

Bennington Area AIDS Project

by Nancy Burns

Though Bennington may be home to a relatively closeted gay, lesbian, and bisexual community, that community may be proud of the organization two men have put together only a year and a half ago—the Bennington Area AIDS Project (B.A.A.P.). In November, 1989, Ted Doucette and Mark Crawford held the Project's first meeting which 35-40 people attended. These were all volunteers—people wanting to help establish an AIDS project in Bennington, wanting to get out there and start providing services to people with AIDS (PWAs) and their families and wanting to educate the greater community about AIDS.

"In all our dealings, I have not had one rebuff," states Doucette. Both men feel that the general response has been overwhelmingly supportive. *The Bennington Banner*, the area's daily newspaper, has given the project quite a bit of positive press. A front page article touted the Project's first meeting, and various articles have charted the activities and progress of B.A.A.P. The exposure has created a lot of interest. "There isn't a redneck attitude," says Doucette. "Most people don't think it's [AIDS] here. When they realize it is, they ask 'What can I do?'"

The money supporting B.A.A.P. has been mostly unsolicited; people have found out about the project and have given. Doucette says that the area's churches have been great; one church even budgeted a contribution to the Project. B.A.A.P. dedicates itself to public education, offers support groups for Parents/Friends and for HIV+/PWAs, provides assistance whenever needed, sponsors speakers (this March they

sponsored a Soviet psychiatrist who spoke on AIDS in the USSR), fundraises to offset the costs of the services they provide, and dreams of services they can offer in the future. Crawford and Doucette look forward to the day when an area AIDS home can be established. "The home would provide housing for AIDS patients when they are well and a medical wing staffed with nurses and doctors for when they are sick," says Doucette. They hope to have level 2 care (covered by Medicaid) and level 3 and 4 care available at this home. They also hope to create a contingency fund. Crawford states, "I don't want anyone with HIV+/AIDS in this part of the state to worry about anything. We just have to find a way to correct whatever it is. Hopefully, this fund will be part of that way."

Doucette and Crawford also plan to develop a training program for volunteers. There will be intensive three day programs (much like those in San Francisco and Chicago) covering such topics as suicide prevention, hospice care, home care, methods of counseling, help-line training, and holistic treatments. Their

goal is to give volunteers as "in depth a caregiver's instruction as possible." Bennington's Project is quite different from those in Brattleboro and Burlington. Here the majority of those involved are heterosexual which tends to alter the Project's dynamics. Doucette and Crawford try to keep politics out of it, emphasizing instead establishing the Project and providing support. In so doing they have created the third largest Project in the state in an area where one wouldn't expect to find it. The people who utilize the services of B.A.A.P. are sure glad it's

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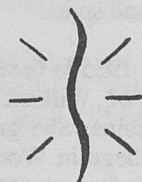
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