UPCOMING EVENT

May 14 | 29th Annual AIDS Walk for Life

Each year in May we take a symbolic walk to remember our friends who have died from HIV-related illnesses, to call attention to the effects of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in our community, and to honor those who make a difference in this challenging work. Please join us!

More information on page 1.
Spring Forward!

Join us for our Walk for Life on May 14

In 2016, the AIDS Project of Southern Vermont is marking 29 years of effort by community members to support those living with HIV/AIDS and to reduce the risk of HIV transmission in Windham, Bennington and southern Windsor counties.

Join us on this special day as we gather at the River Garden on Main Street in Brattleboro on May 14th at 10 a.m. There, we’ll take time to reflect on the memory of those we have lost before setting out on our walk. On our return, we will join together again for music, prizes for fundraising, and a light lunch.

Walk for Life team members may use the Internet-based FirstGiving website as well as traditional means, to reach out to family and friends to join a Walk team and to raise funds for HIV/AIDS direct services and prevention efforts. For more information about what is involved with forming a team, please call Karen at 802-254-4444.

SAVE THE DATE:

May 14: 29th Annual Walk for Life
10am | River Garden, Main Street, Brattleboro
AIDS Project Board Members: Why They Joined

PENNY ABBOTT:
“I’ve lost one friend to AIDS and have others who are HIV positive. I know that the incredible work the Project does helps make their lives a bit easier.”

GEOFF BURGESS:
“One of the reasons I joined the AIDS Project Board was because of the expertise and dedication of the staff.”

ROBERT GLENNON:
“If there was no AIDS Project of Southern Vermont, my brother would surely not be alive today. The care, housing, and medical referrals he received kept him alive. He lives today due to the AIDS Project.”

PATRICK BROWN:
“After participating in the APSV Walk for Life for several years, I was inspired to do more to contribute. HIV/AIDS awareness is as important as ever. I am most excited about our renewed focus on Education.”

DAVID CARR:
“Because AIDS is still with us.”

JULIE VAN DER HORST JANSEN:
“I joined the board because I was able to apply my financial knowledge and skills to a worthwhile organization. What I enjoy most about being on the board is the camaraderie and being able to stay at the forefront of the ever-changing story of AIDS.”

RICK DUMAS:
“HIV/AIDS affects ALL of us. There is no cure as of today. However, if we work collectively and cooperatively we CAN bring the new infection rate to zero.”

Are you excited by the work of APSV?
If so, consider joining our board.
FMI: 802 254-8263

The AIDS Project of Southern Vermont

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aidsprojectsouthernvermont.org

The mission of the AIDS Project of Southern Vermont is to provide direct services to those whose lives are affected by HIV/AIDS, to offer education to help prevent its spread, and to promote understanding within the communities served.

United Way
The AIDS Project is a United Way of Windham County Agency.

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Honor roll student Christol Long may not be one to act up, “but I’ve always wanted to be in a musical.” So imagine the 17-year-old’s reaction upon winning a lead role in the recent Brattleboro Union High School production of the Broadway hit “Rent.”

“‘Rent’?” she recalls thinking. “What’s ‘Rent’?”

The Tony Award and Pulitzer Prize-winning rock opera, Long would learn, chronicles the lives of young artists fighting the initial 1980s outbreak of AIDS with such untested and toxic drugs as AZT.

“AZT?” she recalls thinking. “I didn’t know what that was either.”

The teenager wasn’t alone. The musical’s faculty directors remember when AIDS was a death sentence rather than a treatable disease, but no student in the 17-member cast was alive upon the show’s 1996 Broadway debut, let alone the earlier era it portrays.

So in between rehearsals, the AIDS Project introduced students to social service professionals and people with HIV, all to explain what the threat once was — and how it continues to touch their community today.

Consider the 50-year-old man who grew up in Brattleboro, moved away to work and returned shortly after being diagnosed with the disease in 2008.

“I thought it was the end of the road,” he told students. “I came home to die.”

But the man who once had a mere 10 T-cells — a type of white blood cell that helps a body’s immune system fight infection — now has a normal number (500) thanks to advances in treatment.

“I’m doing well, and I’m here,” he told students who responded with a round of applause.

Michael Gigante, a Brattleboro psychotherapist who helped found the AIDS Project in 1988, can name too many friends who can’t say the same. Of the 45 people Gigante knew had the disease in the early years of the epidemic, “all except for two are now dead. Death from AIDS was excruciating and painful and ugly and hard. It was hell to help someone through that. And we did it over and over again.”

Everything changed during the time depicted by “Rent,” when doctors hit upon lifesaving drugs.

“Although there’s better treatment, for many people, HIV is much more complicated than simply taking a pill,” AIDS Project case manager Marguerite Monet told students. “And there’s still a huge amount of stigma and discrimination attached.”

That’s why the musical’s directors decided not only to tackle the show but also to educate the cast and crew about how the disease developed over time and can be prevented today.

“I thought this could be a teachable moment,” music teacher Stephen Rice says, “an opportunity for students to engage and become more aware, empathetic and compassionate.”

It seemed to have worked. As senior Vanessa Brown concluded: “We’re really taking this show to heart.”