

AIDS Foundation of Western MA (AFWM) Narrative

- 1. Project Plan** AFWM's Education Program contains four specialized branches for different populations. Young people connect best with each other, so five years ago we started the innovative peer-to-peer education AIDS kNOw More Project (AKMP). Presentations are designed and given about twice a month by a group of middle school through college students trained by the MA Department of Public Health to be peer educators in HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis, and Sexually Transmitted Infections. They teach prevention, treatment, and stigma reduction at local schools and community programs. For men living with HIV/AIDS, we began our monthly Living Positive group last year. We bring in educators to teach group-selected topics, including medications and compliance, HIV and depression, AIDS and relationships, and more. Men also learn from sharing and discussion. Our annual Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Conference (WAGHAC) also began last year. Attendees participate in discussions and hear speeches about stigma, testing, disclosure, mental health, social support, and more. This year, we will also offer monthly educational programs for infected/affected people. Topics will include health, financial management, tenancy education, navigating HDAP, and others.
- 2. Need for Project** Holyoke and Springfield rank among the top 4 MA cities with the highest rates of people living with HIV/AIDS.¹ The community is in dire need of action to stem the epidemic and to assist people already infected, so AFWM is expanding its educational program. In 2007-2009, an annual average of 16.2 people per 100,000 were diagnosed in Springfield – 72% higher than the state average of 9.4.² In Holyoke, the annual average was 18.7, a frightening 99% higher than the state average. People in these areas struggle with low employment, limited transportation, drug abuse, violence, below-average school systems, dwindling resources and infrastructure, and lack of formal education on HIV/AIDS and other health issues. As of December 31, 2010, 1,780 people were living with HIV/AIDS in Hampshire and Hampden Counties, 1,026 of whom lived in Springfield, near AFWM's downtown office. We provide infected and affected people with knowledge to navigate their challenges, and we help community members reduce their own risk of infection and dispel the crushing stigma against their infected neighbors.
- 3. Qualifications and Roles of Personnel** The AIDS kNOw More Project is offered by youth volunteers certified as HIV, Sexually Transmitted Infections, and Hepatitis Peer Educators by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. They are guided by dedicated adults who have also been certified, and who are HIV advocates and educators themselves. Living Positive is facilitated by Mark Zatyryka and Robert Quinn, both of whom have been HIV positive for nearly two decades. Mark Zatyryka, a noted HIV educator and advocate, owns the American Homecare Federation, which serves people with bleeding disorders. Robert Quinn has been a counselor for nearly 30 years, specializing in children living with HIV/AIDS. Living Positive is co-sponsored by The Infectious Disease Research Institute, run by Dr. Claudia Martorell, an ID Specialist and Harvard educator. WAGHAC is and monthly educational programs will be offered by

¹ "What is the Geographical Distribution of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Massachusetts?" *Mass.gov*. Executive Office of Health and Human Services. 2012. Web. July 24, 2012.

² All subsequent statistics from:
"Regional Epidemiological Profiles." *Mass.gov*. Executive Office of Health and Human Services. 2012. Web. July 24, 2012.

many experts, including “HIV/AIDS and Depression” by Eunice Aviles, PsyD, LMHC; “Medications and Compliance” by Lucia Rose, PharmD; “Navigating the State’s HIV Drug Assistance Program” by Nicole Abergel, PharmD; “Financial Management” by Pamela Pycko, Asst. Branch Manager of Citizens Bank; and “Where To Start? A Guide for People Who Are Newly Diagnosed” by Sandy Ortega, LICSW, LADC.

- 4. Number of People Impacted and How They Will Be Impacted** Participants in all branches of our educational program learn how to reduce personal risk and social stigma, understand treatments, and find resources. At the first annual WAGHAC, 100 people learned about these topics and the influence of gender. Last year, another 125 young people learned about these topics from 20 AKMP members, local students who thereby became knowledgeable about STDs and developed skills in youth education, curriculum building, leadership, and advocacy. Currently, 17 men are enrolled in Living Positive, participating in monthly meetings to learn how to navigate treatment, finances, attitudes, relationships, and other topics chosen by the group. Men also learn from one another’s experiences, gaining knowledge and emotional support to better navigate the challenges of living with HIV/AIDS. Every month next year, 30-50 people will learn in-depth about topics that help infected and affected people achieve greater dignity and quality of life.
- 5. Evaluation Plan** We track attendance at all programs, as well as demographics and repeat attendance when appropriate. After each annual WAGHAC and Living Positive group, and each AKMP and monthly event, we will survey participants and volunteers for changes in knowledge, attitudes, and aspirations. When appropriate, we mail surveys and interview case managers. AKMP members and advisors inform us of their experiences and requested trainings through annual interviews and surveys. They tailor presentations according to all feedback on an ongoing basis. Living Positive facilitators follow up with each man to discuss whether his needs are being met and how they can be.
- 6. Project Funding and Sustainability Plan** Our educational program is supported largely by volunteerism and in-kind donations. As it expands, it increases our visibility and donor/volunteer base. AKMP is made possible by about 192 volunteer hours/month. All educators and facilitators donate their time for Living Positive and will do so for monthly events. Venue is donated for all events, and food is donated for all but AKMP. Last year, we raised \$X from events and \$X from donors and corporate sponsors; a portion of these funds is used for education. We also plan to continue applying for grants. For 19 years, we have relied almost entirely on event and donor funds; adding grant funding will allow us to expand quickly to meet the community’s dire need for education.
- 7. Project Collaborators** The ID Research Institute co-sponsors Living Positive by providing space, information and expertise as needed, and patient referrals. WAGHAC is presented in conjunction with the YWCA of Western MA, Gilead Sciences, and the Massachusetts Department of Health and Human Services Office on Women’s Health.
- 8. Names of Other Organizations Carrying Out Similar Projects** AIDS Care/Hampshire County and River Valley Counseling Center offer support groups. Both offer general outreach education through tabling at events, as do Baystate Health, Caring Health Center, Gandara Center, New North Citizens Council, and Tapestry Health. No one else offers peer education or events similar to WAGHAC.