

### What the Four A's Syringe Access Program Does for the Alaskan Community

Since May 2007, Four A's has operated two stand-alone syringe exchange programs in Alaska: one at the main office in Anchorage and the second at the satellite office in Juneau. About 1.2 million sterile syringes have been distributed in exchange for over 700,000 used and contaminated needles since the program's inception. The program currently distributes approximately 25,000 sterile syringes and thousands of other safe drug injection supplies per month to hundreds of individual participants.

The primary group of participants of the Four A's Syringe Access Program (FASAP) are individuals who experience addiction to injection drugs, such as heroin and methamphetamines. These individuals are typically very low income and undereducated and often experience homelessness, joblessness, and lack of transportation among other addiction catalysts and barriers to treatment. Addiction is a disease that can affect anyone, including the wealthy and educated, as made evident by the recent death of legendary actor Phillip Seymour Hoffman due to heroin overdose. However, the poor and undereducated are disproportionately affected by addiction coupled with a lack of means to access and sustain treatment.

The purpose of the Four A's Syringe Access Program is multifaceted. One primary success of the program is a reduction in the spread of HIV and Hepatitis C that is accomplished when clean needles are used instead of those which are contaminated with viruses and other pathogens that may cause various infections. Another area of success resulting from the program is decreased rates of overdose. Research shows that participants of syringe exchange programs use fewer drugs and use drugs less frequently in comparison to their usage dynamics prior to accessing sterile syringes. Furthermore, the Four A's Syringe Access Program creates a safety net for first responders, such as police officers and emergency medical technicians, by decreasing the likelihood of unintentional needle-stick accidents due to the program's safe collection and disposal of used and contaminated syringes. Dirty needles are ultimately kept off the streets of Anchorage and Juneau and therefore out of reach of curious children and off of pedestrian walkways. Syringe exchange programs improve the quality of living in communities where they are allowed to be present, and the Four A's Syringe Access Program in Anchorage and Juneau is no exception.

Decades of research shows that syringe exchange programs are the primary means by which individuals addicted to injection drugs access health screenings and health education. It is extremely important for these individuals to seek out regular health screenings, such as HIV and Hepatitis C tests because hearing inaccurate health education messages is rampant. Many of these individuals choose not to pursue formal health screenings and education, such as at health clinics, due to pervasive stigma surrounding their drug use, fear of incarceration, and a lack of means by which to access and pay for treatment. Four A's utilizes the syringe access programs in Anchorage and Juneau to recruit participants into accessing free HIV and Hepatitis C screening tests and to provide participants with health education, informational resources, and realistic options they can use to reduce their risk of contracting and spreading disease.

For more information on the Four A's Syringe Access Program, contact Davy Norris, HIV Prevention & Education Coordinator, at (907) 263-2048 or [dnorris@alaskanids.org](mailto:dnorris@alaskanids.org).



**Our Mission:** To be a key collaborator within the state of Alaska in the provision of supportive services to persons living with HIV/AIDS and their families and in the elimination of the transmission of HIV infection and its stigma.

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Juneau, AK 99802  
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1-888-660-2437  
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#### Fetish Ball 2014: School of Hard Knocks

When the school bell rang at 7pm on Saturday, April 5th, the *School of Hard Knocks* was in session. This annual fundraiser for the Four A's food bank raised more than \$12,000. This year more than 300 "students" attended the school and had the opportunity to participate in three types of school classes—Physical Activity, Applied Technology, and Science. "Students" were seen stocking up on snacks at the bake sale, checking in with the "school nurse," and we won't tell who was in detention hall!

The theme for Fetish Ball 2015 will be announced at the next annual fundraiser, Drag Queen Bingo - *Hunger Gaymes: Queens in the Capitol*, which will be held on June 12th at The Boardroom at 601 West 5th Avenue, Ste. 210. Watch for more information on the Four A's website or Facebook page.

Four A's Board Member, Steven Rampke, and Executive Director, Heather Davis, give the thumbs-up at Fetish Ball.

**2014 17th Annual \$1 Million Giveaway to Fight Hunger**



With the help of students from the Hanshew Middle School Business Partnership class, Four A's collected more than 300 canned goods for the Four A's food bank. Hanshew Middle School held a canned food drive during the month of April. The students helped reach Four A's goal of raising more than \$15,000 toward the Feinstein Challenge; this was

double the amount raised last year!

Four A's would like to thank the students and staff of Hanshew Middle School for all their hard work in organizing, planning and collecting the canned goods. Way to go Hawks!

