



issue 26 Jan 2005

positive lives

the voice of people living with hiv in staffordshire

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cover picture

Photograph (by Scott Ormerod) of 1000 balloons released from Minster Hall, Lichfield to mark World AIDS Day 2004.

The young people involved in the launch also helped to raise funds for a trip to Ethiopia to obtain first hand experience of, and make donations to, a venture that has drawn their hearts and minds to an Ethiopian group of HIV positive women who have set up a business initiative to provide financial support for their children after they have gone.

The Ethiopia project has not only highlighted the understanding and empathy of local teenagers but also their ability to work together for a common cause – the first time that all of Lichfield high schools have cooperated in a single undertaking. It also underlines the successful work of Staffordshire Buddies with LGBT youth in Lichfield under the leadership of Scott Ormerod and his dedicated team.

Diary & Notice Board

Drop in Times Hanley

Tuesdays & Thursdays 2.00-4.30pm

(Therapy sessions to be booked via Steve)

Internet and computer access by arrangement

Gay mens Drop-out planned for Feb/March - evening social
March /April

Drop in Times Lichfield

Fortnightly from Thursday January 13th

3.00 pm - 7.00 pm

(Phone to book therapies)

Heterosexual Men's Group

Fri 21st Jan; Mon 21st Feb;

Fri 18th March; Mon 18th April Times 2-4pm

Esprit (Women's Group)

January 26th, February 9th and 23rd

March 9th and 23rd

(All at Hanley Centre)

TnT - Children's Activities

Jan 25th - Gladstone Pottery

Feb 16th - Ice Skating, Telford

Mar 30th - Alton Towers

Teenmates (Positive Youth)

First Wednesday every month

Members' Evenings

Thurs, 10th Mar; Barlaston

Mon 5th May, Lichfield

Executive Meetings

Tuesday 18th January

Wednesday 16th February

Thursday 17th March

Mesmen Groups (monthly)

Lichfield Social Group - 2nd Tuesday, 8 pm

Married Men's Group - 2nd Wednesday, 5 pm

TV/TS Group - 2nd Thursday, 7.30

Stafford Social Group - Last Tuesday, 8 pm

Tamworth Social Group - Last Sunday, 8 pm

SPACE LGBT Youth Group

First, third & fourth Tuesday plus second Saturday

01543 419002

Hello to all Positive Lives readers.

Having read some of the back issues of Positive Lives, I feel very honoured to be asked to make a contribution to such a professional, informative & entertaining newsletter. I have been in post as Volunteer Development Worker for almost six months now, and hopefully have helped to make some positive moves towards improving the volunteering experience at Staffordshire Buddies and the service given to our service users. I consider myself very lucky to be

performing a role that I enjoy so much and to have met such caring, wonderful people. Truly, Staffordshire Buddies is an organisation for all to be proud of in many ways.

On a personal note, I have recently moved house, hence the stressed look and greying hair (under the peroxide anyway!), with my three cats (2 moggies & a designer cat) and, oh yes my other half, I almost forgot him! I look forward to getting to know you all better over the coming months and



stephen robbins

thank you for the support you have all shown to me and hope that the Volunteer Development Project continues to be successful.

Have a wonderful 2005.
Lots of love
Stephen R.



To introduce myself, I'm Andrew Cave the new Information and Community Development Worker for the South Staffordshire Mesmen Project. Living locally, I have grow up in and around Lichfield, so I am, very much, looking forward to working in my home community to develop our services to meet your needs. I am a graduate from the University of Liverpool, where I had the pleasure of gaining a committee position on the LGBT Society. For two years I held the position of

Entertainments Officer in which I was able to develop the LGBT population into a strong community network, and hope to do the same here. My work for the University enabled me to tackle the personal and social problems faced by students in the LGBT community on a one to one and group basis. To complement this support work, I was able to create strong social activities like Quiz nights, such as "Play Your Cards Right", Discos and bar crawls which climaxed in the end of year "Stars in Your Eyes" contest.

My experience and

knowledge gained at University combined with my great local knowledge from growing up in South Staffordshire makes me feel positive for the future of the Mesmen Project.

