



Pittsburgh **AIDS** Task Force

PATF PERSPECTIVES | ISSUE 010 OCTOBER 2009

FOUNDED IN 1985

M2M: Community Stakeholders Hold Key To New Program's Success

Men who have sex with men (MSM) comprise the group of people in southwestern Pennsylvania contracting HIV/AIDS at the highest rate ... and an increasingly higher rate at that.

M2M Project

As a matter of fact, HIV is skyrocketing in the openly gay and MSM communities.

Furthermore, an estimated 20 percent of all people with HIV/AIDS do not know they have it ... and may be responsible for 70 percent of all new infections.

This is why, according to Kathi Boyle, executive director of Pittsburgh AIDS Task Force, the MSM group is PATF's priority audience, now more than ever. It's also why PATF has been collaborating with Persad Center, the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health, and the Pitt Men's Study to create M2M, a prevention program to be launched this fall that focuses on teaching men how to protect themselves and others.

The unique feature of M2M is that community stakeholders — including members of M2M's target audience, gay bar owners, PATF staff and volunteers — will play a major role every step of the way.

The primary goal of M2M is to help men adopt behaviors that reduce their risk for HIV. M2M organizers are prepared to spread the word to community stakeholders in a variety of settings: educational gatherings, house gatherings, interventions at bars, sex clubs, theaters and book stores, bingo, etc.

M2M's design comes from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Strategic Prevention Framework. SAMHSA earmarked money to help educate MSM via the M2M model in September 2008.

"With Persad's experience as a licensed mental health and substance abuse counseling provider, they were an obvious choice for a partner," said Boyle.

Ron Stall, a nationally renowned HIV and substance abuse expert from Pitt, and Tony Sylvestre from the Pitt Men's Study helped to design the M2M Project. Stall and Sylvestre created a "Prevention Cocktail" approach (playing off the term for HIV medication), focusing on a person's physical, emotional and psychological needs.

"This is not just about someone's genitals; it's about the whole person — there needs to be more substantive intervention," said M2M's new program manager John Green.

According to Boyle, HIV prevention education needs to be handled differently in each community. The problem is that the gay community in the greater Pittsburgh region does not talk much about HIV/AIDS. The stigma is still stronger here compared to bigger cities.

"One of our goals is that the MSM community starts to talk about HIV/AIDS," said Green.

The M2M team will go to places where men congregate and where they are most at risk — where alcohol and drugs collide with judgment. The overarching goal for the aforementioned is to help people shift to an approach of taking care of themselves and one another — a long-term approach, in order to reduce risk.

The Code Red Mini-Ball, which took place in July at PATF, served as a way to test the waters for M2M. The results offered a positive sign: about 100 people attended ... and none of the attendees had been to PATF before the ball. Next on the recruitment docket: a Halloween ball.

"What I'd love to see from a long-term perspective is for young gay men to see themselves through their lifespan and see themselves as important," said Green. "We want to say to them, 'Help us figure out how to help you take care of yourselves and each other.'

"Having a presence — access to information, education and testing — this is what we're aiming for."



John Green, M2M Program Manager

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– John Green, M2M Program Manager

New Outreach Initiative Aims To Remove HIV/AIDS Stigma In Surrounding Counties

If Pittsburgh AIDS Task Force case managers Casey Rubenstein and Erin O'Quinn have their way, people living in surrounding counties will soon be armed with more knowledge, services and programming relating to HIV/AIDS.

Rubenstein oversees PATF's outreach education efforts for Washington, Westmoreland, Fayette, and Greene counties; O'Quinn plays a similar role in Beaver, Butler, Armstrong, and Indiana counties. Their ultimate goal for a new pilot outreach program, "County Connection," is to eliminate the stigma of HIV/AIDS in non-urban areas that hinders clients from getting the services they need. PATF hopes to team up with already-established organizations in each county to educate each community in the most effective way possible.

"We're trying to expand our services in the rural areas. There are challenges everywhere for people with HIV/AIDS, but challenges like social and geographical isolation are magnified in outlying areas. Some people have told no one that they're positive," said Rubenstein. "There's an enormous lack of resources, so people just aren't educated. Transportation is a phenomenal issue, and the stigma is greatly heightened."

