



Positive Lives

Jan - Apr 2004 Issue 25

LOTTERY CASH BOOSTS SERVICES

INSIDE THIS ISSUE..

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- + Living Proof
- + New appointments
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...and much more.

We're pleased to announce that Staffordshire Buddies has won the National Lottery for the 2nd time in under 12 months. Last year we were awarded £56,000 for a project supporting African people living with HIV, which has since been added to by a grant of £20,000 from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund.

We've followed that up by scooping £130,000 to pay for a 3-year Volunteer Development Project – which will focus on improving the support we provide to existing volunteers as well as recruiting new volunteers, particularly from Black & Ethnic Minority communities, people with particular skills and people in particular locations. All of which adds up to 1 key prospect: *Increasing & Improving the services we provide to people with HIV.*

As well as this much needed boost to our volunteer team, other development priorities for the year ahead include: the launch of SPACE – a group for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender (LGBT) young people in Lichfield; TEENMATES – a group for young people living with HIV (Hanley); and refurbishing our Lichfield Centre to enable the running of drop-in services from there.

On top of all that, we're looking to improve the quality of all the services the charity provides, both to people living with or affected by HIV and the LGBT community in Southern Staffordshire

Diary & Notice Board

Drop in Times

Tues & Thurs 2.00 - 4.30pm
(Therapy sessions to be booked via Steve in advance)

Internet and computer access by arrangement

Esprit (Women's Group)

March 3rd - Hanley
March 17th - Hanley
March 31st - Theatre Trip (with men) - from drop in
—Easter Recess—
April 21st - Meeting at Hanley centre - light lunch

TnT- Children's Activities

March 16th - After School Activity - Bowling and Tea
April 14th - Alton Towers - Easter Break Activity
May 11th - After School Activity - Bradwell Centre
June 2nd - 11am - 4.30pm - Crewe park picnic

Teenmates (Positive Youth)

April 7th - 4.30 - 7.00 Bowling
May 5th - Meeting at Centre

Members Evenings

Tuesday March 23rd
Monday 19th April
Tuesday 18th May

Executive Meetings

18th March - Hanley
19th April - Lichfield
12th May - Hanley
16th June- Lichfield

Mesmen Groups: (monthly)

Married Men's' - 2nd Wed
Dressers - 2nd Thurs
Tamworth Social - Last Sunday
Stafford Social - Last Tues
Lichfield Social - 2nd Tues

SPACE LGBT Youth Group

Launch - Saturday 24th April 2004
Every Saturday thereafter.

Welcome Alan!



Hi everyone, my name is Alan Ferrans and I'm the new LGBT Youth Development Worker.

I started in January and this is a new part time post based at the rapidly expanding Lichfield site. I have a very varied background and have been an active member of the gay community since the early 70's working with many organisations including Friend counselling and befriending agency, Gay Switchboard, CAB welfare rights advisor, Yorkshire MESMAC, Terrence Higgins Trust, Street Outreach

Services, Children's Action Group youth leader, Social Services and as a Foster Parent.

The formation of SPACE LGBT Youth Group will be one of my primary tasks, which will serve the young LGBT community of South Staffordshire. I am pleased to be involved in this exciting and ground breaking development for young people who, up to now, have had no specific LGBT youth provision within South Staffordshire MESMEN Project catchment area.

I am also currently working as a Gay Men's Sexual Health worker, part time for Derbyshire Friend. In my spare time, I like to paint pictures in acrylic on canvas. Some of these brighten up the offices at Staffordshire Buddies and MESMEN.

Alan Ferrans

Welcome Sharon!

Sharon Baddely joined the office team in November last year. Apart from general administration duties, Sharon's job includes ringing round to find volunteers in response to requests from service users. She is a local person living in Stoke with her teenage son Tom.

Prior to her previous job as receptionist with Social Services, Sharon worked for 18 years in customer services with British Telecom. She has always enjoyed working with people and feels a close affinity with the aims of Staffordshire Buddies. Until she began working for the charity, Sharon had only connected HIV/AIDS and families with the global

situation especially in Africa; so it came as a surprise to find there were children in Stoke-on-Trent living with HIV.

