

In the Spring 1994 edition of the *AIDS & Public Policy Journal*, clinical psychologist Walt Odets talks about the gay and HIV/AIDS communities' failure to acknowledge and address the independent needs of seropositive and seronegative men: "To date, our education has largely expressed the political idea that all gay men are 'equal' and AIDS education thus applies universally to all. In [AIDS-service organizations] the obvious idea that AIDS prevention is for HIV-negative men... is a controversial, politically inflammatory assertion.... Many HIV-positive men quite understandably have different ideas and feelings about life, and live with different values and objectives from HIV-negative men."

CAP's Schroeder says, "For a long time the gay community shied away from addressing the needs of HIV-negative men for fear of offending or stigmatizing HIV-positive men. People didn't want there to be sort of a sexual apartheid going on. The issue was politicized when it should not have been. Now that's beginning to change, as people realize that HIV-negative men have really been neglected when it comes to meeting their emotional and psychological needs."

Phoenix Rising's Everett says he plans to get a support group up and running in the near future specifically for HIV-negative men. CAP, meanwhile, has been hosting a MenTalk program for more than a year. Bueling says that program is designed to open dialogue between negative and positive men. "We wanted to break down some of the factionalism we saw in the community," he says.

Schroeder says MenTalk offers gay men an opportunity to find understanding, support and comradeship from one another.

"The gatherings can take place in people's homes to make men feel more relaxed. They get to unwind a little and share their thoughts about growing up gay and other issues—things they haven't ever really had a chance to talk about," he explains. "It's been a wonderful community-build-

ing exercise, and it creates an atmosphere of support that has been so severely lacking for gay men in society."

Mpowerment Project, a Eugene-based organization for gay and bi men, has been providing support as well. "I'd estimate 70 percent of Eugene's gay population has been through our doors at some point," says Jason Brown, an Mpowerment Project volunteer.

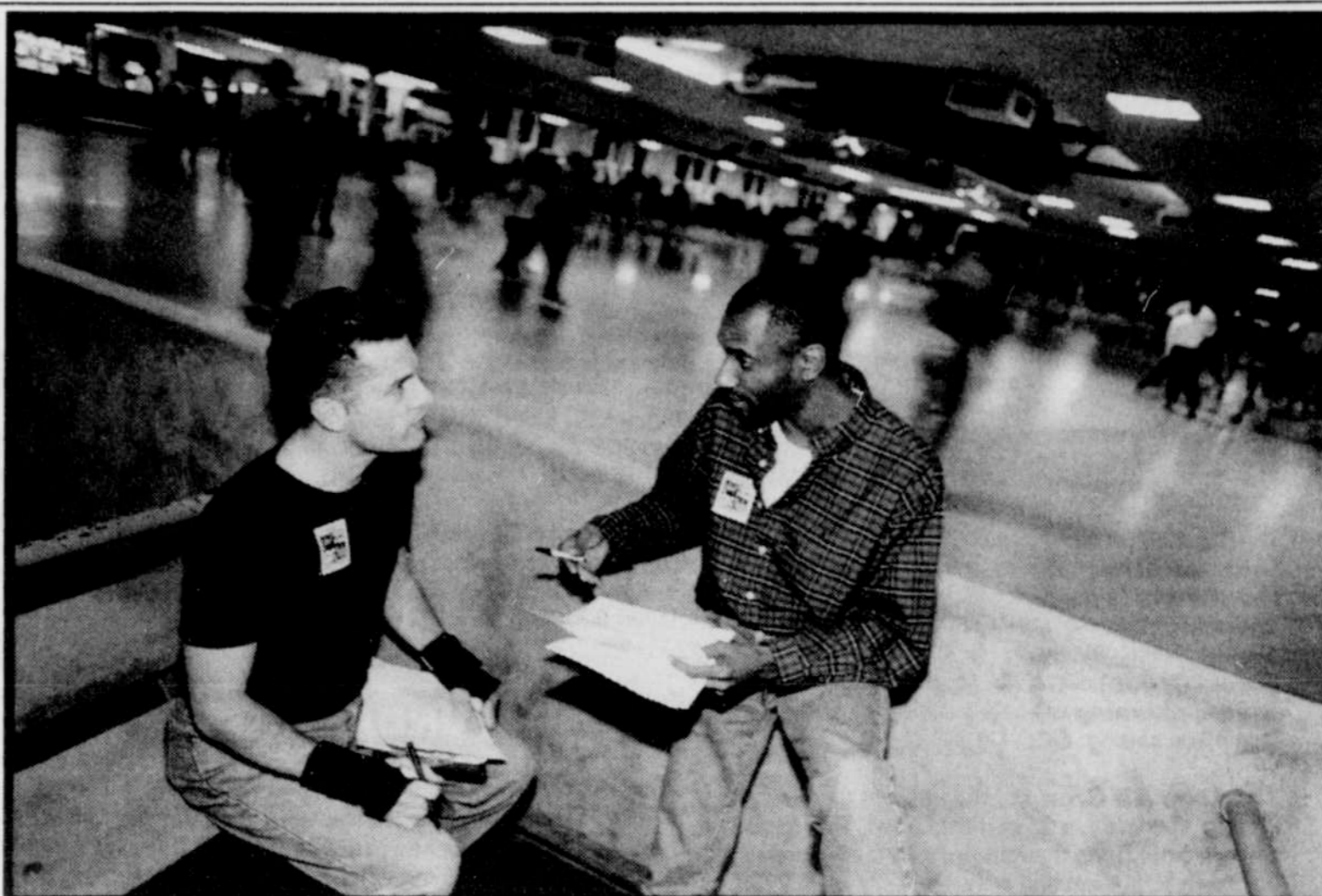
According to Brown, Mpowerment Project sponsors social activities including movie nights, dinners, and rap sessions for gay and bi men, as a way of providing alternatives to the bar scene.