As such, the County Connection program's aim is to provide a combination of two to three events each month in each of the counties that O'Quinn and Rubenstein currently serve. PATF plans to host "provider meetings" for hospitals, drug and alcohol treatment centers, state correctional institutions, dental practices, county human services locations, GLBT organizations, and schools. Also in the works: a testing event in Washington, PA, for National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day.

Currently, there are few other programs offered in outlying areas. The short list includes:

- Allegheny General Hospital's Positive Health Clinic, which provides a morning of clinic appointments once a month in Aliquippa for people living in Beaver County.
- Project HOPE and PATF host a support group for HIV-positive people living in Beaver County the second Thursday of every month.
- Persad and PATF offer a support group in Washington County on the last Thursday of every month.

"What we hope to do is lay the foundation for the future and develop connections with service providers," said O'Quinn. "We want to bring already-existing PATF services beyond case management to the outlying counties — services like outreach, education and prevention. We plan to jumpstart more services for clients and providers who wouldn't otherwise have access to our programs."



Girlfriends Project Hosts Wellness Fair

The Girlfriends Project hosted a Girlfriends Wellness Fair in Homewood on Aug. 29. The intention: to encourage healthy behavior as a means of preventing future illnesses, including HIV.

The atmosphere was comfortable and interactive, much like a Girlfriends party. The event was set in a vibrant space filled with soft fabrics and inviting furniture, which allowed guests to receive positive health messages while lounging on couches and enjoying healthy food, such as roasted chicken, grilled vegetables, and fresh salsas.

Diana Harrington, RN, was on hand for blood pressure screening and to answer general health questions. Vanessa Mayers, MSW, from Mental Health America came to discuss the importance of mental wellness. Martial arts instructor Michael Moore was there to teach self-defense.

The highlight of the event was a trivia game called THINKFAST Awareness. It combined pop culture and HIV-related questions to reinforce the prevention message in a fun and exciting way.

H1N1: SHIELDING YOURSELF FROM THE SWINE FLU

Learn about H1N1 and how to protect yourself.
Please visit: www.AIDS.gov or www.cdc.gov

HIV TESTING

The Pittsburgh AIDS Task Force is the only provider of free, anonymous, community-based HIV testing in the region. If you would like to take an HIV test, here are locations and schedules. No appointment is necessary at any location.

Pittsburgh AIDS Task Force
5913 Penn Ave., East Liberty

Sundays Noon to 4:00 p.m.
Mondays 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Tuesdays 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Wednesdays 9:00 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.
Thursdays 9:00 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.
Fridays 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Rapid HIV testing available

Gay & Lesbian Community Center (GLCC)
210 Grant St.

Downtown Pittsburgh
Thursdays
6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
Rapid HIV testing available

Bethlehem Haven (Women's Shelter)
1410 Fifth Ave.

Uptown Pittsburgh
Third Thursday of every month
11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
Rapid HIV testing available

For more information on HIV testing or HIV prevention, please contact PATF at 412-345-7456.



PATF clients Nathan, Eric, Darrell, and Betty.



PATF supporters John Martine, Mary Beth Johnson and Richard Parsakian

H
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HOPE Starts With You:

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OWN

Annual Campaign Kicks Off

PATF launched its annual campaign with a kick-off on Sept. 30. This year's

theme is "HOPE Starts With You." More than 50 Task Force supporters viewed the unveiling of a client video, "Personal Portraits", during the evening. View "Personal Portraits" by visiting our website, and see how your money does, in fact, give hope.

P
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PATF supporter Jim Cassaro and PATF Development Associate Ron Smutny



Supporter Karsten Chorus, annual campaign chair Rob Lepre and PATF Development Director Mary Bockovich



PATF staff members Casey Rubenstein, Anitra Branch and Tom Downing, and supporter Jackie Keiner-Szwarc.



PATF supporter Nancy Simpronio is welcomed by PATF Executive Director Kathi Boyle



www.patf.org

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business hours.

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In 2005, PATF established the Founders' Society to honor the brave volunteers who founded PATF in 1985 and to recognize committed friends for their outstanding contributions to our Annual Campaign.

In 2007, PATF introduced the Allies Program of the Founders' Society to recognize individuals who demonstrate their

financial commitment to the mission of PATF by making a three-year, leadership-level pledge to support the Annual Campaign.

PATF gratefully acknowledges the following individuals for their extraordinary support of our 2008-09 Annual Campaign:

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