I am looking forward to working with you in all the local groups, and hearing what you want from us. From support groups to pub crawls, and from theme nights to theatre trips, whatever you want from us I would like to know so contact me at andrew@mesmen.co.uk and I'll see what I can do for you.

andrew cave

new staff members..

Well I certainly

Changing Tomorrow. Am I Doing Something ?

about seven different

tried! After all it's not everyday you get asked to help arrange a national conference. You may have seen the adverts that were in Positive Nation, seen the posters or even heard from a friend about the "HIV thing" happening in Leicester in early September 2004. The event was run by the UK Coalition of People Living with HIV and AIDS (UKC), National AIDS Trust, Terrence Higgins Trust and The National Long Term Survivors Group. It was a huge success and all those that I spoke to afterwards wanted it to go on even longer; I do honestly think that everyone took something away with them.

strong.

So, due to my interest in Sero-Discordant support issues, I was asked by Bernard to be a part of the Strategic Steering Group as an independent advisor; someone who is living with HIV and who has also been in that type of relationship for almost 5 years.

The conference committee were very keen to try and be as inclusive as possible, this was reflected in both the main subject matters and also the workshops run. My job was to push the growing issue of Sero-Discordance to see if there was any demand for access to services. Since

my only other previous involvement in the whole HIV services area was a little bit of volunteering at Staffordshire Buddies, email to Bernard and my little website I was very nervous about meeting all these very important people face to face.

But I did eventually face the train journey to London and have to say I was glad I did. The first meeting was quite a big step for me, having only just really come to terms about the amount of work

and input that I would have to give.

I spoke up in the "Any Other Business" at the end of the meeting, and said my piece about my concerns that Sero-Discordance was being over looked, and to my utter surprise everyone agreed, people from the Government bodies, THT, NAT and the NHS. I should have realised that my part in the meeting was to highlight things that these very powerful decision makers have been blinkered to, so I went home quite happy.

The month before the conference was a nightmare. I had

agendas, all different, and loads of reports, but somehow I kept my head and didn't scream too much. Then it hit me - what I had helped to plan IS going to happen. And it was quite a scary thing.

What if there wasn't a need for the workshops/items I suggested? What if it's just me and my partner sitting in a room alone? What if? Things were moving, workshops had been arranged, catering, accommodation EVERYTHING was done. The date of the conference was here!!! The whole thing was staring me in the face - it was really happening.

The opening days were a great show of how people of different sexualities, race and colours could all work together towards a common goal. The workshops were a great success, and I was surprised at the amount of interest in Sero-Discordance, over 50% of the people attending were either in , or had been in, this type of relationship.

We had loads of great ideas and I'm happy to say many of these ideas will be considered by the people who make the changes, so it looks like some things will change at last. "There's simply not the need for it, nor the funding" - remember that? I honestly believe that they now know that there **is** the need.

I was also invited to a workshop about developing a "one stop shop" website for people living with and affected by HIV. This term is used where all types of information, support, dating, access to services and live chat are all in the one place. All the funders have their own websites, but they all agree that maybe there should just be a single "HIV Community" website.

Up till now it's been quite hard to find all the things a person needs on the internet relating to those things. So having one site for it all makes perfect sense and I hopefully will have a full report soon.

Colin Ward



Bernard Forbes and Stephen Bitti (UKC), Deborah Jack (NAT), Lord Mayor of Leicester and Elizebeth Crafer (Positively Women)

I was first involved by Bernard Forbes, the Chair of the UKC, who wrote to me many times in the past as I run a website that attracted his attention. The website was set up to tackle the lack of support for Sero-Discordant couples (where only person is HIV+), and to provide a space for them to meet, chat and offer advice and support to each other.

It was strange that when asked, many other support services said "there's simply not the need for it, nor the funding" - so I went alone and unfunded.

Two years later it's still going

Shaping the Future

Shaping the Future was the title of the National HIV Social Care Conference held at Manchester Town Hall on the 5th November 2004, organized by the George House Trust in association with the All Party Parliamentary Group on AIDS and the Terrence Higgins Trust.