In the three months that Sharon has been with the charity, she has enjoyed her work and, with the increase in clients and staff, hopes that her job will develop and is looking forward to being with Staffordshire Buddies for a long time. Outside the office she is currently hard at work with DIY: redecorating her house.



World AIDS Day Monday 1st December 2003

Staffordshire Buddies Vigils and New Victoria Theatre event

A small group of dedicated volunteers braved the elements to hold brief vigils in Lichfield, Stafford, Hanley and Newcastle. The final vigil was incorporated into an evening organised together with the New Vic Borderlines, Director, Sue Moffat and Julia Barton, Borderlines administrator who organised and acted as compère for the evening. This is the third year that the New Victoria Theatre has collaborated with Staffordshire Buddies on World AIDS Day events to raise awareness of the issues around HIV/AIDS with local young people.

Each of the outdoor vigils consisted of a simple ceremony in which a tree was adorned with red ribbons and labels bearing the titles of the themes for World AIDS Day throughout the 10 years of Staffordshire Buddies existence. Instead of traditional candles that are difficult to keep alight in windy conditions, incense sticks that thrive on a breeze were burned.



Despite the torrential rain, a couple of hardy individuals joined in the ceremonies in the Market Square at noon at Lichfield and the 3.00 pm vigil outside Shire Hall in Stafford. The largest support was found at the 5.00 pm vigil in Upper Fountain Square Hanley where the rain had stopped and the noble core was swelled with twenty – thirty more souls.

The labels :

- 2003** Stigma & Discrimination.
- 2002** Stigma & Discrimination.
- 2001** I care. Do you?
- 2000** AIDS : Men make a difference.
- 1999** Listen, Learn, Live: World AIDS Campaign with Children & Young People.
- 1998** Force For Change: World AIDS Campaign With Young People.
- 1997** Children Living in a World with AIDS.
- 1996** One World, One Hope.
- 1995** Shared Rights, Shared Responsibilities.
- 1994** AIDS & the Family.
- 1993** Time to Act.

The New Victoria Theatre

In keeping with the two-year global campaign against stigma and discrimination, pupils from Berry Hill and Sir Thomas Boughy High Schools presented original pieces of drama, dance and music celebrating diversity and combating prejudice, which were effective and thought provoking. There were outstanding contributions from individuals including members of the cast from Beauty and the Beast as well as specially written material, sung and played by the highly talented Ian Hammond from Sir



Stafford Vigil

Thomas Boughy High School, and a very funny piece of drama by the all male 'Prince's Trust XL' Group from the same school.

Keith Groom, vice-chair of Staffordshire Buddies and veteran vigil organiser presented the vigil ceremony, adapted for the indoor space with the elimination of lighting incense sticks because of theatre fire regulations. Former New Vic youth group member Steven Cuell was joined by his mother Maureen and Maurice Greenham in a reading of Brian Patten's poem, inspired by words of the Spanish poet, Pablo Neruda. Maurice introduced the poem with personal details about himself as someone living with HIV/AIDS and dedicated the reading to the memory of those who had lost their lives because of AIDS.

After all the presentations had ended and thanks had been given, a remarkable thing occurred. Without doubt it was the most moving moment of the entire evening as with apparent spontaneity the young performers came down to the stage and placed their own red ribbons on the tree and on one outside in the garden of the theatre. It is good to know that this seemingly effective collaboration between the New Vic Theatre and Staffordshire Buddies exists and hopefully will grow in the future.

Maureen & Maurice

“Building a Better Tomorrow”

was the theme of the World AIDS Day service at St Peter's Church, Stoke on Friday 28th November. Pupils from St Peter's High School together with children from Bishop Stamer and Joiners Square Primary School helped with the event. The Reverend Phillip Searle led the service acknowledging the legacy of MUSICAID concerts for World AIDS day in the past. As in previous years the chairman of MUSICAID, Maurice Greenham, acted as organist for the evening. This year the event was enhanced with the glorious sound of the natural trumpet expertly played by Dean Wright.

Maureen Cuell from Staffordshire Buddies explained what the charity did for women and children with or affected by HIV/AIDS. She began by thanking everyone for coming and saying how much Staffordshire Buddies appreciated their efforts and how important they were as the shapers of our future.

