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northwest**Center Celebrates
18 Years**

Facility provides refuge to HIV-positive people

by Megan Peura

A small but mighty kitchen fills the air with the scent of freshly cooked waffles and eggs. Just a few steps inside and you are greeted with a "good morning" by someone. From the doorway, you can see tables full of people chatting and drinking coffee. The room looks like any church basement, with its carpeted floor and white walls, but it's not. It is the only refuge many of the clients of the Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon HIV Day Center have left.

The center is open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. weekdays, except Wednesdays. It provides its low-income, HIV-positive clients with many services including breakfast, lunch and home-delivered meals. Breakfasts are made to order and are cooked right at the center. Lunches are made from scratch at Patton Hall, another Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon building, and are brought over. The Daily Bread Express program delivers seven frozen meals a week to immobile people in the surrounding six counties.

Many of the clients who visit the center live in temporary housing or on the street, so the facility provides a washer, dryer and shower. It also provides phones and a message board so clients can make calls to their doctors and caseworkers. "Some of our clients would be unable to keep in touch with their doctors if it weren't for the center," said Lowen Berman, coordinator for the center.

There is a social worker on staff for counseling and referrals. Countless volunteers provide additional services such as massages, acupuncture and haircuts. Doctors and other health officials come to the center to give presentations on the importance of keeping up with medical treatment. Many churches and other organizations through the years have paid for trips to Seaside Beach, the Rose Gardens, the Japanese Gardens and bowling.

Sixteen bus passes are handed out every month for clients who do not have access to a car and have a monthly income less than \$650. The center also makes monthly trips to Esther's Pantry and Tod's Closet, which provide food, hygiene items and clothes to people living with HIV/AIDS.

Despite its laundry list of services, the center primarily provides a safe place where people can receive help and care. "It is refuge for people who face all kinds of stigma," said Berman.

The HIV Day Center has been open since 1989 and was the first of its kind in the country, according to Berman. In 2006 it served 26,466 meals and had 7,340 clients who visited.

According to Berman, because of the rewriting of the Ryan White Act in 2006, the center has lost about \$84,000 in funding this year, which has caused it to close Wednesdays. "Our funding has been continually cut since 1999," he said. "I tried to substitute the loss with grants, but now there isn't enough grants to make up the loss."

The Ryan White Act funds primary care and support services for people living with HIV/AIDS.



Social worker Jay Elbrecht serves lunch to Perry Mazzoni, an HIV Day Center client since 1994.

The rewriting has changed the way the money is dispersed and who is eligible.

"Portland is no longer considered an 'eligible metropolitan area.' It is a 'transitional area.' This means less money for Portland and its people," said Berman.

According to the Ryan White Act, 75 percent of the money granted to a state must be spent on programs that are considered medical core services. And even though the center provides services such as recovery groups, its services are not considered medical core services.

Berman and his volunteers have to work toward building a donor base. "The anniversary celebration is the first step towards that process," he said. According to Berman, they have received a grant from the United Way that will help with the training and planning that goes into building a donor base.

The clients come from all over. "Some of our clients come from Tigard and Beaverton," said Berman. "Many of our clients would have nowhere to go if the day center wasn't here."

Most clients hear about the center from other clients who have participated. Others are referred through caseworkers. "The center is usually the first place that is suggested by caseworkers," said Berman.

Most of the clients who use the center are out of other options. For some, Berman said, the center gives them a reason to leave the house every day. "There is no other place like us in the city." 10

The HIV DAY CENTER celebrates 18 years of service from 7 to 9 p.m. June 6 at 2941 N.E. Ainsworth St. The event will feature music, food and tours of the facility. People who attend can meet the staff and volunteers who help it run. State Rep. Chip Shields, D-Northeast Portland, and the Rev. Rodney Page, former Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon executive director, are slated to speak.

MEGAN PEURA is a Just Out editorial intern.