**UPCOMING EVENTS**

- ◇ June 7th-15th – **PrideFest**
- ◇ June 12th – **Drag Queen Bingo @ The Boardroom**
- ◇ June 27th – **National HIV Testing Day**



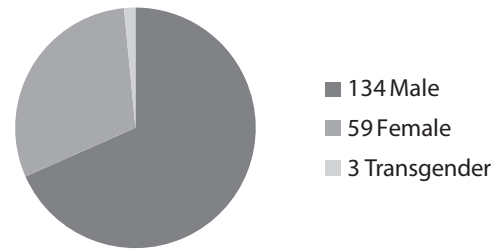
**Out of Sync was completely In Sync!**

Out of Sync, Gigi Monroe, D'Licious, Cali Delgado, Justice, Anita, and local performers rocked the stage at Femme Fatale in Juneau April 24th—26th.

Local performers had the crowd cheering at the Rendezvous Bar on Thursday night. The Juneau Arts & Culture Center took the event to new heights on Friday and Saturday nights.

Four A's would like to thank the Rendezvous Bar, Baranof Hotel, Paige Langit, Jeff King, Abby O'Brien, S.E. Advisory Board Members, Juneau Volunteers, the Queens from Anchorage, and all the generous businesses that provided items for the auction in helping to make Femme Fatale an exciting and successful event.

**Client Services Snapshot**



**Total Active Clients = 196**  
**Ethnicity:** 104 White  
 45 AK Native/American Indian  
 32 Black/African American  
 8 Asian  
 7 Mixed Race  
**New Clients Since January 1, 2014 = 9 (7 Men, 2 Women)**  
**Veterans = 14**

**Helping One Person at a Time**

Recently a man in his twenties came to Four A's seeking information about IV drug treatment options in the community. The young man asked if he could speak with staff privately. Once in the staff's office, he stated that he was ready to quit using and that his drug use was eating his soul and ruining his life. He tearfully explained that he recently reunited with his ex-wife, who was also an IV drug user, and was fearful that if they did not quit soon their young daughter might eventually catch on and start using. He said he was ready to quit but did not know where to go or what to do; his ex-wife was not ready to quit and blamed him for getting her hooked. Staff thanked the young man for sharing this very personal information, saying it was a sign of strength that he was ready to face his addiction. Staff suggested that to gain perspective, he make a list of things that would be supportive of his goal and those that would pose a barrier to his goal. A copy of the IDU-specific resource guide recently developed by the Four A's was given to the client. He was encouraged to seek information and advice from others in his position at one of the support groups listed in the guide and to call the drug treatment programs and request a formal assessment and be placed on their waitlists. The man thanked staff and stated that he had not been completely sure whether or not he was ready to take action until talking with staff. Staff stated that just coming in to discuss the options was the first action step, and encouraged him to continue on toward his goal of overcoming his IV drug addiction.

**Prevention—Hard at Work in 2013**

- ◇ 940 HIV Tests conducted in Anchorage/Juneau
- ◇ 300 Hepatitis C Tests conducted in Anchorage
- ◇ 85,000 Condoms Distributed statewide
- ◇ 11 Outreach Testing Sites in Anchorage/Juneau

**From the Executive Director, Heather Davis**



In October we began enrolling clients into the health insurance exchange under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). For people living with HIV/AIDS, the ACA can provide better health care coverage. For one thing, anyone living with HIV/AIDS can receive coverage regardless of pre-existing conditions. This is a significant change as prior to the ACA many living with HIV experienced obstacles in getting health coverage, were dropped from coverage, or avoided seeking coverage for fear of being denied. The ACA also prevents insurances from capping care which is good news since treatment for HIV/AIDS is typically expensive. Additionally, HIV screening for those at risk is covered. This can help infected individuals detect the virus earlier and thus treat it more effectively. We also know that those who control the

virus through treatment are less likely to infect others.

Is the system perfect? No. People with pre-existing conditions can face higher drug costs because of what is known as a closed drug formulary. Dependent on what prescriptions a person takes the prescription cost may only partially be covered or not covered at all. And while states had the option of choosing to run their own insurance exchanges and expand Medicaid, Alaska chose to go with the federal exchange thus not expanding Medicaid and causing additional economic hardship to many living with HIV/AIDS.

Nationwide, more than 1.1 million people live with HIV/AIDS, and they now have far greater access to quality treatment and care than has ever been available in the past. At the Four A's, we continue to work with clients to make sure they have access to the most affordable care and treatment available. The ACA is another resource we now have at hand.

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**A Family United**

A gentleman in his forties, originally from the United States, was living outside the U.S. with his family. In April 2013 he moved to Alaska with very little money to make a better life for himself and his family. He left his family behind and promised he would send for them as soon as possible. Upon his arrival in Anchorage he sought assistance from the Four A's. An old friend let him stay in his apartment for a short period of time, and then he moved into a shelter. While there he actively searched for jobs and was able to

find one making \$13.00 an hour. He was unable to stay at the shelter due to his work schedule, so the Four A's was able to provide him with emergency housing services and placed him in a hotel for two weeks. He then obtained transitional housing through the Salvation Army, and the AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP) provided his HIV medications. Nine months later he was making \$15.00 an hour with medical insurance, and he was able to start saving enough money to bring his family to the U.S.