

OUT in the mountains

Vermont CARES Secures New Funding

VERMONT'S VOICE FOR THE LESBIAN, GAY,
BISEXUAL & TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY SINCE 1985

Service to People in Prison Will Expand

BURLINGTON - More than a year after giving up federal funds for refusing to compromise the confidentiality of the people it serves, Vermont CARES has nearly recouped the loss with new funding.

Vermont CARES decided in 2004 to forego \$100,000 in federal funding that would have "seriously jeopardized the integrity of its programming through invasive and overly personal participant surveys and track-

ing," said Anna Swenson, development program specialist at Vermont CARES.

Now, a new grant from Vermont's Department of Corrections (DOC) will expand Vermont CARES' current work in state prisons; and another grant will finance the rapid-result HIV testing program for two years, allowing Vermont CARES to provide the tests to Vermonters free of charge for the first time.

"These are great opportunities," said Peter Jacobsen, executive director of Vermont CARES, Vermont's oldest and largest organization that serves people living with, or at risk of contracting, HIV and AIDS. "I think we're moving HIV prevention far forward in Vermont with this funding."

An \$80,000 grant from DOC will cover expanded services to prisons over a 20-month period. Vermont CARES currently com-



Vermont CARES staff L to R: John, Anna, Mary Kathryn, Jose, Eric, Penni and Peter

PHOTO: DONNA IVERSON

bines HIV prevention presentations with one-on-one counseling and rapid-result testing at six of Vermont's correctional facilities, while using private donations to support the work. Jacobsen noted that, while the organization has long been serving people in Vermont's prisons, the need is great.

"It (rapid testing) works so well in corrections and substance abuse treatment," Jacobsen said. "Folks are so transient they might

not be able to get their results in two weeks," he said of conventional testing procedures.

The new grant will enable Vermont CARES to visit prisons more frequently and educate prisoners about STDs and the growing problem of hepatitis in much more depth, Jacobsen said. Inmates of Vermont prisons in 2005 were nine times more likely than the general population to be HIV-infected, according to Vermont CARES.

"Our goal with (this) funding is to reduce HIV infection rates by focusing on people's risk behaviors, both in prison and beyond," Jacobsen said. "HIV is absolutely preventable."

Vermont CARES will also receive \$30,000 a year for the next two years from the Jessie B. Cox Charitable Trust in Boston to maintain its rapid-result HIV testing program.

"We felt strongly enough about rapid testing that we decided to pursue private funding," Jacobsen said. The new procedure is not yet available through the Health Department, although the state is looking into it, he said.

The rapid-result testing, which before cost \$40 per test, will now be offered for free. Results from the oral-swab test are available in about 20 minutes.

Vermont CARES started its rapid-result testing program in December 2005, with no false positives to date, unlike the false readings the testing has experienced in other locations. "The test has proven remarkably accurate," Jacobsen said.

Testing is available at Vermont CARES in Burlington, St. Johnsbury and Rutland. Vermont CARES also partners with Health Department programs in Newport, St. Albans, Montpelier, Barre, Johnson, Middlebury, and other locations. ▼

Outright's Talk Rescheduled at Williston Middle School

WILLISTON — In late March, many Williston middle school students eagerly anticipated the anti-bullying workshop to be held by Kate Jerman, co-executive director of Outright, Vermont's statewide organization that supports gay youth,

students to be the first of the series because a survey showed that this population is harassed most often in school and that incidents have worsened recently.

McFadden often accompanies Outright to talk to young people about his experiences in

However, at a breakfast meeting where the workshop was explained to parents of the students participating, two parents in particular strongly objected to the workshop and the principal abruptly canceled the session. Many students and parents were upset by the cancellation, while a few were pleased with the decision.

The issue drew attention from newspapers as distant as Georgia and Texas, according to the "Williston Observer."

"I am very disappointed that a very small minority of parents prevented Thursday's workshops from happening," Jerman said. "The students were well aware of the topic of our workshop and canceling it sent the message that it's not OK to talk about LGBT issues."

Outright's other Co-Executive Director, Lluvia Mulvaney-Stanak, echoed Jerman. A handful of vocal parents were able to use fear and intimidation to bully the district principal into canceling the day.

After the parents objected to the session, it was canceled about half an hour before it was to begin. Williston school

officials later announced the school would hold two sessions: one with Jerman and McFadden, and the other to be led by school counselors.

Following an hours-long forum April 3rd during which many community members spoke on both sides of the issue, the school board decided to go back to its original plan. Many of those who spoke, including several current and former students, urged the board to hold the workshop with Jerman and McFadden as speakers.

Williston Central School District Principal Walter Nardelli emphasized during the forum that Outright received "impeccable" references by all the school districts where the organization had previously held workshops. Jerman later said there hasn't been this much opposition to Outright's efforts since the civil union debates.

Other workshops at the school will focus on preventing bullying of youth belonging to the other protected categories of national origin, creed, color, race, sex, marital status and disability.

School officials have rescheduled the workshop on sexual orientation for early May. ▼

What happened in Williston is a perfect example of the bullying that exists not only in our schools, but in our communities.

LLUVIA MULVANEY-STANAK,
CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, OUTRIGHT VERMONT

and Connor McFadden, a gay high school student from Burlington. The workshop was to be the first in a new "Safe and Supportive Schools Speaker Series," developed in response to Vermont's anti-bullying and harassment legislation that was enacted in 2005.

Harassment of students by their peers, especially on the basis of sexual orientation or gender expression, has escalated in recent years in Vermont schools. The district planned the workshop around bullying of LGBT

coming out to himself as gay in middle school, and why he was not able to come out to others at that time. Studies show that young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender are far more likely to feel very isolated and to attempt suicide than are other youth.

Parents had been given two weeks' notice by the school and had the option to have their child not attend the session. About 20 of 260 students had already opted out of the session, school officials said.