Women's Services

She said “Ten years ago when Staffordshire Buddies started we didn't have a dedicated

service for women or children, but it's very different now. We run a drop-in specially for women with HIV/AIDS, where they meet every two weeks to relax and have a good time in a non-threatening environment. The important thing for these women is that their meeting place is safe; by that I mean that they can talk aloud about their condition without being overheard by others who might make judgements about them because they don't know the real facts about HIV or AIDS. When the women get together at Staffordshire Buddies, they are able to share their concerns and support each other through difficult times without fear of prejudice. They get together on other occasions too, and with members of staff and volunteers have recently been horse riding and salsa dancing and on weekends away as well.

Children's Services

In 2000, a service for children and young people aged between 4 and 17 was started by Staffordshire Buddies. Some of the youngsters have HIV but not all of them know they have it. Because of the prejudice surrounding the disease, parents or carers choose not to tell the children for fear of what might happen if others find out. Some of the youngsters have parents or brothers or sisters with HIV but for the same reason aren't told about it. They're boys and girls the same as you, and will enjoy doing a lot of the same things as you do. We run a regular after school club and a programme of school holiday events for them, and we do things like feeding the ducks, play on the swings, hold

barbecues, go to Alton Towers, bowling, the cinema, Pizza Hut and the seaside. With Christmas coming up, we'll have a party and go to the pantomime. We do have a lot of fun together. One of our 6-year-old members has written about what we do. He said this:

'I like coming to the club...I meet up with lots of friends and we go to really good places like Alton Towers. I wish we could go more often though...I miss everyone when I don't see them for ages.'

Doing these things together means something else as well. It means that for the time that we're out with the children, the parents or carers have some time to themselves to do as they please. One of them said:

'My three children have been going to Staffordshire Buddies since it began about 4 years ago. They always have a good time and the staff and volunteers provide an excellent service for us all. I look forward to the days the children are taken out as it means I can have some much needed rest! Sometimes I just sleep all day whilst other times I visit friends. I don't know what I would do without the summer scheme!'

Maureen ended with a quote from Adam Lindsay Gordon:

“Life is mostly froth and bubble,

Two things stand like stone, Kindness in another's trouble,

Courage in your own.”

and concluded by saying;

“I hope that whilst you are growing up, you will remember to be kind to others when they are in trouble, be courageous when you are in trouble and help to build a better tomorrow for everyone.”

**Maureen Cuell
& Maurice Greenham**



Human Wrongs ...Update.

In the last edition of Positive Lives I reported on the story of a person living with HIV/AIDS who had been forcibly removed from the accommodation provided for him by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) while still awaiting a response from the Home Office to his plea for leave to remain in the UK on human rights grounds. I am sad to report that despite all the best efforts of Staffordshire Buddies and others involved in his case he has now been deported back to his home country.

To help other people in future I want to say a bit more about what happened to this person and how he ended up in the situation that he did.

He arrived in the UK a couple of years ago and claimed asylum on political grounds. His claim was unsuccessful and went to appeal. While awaiting a decision on his appeal he was diagnosed HIV positive. He decided not to tell his solicitor about this but to wait and see what the outcome of his appeal would be. His appeal failed and at this point he disclosed his HIV status to his solicitor who wrote to the Home Office requesting further consideration on human rights grounds. He was not at that point in need of anti-retroviral therapy but his solicitor argued that he might

need it in the near future.

I was surprised to learn that because his request on human rights grounds came after his appeal had been refused, the Home Office were under no legal obligation to respond. Once someone has been told that they must return home they have a period of grace in which to make arrangements to return to their home country. His period of grace had come to an end - hence NASS removed him from his accommodation. The Home Office had no obligation to consider things further and there was therefore, in the end, nothing further that could be done to get him leave to remain in the UK.

Here are some of the things we all need to take note of:

- If an asylum seeker living with HIV wants to ask for leave to remain on human rights grounds related to a need for treatment, this must form part of the application for asylum at the earliest possible stage. If it hasn't been brought up before the application and any subsequent appeal has been determined, it may not be possible to raise it later.
- It is now extremely unlikely that anyone who is not already on anti-retroviral

treatment will get leave to remain on the grounds that they will need treatment in the future. The Home Office takes the view that a future need for treatment that might be unavailable in the person's home country is speculative.