Every place for the event was taken; so there was a buzz of activity from the very start. A friendly and efficient registration was followed by a cup of fresh coffee with a selection of filled baps and Danish pastries that provided fuel for delegates to cope with the intensive programme of the day. After everyone had taken their places in the Council Chamber, Michelle Reid, the chief executive of the George House Trust gave a warm welcome and introduced the keynote speakers.

Neil Gerrard MP outlined some of the deliberations of the All Party Parliamentary Group on AIDS of which he is the chairman and noted the present and future challenges likely to be encountered in the light of the National Sexual Health and HIV Strategy and the reorganisation of the National Health Service. Neil highlighted the fact that the shifting of control of funding for HIV treatment and care from central government to local Primary Care Trusts means that he now finds it almost impossible to track down where money intended for HIV is being spent.

Dorothy Mukasa, secretary of the African HIV Policy Network presented issues specific to the black African HIV positive community, such as racial discrimination in the Health Service and Judiciary as well as common problems like increasing demands on decreasing resources. Next, Cathy Hamlyn, Head of Sexual Health and Substance Misuse at the Department of Health gave a presentation of statistical information relating to rates of new HIV diagnosis, AIDS case reports and deaths over the past decade. She pointed out the action taken by the UK government since the mid 1980 and the aims of the National Strategy

as well as its involvement in HIV prevention and health promotion; HIV treatment and care; social care and finally its efforts to reduce stigma and discrimination.

Finally, Nick Partridge, Chief Executive of the Terrence Higgins Trust, highlighted the discrepancies between the National Strategy targets and the actual numbers of newly diagnosed HIV infections: whilst the National Strategy's target indicated a small, gradual decline, the actual figures available up to December 2002 show a big, rapid increase. Similarly, the National Strategy's target of a significant fall in the number of undiagnosed HIV infections contrasts with the real situation which continues to remain at 30%. Nick went on to note the key issues in HIV prevention: the rise in UK infection; the impact of the global epidemic and migration, and the impact of recent court convictions.

An impressive array of speakers, experienced in their respective fields, informed delegates and fuelled lively debate in the morning workshops. The range of options included: investigating different approaches to modernising and improving HIV voluntary sector care services; looking at how we support people with HIV to remain in and return to work; meeting the needs of gay positive men; public campaigning to keep HIV on the Agenda; the human rights and wrongs of immigration and a report back and discussion of the Changing Tomorrow Conference at Leicester University in September.

Afternoon workshops included 'HI Veterans' that considered the needs of the long term diagnosed. It was chaired by Maurice Greenham and addressed by Dr Rupert Whitaker, clinical consultant in psychological and behavioural medicine, specializing in HIV and chronic illness and also co-founder of the Terrence Higgins Trust, followed by Babs Evans, PPI project co-

ordinator and conference organiser for the National AIDS Trust. The two excellent presentations were interestingly contrasted in their approach, style of delivery and perspectives but were similar in that both were grounded in personal experience. The resulting wide-ranging discussion drew contributions from commissioners and other HIV professionals as well as long-term diagnosed people themselves: without doubt a stimulating workshop.

Alternative afternoon



Dr Rupert Whitaker

options addressed questions such as: how do improve and integrate services; how best do commissioners work with the voluntary sector to ensure increasing needs are met; what support do African people with HIV need now and in the future; how do we support people affected by HIV – carers, young carers and dependent children; how do we deal with the effect of criminalisation of HIV transmission on providing support to people with HIV?

The final session provided an up-beat end to the day, with strong views spontaneously expressed from the floor that added colour to the considered responses by the panel to questions submitted in advance.

George House Trust last organised a national HIV conference four years ago; hopefully, the success of the year's event will encourage them to reduce the time before the next one.

MG

Service for World AIDS Day at Lichfield Cathedral

Staffordshire Buddies has been working in partnership with Christian AID for over a year as part of an AIDS Advocacy and Awareness Group working to raise HIV/AIDS awareness



across the diocese. Part of this partnership involved organising a high profile World AIDS Day service held at Lichfield Cathedral on 30th November.

