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The SAFE CONNECTION

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTHERN ARIZONA AIDS FOUNDATION

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Photo by Scott Griesel, Creatista

Celebrating the Lives We've Lost: The Story and Faces behind the AIDS Memorial Quilt

By Rachel McMenamin, Grants Coordinator

The National AIDS Memorial quilt, also known as the NAMES Project, is the world's largest and longest-running community art project, designed to remember, heal, raise awareness, and inspire action. Each one of the more than 50,000 colorful 3x6-foot panels in the Quilt celebrates the life of a person lost to AIDS and the love and healing of those who have stitched together the quilt in remembrance.

The idea of the quilt was born in 1985 by long-time San Francisco gay rights activist, Cleve Jones, who wanted to create a memorial for those whose lives had been lost to AIDS. Today the quilt remains a powerful visual reminder of the scope of the AIDS pandemic.

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To cultivate
a healthy and
stigma-free society
through
transformative
action.



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Bringing An End to the HIV Epidemic

By Luis Ortega, Director of Programs



Photo by Scott Griessel, Creatista

We have reached an exciting and critical point in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Having just returned from the United States Conference on AIDS (USCA) where the conversation and focus was on Ending the HIV Epidemic: A Plan for America, we at SAAF are inspired to join these national efforts and work towards ending the HIV epidemic in Southern Arizona. SAAF has aligned our goals with that of the nation to reduce new HIV infections by 90% in the next 10 years.

Science is showing that we now have the data and the behavioral and bio-medical tools to end the epidemic. Through scientific advances we understand that treatment is prevention: we have PrEP and PEP to reduce the risk of HIV infection, and we know that when the virus is undetectable it is untransmittable, or U=U. U=U can help control the HIV epidemic by preventing HIV transmission, and it reduces the stigma that many people with HIV face.

We are excited to announce the steps SAAF has taken to reach our goal to end the epidemic. SAAF is proud to partner with El Rio Community Health Center and the University of Arizona Petersen HIV Clinics to implement a Rapid Start Initiative in Southern Arizona. This initiative will reduce the number of days that it takes for a newly-diagnosed individual to complete their first medical visit and begin antiretroviral therapy (ART). Research shows that early ART improves the health and survival of people living with HIV and reduces transmission. Through our Rapid Start Initiative, El Rio reports having an

average of 2.5 days between diagnosis to care and the start of medical treatment.

To accelerate our community's local AIDS response, SAAF is working with El Rio and other community providers, local partners, stakeholders and city administrators to declare Tucson a Fast-Track City. As a Fast-Track City, Tucson would sign onto the Paris Declaration and make a local commitment to strengthen our HIV programs and leverage resources to end AIDS by 2030. To accomplish this goal, our community will work together to achieve four benchmarks:

- 95% of people living with HIV (PLHIV) will know their HIV status
- 95% of PLHIV who know their HIV-positive status are on antiretroviral therapy (ART)
- 95% of PLHIV on ART are virally suppressed
- 0 stigma and discrimination

The end of the epidemic is in sight and we have you to thank. Your heart, your commitment, and your support allow us to move forward in cultivating a healthy and stigma-free community. We are grateful to have you by our side.

Sincerely,

Luis Ortega,
Director of Programs



Photos by Scott Griessel, Creatista



SAAF CARE SERVICES

Services Available for People Living with HIV/AIDS Include:

CLINICAL SERVICES

- Case Management
- Peer Counseling

SUPPORT SERVICES

- Complementary Therapies
- Dental Care
- Food Programs
- Holiday Project
- Medical Benefits Cost Sharing Assistance for those enrolled in statewide ADAP Assist
- Medications Assistance
- Support Groups
- Transportation
- Wellness and Buyers' Club
- Other Personal Support Services

HOUSING SERVICES

- Housing Units Owned by SAAF
- Community-Based Subsidized Housing
- Emergency Rent, Mortgage, and Utility Assistance
- Move-in Deposits

PREVENTION SERVICES

- Risk-Reduction Counseling

Volunteer Feature "Why I Walk"

By Curt Beall, SAAF Volunteer

My first AIDS WALK was in Buffalo, NY in 2002. I had lost almost a dozen friends and heard that we were going to have our first AIDS WALK. I had just been diagnosed with the disease myself. I wanted to honor my friends and to raise funds for the local AIDS organization that had helped me through those terrible first few months of finding out and dealing with my own diagnosis.

The local AIDS agency provided me with one-on-one counseling. They provided support groups for me to attend. They gave me information on other agencies that could assist me. They were there to hold my hand when it needed holding.

That year, I decided to make a poster dedicating my walk to my friends who had lost their battle with this terrible disease. I wrote in big letters at the top: MY WALK IS IN MEMORY OF. Then I listed each of their first names. In those days, several of my friends' families didn't know that it was AIDS that had taken their loved ones and by listing their last names, I felt it would be outing them. That year they estimated that close to 40,000 people were being

infected with the virus. I'm angry that those statistics are still the same today. With all the education and loss, you would think that we could bring these numbers down but still after all these years people are still being infected by the thousands.

