

street \$1 roots

Positive — in poverty

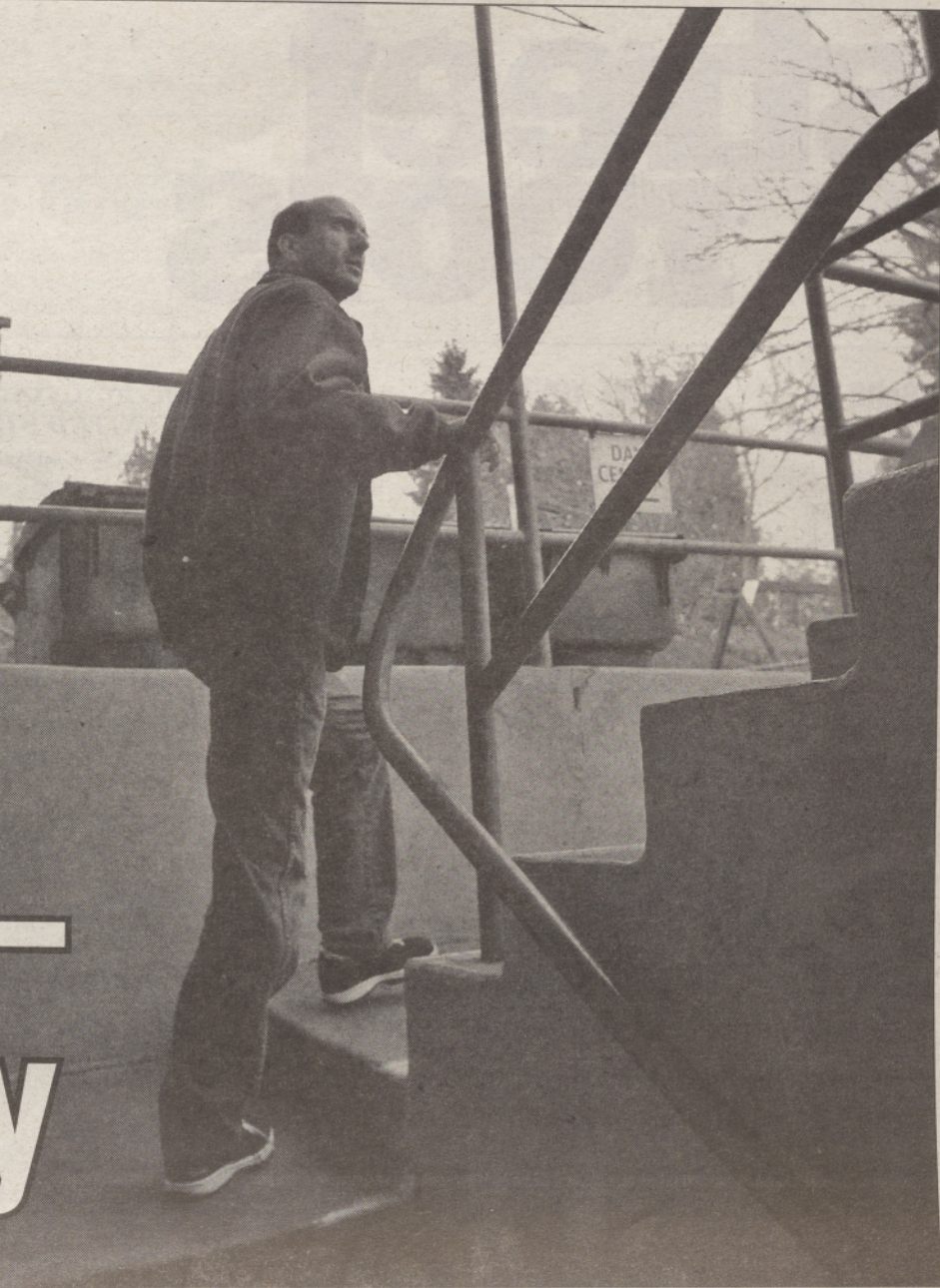


PHOTO BY AMIRAN WHITE

Caring for HIV and AIDS patients becomes even more perilous on the edge of the streets

BY AMANDA WALDROUPE
STAFF WRITER

If it were not for Adam Kutumbos, 48-year old Brent Pitchford says he "would be wandering around like a lost duck."