- An increasing number of African Countries have small-scale programmes of anti retroviral therapy underway. The Home Office may use this information to justify a decision to refuse leave to remain even where it is obvious that the person has no hope of being able to access a programme of treatment in his or her own country.

Staffordshire Buddies cannot provide immigration advice directly (it is against the law for us to do this without being registered with the Home Office). However, we will continue to do all we can to ensure that asylum seekers get the best service from their solicitor and from other services that can help. If you are worried about your immigration status in the light of what you have read here, please talk to a Staffordshire Buddies staff member.

Andrew J. Colclough
HIV Services Manager

World Aids Conference 2004

This next conference is set to take place in Bangkok in July. Staffordshire Buddies is hoping to raise funds from drug companies and other external funders for delegates to attend.

Following previous

attendance by a delegate who travelled alone and found the experience very traumatic, it is felt that a minimum of 2 delegates should attend, and if possible, we should try to secure accommodation as close to the conference centre as possible in order to minimise travelling times, and enable

delegates to relax between some of the very emotionally demanding workshops they will be attending. Anyone wanting to attend the conference or with ideas of how we could secure additional funding should contact our Director, Chris Woolls, at the Hanley office on (01782) 201251.

Conference Reports - HIV & The Law

This article marks the first of a new series of reports from HIV/AIDS related conferences.

Chris, Gary & Scott recently attended the 7th Community HIV/AIDS Prevention Strategy (CHAPS) conference in Liverpool, which focused on HIV Health Promotion work with gay men.

Chris Morley, Policy & Publications Co-ordinator at George House Trust, Manchester, presented on *Changing legislation and its impact on the sector*. We caught up with Chris afterwards and he elaborated on these themes for the benefit of our readers.

Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA)

Current Discrimination law and HIV.

The DDA outlaws discrimination against people with disabilities in areas of life like employment, education, housing, goods and services (including health services), and to some extent public transport.

If you think you have been discriminated against, you can get advice from the Disability Rights Commission's help-line. They may agree to negotiate for you and help you take your case to a tribunal. You might get an apology, financial compensation, a promise not to do it again and have your original request granted. The key question is - *are people with HIV covered by the Act?* The answer is yes, more often than not. We should presume people with HIV will be protected by the act unless proved different. We shouldn't self-censor potential claims. It is not true to say that "people have to be symptomatic" to be able to

make a complaint. Anyone who is symptomatic, would clearly fit the rules, but what this view means is that we overlook many more who could also have a valid claim.

The Act has been successfully used by several people with HIV because HIV is mentioned in some of the anonymous case summaries. *But...* it is usually overlooked as a way of dealing with examples of discrimination against people with HIV – probably because people with HIV and workers don't see HIV+ people as disabled.

The DDA - as it stands now - (Sch 1 para 8)

Progressive conditions:

- A person has a progressive condition (such as cancer, multiple sclerosis or muscular dystrophy or infection by the human immunodeficiency virus).
- As a result of that condition, they have an impairment which has (or had) an effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities, but, that effect is not (or was not) a substantial adverse effect, they shall be taken to have an impairment which has such a substantial adverse effect if the condition is likely to result in their having such an impairment.

There is official guidance, (a Code of Practice) that has to be taken into account by any Tribunal deciding any claim, on how this is to be interpreted. This says:

Progressive conditions

- A progressive condition is one which is likely to change and develop over time. The Act gives the following examples of progressive conditions: cancer, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, HIV infection. The Act provides for a person



with such a condition to be regarded as having an impairment which has a substantial adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities before it actually does so. Where a person has a progressive condition, he or she will be treated as having an impairment which has a substantial adverse effect *'from the moment any impairment resulting from that condition first has some effect on ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. The effect need not be continuous and need not be substantial.'* For this rule to operate medical diagnosis of the condition is not by itself enough (Sch1, Para 8).