So, I will walk again this year to honor the friends I have lost to this disease and to hopefully educate people to the fact that this disease did not go away. Yes, the medications have helped people live longer but with each new infection, it puts more of a strain on our local AIDS organizations to help these individuals. More people every year are in need of case management, housing, food, and counseling. So Remember. Educate. And for Brian, Steven, Brad, Ryan, & Frank, and the countless others who lost their lives to this disease, I will walk again. I hope you will join me.

SAAF remains grateful to Curt for his dedication and passion. AIDS WALK depends on volunteers to be successful. If you or your group are interested in volunteering for AIDS WALK contact Jessica Patrick, Events Manger, at jpatrick@saaf.org or (520) 547-6107 to sign up to volunteer.



Photo by Scott Griessel, Creatista



Photo by Scott Griessel, Creatista



Photo by Scott Griessel, Creatista

Celebrating the Lives We've Lost: The Story and Faces behind the AIDS Memorial Quilt

By Rachel McMenam, Grants Coordinator

(continued from front page)

Every year, SAAF brings several sections of the NAMES Project to Tucson for AIDS WALK. Each requested panel has a special tie to our community. From family left behind to a community that still remembers, many of the names seen on the Quilt panels once called Tucson home.

Originally from Tucson, where his family currently resides, Eric Wolken was the first person in the state of Kentucky to be public about having AIDS. After his diagnosis in 1990, Eric "went all around the state to high schools and organizations for young people and he would start his speech, 'My name is Eric Wolken and I have AIDS.' He would encourage people to not do the things he had done unknowingly that resulted in his HIV infection," said his mother. Eric helped provide education and reduce fear and stigma everywhere he went.

After Eric's death, his family gathered together to create Eric's panel for the NAMES Project. The process of creating the powder pink panel with hand-stitched lettering and photos from Eric's acting days was all part of the healing process for the Wolkens. The panel exists as a celebration of his life to keep his memory alive even as his family continues to hold him in their hearts.

"He made people laugh and nobody that ever met Eric, even just briefly, ever forgot him. He made an impression on anybody and everybody," Karyn remembers.

Each year, the Wolken family attends AIDS WALK Tucson and the Quilt Opening Ceremony with SAAF in honor of Eric. For the Wolkens this is a time to remember, to celebrate and to heal. It's a time for our community to remember that HIV/AIDS still exists today. It's a time to connect with others who have suffered the same heart-wrenching loss, and it's a time to support one another as a community today.

On October 13th, we invite you to join SAAF and the Wolkens at AIDS WALK and the Quilt Opening Ceremony to remember and honor the lives of those we've lost. The ceremony will be held at 10:00 am after AIDS WALK. Begin your morning with a walk in celebration of those we've lost and in support of those living with HIV/AIDS and then join us to honor, remember, and heal.

To learn more about participating in this year's AIDS WALK Tucson, please continue onto the back cover.





KNOW YOUR STATUS

PrEP and PEP: The Game-Changer

PREP

By Ricky Harrison, PrEP/PEP Navigation Program Coordinator

With new medical advances, we continue to move closer to ending the HIV epidemic. At the heart of reducing the spread of HIV lie PrEP and PEP, game-changers in reducing the risk of HIV infection.

PrEP and PEP are powerful HIV prevention tools that, when combined with condoms and other prevention methods, greatly reduce the risk of HIV infection. PrEP, Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis, is a once-a-day pill that has been shown to reduce a person's risk for HIV infection by up to 99% when taken consistently. PEP, Post-Exposure Prophylaxis, is a 28-day therapy that can be taken within 72 hours of possible HIV exposure that will protect individuals from acquiring HIV. By providing PrEP and PEP Navigation Services to the public and linkage to a PrEP provider, SAAF works to protect people from acquiring HIV prior to and after exposure, respectively. PrEP and PEP are helping stop the spread of new infections among individuals engaging in sexual activities and other behaviors that may put someone at risk.

As a PrEP and PEP Navigator at SAAF, I work to empower the public with the knowledge to advocate for themselves in health care systems. SAAF navigators educate the public on the medication, the

importance of taking it properly, and the potential side effects. SAAF navigators help participants to feel comfortable speaking to their health care providers about routine labs, provider visits, and their overall sexual health.

We link at-risk individuals who are insured, underinsured or uninsured with PrEP providers and clinics. Through navigation services we also connect clients with PrEP assistance programs, like medication co-pay cards and other patient support programs, to help cover the cost of medication. We follow clients through their initial prescription, following up with them at 3 months, 6 months, and 9 months of medication use. If at any point anything changes or questions arise, we provide additional assistance and support.

PrEP and PEP are fact-based prevention strategies used to stop the spread of new infections, allowing individuals to live long and healthy lives without the fear of acquiring an infectious disease.

SAAF is proud to partner with Arizona Department of Health Services to provide patient navigation support for Southern Arizonans interested in starting PrEP and PEP, and resources for providers who want to prescribe both of these powerful preventions. If you're interested in PrEP or PEP, contact our PrEP/PEP Navigators at prep.pep@saaf.org or call 520-547-6139.