The headline speaker was supposed to have been Christian author Adam Plass, but unfortunately a vehicle breakdown left him stranded near London and Penny Thompson of Christian AID had to step into the breach at the eleventh hour. Penny made an amazingly powerful and moving speech to the more than fifty people who attended and I think she gave us all much food for thought.

Members of the AIDS

Advocacy and Awareness Group read out true stories of people living with HIV/AIDS around the world and added their names to a map to bring personal reality to the overwhelming global statistics. People attending the service were also invited to read stories given to them and to add names to the map and pray for the person whose story they had read.

The event was very well received and I hope the Cathedral will welcome us again next year!

The photograph shows Andrew Colclough with the map.

events

World AIDS Day Keele University Service

The service was based around the UNAIDS theme for World AIDS Day 2004 – Women, Girls, HIV & AIDS – and was led by the Catholic lay chaplain Ray Bayliss. Musical accompaniment and readings were provided by Keele University students. As most of the service was devoted to the global picture, Staffordshire

Buddies was invited to give a local dimension; Maurice Greenham responded to the request with a speech based on Public Health Laboratory figures and Staffordshire Buddies Annual Report. The brief overview of the local picture was rounded off by mention of a common issue that linked all people living with HIV/AIDS across the planet – that of prejudice.



Staffordshire Buddies World AIDS Day Vigils

None of us who took part in last year's World AIDS Day vigils will ever forget the constant heavy downpour of rain that day. However, this year the weather was beautiful all day long. The day started early enough, leaving home before 9 o'clock to meet at the Appleby pub in Burton-on-Trent for our first ever vigil in that town. Jo and her partner made us very welcome but it was soon time to go and, with labels, ribbons, scripts and candle, we made our way to the site of the vigil. As is our tradition this was near to a tree of convenient height so that we could tie labels on its

branches. In a circle round the candle, the readers took it in turn to relate the global, national and local HIV/AIDS statistics, incorporating a short period of silence allowing people to remember friends and relatives who have died from the virus. Then followed the traditional tying of labels to branches

The other vigils held in Lichfield, Stafford and Hanley followed the same pattern although along the way we were joined by others wishing to take part – most spectacularly in Lichfield, where Scott from MESMEN came along accompanied by dozens of local young people. It was especially good when many of them agreed to read with us, before leaving for their balloon launch. In Stafford we were joined by good friends from the past and there was the usual good turn-out

in Fountain Square, Hanley, which is where the vigils traditionally end. Just as we were made welcome at the first vigil in Burton, so we were made welcome after our last vigil; this time by Roberto and David at Chaplin's where we enjoyed hot drinks and mince pies

As well as providing an opportunity for people to remember dead friends and relatives, the vigils promote awareness about HIV, show our solidarity in caring about people who are infected with or affected by HIV and AIDS, express our support for action against the epidemic and renew our commitment to fight stigma and discrimination. Thank you to everyone who supported the vigils. Rumour has it we'll be in Cannock next year!

Maureen Cuell

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New Victoria Theatre Monday 29th Nov

Staffordshire Buddies and New Vic Borderlines' collaboration has become an annual feature marking World AIDS Day. This year more people than ever were eager to become involved, and the result was a varied and highly enjoyable evening.

Staffordshire Buddies opened the proceedings and then presented a short "Ask the Expert" session as well as their Vigil readings of global, national and local statistics. In a period of

silence people were able to remember the millions of people that have died from the virus.

The Borderline team had been working with a group of young people from Sir Thomas Boughey High School and

their teacher; their resultant piece of drama highlighted the stigma attached to HIV/AIDS. It was a powerful and moving performance, with comic moments provided by the teacher using a banana and condom for props. The value of the work



Maureen, Gary and Maurice

done by Borderlines was underlined by the welcome return of Ian Hammond, Shane Price and friends, who also took part in last year's event when they began what looks set to become another WAD tradition, spontaneously attaching red ribbons to a commemorative tree.

Lucky for us, some of the cast of the New Vic's current production of "Pinocchio" took the time and trouble to sing acappella, and the musical director, Laura Bangay, provided accompaniment to several of the songs as well as performing one of her own compositions.

