



Bloom - The Iris House Newsletter

Fall 2014

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Volunteer Eric Booker is recognized at our annual family picnic.

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Building Capacity and HIV Prevention in Haiti

Ofelia Barrios, MA, Senior Director of Community Health Initiatives

Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere; amidst such conditions, the country thrives from a legacy of strength, conviction and a history traced back to the African middle passage. Today, Haitians have written their own history, weathered public health crises, natural disasters, political instability and are a people with power and resilience who continue to overcome inevitable tragedies. Haiti is a place that touches the core of human spirit and leaves the heart humble. HIV is one of the many pandemics that continues to disproportionately affect the world and has definitely left its mark on Haiti.

Iris House participated and co-sponsored with AMME Community Health and Wellness Center the First Annual HIV/AIDS Symposium in L'Artibonite, Haiti on July 24th through July 26th, 2014. Serge Jean, our Listen Up Program Manager (and a native of Haiti) and I attended on behalf of Iris House. The symposium offered the organizations opportunity to provide HIV and Hepatitis C (HCV) prevention education, capacity building assistance and medical care to over two-hundred individuals, including children, adolescents, adults, senior citizens and medical providers. Workshops on HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis C, safer sex, nutrition, teen education and the impact of HIV in Haiti were given by Iris House staff, Touro College interns, private practitioner Dr. Emmanuella Cherisme, and Dr. Jonas Sainvilien from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention CDC/CGH/DGHA. Participants asked questions about HIV and HCV transmission, safer sex practices and shared their concerns on how stigma, lack of knowledge and fear keep their community from getting tested and or accessing medical services.

During the HIV teen workshops, several participants shared their personal experiences and views; they spoke about the lack of HIV knowledge, the fact that free testing is available, but most do not get tested because they fear being stigmatized and would opt not to know their HIV status. Fear and stigma were prevalent barriers when addressing HIV and testing. While at the HCV workshop held at Hospital Albert Schweitzer (HAS) in Verrettes, medical staff inferred to the lack of HCV testing, treatment options and cost in Haiti as definite obstacles. These barriers along with lack of clean water, electricity, appropriate housing, unemployment, waste and garbage disposal, and other infrastructure inadequacies have clearly affected the country's ability to address HIV or HCV.

Addressing health disparities and building capacity in Haiti was not an easy task, but the experience afforded Iris House the possibility to collaborate with advocates, community leaders and medical providers in Haiti. It also shed a better perspective on how community based organizations in the US can learn from our counterparts in Haiti and why building capacity will serve to provide us with a better understanding of how to fight HIV locally and abroad.



A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Fall has officially arrived and therefore a season of change. At Iris House a lot has been changing over the past few seasons and the past year. In 2013 we undertook a strategic planning process to help shape the next 3 years of the agency's evolution. We are excited as this plan included an update to our mission statement, an expansion to include other health disparities that impact our communities such as Hepatitis C, Diabetes and Obesity. This doesn't mean we are steering away from HIV but we are now including a focus on the other disparities that many of the people living with HIV we serve live with daily and those that are affecting the health of the communities in which we work.

We have already launched our *Live Healthy, Live Active, Live WELL Diabetes and Obesity Prevention Program* in partnership with St. Luke's Medical Group. This 8 week intervention and workshop series features educational and interactive presentations not just for people living with HIV but for members in our new care coordination program and the general Harlem and South Bronx community. Iris House is also now offering Hepatitis C education programs and testing in-house and in collaboration with other community organizations.

As the needs of women living with HIV have continued to change, Iris House has continued to evolve. You may not be aware but in 2013 49% of the people we served were men, while we maintain a focus on women, with 62% of the HIV+ people we serve being women. Often our stakeholders are surprised by the number of men served by our agency and even more surprised to learn that 35% of those we serve are under the age of 29 and another 30% over 50. Our services adapt to the changing needs of the communities in which we work.

We are thankful for the support of all of you and hope that you will stay on this journey as we work with our community partners and the government to End AIDS, not only in NYC, as seen by our work in Haiti this summer, but across the globe.

Ingrid Floyd, Executive Director

A HEALTHIER NEW JERSEY!

On Saturday, August 9th, Iris House presented its third annual health fair in Plainfield, New Jersey, home to our growing programs in the Garden State.

This year's health fair was presented on Church Street between East Front and East 2nd Street, and provided attendees with information on various health conditions, educational material on how to improve their nutritional and fitness practices, and other tips that will help them to understand and implement positive lifestyle changes.

We had over 100 individuals attend; 53 people were screened for glucose, cholesterol and hypertension, 14 people took advantage of free, rapid HIV tests, and more than 6,200 condoms were distributed!



