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MAY 2007 EDITION

We've moved into our new space at 3656 N. Halsted. As we finalize grand opening and Pride activities and programming, we're also busy planning for the future. Stop by and see what's going on in *your* Center on Halsted!

For a preview of June events and to learn more, visit www.centeronhalsted.org

State of Illinois AIDS/HIV & STD Hotline

To celebrate Mother's Day and National Women's Health Week, May 13-19, the Hotline counselors and I would like to share some of the incredible medical advances that are allowing HIV+ women to give birth and HIV+ men to become biological fathers with very little risk to their own or their child's health.

HIV+ men who would like to become biological fathers can undergo a procedure called sperm washing. Since HIV is primarily found in seminal fluid rather than in the sperm itself, the sperm can be cleansed of the surrounding seminal fluid without causing damage. Once the sperm has been tested to ensure that all HIV material has been eradicated, it can then be implanted in the mother safely. The risk to the HIV- mother of contracting HIV from the father's implanted sperm is so low it is considered only theoretical. Many hundreds of serodiscordant couples have become parents to healthy babies using this sperm washing technique.

New, baby and mother-safe antiretroviral regimens can lower the rate of mother-to-child HIV transmission drastically. An HIV+ woman can pass HIV to her baby during pregnancy, delivery, or through breastfeeding. Without any treatment or breastfeeding the rate of transmission to the baby is about 25%. But with antiretroviral treatment during pregnancy, the rate of transmission can be less than 2%. Since breastfeeding is a mode of HIV transmission from mother to baby, it should be avoided by HIV+ mothers except in very poor countries without safe drinking water or easy access to food. In this case, the risk to the baby from illness or death from unsafe food or malnutrition is often greater than the risk of contracting HIV from breastfeeding.

These exciting advances are allowing HIV+ people to become biological parents and as the medical community's understanding of HIV grows, the path to parenthood will become even safer for mother and child.

To speak to a trained counselor in English or Spanish about perinatal HIV transmission or any STD issue please call our anonymous and free hotline at 800.243.2437.

Jill Dispenza

*Hotline Call Center Manager
Center on Halsted*

Anti-Violence Project

Do you know how to contact your congressional representative and senator? Call 1-800-828-0498 and ask that they override a threatened veto against a bill that would expand the definition of federal hate crimes to include gender and sexual orientation. The White House issued a statement threatening the veto because there is *"no persuasive demonstration of any need to federalize such a potentially large range of violent crime enforcement."*

The Center on Halsted Anti-Violence Project is a founding member of the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP). In its media statement released earlier this month after House passage of the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crime Prevention Act of 2007, Clarence Patton, Executive Director for NCAVP, issued the following statement:

"Every day, members of the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP) work to eliminate hate motivated violence from the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and

transgender people. LGBT communities are continually reminded of their inability to simply exist in safety. The open and virulent hostility that pervades our lives impacts us on a multitude of levels and must be addressed. The Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act (LLEHCPA) which was passed today by the US House of Representatives is a significant step forward in our long struggle to ensure the safety of LGBT people across the nation."

"Through a long history of addressing hate motivated violence, NCAVP is clear that local communities should have as many resources as possible available to them in combating bias-motivated violence. Accurately identifying and naming an incident as hate or bias-motivated is tremendously important for both victim and community healing and is also a crucial step in prevention. It can be very challenging for communities to do this because hate violence against LGBT people can be disguised as a random act of violence or other crime. Giving law enforcement the necessary tools and support to help them more accurately and sensitively address these acts of violence is critical. Furthermore, LGBT people of color, people of transgender experience, and homeless LGBT people, are often more frequently targets for violence because offenders believe that [their] actions against these communities will be condoned by society and by government. It is our hope that the passage of this Act sends a message to the contrary."

In previous articles I have made a variety of mentions that violence in the community affects us all. This is an opportunity. It *is* everyone's issue.

"Be the change you wish to see in the world."

-Gandhi

For more information about Anti-Violence Project services, please call 773-472-6469. If you or someone you know is a victim of LGBT discrimination, domestic violence, hate crime, pick-up crime, police misconduct or sexual assault, please call the AVP 24-hour crisis line at 773-871-CARE (2273).