Explanation

What this means in reality is that people with HIV are protected by the Act from discrimination from the moment that you can show HIV has some affect on ability to carry out normal day to day activities. For example, it is a question of legal interpretation whether mental effects following HIV diagnosis (reactive depression for example) would be treated as enough, provided they affect someone's day to day activities

at least some of the time. I would argue that the day to day effects on everyday activities of depression and anxiety as a result of HIV are covered, and I could mount a pretty convincing case in support of this. Ultimately it would be a Disability Discrimination Tribunal that would have to decide whether someone is disabled in the words of the Act.

Until Tribunal decisions are made on this point (none have) I think that is enough. Tactically we should presume people with HIV have this DDA protection until a Tribunal decides otherwise. We don't need to tell misbehaving dentists or obnoxious bar staff that the point hasn't been conclusively decided yet.

Anyway, how could a dentist or bar-worker tell just by looking whether you have HIV and that your day to day activities are sometimes limited? They should treat everyone well and not make assumptions. We can hope / expect that the Disability Rights Commission will offer support (it seems keen to do this for people with HIV) and help negotiate a settlement with the service provider / employer. People with HIV can always withdraw claims if this doesn't work, or if they don't want to put their case to a Tribunal.

The Disability Rights Commission has a useful website. There are summaries of cases which illustrate some of the potential: <http://www.drc-gb.org/law/caseslist.asp>

The proposed changes to discrimination law

The draft Disability Discrimination Bill will amend the Disability Discrimination Act in a number of ways: the critical point for us is that the **definition of disability will be**

extended to clearly include **all people with HIV**, cancer and multiple sclerosis **from the moment of diagnosis** (at present DDA protection is not guaranteed).

Everyone diagnosed with HIV will then automatically have immediate DDA protection. The Government proposes this because it realises HIV discrimination happens largely because of stigma rather than the extent or visibility of any disability. THT have actively campaigned for this law change. See: www.drc-gb.org/newsroom/newsdetails.asp?id=602§ion=4

You can get the **draft bill** from this page: www.official-documents.co.uk/document/cm60/6058/6058.htm

There is, as yet, no implementation timetable. It is possible the final bill will be introduced in the next session of Parliament (starting November 2004) after this draft one has been discussed in committee this session. We won't know until the Queen's Speech in the autumn. The new law might get delayed until after the next election. We will also have to wait for an implementation date after the bill becomes law (therefore this change may not happen on the ground until late 2005 at the earliest).

Lesbian & Gay Partnership law proposals

The government announced in the Queen's Speech in November that this year it will introduce a Civil Partnership Bill which will allow same sex partners from age 16 to register their relationship in Town Hall /



'We are watching the government's legislative programme with interest and anticipate introducing Civil Partnership Ceremonies once the Bill becomes Law. We look forward to consulting with the local community on the most appropriate way of implementing this here in our city'
Mike Wolfe - Mayor of Stoke-on-Trent.

church-based ceremonies. This will give certain rights and responsibilities concerning property, inheritance, benefit claims and from 6 years time, pensions. The bill has not been published yet but what they propose is fairly clear from their responses to the public consultation on the proposals. www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/publications/CP_responses.doc

There will be a similar procedure as divorce if the relationship breaks down and there will therefore be obligations for continuing support and sub-division of property.

Implications for the Lesbian & Gay community and the organisations they belong to:

- This law will help develop a climate of greater social acceptance within society and help boost the self-esteem of gay people in particular.
- Think about the responsibilities as well as the rights – it will be marriage in all but name and therefore needs thinking about carefully.
- Some towns already have partnership ceremonies (which confer no legal rights or duties) but are a way of getting some public

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A voice for your views

- Do you have views on how our health could be improved?
- Fancy becoming a voice for Health?

Here's your chance to have a say right at the heart of health & healthcare. A large network of local health forums is being set up right across the country. With legal powers, **Patient & Public Involvement (PPI) Forums** will be able to speak up for the public on health – which, of

course, will include the lesbian, gay, bisexual & transgender communities, as well as people living with HIV. But unless people from those communities get involved **locally** it's hard to figure out how our voices will be heard.

Across Staffordshire, **PPI Forums** are being co-ordinated by Age Concern. They are now seeking the very first members for the new forums to provide that important checking and challenging function for the NHS.

