



The Network

JULY 2014

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PRIDE Matters.

When Gilbert Baker set out to design a community symbol for LGBT folks, he found colorful inspiration surrounding him, and thus was born the iconic rainbow symbol for the LGBT community.

Each color of the rainbow flag symbolizes what Baker considered to be an important aspect of the gay community,



including spirit, healing, nature, and life.

HIV/AIDS is not now, nor was it ever, a "gay disease." That being said, the gay community was devastated at the hands of this epidemic, and continues to be one of the primary groups affected by this disease.

How appropriate, then, that red, a universally recognized color used for HIV/AIDS awareness, stands for *life* in the LGBT rainbow. It is as if affirmation and encouragement were purposefully embedded into the rainbow flag symbol.

One of the biggest challenges in the struggle towards an AIDS-free generation is the fight against stigma, which is best

fought with awareness, compassion, and presence.

Stigma is a common experience within both the LGBT community and for people living with HIV/AIDS (and even hepatitis C).

As always, the ASN's purpose is to support our community, not just with our many services, like the Food Pantry, but to also combat the stigma that still exists in our culture.

With this in mind, Fusion and the ASN will be at **the Central Coast Pride Festival on Sunday, July 13th!** The event is at **Mission Plaza in downtown SLO, and runs from Noon - 5pm.** We'll see you there! For more details, visit: SLOpride.com

Walk for Life 2014: You mean you haven't started yet?

Trust us, now is just the right time to get started on gathering and planning your Walk for Life 2014 experience.

This 10K walk winds through beautiful San Luis Obispo, starting and ending at Santa Rosa Park, with lots of surprises and fun events along the way. Did I mention the scrumptious food we'll be providing everyone?

And more important than all that

fun, remember that all funds from the Walk help connect our clients to healthcare, provide access to benefits programs, support them in their home and assist them with healthy, nutritious meals from our pantry. Every dollar helps!

Here's what you can do right now!

- Start thinking of creative ways to fundraise to help

reach your goals! (i.e. plan a group yardsale, ask if your company is willing to match donations made to your team, etc.)

- Start getting your team together!
- Make sure that you can be there!



“Like his father recognized, this work is both necessary and fulfilling, and the group’s members are grateful for the incredible work that Terry provides.”

Gratitude, HIV, and the California Men’s Colony

For a long time, Terry Comer thought his dad, Richard, disapproved of his HIV support group at the California Men’s Colony. Every time it was brought up, his father would cry and not be able to speak.

Terry, the ASN’s HIV Health Counselor, started this support group for inmates with HIV twenty years ago.

Though his dedication to the men in the group outweighed what he thought was his father’s disapproval and fear, he was still affected by Richard’s opinion.

After his father passed away, Terry’s group was brought up in a conversation with his brother. Terry told him how he wished he could have assuaged his father’s fear for him at CMC. His brother replied that their father cried because he was *proud* of his son, and he knew that Terry was making a real difference for those men. It touched him to the point of tears.

For twenty years, along with a revolving line-up of licensed social workers who work for the prison, Terry has met with this

group of men every week to bring them updated news about HIV treatment and more.

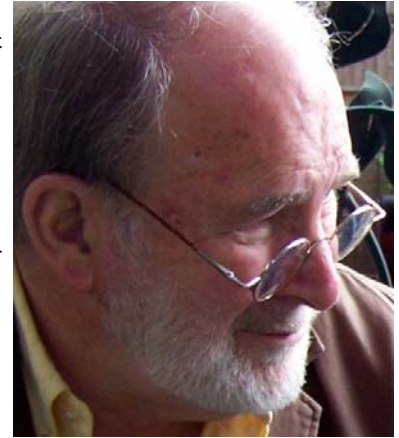
The purpose of the group is to help the inmates, who are always excited to see someone from the ‘outside.’

The groups are mainly for HIV+ people, though some take the class simply to educate themselves, usually because someone close to them is living with the disease.

The class is kept private and confidential, as stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS is alive and well in the prison system, even with a few of the guards.

Every now and then, Terry will write a letter for one of his group members to advocate on their behalf for parole.

Every year, Terry asks the group what do they want to learn, and plans his lessons around that. Often, they simply ask for the latest news, and if a cure has been found. But Terry also teaches them other things, like how to read their lab results, the disease process, medicines and their side effects, and what they need to do



ASN Health Counselor, Terry Comer, found unexpected fulfillment in his work at CMC.

first when they are released.

This is particularly important because, due to budget deficits, case management for new parolees is minimal.

Living with HIV as a parolee is hugely difficult without a case manager, so Terry presses this fact to any of the members who are about to leave.

Like his father recognized, this work is both necessary and fulfilling, and the group’s members are grateful for the incredible work that Terry provides.

Cal Poly’s Incredible Donation



A great big HUGE thank you to all departments and staff at Cal Poly that helped coordinate this Year End Residence Halls Food Drive.

Over 2,800 items were donated to our Food Pantry, which translates to over 2,500 meals! Wow!

Special thanks go to our incredible volunteers who spent over 3 days sorting through 8 huge bins full of

donated food to get it onto the Pantry’s shelves, asap!

As always, if you are interested in supporting the Food Pantry, there are many ways that you can help.

You can donate items, time, or money. We’ll even help you schedule a food drive at your local supermarket!

For more information, visit: http://asn.org/services_food_pantry.php

HIV and Youth: Born 1990 and beyond...