They met almost one year ago. Adam is a client advocate for Cascade AIDS Project's CareLink program, which works with people newly diagnosed with the human immunodeficiency virus, or HIV, including low-income and homeless people who have little or no medical care.

Brent wrote a letter from the Oregon State Penitentiary where he was serving a 20-month sentence for a sexual offense charge. HIV positive for the last 15 years, Brent asked Adam what services would be available to him once he was released on Dec. 7.

So began a yearlong exchange through letters (Oregon prisoners do not have access to e-mail and are rarely allowed to use the telephone). They began Brent's applications to the Oregon Health Plan and CareOregon for health insurance, his Social Security disability application, and finding a doctor.

Adam never wrote that he worked for CAP during the correspondence, knowing that Brent's mail would be read by others. Working through mail presented other difficulties. Many topics and documents Adam and Brent discussed were complicated and required thorough explanation that would have been less stressful with a phone call or meeting.

"(I'm thinking) how many phone calls and how many more letters is this going to take? How am I

going to say this correctly without ruining any confidentiality?" Adam says.

Adam repeatedly requested that the Department of Corrections send him Brent's medical records, as well as certification that he is HIV positive (such information is not given directly to the inmate). With a requirement that people in the CareLink program be HIV positive, Adam needed substantive proof.

According to the Multnomah County Public Health Department, approximately 4,000 people living in the Portland area have HIV or AIDS. 2010 data shows that 15.5 percent of that population was homeless at some point during the previous 12-month period. For the first time in 10 years, CAP and service agencies serving homeless youths — Outside In, Janus Youth, New Avenues for Youth, and the Sexual Minority Youth Resource Center surveyed homeless youth in early 2010 about HIV risk and prevalence among that population. The final report is expected to be released in the next few months.

Since being released, Adam has helped Brent connect to resources, job options, food pantries, clothing closets and other services.

Brent also found out about the HIV Day Center through Adam. The Day Center is operated by Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon. Lindsay Ross-Hunt, the program manager of the center, says they serve approximately 260 people each year, and serve 9,000 meals. She says those numbers are increasing "more than ever before" because of the economic decline.

The Day Center takes up a large basement in a

NE Portland church, and provides breakfast and lunch meals, access to telephones and computers, job resources, and respite during the day.

Brent spends many days there if he is not looking for a job or at the doctor. "It's quieter here," he says, than his room at the Shoreline, a single resident occupancy building downtown providing rooms to people recently released from prison for up to three months.

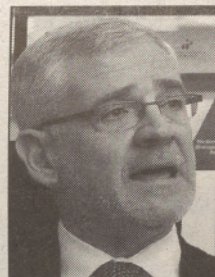
The impact Adam has had on Brent's life in the brief period of time he has been released has been enormous.

"He's been there when I needed to talk to someone. If it wasn't for Adam, I wouldn't have had any of the (things I have)," Brent says.

Life for Adam's clients is filled with uncertainties. During the first two weeks in February, Adam is nagged by the fear that one client will be evicted. The client is on Social Security disability, and routinely loses the debit card allowing him to access those funds. He had lost the card again and cannot pay his rent. He told Adam he had ordered a new card, but it would take up to five to eight business days.

"Tomorrow is, like, the day," Adam says on Feb. 10, when the client needs to pay the rent to prevent eviction. "It could be a good or a bad day, tomorrow."

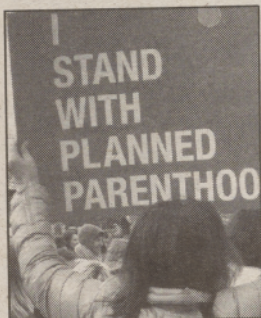
The client has a severe mental illness, and Adam normally checks in with him every day. But the



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