- + The role of a member includes: Independently

- watching over the quality of local healthcare
- + Shaping decisions which impact on our health
- + Influencing local and national decisions as part of a growing network of public involvement
- + Becoming a force for fairness and change

Think you are up to it? Then call 0845 120 7115, Minicom: 0845 120 7113 or click on www.maketimeforhealth.org for more information and an application pack.

Overseas News

The South African government has finally agreed to distribute free anti HIV drugs, under a plan drawn up by the William Clinton Foundation. However, it's not clear how long it will be before the drugs are widely available, as the specialist

health infrastructure to put the plan into effect has yet to be created. South Africa has the world's highest number of people living with HIV, nearly 5 million people.

Definition of disability to be changed to include the diagnosis of HIV.

Under new legislation planned by the government the current Disability Discrimination Act will

be amended to increase the protection for people with HIV and amend the definition of HIV. Currently only people with HIV and showing symptoms are protected from discrimination, but if the new law passes the protection from discrimination will start from the time of diagnosis.

Source: Village Citizens' Advice Bureau: www.thevillage.org.uk

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recognition.

- People in relationships should consider what steps to take now to maximise their rights (e.g. make wills).
- It will give people more right to insist on being treated as the Next of Kin in decisions about a partner's hospital treatment.

Anti-gay discrimination now illegal in employment and training.

Since December 2003 discrimination against lesbian or gay people at work, in recruitment, promotion, terms and conditions (including health benefits and pensions), dismissal and in training is illegal. Harassment and victimisation of people at work

because of their sexuality is also now against the law. ACAS (the Arbitration and Conciliation Advisory Service) and many Trade Unions have published guidance on the new rules. ACAS also has a helpline. www.acas.org.uk/

www.acas.org.uk/publications/pdf/guide_sexualO.pdf

Registration of Death.

The government has published a White Paper which says that something needs to be done to allow same sex partners to register a death and to allow a version of the death certificate that does not give the cause of death. It is likely that any legal change will wait until the Shipman Inquiry has finished and made its recommendations. The White Paper also deals with changing the gender on

birth certificates for transsexuals: www.statistics.gov.uk/registration/whitepaper/default.asp

Adoption. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 will be implemented in 2004 and allows same sex couples to apply jointly to adopt a child: www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/lgbt/orientation.htm

In the next edition we will be continuing Chris' article and looking at the Sexual Offences Act 2003 as well as issues around the **Criminalisation of Sexual Transmission of HIV**. If you have any questions on this subject email news@staffordshirebuddies.co.uk and we'll try and find the answers.

Chris Woolls

Living Proof

For many years the national long-term survivors group held their residential weekends at Glenfall House near Cheltenham, an elegant mansion dating back to the 18th century. Although the place made a glorious setting for the group it was discovered on moving that the group itself was the real treasure and Shallowford House the current venue for the group's meetings is not without its own attractions. Unlike Glenfall, all the bedrooms and facilities are under one roof. Surrounded by well-kept gardens, it is peacefully situated in the Staffordshire countryside not far from Isaac Walton's cottage. The food is excellent and the staff are very friendly. So far as users of Staffordshire Buddies services are concerned it couldn't be more convenient; no more than 15 minutes drive from Stoke.

The group welcomes anyone who has been diagnosed HIV+ for 5 years or more. Each new member is made welcome and soon feels part of a loving inclusive family. The great thing about the group, which has dubbed itself 'Living Proof', is the tremendous support that people give and receive from each other. Considering that some members have been positive for

more than 20 years you can imagine that there is plenty of experience to draw on. The majority of members are gay men but there are always women and usually at least one straight/bi person present. Some people are living well without medication; others are coping successfully with different versions of HAART. Of course, we all have our individual problems and it is good to be able to share them and consider the advice that others may be able to offer.

Each weekend has an excellent team of complementary therapists, some of whom will be familiar faces to Staffordshire Buddies clients. You can book in for a session of a therapy you know or experiment with something different. Alongside of the therapists here are trained facilitators who run small group sessions dealing with themes put forward by members themselves. One to one sessions are also offered. The accommodation is simple but comfortable at all times of the year and although there is a no-smoking policy, smoking is permitted in the conservatory at the end of the main hall and in the bar run by the group. There is ample opportunity to make new friends and enjoy the company of others. On the other hand, if you need to, there

is also space to take time out and be on your own either indoors

or outside sitting in the extensive gardens or walking in the surrounding countryside.

