

# AIDS Project of Southern Vermont NEWS

aidsprojectsouthernvermont.org

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## As HIV leaders change, the fight against an often-forgotten virus remains the same.

By Kevin O'Connor / Vermont Digger / September 9, 2022

When Karen Peterson began work at the AIDS Project of Southern Vermont in 1993, the novice assistant toiled daily in the shadow of a disease that was a certain death sentence.

Peterson would go on to witness life-saving advances in testing and treatment as she climbed the career ladder to become the Brattleboro-based nonprofit's executive director in 2013. So why, as she prepares to step down after three decades of work, is her job harder than ever?

"I get comments like, 'Does AIDS still exist?'" Peterson said. "People aren't as conscious of it anymore. It's not front and center like it was for so many years."

Over the past decade, the AIDS Project has served an ever-changing array of about 70 clients in Bennington and

Windham counties. But in that same period, its annual budget has dropped 15%, from \$529,000 in 2012 to \$447,000 this year. As a result, the organization was forced to cut Peterson's old full-time clerical position and staffers for prevention efforts that focused on sexual health.

On the flip side, an increase in opioid overdoses has led to more funding for the AIDS Project's syringe services program, which provides harm reduction education and equipment such as Narcan and sterile needles as well as testing for HIV and hepatitis C.

Samba Diallo has experienced the shift firsthand. The 36-year-old started at the AIDS Project as a direct service associate in 2019, only to become an HIV



Karen Peterson and Samba Diallo, respectively the outgoing and incoming executive director of the AIDS Project of Southern Vermont, hold signs outside their Brattleboro office.

prevention specialist in 2021 and harm reduction coordinator this year because of changes in focus and funding. He's now set to succeed Peterson when she departs upon her 30th anniversary in January.

**I am pleased** to announce Samba Diallo as the next Executive Director of the AIDS Project of Southern Vermont.

With his leadership, those living with or at highest risk for HIV will continue to be provided with the best services in southern Vermont.

*Karen Peterson*

**I'm excited** to be stepping in as the Executive Director of the AIDS Project of Southern Vermont. I want to lead with optimism, to develop a culture of respect, with a positive atmosphere.

The past few years at APSV I've come to realize that the work we are doing is still relevant and changing. Through partnerships, collaborating with other organizations, and building relationships with community members APSV will continue to provide great services.

I want to thank the board, and my coworkers for giving me the opportunity. I also trust that with their help we can continue to provide outstanding services and also position ourselves to be ready for changes in HIV treatment and prevention.

*Samba Diallo*



## AIDS Project of Southern Vermont

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15 Grove Street  
PO Box 1486  
Brattleboro VT 05302  
802 254-8263

324 Main Street  
PO Box 4264  
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802 447-8007

[aidsprojectsouthernvermont.org](http://aidsprojectsouthernvermont.org)

Mission: Provide direct services to those whose lives are affected by HIV/AIDS, to offer education and supplies to help prevent its spread, and to promote understanding within the communities served.

Vision: Our community will become a place where new HIV infections are rare and when they do occur, every person, regardless of age, gender, race or ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or socio-economic circumstance, will have unfettered access to high quality care, free from stigma and discrimination.



# Thank you, Alex!

The AIDS Project thanks Alex Potter for his generous support over the years beginning in 1989 as a volunteer, then eight years running our men's program, followed by six years serving on the board of directors. We will miss Alex and his dedication to improving the quality of life for individuals living with HIV and those at highest risk.

—AIDS Project Board of Directors

**Alex:** Over my time on the board I've worked with stellar people — kind, dedicated, funny, understanding, and giving. People who join this board care deeply, and it shows. As a board member I was in a privileged position to watch the staff struggle with and meet the challenges the COVID pandemic presented to a nonprofit organization working with a population especially vulnerable to infectious disease. Every meeting we heard about the perseverance and resources of the clients, and how the staff strived to keep close and supportive. Know that your donations go exactly where they need to, are put to the best possible use, and the people served by this organization appreciate the result of your support more than you can imagine. I was given an inside view of how this agency impacts people daily and it made my service on the board richer and more meaningful. I know I will continue to be involved with APSV given my career and my personal connections. The Board has been one more way to interact with this agency and community, and I am grateful for the opportunity.