Get Tested at SAAF

Testing is available at SAAF, as well as at our community events throughout the year. All tests are confidential. SAAF uses a Rapid HIV Antigen and Antibody Test, with results available in approximately 20 minutes.

Testing takes place by appointment on:

Monday, Wednesday & Friday
from 8:30 am-2:30 pm

Tuesday & Thursday from
1:00 pm-7:00 pm

For more information on testing or to make an appointment, please call (520) 628-7223.

A \$20 fee is suggested, but no one will be turned away due to inability to pay.

If you want to cover the cost of an HIV test for someone who can't pay, please make a gift of \$20 for one test or \$200 for ten tests! Use the envelope provided in this newsletter, or give online at www.saaf.org/site/donate.





Voices that Care

By Members of the Care Services Team

“Challenges with clients vary, but those who are homeless are the most challenging. They must face the elements each day living on the streets. These clients will need survival skills. They often live in fear that their medications and belongings will be stolen or lost during the night while they sleep. They fear that they will miss doses of their HIV medications every day. Some clients who have no income must also forgo some of their basic needs such as food and bathing, all while facing the outside elements.”

– Linda Hampton, Senior Case Manager

“Being a Case Manager has been one of the most rewarding jobs I’ve ever had. There is no greater feeling than being able to provide resources to help better my clients’ lives. I am able to feed them when they are hungry, help them apply for insurance to reduce the cost of their medications and to be a strong support system for many who have no one to turn to.”

– Rachel Tapp, Case Manager.

“I have had two refugee families and one undocumented family give birth to healthy baby boys this year, and to be able to support the families with diapers, baby wipes, baby clothes, and other items has been a real pleasure. All three of the babies have just received confirmation of their final test that they are HIV negative. To have each one of those clients share their joy with me, of finding out that their children did not contract HIV, is such an incredibly heartwarming feeling.”

–Haley Smith,
Bilingual Housing Case Manager

“Stigma. The stigma associated with so many of the things that they may be experiencing such as living with HIV, having insufficient income, housing instability/homelessness, mental health challenges, substance dependence. The societal stigma around these issues negatively impacts the clients in a myriad of ways. Stigma impacts their self-worth which, in turn, inhibits them from seeking help and having frank conversations about their needs and concerns, so that they may start laying the groundwork for positive change.”

–Tom Rose, Senior Housing Case Manager



Expanding HIV and Sexual Health Education with ETAF

By Tucker Grace, YELL & ALLY Youth Programs Manager

When you were young, did you ever learn about HIV/AIDS, how to properly use a condom, or how to have healthy sexual relationships?

The odds are the answer is no. At SAAF we are working to change that for the youth of today. SAAF was proud to have been awarded a \$25,000 grant from the Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation in partnership with Macy's to expand HIV Youth Education in Tucson's schools. Workshops serve as a unique vehicle to build positive sexual health and self-efficacy among Southern Arizona's 13-24 year olds.



Tucker Grace, a SAAF Program Manager, who was instrumental in rethinking how to expand SAAF's HIV youth education, speaks to the benefits and vision behind these interactive sexual health education workshops. Through this program, more of Southern Arizona's youth will benefit from scientifically accurate education covering a wide breadth of information on sexually-transmitted infections, including but not limited to HIV.

In your words, why is it important that youth have access to HIV and Sexual Health Education?

Youth deserve to have all of the information they need to lead happy and healthy lives, including HIV and Sexual Health Education. Youth are more than capable of making decisions that impact their bodies and minds. They do it every day with or without information that benefits them. Why withhold what could be crucial knowledge that could change the course of their lives? I don't see the logic in doing anything other than educate. It's the responsible thing to do, and it's what youth deserve.

Briefly describe the partnership SAAF has with the Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation.

The Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation has supported SAAF in delivering HIV and Sexual Health Education for many years, in many forms. We are excited to see their support increased for this year, increasing our capacity to work with even more youth through our Community Education Program. We will reach hundreds of youth with HIV and Sexual Health Education. I feel so excited that Tucson's youth will have more access than ever before to this type of education.

How do you see this partnership benefitting youth in our community?

The Community Education Program is really amazing in that it supports a wide array of people learning a variety of topics in one-time, workshop-style presentations. This is especially true for youth, who often don't have the flexibility and time to commit to a multisession curricula, but can still gain important information from an hour and a half workshop. Workshops can be integrated into the health class schedule at schools with ease.

What is your vision for this program?

I would like to see this workshop be integrated into health classes all throughout the Tucson Unified School District, as the largest school district in Tucson. Especially with the recent abolishment of the district's "no promo homo" policy, I can see the future including all kinds of youth in the conversation that have previously been excluded.



Southern Arizona AIDS Foundation

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The SAAF CONNECTION

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Join Us for
AIDSWALK 2019!
aidswalktucson.org

Joel D. Valdez Library - Downtown Tucson,
7am Registration, 8am Walk Begins.

Benefiting the Care Services, Prevention
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AIDSWALK October 13, 2019