At present the group receives no financial support from any government, charity or commercial sources. The revenue comes from the fund raising activities of members and the fees they pay for each weekend – currently £150. Some HIV charities and local authorities have been willing to meet the cost and travel expenses for individuals to attend but as funding becomes tighter these are becoming fewer. For those people who can afford to pay for themselves, the group offers another weekend free (to be taken within a 12 month period). Anyone who has benefited from the group will testify that wherever it comes from it is money well spent. The levels of joyful laughter over the weekend and tearful sadness on departure bear witness to the truth of that testimony. If you want to know more about the group you can visit the website: <http://www.nltsg.org/>



A new life brings joy to the Hanley Centre...

Pictured left is Staffordshire Buddies Director, Chris Woolls with our youngest client yet!!

This beautiful baby was just two days old when (s) he came into the Hanley centre with his/her mum, who is also one of our service users, and captured the hearts of everyone present.

Amidst many ooh's and aah's the new arrival was a breath of fresh air and left everyone feeling very broody... even our Director, Chris!

Join research on well-being and what HIV means to you...

Would you complete a questionnaire (it should take about 20 minutes) about how you have adjusted to living with HIV or AIDS? Have you been able to "find meaning" in your illness? Are there particular aspects of the experience (positive and negative) which affected the way in which you adjusted?

Christiaan Morgan is working as a clinical psychologist in a central London sexual health clinic. He is currently undertaking research to investigate these factors - how "finding meaning" helps general wellbeing, and the role of insight into that process. He is looking for males to take part, who have had a diagnosis for at least 6 months.

Currently, not much is known about this topic. Studies

with people living with other illnesses have shown that people who are able to find meaning are more likely to have better outcomes, both physically and psychologically. However, we do not know whether it is important that people *find* meaning, or the *type* of meaning that they find. Is ignorance bliss? Is it better to simply focus on the positive, or achieve a realistic "balance" in our appraisals? Research into this area is lacking, and would not only go some way to developing clinical psychology services at the clinic, but also join the growing body of research that suggests that "well-being" is more than a simple absence of negative symptoms, and that some people are able to grow in many ways when faced with adversity.

If you do choose to take part, Christiaan can send you a questionnaire and freepost envelope. The study is anonymous, although a name is asked for in case you want to



Christiaan Morgan
Clinical Psychologist

withdraw. The questionnaire is also available online at <http://members.lycos.co.uk/northcircular74/index.htm>

If you would like to take part, you can contact Christiaan by email on christiaan.morgan@btinternet.com or by phone on 07966 977442. He is happy to keep you informed as to the outcome of the study, and send on copies of any articles written. All questionnaires will be kept confidentially, and destroyed after the study is complete.

Christiaan Morgan

Children and Young People Web Watch:

Children With Aids Charity was set up to help the youngest of those affected or infected by HIV and AIDS. It is a national UK charity with the simple aim of working towards a future without prejudice for these children and their families. www.cwac.org/

The 'thrive guide' is a survival manual for young people living with HIV. It was produced by 'Health Initiatives for Youth' in California, USA. Although they have a different health-care system to the NHS in the UK, it is still worth viewing as it contains useful general

advice as well as personal stories. You can read it online at: www.whatudo.org/

Youth HIV (pictured right) is a website created by and for HIV-positive youth and HIV peer educators. The purpose is to provide a safe and effective

website offering sexual and mental health information, community support, opportunities for advocacy, resources and referrals, and online peer education. www.youthhiv.org/resources/faqs/index.cfm

YouthNet is a global program to improve reproductive health and prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS among



people 10 to 24 years old. www.fhi.org/en/youth/youthnet/index.htm

Body and Soul is a UK charity supporting children, teenagers, women, heterosexual men and their families who are living with or closely affected by HIV and AIDS.

www.bodyandsoul.demon.co.uk/

Maurice's

Angle

Happy New Year

New Year is a good time to take stock; a suitable occasion to look back over the successes and failures of the previous year and to look forward to having another chance to do better in the year ahead. With this in mind I took a glance back at the ups and downs for me in 2003. I guess, like most folk, I recalled a mixed bunch of highs and lows.