## We are pleased to announce two new Board members:

**Patrick Brown:** I'm thrilled to be returning to the APSV board. Previously, I served three terms. The Project has always meant a lot to me. I was born and raised in Southern Vermont and have stayed in the area my whole life. I live here in Brattleboro with my husband and fellow board member Paulee as well as our two dogs. Since leaving the APSV board, I've joined two other boards including Keene Pride. Although my plate is full, when asked if I would be interested in coming back to APSV, I couldn't help but say yes. The work that the Project does for our local community is vital. The staff and volunteers are among the most dedicated people that I've ever come to know. I look forward to working with my fellow board members, APSV staff and volunteers as I rejoin the board during a time of transition.



**Cameron Grader:** Born and raised in Australia, I moved to Western MA in 2016. Since then I have been working for People's United Bank (now M&T Bank) and have been involved in volunteer projects across the Franklin area. Since my diagnosis of HIV in 2011, I have been an advocate for health and wellness of people living with HIV, and work tirelessly to eliminate stigma and misconceptions around the virus. I am bringing this enthusiasm for "living longer, living better and living without restrictions" to the Board of the APSV. I live in Shelburne Falls, MA with my husband of eight years and our two beautiful dogs.

# Welcome to New AIDS Project Staff Members



**Jill Joy**

**DIRECT SERVICES ASSISTANT**

After many years of volunteering in the Bennington office, Jill joined the staff in October. She is happy to work alongside Cynthia to help support our community's needs. She enjoys writing poetry, spending quality time with her wife, children and spending time with her seven-year-old dog Bella. Her father is her hero, he supports her and keeps her grounded to stay on the right path. She is looking forward to serving the community.



**Dakota Roberts**

**OVERDOSE OUTREACH WORKER**

Dakota works alongside Samba and Sue in the Harm Reduction Program. "I strive to be an unbiased advocate for people who use drugs. Using my time as a person with lived experience, I hope to use that knowledge and experience to improve the quality of life and health of people who use drugs. I hope to be able to help expand the syringe exchange and harm reduction programs."



**Sam Warren**

**HARM REDUCTION COORDINATOR**

Sam joined our staff in October as the Harm Reduction Coordinator. They have a degree in Sociology with a minor in Critical Race and Ethnicity Studies from the University of Vermont. They have a background in caregiving but are thrilled to grow professionally, and become part of APSV with the opportunity to engage with the community. "I am excited about the connections I will make, educating the community about our programs and advocating for the people we serve."

## The Prevention Program Offers:

- Syringe services and harm reduction supplies
- HIV and Hepatitis C testing and information
- Health and addiction treatment referrals
- Substance use disorder treatment and recovery referrals
- Educational presentations to groups and agencies

All services of the AIDS Project are free. We are dedicated to improving the quality of life for people living with HIV and reducing the number of new infections in southern Vermont.

**For more information contact:**

- **Sue:** 802 246-7147 [sue@apsvt.org](mailto:sue@apsvt.org)
- **Samba:** 802 440-6776 [samba@apsvt.org](mailto:samba@apsvt.org)



## Thank you ...

You and your staff are amazing btw ... You have done great things for us (people struggling with addiction) and I, and others I'm sure, are truly grateful.

— client of APSV



## Excited by the work of APSV?

If so, please consider joining our board. For more information, call 802-254-8263.





**AIDS Project of Southern Vermont**

aidsprojectsouthernvermont.org / 802.254.4444

P O Box 1486, Brattleboro, VT 05302-1486

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# DECEMBER EVENTS

## **December 1: World AIDS Day Commemoration**

12–1 p.m. | Centre Congregational Church, Brattleboro | [details: apsvt.org](http://details:apsvt.org)



## **December 3: Holiday Drag Show | A benefit for APSV**

8 p.m. | American Legion, Linden St, Brattleboro

The Ladies have served up lip-synching and laughter to area audiences since the late 1990s. This event will feature adult entertainment, basket raffles, a 50/50 raffle and cash bar. **FMI: [apsvt.org](http://apsvt.org)**