Laura A. Velazquez
AVP Manager
Center on Halsted

Horizons Youth Program

April is Sexual Assault Awareness month and an opportunity to understand at a deeper level how our LGBT young people become victims-and survivors. Did you know that 30% to 40% of homeless youth identify as LGBT here in Chicago? And that within 48 hours of being on the street, our young people are approached and asked to trade sex for shelter, food and/or clothing? Often, in their attempts to survive, our young people become prey.

These realities were presented recently by our youth in their public reading of *Body & Sold*, a play about youth and their involvement in our society's sex economy. Performed

at Columbia College and co-sponsored by Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation (CAASE) and Chicago Foundation for Women's What Will it Take? campaign, *Body & Sold* is a play based on the true stories of young people and written by Tempest Productions in Boston. Twelve brave young people, including youth from Lawrence Hall Youth Services, stepped into the lives of these characters and presented their stories to a standing-room-only crowd of more than 120 people. It was a proud moment for our program and for our youth. Please take time this month to learn more about how and why our LGBT young people become homeless so you can assist in decreasing their risk of sexual assault.

Janine M. Denomme

Director, Horizons Youth Program

Center on Halsted

Mental Health Program

As we catch our breath after the recent move and anticipate a glorious series of grand opening events, I try to take a few moments each day to relish our new home and everything this transition represents. One of those moments occurred yesterday when we hosted the Quarterly LGBTQ Mental Health Providers Meeting.

Center on Halsted (COH), Howard Brown Health Center and the VALEO Program at Chicago Lakeshore Hospital all work together to provide a continuum of LGBTQ sensitive and competent care. The organizations host a quarterly gathering of mental health professionals working in the LGBTQ community. Counselors, psychologists, social workers, psychiatrists and graduate students are welcome to attend these events. This is an opportunity for clinicians to socialize, network, and build resources to better serve our community. A brief presentation of interest is preceded by a complimentary lunch provided by the VALEO Program.

The excitement of the participants was palpable as they toured the building, enjoyed lunch in the 3rd floor prefunction space and eventually took their seats in the Hoover-Leppen Theatre. Various program staff assembled on stage for a discussion of our respective roles and related services. Listening to them speak, I felt honored yet again to call them my colleagues.

As I surveyed the participants in the theater, I was humbled by the collection of talents and expertise gathered there. What a fantastic sight! Almost 70 providers, representing over 50 organizations serving the LGBT community of Chicago, had come together to share this historic moment with COH. It was the living, breathing embodiment of our mission statement: In a safe and nurturing environment, the Center on Halsted serves as a catalyst for the LGBT community that links and provides community resources, and enriches life experiences.

I fielded a question from the floor regarding our youth program. At just that moment, I locked eyes with Starla Sholl, a licensed clinical social worker now in private practice. Starla and I were volunteer advisors in the Horizons Youth Program almost 20 years ago. I was transported back in time to the modest storefront this organization occupied then

on Sheffield near Belmont.

Indelible memories of that period in my life came flooding back: an 18 year-old male in the United States military who would change out of uniform at the nearby Muskie's and don civilian clothing before entering the building; carrying the program banner with youth participants at the Pride Parade and marching side by side with them through the streets of Lakeview; conversations of mentoring and fellowship with the other youth program volunteers-some of which became the basis for my decision to enter a graduate social work program; channeling our collective horror at the revelation of Jeffrey Dahmer's crimes into action helping youth develop safety plans when dating or in high-risk situations.

Perhaps my fondest memory is that of a young transgender male who stood up at a Saturday discussion group and declared that it wasn't so much what any of us as volunteers did for the youth-it was our presence alone as reasonably well-adjusted LGBT adults, living and loving in a hostile world, that symbolized hope and opportunity.

As I gazed at Starla, I couldn't help but experience the power of a personal and professional journey that began here years ago and now comes full circle through my work in Mental Health Services. I felt the proverbial lump in my throat and I'm sure I saw a tear glistening in Starla's eyes, as well.

I am eternally grateful for my relationship to this amazing organization. It is so much more than a fancy new building. It is the past, present and future of not only me but generations of LGBT individuals. It represents a legacy that is greater than all of us. Walking through the spacious hallways and rooms of the Center, you hear it speaking to you. It encourages, challenges and inspires you to accomplish the very best. It is an awesome sound.

Jason T. McVicker, LCSW, RDDP
*Director of Mental Health Services
Center on Halsted*

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