Two other young people who participated were Wendy Barton who had written and read "This Year's Poem" and Stephen Cuell who gave a harrowing account of a young boy's reaction to his HIV diagnosis. In contrast Maurice Greenham told everyone that he is now in his third decade since diagnosis, working towards a 'mongrel' degree with the Open University, and looking forward to backpacking in New Zealand in 2005.

The Potteries Poet, Gary Oliver, wouldn't let Maurice leave the stage, until he was hailed as a 'hero' and cheered to the rafters. Gary then went on to perform, in his own inimitable style, his poem "H.I.V.A.I.D.S." written specially for the occasion.

Particular thanks must go to Julia Barton and her team at the New Vic Borderlines for making this a very moving and successful evening.

Alan Cuell

SERVICES

Holy Trinity Sneyd Burslem, WAD Service

The afternoon of Sunday December 5th saw the gathering of a group of people connected with Staffordshire Buddies for the annual service of prayer, reflection, and remembrance at Holy Trinity Church in Burslem. Candles were lit, prayer cards written, music played, silence observed - time to think about people, the living and the dead - time to learn about those around the world who live with the virus. Andrew

Colclough led a memorable exercise where we read out stories and added stickers to a world map giving the names of individuals described. (We continued to read stories and add names during the daily service that week). Geoff Flint, from Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement and Father Brian Williams organised the service. Food and drink miraculously appeared at the vicarage after - well, courtesy of Staffordshire Buddies.

A quiet celebration and good to be there.

Brian



Photo shows the Candles of Remembrance besides the Tree of Messages and Andrew's world map behind the altar

stafford



hanley



lichfield



Keele University WAD Events

Keele University held a series of events to mark World AIDS Day 2004. Spearheaded by Student Union representatives and members of Keele University LGBT group, students responded enthusiastically to HIV/AIDS awareness activities: wearing red ribbons, accepting handouts of free condoms and leaflets and making donations.

Perhaps the highlight of the campaign was the Variety Extravaganza on Thursday evening in the Students Union. The bar staff dragged up for the occasion, DJs got people dancing, there was a raffle, performances by individuals and groups all overseen by a local stand-up comedian who acted as compère.

On Wednesday, World AIDS Day, Ray Bayliss, Catholic lay chaplain, led a service in Keele Chapel. The service was based around the UNAIDS theme for World AIDS Day 2004 – Women, Girls, HIV & AIDS. Keele University students provided musical accompaniment and readings.



Maurice's speech carried the message that HIV cannot be passed on through normal everyday activities; it is perfectly safe to

hug, kiss, to share a cup or to go swimming with a positive person.

Similarly, no special precautions are needed in dealing with HIV+ people in clinical settings: just the same high standard of hygiene that everyone expects and ought to be able to depend upon.

Some idea of the success of this year's campaign might be gauged by the willingness of students to

engage themselves with issues around HIV/AIDS by coming forward to ask for information leaflets, wanting to make donations and wearing red ribbons. The funds collected are to be split

evenly between the local HIV/AIDS charity, Staffordshire Buddies and the National AIDS Trust.



poetry



A.I.D.S.H.I.V

...All is but a fleeting glance
In a transitory passing chance.
Deal with the here and the now.
So all take from the sacred cow.
Higher on life than anyone be
I take what pill that is mine.
Victory over the ever free
And I fly upon golden wings.
I die, yes but you die, you
Die. We all do-it is so true.
Show them that we must live
A life, a precious gift to give.
It fills this lonely space
Delight smiles on a happy face.
Sends shivers of silver moons
Heads spin to enchanted tunes.
In a maze of life's wonderlust.
Venus does not give out hate
And her purpose, oh so latent.
In this struggle must adhere
Devoured disease has its toll
Still whisper of bitter's role.
Have sands slip through finger
In hands held tight the grasp?
Venom spits through windows

A complaint un-uttered name
In seeking to only lay blame.
Do your silent sullen work
Some hopes will be by love
Hope all in all to the good
Is always there to show us.
Vital messages to a dream.
A brief moment snuffed out.
I will conquer life's stall
Die why? Why die I have oh
So much to give and live for:
Home the place of belonging to.
In love to be loved not lost
Virtually, death is life's cost...

