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The Newsletter of the
Rural AIDS Action Network

The Networker

The Rural AIDS Action Network exists to organize, develop and sustain caring communities of professionals and volunteers who serve and support persons living with, affected by, or at risk for HIV/AIDS in the rural Midwest.

Keeping Momentum

It has been nearly a year and a half since I have taken the reins as Executive Director at RAAN. I don't mean to sound cliché, but time really has gone by quickly since June of last year. RAAN made a lot of positive changes in 2006 and we continue to build and grow on those changes.

In July, the fifth annual Red Ribbon Ride presented by Chipotle was a great success. We raised nearly \$625,000 for eight local HIV/AIDS service agencies including RAAN. David Hanson did a great job as captain of Team RAAN and I had a blast as a crew member for the first time. A huge thank you goes out to the riders, crew and supporters. Planning for next year's ride, July 17-20, 2008, is already in place under the leadership of our new Ride Director, Theresa Fetsch. We feel very privileged to have her with us as our founding Director, Kari Johnson, left for new endeavors. For more information on the Red Ribbon Ride or to sign up as a rider or crew member, go to www.redribbonride.org.

Staff and volunteers have been busy conducting outreach efforts around the State. We were able to participate in the Twin Cities Pride Celebration, as well as Pride Festivals in Duluth, Mankato, Rochester, and Pine City. We also attended many community events and health fairs to disseminate information about HIV and RAAN services in Greater Minnesota.

RAAN was fortunate to receive a contract from the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) to provide additional case management in Greater Minnesota. This is the first time RAAN has been funded by DHS to provide case management and it comes at an opportune time with the continued rise in client numbers. We now have over 130 active clients, the most in our history.

In this current newsletter, you will find an insert describing RAAN's Annual

Continued on back

Safe R Zone

Safe R Zone Events

Safe R Zones are designed to bring together sexually active gay and bi men, 18+, to define safer sex and discuss ways to negotiate a safer sexual experience. A Safe R Zone Event to be held in St Cloud in December will provide an opportunity to find out more about safer sex, to meet and learn, to have fun, and to make new friends and new goals in a safe, gay-friendly environment. We provide dinner and beverages, fun goodie-bags and great information. Call 800-966-9735 to learn more and to register. Tell your friends!



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You can view this newsletter online at www.raan.org, where it is in color.

OraQuick – The Next Generation

RAAN is in the process of switching over from OraSure HIV tests to OraQuick tests. RAAN has used OraSure, which requires sending specimens to a lab and waiting a week or so for results, for many years, but we're pleased to announce we've made the decision to switch over to the OraQuick oral swab test.

The main advantage of the OraQuick test is that results are available on site within about 20 minutes. A line appears on the test stick indicating either reactive or non-reactive results based on the presence or absence of HIV antibodies in the material swabbed from the inside of a subject's cheek.

OraQuick is just as reliable as OraSure, and it actually costs a little less, because there are no lab fees, but RAAN has been

slow to switch over because OraQuick test materials have always been more temperature sensitive than OraSure, and since rural testing typically involves a great deal of travel in order to make the test available to the broadest population, we were concerned that summer heats and winter freezes might be a problem. Further research has convinced us that we are capable of keeping the tests heat-stable in transit, and we're very pleased to be able to offer the convenience of one-visit testing to our test subjects, not to mention our test counselors.

We want to use up our supply of the OraSure 2-visit tests before we completely switch over, but we hope to be using OraQuick exclusively by January of 2008.

Testing in Greater Minnesota

RAAN currently supplies ten test centers with test kits and training. In the past five years, we've tested hundreds of people from the following counties: Beltrami, Blue Earth, Brown, Carlton, Cass, Clay, Clearwater, Crow Wing, Grant, Hubbard, Isanti, Kandiyohi, Lake, LeSueur, Lyon, Morrison, Nicollet, Nobles, Otter Tail, Pine, Polk, Pope, Rice, Richland, Rock, St Louis, Stearns, Steele, Stevens, Swift, Waseca and Winona

Regional Spotlight - North Central

Debra Davis in Bemidji

In 1998, with the support of the administration, male librarian David Nielson left his job on a Friday and returned the following Monday as female librarian, Debra Davis. Ms Davis now regularly crosses the country speaking on transgender issues, and recently she was invited to share her unique perspectives with audiences at Bemidji State University.

