

just out

The IN publication for the OUT population

FOUNDED 1983 • JAY BROWN AND RENÉE LACHANCE
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GUEST COMMENTARY

BY THOMAS BRUNER

Walk of life

Are gay and bisexual people still committed to Cascade AIDS Project?

In 1983 at a Southeast Portland living room, 14 gay men and a grandmother gathered to assess the personal and community devastation unfolding around them, as friends, sons and lovers got sick and died. With virtually no services available to those suffering with fatigue, night sweats, weight loss, yeast infection, skin lesions and a rare pneumonia, they decided to take action. The organization that was to become Cascade AIDS Project was born.

I wasn't in Portland in 1983 and actually did the bulk of my HIV work in Texas until 1998, when I moved here. But the story of CAP's founding and early years is not unlike hundreds of AIDS organizations around the country—founded, staffed and funded by gay people and focused on supporting and educating gay men.

Of the people with AIDS CAP served in those early years, virtually all of them were gay or bisexual white men. The same was true regarding our prevention education outreach. Not surprisingly, the agency often thought, acted, advocated and marketed as much as a gay community center as it did a health and human services organization.

Of course, as we knew would happen, AIDS didn't stay exclusively a gay issue for long. Quickly, organizations like CAP began to see others with and at risk for HIV. And as a result, a broader base of volunteers, staff, funders and donors followed. Others outside our community joined gay men and women in their heroic efforts.

Fast-forward to 2002. Who does CAP reach today? Of the 25,000 people we educated about HIV prevention last year, 50 percent were youth, 40 percent were women, and 27 percent were people of color—a dramatic shift from our early years. And of the almost 1,600 people with HIV we served, 18 percent were women, 27 percent were people of color, and 39 percent were heterosexual—another dramatic shift.

CAP is proud of the remarkable diversity and inclusiveness evidenced by those numbers. In recent years, we've intentionally increased our efforts to be the kind of AIDS organization that anyone would think to use for either prevention information or support services. Our mission calls for us to be everyone's Cascade AIDS Project—not just for people who like me who are white, gay and male.

So, in light of all this newfound diversity, is CAP still committed to gay and bisexual men? Do gay people still hold an important place in the mission of the agency? Or has CAP tossed gay men overboard in a race for more politically palatable and marketable constituencies? Those are fair and important questions.

Let's look at the demographics of who CAP reaches again from a different angle. Of the almost 1,600 people with HIV we served last year, 61 percent were gay or bisexual men—more than three out of five. In spite of all the press about the "new face" of HIV, the clear majority of our clients are gay men.

The same is true for new HIV and AIDS cases reported in Oregon—the clear majority continues to be gay or bisexual men. And of those 25,000 people CAP educated last year, some 40 percent were gay or bisexual men—a large number considering our estimated incidence in the general population. Further, gay and bisexual people are solidly represented at every level of our agency—60 percent of state hot line callers, 45 percent of agency volunteers, 40 percent of staff, 40 percent of board members and both our board president and executive director.

Is CAP still committed to gay and bisexual men? Yes. Are gay and bisexual people still committed to CAP? Maybe. But if they are, I sure couldn't tell it from the crowd at AIDSWalk, the largest annual AIDS fund-raiser in Oregon and Southwest Washington.

Don't get me wrong. I love babies, straight families with toddlers, heterosexual co-eds from Portland State University and the like. But I also know that when I scan the crowd, it looks amazingly straight to me. It's not about not appreciating who's there—I do. It's about wondering where the rest of you are.

I know some of you were burned or disappointed during CAP's sometimes messy, tumultuous history through the mid-'90s. That was also almost eight years ago now, and by any standard, our organizational turnaround has been widely hailed as impressive.

I know some of you see CAP as a fat-cat agency, with a big budget, lots of staff and an administrative cost rate rumored to be huge. In fact, our administrative and fund-raising costs combined are less than 18 percent of our total budget—below nonprofit industry standards.

I know our aggressive marketing to communities other than gay or bisexual men has irritated some of you. But compassion isn't a limited commodity, as if caring for one group means having to care less for another. Our arms at CAP have gotten bigger in recent years, more inclusive—not less.

I want to reach our \$220,000 goal for AIDSWalk02 as much as anyone does. But whether you raise tons, a little or no money, I want you to be there with us Sept. 21. In addition to money, AIDSWalk is about reminding our community that this issue still matters, that gay and bisexual men are still being diagnosed every day and that for all the progress we've made we still have lots of work to do.

While CAP has a responsibility to make sure that message gets heard, so do you. It takes both of us.

Stay with us. It's not over. **J**

Join honorary chairman Danny Glover for AIDSWalk02 on Sept. 21 in Pioneer Courthouse Square. Register at 503-223-WALK or www.cascadeaids.org.

THOMAS BRUNER is the executive director of Cascade AIDS Project.

REFLECTIONS

10 years ago in just out... VOL. 9 No. 11, SEPTEMBER 1992

• Gays and Friends for Animal Rights, also known as Queers for Steers, protested San Francisco's first gay rodeo, although it was promoted as "a gentler sport than its straight counterpart."

• Los Angeles Police Chief Willie Williams met for an hour Aug. 5 with members of the city's lesbian and gay community, sharply distinguishing himself from his bigoted predecessor, Daryl Gates.

• At least 40 people were assaulted June 28 in St. Louis' Forest Park after the annual Gay and Lesbian Pride Festival. Hundreds of youths mobbed people who were attempting to return to their cars at the conclusion of the event.

• "By participating in 'From All Walks of Life,' we come together to walk for care and compassion. We walk hand in hand for justice and equality and against the forces of bigotry and hatred," declares the Rev. Rodney I. Page, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon executive director. He and Oregonian columnist Sara Perry will serve as honorary chairpersons for the sixth annual pledge walk.

• The Nobody for President Campaign '92 lands in Portland on Sept. 10 with legendary Woodstock master of ceremonies Wavy Gravy and northern California eco-rockers Clan Dyken.

• The Portland Lesbian Choir will be performing during Artquake at 6:30 p.m. Sept. 5 on the Cabaret Stage, Southwest Madison Street and Broadway. It will be joined by the Portland Gay Men's Chorus.



endorsements

Just Out endorses Serena Cruz for Portland city commissioner and recommends "yes" votes on Measure 19, which would transfer education funding, and Measure 20, which would increase the cigarette tax and use the revenue for the Oregon Health Plan and other programs. Mail-in ballots are due Sept. 17.

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