Gary Oliver Falconer,
VERBAL ARTS

Christmas Party at Chaplins, Hanley



Neil Pepper
received a
'Friends of
Staffordshire
Buddies'
certificate



David and Roberto of
Chaplins bar received a
'Friend of Staffordshire
Buddies' certificate

The 2004 Christmas Party was held at Chaplins bar in Hanley on 12th December. Well attended, by over 60 guests, it was a chance to celebrate the achievements of people associated with the charity with awards and presentations being the focus of the evening.

Vice-Chair Keith
Groom chaired the
evenings events

Office Manager Sarah
Beech received a '10
year service' award



Special thanks
go to David
and Roberto
of Chaplin's
bar for their
fantastic
fundraising
efforts
throughout
the year for
Staffordshire
Buddies

FACING THE FUTURE

As everyone living with the HIV Virus knows, it can be difficult, physically, mentally and emotionally. One of the crueller side effects of drug therapy and the virus itself can be lipodystrophy (changes to body fat distribution).

I've had this for a number of years, on my face, arms, legs and bottom. The latter making it uncomfortable, even sometimes painful to sit for any length of time.

Out of all the above, the facial wasting bothered me the most. I could hide the rest, but my face was always on show. I hated how I looked and avoided mirrors at all costs!

I thought it made it look obvious that I was HIV positive and no matter how well I felt in myself, my face told a different story. My doctor at the local G.U.M. clinic informed me that funding might become available quite soon and asked how I felt about having treatment for the facial wasting. I told him I'd be very interested if it could take away what I thought of as the "ill" look. As the treatment was not available locally I would need to travel to a hospital which provided this kind of service. I was told it could be Manchester or Birmingham.

A while later, with funding secured, my doctor arranged an appointment for me with a Consultant

Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeon at Selly Oak Hospital in Birmingham. When I went for my first appointment earlier this year, it was suggested I had a treatment that they had been using on other patients with which they said they had seen some very good results.

The treatment they recommended was called BIO-ALCAMID™, an injectable endoprosthesis with benefits including: it was non-toxic, made up almost entirely of water, and when injected as a gel it is surrounded by a thin capsule of natural collagen which keeps it in place, so the effect is both immediate and permanent.

I agreed to the treatment and was told an appointment would be made for me. I went to have some photographs taken for comparison before treatment and then went home. I returned around two months later for the treatment. It was done under a local anaesthetic and took around 45 minutes. Afterwards, it was decided I'd need some more treatment.

My face swelled up a little and some bruising appeared over the next few days, but it only felt a little sore around the two injection sites and I didn't need painkillers. Once the swelling had settled down the improvement was obvious, the deep indentations on each side of my nose had gone! The skin felt warm and completely natural. I was really pleased with the result.

When I went for a check-up appointment I was advised I needed more treatment around the edges of my cheeks towards my ears and under my eyes, so that my cheeks would look more even overall.

This I had done a couple of weeks ago, resulting again in a little swelling and a bit of bruising, and when this cleared up after a week or so, an even better result was revealed.

At the time of writing this I am due to go back to see the consultant in November. She says I still need some treatment around the edges, and temples.

I am really happy with the results so far. I can't say the treatment itself is pain-free, but the results are well worth the short-lived discomfort.

For anyone who is concerned about lipodystrophy I'd say to them, don't despair, there are effective treatments available. I'd say talk to your doctor or consultant and tell them about your concerns and find out about available treatments that you can access.

Personally I'm glad I had the opportunity to have this treatment, it's made a big difference to me and all for the better.

For more information on the treatment I had you can go to: info@cloverleafproducts.com or www.cloverleafproducts.com

All Good Wishes
Den.

Youth creating and communicating on HIV/AIDS

(www.digarts-hiv-unesco.org)

This site aims to encourage communication through creating images about HIV/AIDS. It also has a forum where members can share

experiences and discuss issues around living with HIV/AIDS.

Please Note:

There is no age check on membership, or compulsory personal details boxes. This has advantages and drawbacks – for example: it allows you to participate anonymously but you can't be sure of anyone's age.