He says, "When you go to a bar it's so easy to get buzzed from alcohol or drugs and then it's easy to slip. We don't want to see men being put in that position."

In what may be the first project of its kind in the country, the Oregon Health Division, in conjunction with county health agencies and with funding from the federal Centers for Disease Control, is about to unveil a new program, Path Finding: Connecting Our Past, Present and Future, which is specifically designed to create a pro-social support network for gay and bisexual men in Oregon.

"We did a study last year which found that men were twice as likely to use condoms if they were involved in pro-social activities [other than the bar scene]," says David Lane, Ph.D., the state Health Division's coordinator of community-based programs.

"We brought together a focus group comprising gay men, health advocates and others, and we came up with this idea," he says. "The group told us that they felt there was a lack of a social network for gay people, particularly in more rural areas. They felt a network would really help foster a sense of community and help people feel good



CAP safer-sex activists Roland Bayse (left) and Ronald Webb at Oaks Park Roller Skating Rink, during a roller skating event for gay men and lesbians sponsored by Rosetown Ramblers.

about themselves. The logic behind this project is to make people feel good about themselves so they feel inclined to change their behaviors."

State and local health authorities are working together to conduct outreach efforts to gay and bisexual men and to create social activities that this population might enjoy. Activities may include bowling or movie nights, Portland Gay Men's Chorus concerts, dinners, potlucks, and other alternatives to bars.

"What I find is that when men engage in pro-social events their self-esteem goes up," says Lane, who is also a psychologist. "If you're feeling isolated—or don't have anywhere else to go—you may go to the park or the bar or the bath

house. We need to give men healthy choices."

Another key component of this effort is the newly created Gay Resource Connection, (503) 223-2437, which is a hotline that gay men and lesbians can call to find out about gay- and lesbian-positive groups and events in their area.

According to Bueling, CAP is also pondering a new campaign that helps men realize they can have long-range goals and desires. "CAP is thinking about putting together a campaign that may include things like posters of two elder gay men together," he says. "We don't want gay men to feel hopeless. We want to try and provide them with a new vision, a sense of hope, and a reason to want to survive."

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