Christmas in bed

Perhaps this was the lowest point of the year for me. I suffered a sore throat, a hacking cough, a stuffed up nose, red gummy eyes, headaches, nose bleeds and mild night sweats; in short, I was not a happy bunny! No doubt my health had been affected by the load of Christmas activities; concerts, church services, motorway journeys to exchange presents with family, and there was no shortage of air-borne infections freely available. Emotionally, I was saddened by the AIDS related deaths of people I knew and also that of the neighborhood cat Blacky who died in my house just before Christmas.

Highs of 2003

The high points of the year that I recall, have to include those occasions when I had the chance to make new friends. These happened on the Internet, at summer school in Santiago de Compostela and at the George House Trust residential weekend in Hebden Bridge. I had a memorable day out in Manchester where I had lunch at Body Positive North West and visited the Imperial War Museum North before meeting up with several of the friends I had made at Hebden

Bridge for a meal in the village. The National long-term survivors group Christmas weekend at Shallowford House brought another high with its mix of faces old and new and peer support of the highest calibre.

Without doubt, the continuity of established friendships has been a constant source of strength and uplift throughout the year.

A narrow escape!

One incident in 2003 I am unlikely to forget in a hurry: my spectacular escape from imprisonment at St Mark's School Shelton. It happened at a yoga class after building work had demolished the toilet the male members of the group normally use. I discovered alternative men's toilets in another part of the building but when I came out, I found the door that leads into the main hall locked; presumably by the caretaker who had subsequently left the premises. No one else had a key and there was no fire escape in that part of the building. I quickly sized up my options and realized that there was a chance of escape through a tiny unlocked toilet window.

With the aid of a stepladder firmly held in place by members of the yoga group on the outside, I climbed up the inside of the toilet and swung myself into a horizontal position astraddle a small gap at the top of the window. Carefully, I reached for the top of the stepladder with my foot. I placed my full weight on the steps and made my descent. In no time we were back inside heaving sighs of relief and having a good laugh. After thanking my rescuers profusely, the class began.

On reflection I was thankful that I was fit and supple enough to pull off the stunt successfully. Houdini eat your heart out!

Course results

Despite my gloomy forecasts of the outcome of my Open University courses, I did better than expected; I passed both Spanish and Latin. With these out of the way I now have additional confidence to begin work on my next course at level three.

Winter Break

In the middle of January, I took a short holiday in Nerja on the Costa del Sol and was blessed with glorious sunshine. I had a chance to walk, see the caves and generally relax but had few opportunities to practice my Spanish, as most of the guests in the hotel were British. For a change, the only incident I suffered was a minor cut from climbing over rocks. However, there was some excitement on the return journey, which was lengthened because the plane had to alter flight and return to Malaga airport in order to off-load a passenger who had fallen and seriously injured himself. It was 71 degrees when we left Malaga; in Manchester, when I arrived at my car, I had to scrape the ice of the windscreen before I could drive home. Still, there are many warm memories and a few photos to remind me of a very pleasant week – I have included one to share with you – I hope you like it.

Keep well.

Maurice



Positive Lives

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The mention, contribution or likeness of any person or organisation appearing in this publication is not to be taken as any indication of the sexual, social, political orientation nor of the HIV status of such persons or organisations.

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.

Executive Committee

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 who wishes to sit in on meetings should contact the office for details.



WANTED!

Positive Lives welcomes contributions from all our readers. We would like to encourage participation from positive women, young people and people from ethnic minority groups.

You don't need to be an accomplished writer, in fact the best stories come from "ordinary people" writing about their everyday lives coping with living with the virus. If you have a story that you think you could share with our readers, please get in touch with either Chris or Bob at the Hanley office. If necessary we will try and help you put pen to paper and inspire other readers to share their stories with us. Contact us either by phone (01782) 201251 or by email to:

chris@staffordshirebuddies.co.uk

G.U.M Clinics

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

Helplines

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)

**Deadline for next issue is
30th April 2004**