Green Arrow comic book

Along with fighting alien menaces and criminal masterminds, the "Green Arrow" comic book now features a sidekick named Mia

engaged in a more personal struggle this one against HIV. It's the first major comic book to deal with HIV, and a dose of hard-edged reality to the usually fanciful world of costumed crime fighters.

Unofficial bookwebsite:

www.greenarrowfansite.com

Just stuff
web



maurice's

angle

To mark my 20th anniversary of living with HIV/AIDS, I decided to participate as fully as possible in this year's World AIDS Day events - more than I thought!

At short notice, I found myself preparing speeches and organising activities for some of the events mentioned earlier in this newsletter. It was an exhausting but rewarding experience. I was particularly impressed by the keenness of young people willing to give up their time to create, prepare and perform material in front of live audiences.

Wherever I was asked to speak, I made a point of being open about my sexuality and HIV status, hoping thereby to make a difference. I firmly believe that: a real human face can successfully challenge the prejudiced false image of HIV/AIDS created out of fear and ignorance.

new legislation

As an HIV+ gay man with a part time job, I suppose I should be delighted by recent legislation. Amendments to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 now offer protection from HIV discrimination in employment, housing and in the provision of services; the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) bill increases rights against dismissal, homophobic harassment and victimisation; and, lastly, there are the benefits of the Civil Partnership Bill. Fine! Except that: I don't have a partner; I'm a tax-paying house owner and I'm employed by a religious organisation that is exempt from the new regulations.

Well, there may be nothing for me personally, nonetheless, I am pleased that others will benefit. The new measures should improve the lives of some readers and it is good to know that people now have visiting rights to a same sex partner in hospital and cannot be deprived of shared homes and possessions if one partner should die.

religious homophobia

Homophobic utterances from some church people, I bear with gritted teeth. However, I derive comfort knowing that I am not alone: there have always been gay people actively involved in religions and I believe there always will be. Still it was heartening to hear the words of

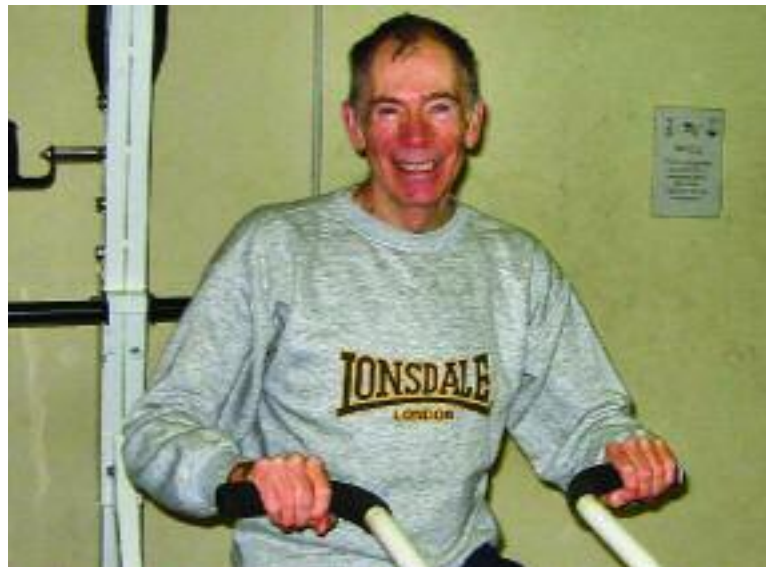
Archbishop Desmond Tutu in his sermon at Southwark Cathedral in February 2004: "To discriminate against our sisters and brothers who are lesbian or gay on the grounds of their sexual orientation for me is as totally unacceptable and unjust as Apartheid ever was."

decrease in HIV discrimination?