On April 8th, 1990, Ryan White from Kokomo, Indiana, died. He was HIV+, and had become well known due to his fight to be allowed to attend his public school, which he won. Parents and teachers in his school system were terrified by his diagnosis, and though his doctors reassured them that Ryan was not a threat, they rallied to stop him from attending. Fear, not malice, motivated their actions, a fear that was still prevalent during the 90s.

Though stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS endures even today, new medical advances in treatment and prevention have changed the landscape of living with this disease. People are living longer and healthier lives, usually with controlled viral loads and even effective options to prevent transmission of the virus between serodiscordant couples, or couples where one partner is HIV+ and the other is HIV-.

Some people say that youth today, ages 13-24, didn't grow up with the same sense of urgency because they didn't live during the height of the AIDS epidemic. People who are 24 were born the same year that Ryan White passed. Antiretroviral treatments for HIV started just a few years before they were born, and their effective use was still being debated by the medical community.

By the time they were toddlers, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) had just begun their first aggressive campaign recommending condom use to prevent transmission.

By the time the youth of today were teenagers, HIV treatments were helping people not only live with this disease, but thrive.

In short, the landscape has changed dramatically, and new approaches are being utilized to reach the youth of today. Even modern prevention tools are much different. For example, both PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) and PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) have been proven extremely effective in HIV prevention, when used correctly.

More and more, the CDC and other large HIV/AIDS organizations have agreed that, while condom use is an essential part of the prevention toolkit, it is not quite as effective when proposed as the sole option to reduce risk.

According to the CDC, there are several prevention challenges when it comes to reaching youth.

- 1) Low perception of risk: According to a Kaiser Family Foundation survey, most youth are not concerned about becoming infected with HIV.
- 2) Low rates of condom use: the majority (40%) of sexually active teens use condoms sporadically, at best.
- 3) Inadequate HIV prevention education: LGBT youth often receive inadequate sex education

because many of these programs specifically exclude information about same-sex couples, and a few states even disallow HIV/AIDS information in these presentations.

These are only a few of the many realities that factor in to why youth, who make up only 17% of the population, account for an estimated 26% of new HIV infections in the United States (CDC).

ABOUT 1 IN 4 NEW HIV INFECTIONS IS AMONG YOUTH AGES 13-24



MOST OF THEM DO NOT KNOW THEY ARE INFECTED, ARE NOT GETTING TREATED, AND CAN UNKNOWINGLY PASS THE VIRUS ON TO OTHERS

Even here at the ASN, we've seen a spike in this demographic. We have seen more newly diagnosed young gay men accessing our services than ever before.

Thankfully, SLO county has Fusion, the ASN's HIV prevention program based on the highly successful and CDC approved

MPOWERment project out of the University of California, San Francisco.

One of Fusion's strongest attributes is peer led programming. In short, youth create prevention messages and events for their peers! Who better to understand the current needs of our youth than people who live in that world!

Check out Fusion's Facebook page here: <https://www.facebook.com/Fusionslo>

Your support and the support of local community members and businesses are vital to our continuing ability to provide comprehensive services to our growing number of clients. There are many ways that you can make a generous donation!

- **Money:** ALL MONEY DONATED TO THE ASN IS TAX DEDUCTABLE & REMAINS IN THIS COMMUNITY to help SLO County residents in their struggle with HIV/AIDS and/or Hep C.
- **Time:** One of the most important ways our community supports this agency is through the gift of time. Our Volunteer Program creates opportunities to directly assist clients and staff!
- **Food:** ASN's Food Party is always in need of the basics. If you would like to hold a food drive, or donate food directly, we have a list of suggestions for you!

You will make a difference! Contact us, or visit ASN.org, for more details!

You Can
Make a
Difference!



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The San Luis Obispo County AIDS Support Network remains the sole community-based, non-profit organization in this county that provides supportive services to residents living with HIV disease & AIDS, and their families and friends.

The SLO Hep C Project is dedicated to meeting the needs of people living with hepatitis C and increasing public awareness through educational outreach in SLO County.

The agency strives to improve the quality of life and independence of its clients by providing support on an individual basis.

Learn more at ASN.org & SLOHepC.org

Upcoming Events & Opportunities!

We are proud to offer our community a wide variety of **volunteer opportunities**. You're sure to find one that's perfect for you!

Front Desk Volunteer:

Our front desk volunteers are the back bone of the office. They direct phone calls, greet incoming clients, help with distributing food from our pantry, and overall help to keep us sane! We love, LOVE, our front desk volunteers!

Direct Client Services:

There is always a need for a variety of services, including companionship, meal delivery & preparation, housekeeping, gardening, transportation for medical visits or groceries, pet care, and other invaluable services.

Contact us for more details!



Upcoming Events:

SAVE THE DATE! November 1st, 2014

Saturday, Nov. 1st is the 23rd Annual Walk for Life!

*It's not too early to start planning your team, getting your strategies ready for fundraising, or even asking your family, friends, or organization if they'll match what you raise to double your goal! **Keep an eye for more information as we get closer to November!***

Eat Out, Save Lives

What is your favorite restaurant in SLO County?

We're still searching for potential restaurants throughout the county to participate in our upcoming fundraiser event!

Restaurants who want to participate will donate a portion of their profits to support the ASN's Food

Pantry Program.

Call us today and tell us your favorite restaurants!

For more information, visit www.ASN.org