The day following two conferences before about 400 folks, Debra was kind enough to have lunch with us at our Fall NE Regional Partner Meeting. Debra, who describes herself as a parent, grandmother and friend—"and oh yes, I also happen to be transgender" -- is the founder and Executive Director of the Gender Education Center in Maple Grove. The term Transgender, she says, describes "all manifestations of crossing gender barriers, including all who cross-dress and otherwise transgress gender norms". Thanks in part to

Debra's assistance, the Minnesota Human Rights Act now includes transgender people in its protection and defines this orientation as "having... a self image or identity not traditionally associated with one's biological maleness or femaleness". Statistically, between 1 and 5% of the population are transgender, and, sadly, Debra says, "as many as 60% of transgender youth attempt suicide."

A University of Illinois study found HIV is a serious health concern in the transgender community. Cited among the reasons are the use of shared needles for hormone treatments, risky or unsafe sexual practices and concomitant drug use. Additionally, transgender people face increased risk "if they have had vaginoplasty to construct a new vagina, due to the vagina's fragile lining." (Modan et al)

Cheryl Yarnott, ACRN, Case Manager

For additional information on transgender issues, go to Debra's Gender Education Center website, at gec@debradavis.org.

HIV Support Groups

RAAN is pleased to announce the inception of a new support group for people living with HIV/AIDS or affected by the virus. The group will meet once a month beginning on November 28, 5:00 to 7:00 pm, at the Central Minnesota Red Cross Building, 1301 West St Germain in St Cloud.

There will be a greeter at the door to direct you to the meeting room, pizza and soft drinks will be served and we hope to have a speaker to give a 15-minute talk, at the beginning of the meeting, on "Self Care".

For directions, call the Red Cross at 1-800-560-7641 or RAAN at 1-800-966-9735 during business hours. If you'd like to receive a flyer as a reminder call, write or email RAAN and leave your name and address.

Yee-Haw!

RAAN is a beneficiary of a recent North Star Gay Rodeo Association fund-raiser. The NSGRA is a rodeo club operating in Minnesota, Wisconsin and the Upper Midwest since 1989, raising funds and awareness – while having fun – in rodeo shows, competitions and camp events. RAAN gratefully acknowledges their contribution and wishes them happy trails until we meet again.

To learn more about the NSGRA, become a member or contributor, visit them at www.nsgra.org

World AIDS Day – December 1, 2007

Probably the most significant day on the calendar for AIDS Service Organizations such as RAAN, is December 1. This is World AIDS Day, an annually recognized day when the whole HIV community - infected, affected and empathetic - can catch up on the progress made and review together the strides yet to be taken. It's a memorial, a celebration, and a time to renew commitment to a healthy future.

The first World AIDS Day was observed in 1988 when a summit of health professionals from around the world called for a spirit of social tolerance and a better flow of vital information in the HIV/AIDS community. In 1996 UNAID was created to unite 6 global agencies in their response to HIV/AIDS. Today, a commission designated by UNAID oversees World AIDS Day each year.

In Minnesota, many organizations and individuals are planning World AIDS Day events. Visit their website www.worldaidsday.org for information about local and worldwide events.

AIDS FACTS

Worldwide Estimates in 2006 (UNAIDS)
65 million people have been infected since 1981
39.5 million people are living with HIV/AIDS
Over 25 million people have died of AIDS since 1981
4.3 million people were infected in 2006 (11,781 per day)

United States Estimates in 2006 (CDC)
984,155 people have been infected since 1981
433,761 million people are living with HIV/AIDS
(an estimated ¼ are unaware of their infection)
550,394 people have died of AIDS
40,000 people were infected in 2006

Minnesota Estimates in 2006 (MDH)
8,149 people have been infected since 1981
5,566 people are living with HIV/AIDS
2,838 people have died of AIDS
318 people were infected in 2006 (one case every 27 hours)