A recent experience in my capacity of transport volunteer led me to believe that HIV might be becoming normalized. It contrasted with my own NewFill treatment for facial wasting in 2001 at North Manchester General Hospital. In 2004, Selly Oaks Hospital Birmingham was offering Bio-Alcamid, another facial wasting treatment, in it's Accident and Emergency burns unit alongside other (non HIV) patients; a considerable transformation from the hostile discrimination experienced by those HIV patients who needed treatment from hospital departments only a few years ago. However, regrettably, prejudice and discrimination have not been eliminated from at least one department in North Staffordshire where a friend was recently denied treatment for a minor operation on the grounds that being HIV+ greatly increased risk death if infected with a 'super bug'. It seems ignorance about the basics of HIV/AIDS still needs to be challenged. All healthcare professionals should know that in clinical settings, HIV+ patients are at no greater risk than others, providing that the same high standard of hygiene that everyone expects is in place. Limb replacements and organ transplants for HIV+ people are no longer wistful dreams, but part of medical history. In 2003, a comparison of 24 HIV infected transplant recipients with age and race comparable HIV uninfected recipients found equivalent survival after 12, 24 and 36 months.

personal health

Despite the additional stress of the past few weeks, I continue to be "disgustingly healthy!" (That's what my GP said) I am sure that my regular gym sessions and flu jab have helped to stave off winter illnesses; in addition, the fact that I feel I am doing something useful and that there are people who care about me, gives a major uplift to my spirit. I am relatively content with my last set of blood results - I don't expect that I shall ever achieve a 'normal' CD4 count - but pleased that my viral load remains undetectable. My GP advises me to reduce my cholesterol so I am back on a low fat diet. I keep in mind that currently most deaths of HIV+ people are from non-AIDS defining illnesses like



liver and kidney complications and heart disease - "prevention is better than cure".

open university

Hopefully, Santa will bring me a pass for last year's music course; but, regardless of the outcome, I have signed up for a level 3 Spanish course that begins in February. Before then, I am off to New Zealand for a back-packing adventure; hopefully, I will have a chance to follow some of the trails of Frodo, Sam and the Fellowship of the Ring across Middle Earth. Thankfully, all the orks, barogs and Ring Wraiths have been dealt with, and I'll try to avoid slipping down the crater if I get to climb the slopes of Mount Doom.

Keep well!

maurice

Positive Lives

Address: P.O. Box 474 Hanley ST1 3HX

e-mail; news@staffordshirebuddies.co.uk

This newsletter is available online at:

www.staffordshirebuddies.co.uk

News Letter Team:

Maurice Greenham, Chris Woolls & Bob Lishman

Co-Editors : Maurice Greenham & Chris Woolls

Design and Layout: Bob Lishman

Contributors this edition:

Maurice Greenham, Maureen Cuell, Alan Cuell, Colin Ward

Chris Woolls, Denis Vasey, Gary Falconer, Brian Williams, Stephen Robbins, Andrew Cave

purpose of this newsletter

The purpose of this Newsletter is to offset the loneliness, isolation and anxiety often encountered by people living with HIV/AIDS. There is, however, no restriction to being placed on our mailing list which currently extends to volunteers, health workers, hospital departments, doctors, dentists and others who are interested in matters around HIV & AIDS. Please contact our office for details.



Staffordshire Buddies is a registered charity (No.1047375) governed by a committee of trustees. This executive committee currently comprises a maximum of 13 people, including 5 service-user representatives co-opted onto it. As a charitable organisation we believe that members of the public should be able to attend committee meetings to observe the organisations' business. Any service user, client, volunteer or member of the public who wishes to sit in on meetings should contact the office for details.

useful contact details:

Staffordshire Buddies
Tel (01782) 201251

North Staffs GUM Clinic:
Health Advisors:
01782 846655
Appointments:
01782 554205

South Staffs GUM Clinics:
Cannock:
01785 23026
Burton on Trent:
01283 531407
Stafford:
01785 23026
Tamworth:
01827 263810

National AIDS Helplines:
0800 567 123
(English: 24 hours)
0800 371 135
(Urdu: 6pm-10pm)
0800 371 133
(Punjabi: 6pm-10pm)
0800 521 361
(Minicom: 24 hours)
Samaritans
01782 213555 (24 hour)

Stoke Lesbian & Gay Switchboard
01782 266998 (8pm-10pm)
(Monday, Wed, & Friday)



Thanks to Gilead for supporting Positive Lives in 2004/5

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Deadline for next issue is 30th March 2005