Children participated in face painting, balloon art activities and received school supplies toys and games from many of the groups tabling, including the Plainfield Fire Department which gave out toy helmets!

We are grateful for the support of local business and faith communities that helped to sponsor this year's event, including Mt. Zion AME Church, Covenant Methodist Church, the Plainfield Society of Friends, the Front Street Pharmacy, Judkins Colonial Home, Brown Funeral Home and Staples in Watchung.

CLIENT CORNER

Diane Campbell



**Coming to Iris House
Since: 2004**

Programs: Women’s Supportive Services, Harm Reduction, Food and Nutrition

What Does She Do? Diane recently retired after more than 20 years working in the food and nutrition industry.

“When I was diagnosed, I didn’t know the difference between HIV and AIDS, but when the tears dried, I realized that I needed education. A friend I met at another agency brought me to Iris House.”

“I really appreciate the love that I get from staff and other clients that I’ve known for years. I can go away for a while and come back when I need the support: it’s like I’ve never gone away.”

“Iris House has really helped me to stop feeling shame. I come here and am encouraged to have feelings, to express myself and to talk about my issues.”

“It’s sad, but true: I’m a recovering hoarder! Iris House has helped me deal with periods of stress and depression, and given me the strength to face my challenges. After fifteen years of being a shop-a-holic, now I’m a sell-a-holic! I’m going to flea markets and making money.”

“I get better as I get older. I am not in denial: I love myself despite all these things I’m going through. It will pass and I’m determined to live a quality life and do all the things I want to do.”

Are You At Risk for Hepatitis C / Viral Hepatitis?

According to a 2013 report, there are more than 150,000 New Yorkers living with Hepatitis C, a prevalence of 2.4% of the population.

If you are a baby boomer, had a blood transfusion before 1992, are a healthcare worker who suffers needle-stick incidents, have used injected drugs, have high-risk sexual behavior with multiple partners, or share personal items like toothbrushes or razors with someone that is HCV infected, you may be at risk.

Get tested today at Iris House, or find a location in NYC by calling 311.

THANK YOU!

Our Food and Nutrition program has been sustained this year by generous grants from The Walmart Foundation, The BJ’s Foundation, The MAC AIDS Fund and Broadway Cares /Equity Fights AIDS.

We deeply appreciate their support!



SUPPORT OUR WORK WITH WOMEN

As we reported to you in the Fall, major government funding for HIV+ Women’s Supportive Services ended in June. For 20 years, Iris House has been providing comprehensive case management, emotional wellness groups and other direct services to help women living with HIV manage their healthcare, cope with the challenges of raising children (and grandchildren) and a range of other programs.

We are grateful to the MAC AIDS Fund for a grant that is helping us continue these groups through June 2015, but more help is needed.

If you believe that there is a need for women living with HIV to have access to supportive services, now is the time to join us and keep these programs available. We offer four emotional wellness groups each week for women, and one for men in addition to more than a dozen specialized groups. \$100 provides metrocards, snacks and educational materials for one group. \$500 supports a week’s worth of programs. If you’d like to help, call Michael at (646) 548-0100 x222.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Name: Maryssel Delgado

Title: Care Coordinator, CASAC
(Credentialed Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Counselor)

Hometown: Brooklyn, New York

Time at Iris House: 10 months

Time in the Field: 9 years

Number of members you manage: 64

What makes you smile: At work – when I’m able to make a difference in someone’s life. (At home – My grandson!)

Favorite Song: “Shackles” by Mary Mary

Favorite Food: Sushi

What “feeds” you most about working at Iris house? Watching coworkers become more like a family.

Hobbies: Watching the Sunset at Coney Island and long rides upstate on her motorcycle.

“I believe myself to be a compassionate and caring person and the rewards of my career come when a past client bumps into me and tells me that I helped make a difference in their life: the being there for someone, as someone was there for me many, many years ago”.



Save the Date!!

Christo Fifth Avenue and Iris House present our seventh joint Awaken the Beauty Within fundraiser!

Featuring Tanya Wright from the cast of Orange is the New Black, True Blood and Buddies, signing her new book!

Monday, October 20, 2014 6-9 PM

For more info, call Michael at 646-548-0100 x222

SOCIAL MEDIA and IRIS HOUSE

Come see what all the fuss is about and get daily news in your feed about what we’re up to!

On the Web: www.irishouse.org

Facebook: Iris House: A Center for Women and Families

Iris House: New Jersey

Twitter: @IrisHouse

YouTube: IrisHouse2010



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