

AIDS

Profile: The Vermont AIDS Council

In April of 1989, representatives of Vermont's eight community-based AIDS service organizations (ASO's) met for the first time. They came together to remedy the isolation they experienced as they worked independently in their corners of this rural state. The groups continued to meet over the following months, and the result of their efforts was the creation of the Vermont AIDS Council.

The Council includes the AIDS Community Action Project, AIDS Community Resource Network, the Bennington Area AIDS Project, the Brattleboro AIDS Project, the Franklin/Grand Isle Task Force, HEAL Vermont, the Northeast Kingdom AIDS Coalition, and Vermont C.A.R.E.S.

The Council's mission is to serve as "a forum to insure the delivery of the best education, information, and services to the people of Vermont as they are affected by HIV diseases."

The Vermont AIDS Council serves as an umbrella for the member organizations by providing a network for information and resources, and also provides a mechanism for collaboration and cooperation among the organizations. Rather than reinventing the wheel around the state, the ASO's are able to share their knowledge and skills with each other and to participate in shared trainings and gatherings.

The Vermont AIDS Council provides a unified voice of advocacy for persons

living with AIDS in Vermont. Among its priorities are the creation of a state policy and plan for AIDS and ensuring that adequate funding and services are made available to meet the needs of Vermonters affected by HIV. As Vermont is one of only eight states that has appropriated none of its own revenues for AIDS programs or services, the Council will need to wage a sustained campaign to make AIDS an issue with the state's planners and policy makers.

In its brief history, the Vermont AIDS Council has accomplished a great deal. It has incorporated as a not-for-profit organization and is in the process of applying for tax-exempt status. In July the Council held a well-received statewide gathering for caregivers of people living with HIV and AIDS in Vermont. The Council has also become a member of the Vermont Coalition for Disability Rights.

The Council has worked to ensure continuation of the program that pays for AZT for people with HIV infection. It has worked closely with our U.S. Senators to fight implementation of federal funding formulas that would be extremely damaging to Vermont's AIDS programs. It was also an active participant in planning a November conference that brought together representatives of provider groups from all regions of the state.

In June, the Vermont AIDS Council hired Erica Garfin to serve as its Executive Director. Garfin came to the Council with a background in health advocacy and planning and with many years of experience at the Vermont Center for Independent Living, an advocacy organization for people with disabilities.

For more information about the Vermont AIDS Council, write to PO Box 275, Montpelier VT 06501, or call 229-2557.

Safe, Sexy, and Sane!

Have you ever wondered what the "other guys" do between the sheets? Does the thought of putting on another condom bore you to tears? Have you ever wanted to spend an evening with a group of your friends discussing how the AIDS epidemic has affected your personal and sexual life? Do you need a self-esteem boost?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, Vermont C.A.R.E.S. has the answers for you in their "Safe, Sexy, and Sane" workshops. These workshops, which usually last for three hours, cover a variety of topics designed to educate and entertain the participants.

The "Safe, Sexy, and Sane" program is designed to help educate members of the gay community on current information about HIV and AIDS. By exploring the transmission modes of the virus, you can begin to separate the facts from the myths

about the disease. In addition, the risks associated with specific sexual activities are assessed, and the personal risk factors of workshop participants are reviewed. Risk reduction and safer sex practices are also outlined.

The fun really begins as brainstorming groups discuss how to eroticize safer sex. The only limit here is your imagination.

Workshop members also participate in exercises that address issues of self esteem and problems faced in negotiating safer sex with present (and future) partners.

Finally, the workshop would not be complete without the "Mystery Dating Game," where participants pick their dream dates and practice their best pick-up lines.

Sound like fun? Want to host a workshop? Just want more information? Take a chance and give Vermont C.A.R.E.S. a call at (802) 863-2437.



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