1,500 children are infected with HIV each day. In Sub-Saharan Africa about 7,600 people are infected and 5,700 die each day. Worldwide, 2.9 million people died of AIDS in 2006

Staffing Update

Marcy Yarger

Marcy Yarger is the new case manager in the North East Region. Marcy is a graduate of Concordia College with a degree in social work; her background is in services for children and youth. She relocated from Fargo, North Dakota to Mora this summer when she was hired by RAAN. Her office is at 105 Union Street, Suite 4, in Mora, and her phone number is 320-210-2041 or 800-966-9735. Marcy has a great sense of humor – which is almost required to work here – and lots of energy and commitment. We're so pleased to have Marcy on board.

Nichole Rieck

Nichole (Bauman) Rieck, our case manager in the South West is a new mother. Brody Dean Reick was born October 19, to Nichole and her husband Jason. Brody, 8 pounds, 7 ounces and 22 inches long, was also welcomed by sister Brianna and brother Braeden. Mother and baby are doing fine. Congratulations, Nichole and Jason!

Judy Sarkilahti

To improve services to PLWH/A in Central Minnesota, RAAN has designated the area of St. Cloud to Brainerd as the Central Region and reassigned Judy Sarkilahti from Care Advocate to Case Manager to oversee it. Judy's office is midway between the two cities in Little Falls.

Board of Directors Updates

A big thank you goes out to Katherine Johnson and Nancy Emery, recently retired from the Board of Directors, for their time and dedication to helping PLWH/A in Greater Minnesota.

The Board extends a warm welcome to our new members, Barb Lyons of Little Falls and Lois Bergman of Hinckley. Barb is the branch Manager of Mid-Minnesota Federal Credit Union and Lois is trained in Classical Homeopathy. They are both very excited to be on the Board and we look forward to their contribution.

Rural AIDS Action Network Board of Directors

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Nichole Rieck, Case Manager
Beth Carlson, Case Manager
Courtney Busch, Case Manager
Judy Sarkilahti, Care Manager
Theresa Skorseth, Program Assistant

Keeping Momentum continued

Fall Fundraising effort. This year we are really excited to announce the Otto Bremer Foundation will match up to \$10,000 for this fundraising drive. This is an incredible opportunity for you to double your donation power by taking advantage of the Otto Bremer Foundation's generosity. Please take the time to read and fill out the fundraising insert to help people living

with HIV/AIDS in rural Minnesota.

In closing I would like to remind people to participate in a World AIDS Day event near you. World AIDS Day is December 1st and it affords us an opportunity to reflect on the impact of HIV world wide as well as locally. It is also a time to celebrate all those incredible individuals who live with

the disease and thrive despite the obstacles they encounter. I am truly blessed to be a part of RAAN and the movement to eradicate HIV/AIDS.

Best Regards and Happy Holidays,



Executive Director

South Central

My job, as a facilitator, is to moderate and lead our support group, but as a person living with AIDS, I also participate as a group member. I can't quite put my finger on the moment when I found myself as much a group member as a facilitator, but I guess it happened when folks began to feel comfortable enough to share their personal stories.

Though I consider myself an expert in HIV/AIDS, I'm surprised at how much I've learned from "The Positive Positives". Before, I had problems opening up to anyone about how this disease impacts my life. I couldn't imagine telling people

my numbers or the reason for a hospital visit. Now I'm inspired to share my own experiences -- truly a gratifying feeling - - but what's most encouraging is that, as time goes on, stories one wouldn't have imagined just months ago have come spilling from the lips of some of our quietest participants. If this is the group's intention, we have met our goal.

Emotional Support Groups are a great way to release lingering negative feelings in persons living with HIV / AIDS. After each group, I feel renewed, able to go on, to keep combating this disease and to be a partner to others who are

struggling. If you are infected or affected by HIV / AIDS, I strongly suggest you find a group like the Positive Positives and join up.

Randall Guilford

Randall facilitates a support group which meets monthly in Mankato. If you'd like to know more, call the RAAN office at 800-966-9735



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We need your help in the fight against HIV in rural MN! Support RAAN by contributing online today. www.raan.org