, dogs, birds, or other pets. Many viruses cause diseases that are like AIDS, such as feline leukemia virus, or FeLV, in cats. These viruses cause illness only in a certain animal and cannot infect other animals or humans. For example, FeLV infects only cats. It does not infect humans or dogs.

*What should I do when I visit friends or relatives who have animals?*

When you visit anyone with pets, take the same precautions you would in your own home. Don't touch animals that may not be healthy. You may want to tell your friends and family about the need for these precautions before you plan any visits.

To sum it up, it is possible, and beneficial, for most people with HIV to safely own pets. Open and honest communication with your healthcare provider and veterinarian can help you live safely with your pets.



## 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.

### 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 9AM - Noon (Anonymous) 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. In Ithaca, Tuesdays from 9 AM - 11:30 AM (Anonymous) and confidential testing can be arranged Thursdays, 9 AM - 11:30 AM.

## 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 ADVOCATES

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?

James Elrod, Medical Advocate (Chemung, Chenango, Cortland, Tioga, Tompkins Counties) 607-426-9445

## 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:

You must have no prescription coverage

Have a photo ID or Social Security Card

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.

Bring proof of residency - one piece of mail with your name and address, such as a phone bill, NYSEG bill or cable bill.

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](http://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.

### **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.

### **Community Art Class at The Cube Taught by Angelo Fiori**

STAP Board Member and Volunteer Angelo Fiori is starting a Community Art Class. It will be held at *The Cube* on Thursday Evenings, 7-10 PM as a weekly class at first. Depending on the funds raised and interest, it would be weekly, bi-weekly or monthly. The class would be open to all groups: HIV positive, HIV negative, LGBTQ community, gay or straight. His vision of this art class is to be one of and about our community and coming together to respect each other's differences. Please show up if you are interested in participating in this Community Art Class. The class will include drawing, collage, watercolor, painting and more. Beginners and all are welcome to participate to bring out their artistic possibilities and great discussions.

The Cube address: 208 State Street, Binghamton, NY 13901

## THROUGH THE EYES OF A CLIENT

I recently wrote and uploaded my story to [WWW.ITGETSBETTERPROJECT.COM](http://WWW.ITGETSBETTERPROJECT.COM) to remind young gay men and women that no matter how hard it gets, things can and will change. Many gay, lesbian, trans gender, bi-sexual, or questioning people find happy and fulfilling lives. God does not hate you. Life for me is truly worth living and I pray we have seen the last suicide over this (or any) issue. **Please, if you have not done so, go to the website "take the pledge" and join the over 100,000 people who already have.**

“It Gets Better”: Erik vonHausen Albany, NY

I grew up in a small town in Massachusetts called Wrentham. I had loving and supportive parents, a younger brother, and 3 cats. High School, for me, was an absolute nightmare. I dreaded every single day I stepped through the doors of King Philip Regional High School. I was taunted mercilessly for being gay and to tell you the truth, I didn't really understand what gay was or how I deserved to be teased.

I had few male friends, but I easily befriended girls. Many of them, like my friend Sharon, would threaten to hurt anyone they caught making fun of me. My female protectors should have made me feel more secure, instead I felt more like the school “freak”. Looking back, I am so proud of all my girlfriends who took a stand and helped insulate me from the cruel taunts of the other students.

College offered some relief from the constant demoralizing insults, but I wasn't ready to face the still small voice inside me that was telling me I really was different. By the time I reach 25 years old, I could stand it no more. I hurled open the closet of denial and “came out” as a gay man to anyone who had ears. My parents took the news hard with concern for “how hard my life will be” and some fears about whether my choice was morally and spiritually right, but after 30 days of thought and prayer they decided to support me 100%. My Dad said to me, “Son, we are all responsible for our own choices and who hasn't made mistakes? I certainly do not have the right to judge you.” My parents are the most loving, respectful, and supportive parents on the face of the planet. I mean it. I asked around - they're truly the best.

Today, I have a partner of 10 years, a job as a photographer and I work with people at the Albany Damien Center who have HIV/AIDS, like me. My life has never been easy, but it has been fulfilling and I am glad I never contemplated taking my life. I have the love of my partner Wes, I have friends, I have my family, I have 2 wonderful cats and I am happy. I thank God for every day and after 25 years High School is a dim memory. If you are reading this and you can relate to my story, just know I am praying for you. I want you to know I love you, you are valuable, and you can be happy. Hang in there and remember IT GETS BETTER!

w/peace,  
Erik