

CAP Board addresses leadership changes

Cascade AIDS Project has undergone several changes recently. As the newly elected Interim Board Chair I would like to take this opportunity to openly and honestly address these changes.

As you may know by now, the Board of Directors has voted to remove Mike McGowan as Board Chair. Also, Tom Koberstein, our executive director for the past three years, has announced his intention to resign. Tom's decision to resign is unrelated to the Board action and due more to personal reasons. Three years as executive director of an AIDS Service Organization is a long time. Tom has given the utmost of his courage and commitment to this agency and will be sorely missed.

I believe the only thing constant in life is change. Change is inevitable in community-based organizations. I firmly believe that it is an indication of the strength of this agency that we can undergo this kind of transition and still remain healthy and stable. In the end, I believe we will be stronger and more valuable because of it. There are a few areas which deserve more in-depth explanation.

First, I wish to stress that the transition in leadership will not affect the delivery of programs and services to people affected by AIDS and HIV disease. The agency is in a strong and stable condition. We will continue to provide these essential services and play a leading role in the AIDS/HIV health crisis.

Second, the transition in Board leadership has, admittedly not been without discussion and debate. Several Directors disagreed with the timing and manner of this transition while others believed the agency needed to diversify and develop a more aggressive and visible leadership. In the end, a majority of the Board felt this was the most effective way to accomplish these goals.

Finally, the transition itself signals a shift in emphasis for Cascade AIDS Project. The AIDS virus continues to spread to other communities, most notably, minorities, women, and IV drug users. Like the virus itself, CAP must reach out more to other communities affected by AIDS and offer our experience, courage, and commitment. We will help others help themselves, just as we have learned to do in our struggle with AIDS.

It has often been said that different cultures are known by the way they respond in a time of crisis. For the gay and lesbian community, AIDS has been our time of crisis. For the rest of America, our response has been the most visible part of the AIDS story. That response, our courageousness in the face of AIDS, will come to mark and define our culture. Our nation's response to AIDS has sprung from the deep reservoir of courage, commitment and talent within the gay and lesbian

community. Be clear about this: we have moved this nation to respond to AIDS. And, largely, we have succeeded in at least slowing its spread in our community.

The true story of AIDS has been the extraordinary response of our community in helping ourselves. When AIDS began, nobody was prepared — not the government, not the medical establishment, not even our own institutions. We had to change, educate and organize ourselves. And because it was our own selves, our friends, family and lovers, we succeeded.

That we have done it is best of all. As an agency and a community we do not have the magic answer to what works or doesn't work. The most of what we have to offer is our experience, our courage, and our commitment. We must now share with others so that they can help themselves, so that they can change, educate, and organize themselves as we did.

The problem is much bigger now, the needs greater, our challenge escalated. At CAP, I believe the best way to share our knowledge is to truly become inclusive of the range of communities affected by AIDS. Therein lies the major reason and impetus for change within Cascade AIDS Project.

In short, we cannot continue to be a largely gay and lesbian organization "helping" other communities organize and educate. We must become a black, white, red, gay, straight, lesbian and "all others" organization striving to help ourselves in the fight against AIDS. To do less would be to ignore what we have been saying for years. AIDS is not a gay disease!

Cascade AIDS Project has grown tremendously over the past three years. Under Mike and Tom's leadership we have become the major social service provider for people living with AIDS and HIV disease in the state of Oregon. Their courage and commitment have led us through a difficult, first-phase of growth. Now, like the virus itself, we feel a need to move in a new direction. We feel a need to expand our notion of who we are as a community. Not just as gays and lesbians but as a community of people — all people — affected by AIDS.

In the coming months, CAP will need your support and assistance. Change is natural and positive, but often difficult. Please get involved. As an agency, we are only as strong as the individuals supporting us. As a community, our strength is needed in the fight against AIDS for everyone.

Jim Simons
Interim Board Chair, Cascade AIDS Project

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