



Four A's staff and community partners at Project Homeless Connect

Much has changed in those 30 years. As the epidemic grew and changed, so did the Four A's. We went from humble beginnings as a volunteer-run helpline to become the lead HIV/AIDS organization in the state. Client services expanded to ensure that no Alaskan living with HIV or AIDS need go without such essentials as medication, housing, nutrition, medical care, or social support. Our prevention programs remained innovative and responsive to shifting community needs, helping Alaska to remain a low incidence state for HIV infection. With new treatment options, AIDS evolved from being a terminal illness – a “death sentence” in the eyes of many – to being a chronic disease with which we can live and live *well*. Throughout this journey of change, Four A's has remained grounded in the life-affirming values that have always motivated our services for people living with HIV or AIDS.

Unfortunately, some things have not changed enough. Nearly half of our clients (46%) report that they continue to experience discrimination because they have HIV. New HIV infections continue to be diagnosed each year, and they continue to be concentrated in underserved pockets of our community: people of color, gay and bisexual men, people without stable housing, and injection drug users. Medical science is still years away from identifying either a cure or a vaccine. We have come a long way, and we still have a long way to go.

This year, as we commemorate our thirtieth anniversary, we are looking back at the progress that has been made, celebrating the incredible work that has been done with the help and support of so many people in this great community. We are not celebrating the epidemic but the responses to it, the outpourings of love that have transformed the face of HIV and AIDS in Alaska. Together, we have learned to live with HIV and AIDS. Together, we will continue to work toward that day when neither HIV nor its stigma is transmitted in our communities, when we can all live *without* HIV or AIDS. On that day, we will hold our last and biggest celebration.

The AIDS Memorial Quilt Returns to Alaska

When we reflect upon the ways that the HIV epidemic has touched our lives, we are always talking about something more than a disease. We are talking about people, often about people that we have loved and lost. When we look back upon the past 30 years, we remember their faces, their names, their stories. As we look ahead to the future of HIV/AIDS, the changes that we hope to see, and the world that we are working to shape, it is their memories that we wish to honor.

This deeply personal aspect of the HIV epidemic is captured in The AIDS Memorial Quilt. An ever-evolving memorial with panels dedicated to more than 94,000 individuals, the Quilt is the largest ongoing piece of community folk art in the world.

To culminate this anniversary year, on World AIDS Day (December 1), Four A's will be presenting sections of The AIDS Memorial Quilt at the Anchorage Museum. Look for more information in future issues of *The Common Thread*, and don't miss the opportunity to bear witness to the lives and stories reflected in this vital piece of our shared history.



Viewing the Quilt in Anchorage in 1994



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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Proud to be an Agency Member of
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Harm Reduction in Action

Joanna and her boyfriend had become regulars at the Four A’s Syringe Access Program in Juneau, so their recent absence from the program was noticed. One day, Joanna returned to the office. She greeted James Hoagland, Four A’s Coordinator of SE Services, with a huge smile, and, with a lot of excitement and pride, told him that she had been clean for a whole month. James noticed an increase of energy, enthusiasm, and a marked appearance of wellness in Joanna. He let her know how happy he was for her. Joanna and her boyfriend entered sobriety together and had been doing well until the previous night, when they had an intense urge to use and didn’t know what to do. She proudly explained that they knew better than to re-use one of the dirty needles that was still in their house. They made a plan to hold off, at least until they could come in to the syringe exchange and get a kit of sterile supplies in case the situation arose again. Joanna’s story illustrates the importance of the Syringe Access Program as a harm reduction tool, both for those who are actively using injection drugs and for those engaged in the hard work of sobriety.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- ◆ March 19—**Million Dollar Quartet Cabaret** @ Mad Myrna’s
- ◆ March 28—**Fetish Ball** @ Mad Myrna’s
- ◆ April 3—**First Friday art show** @ Four A’s Juneau office
- ◆ April 30—**Dining Out For Life** @ Table 6, Sack’s Café, Haute Quarter Grill, and The Loft at Midnight Sun Brewing Co.



World AIDS Day 2014

World AIDS Day was a big success in both Anchorage and Juneau, where well-attended events and broad media campaigns helped to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS in Alaska, while honoring those who live and die with the virus.

As part of the Anchorage event, a remembrance tree was established and hung with the names of loved ones that we have lost to the epidemic. The tree is shown above with Four A’s staff Robin Lutz, Heather Davis, Jamez Terry, and Board President Candace Bell.

Many thanks to our World AIDS Day sponsors: ConocoPhillips, Great Land Infusion Pharmacy, and Green Connection.

From the Executive Director, Heather Davis

Despite the progress that has been made over the last 30 years, HIV is still a major ongoing epidemic. About 1.1 million people continue to live with HIV in the U.S. with 50,000 new infections diagnosed each year. Stigma and discrimination continue to hamper people’s access to HIV prevention, testing, and treatment services, fueling the cycle of new infections. The National HIV/AIDS Strategy focuses on three goals: reducing new HIV infections, increasing access to care and improving health outcomes for people living with HIV, and reducing HIV-related disparities and health inequities. To break the cycle of transmission, greater efforts must be made to ensure that vulnerable groups are regularly tested for HIV and that they access treatment, that there are increases in treatment and pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) as they have the potential to considerably reduce new infections, and that there are continued efforts to increase HIV prevention education, especially among those with high-risk behaviors. Four A’s staff remain at the forefront of this disease, making sure our clients get the best possible care, looking for ways to increase HIV testing among those most at risk, and fighting the stigma and discrimination that unfortunately remains. Thank you for being part of this journey for the past 30 years and as we move forward in the years ahead.

Welcome to the Team!

Four A’s would like to introduce Rebecca Morrissey, HIV Prevention and Education Coordinator. Born and raised in Alaska, Rebecca graduated from UAA with a Bachelor in Nursing Science, and has worked for 7 years in the local nonprofit sector. Stop by and say hello next time you are in the Anchorage office.

Pick.Click.Give.

Last year, 145 Alaskans donated a total of \$10,875 to the Four A’s through the Pick.Click.Give. campaign. A record number of people are expected to participate in the 2015 campaign, giving upwards of three million dollars to non-profits throughout the state. Ten lucky Pick.Click.Give. participants will be given an extra dividend.

When you file for your PFD this year, please consider making a Pick.Click.Give. donation to the Alaskan AIDS Assistance Association. If you’ve already filed, it’s easy to log on again and share your dividend with a cause that matters to you. Thank you!

What Your Support Made Possible in 2014

- ◆ Comprehensive case management services for 282 clients
- ◆ Rental subsidies for an average of 36 households each month
- ◆ More than 1,000 bags of food distributed to clients
- ◆ 680 HIV tests conducted in Anchorage and Juneau
- ◆ More than 280,000 syringes exchanged
- ◆ More than 60,000 condoms distributed statewide
- ◆ Better quality of life for those affected by HIV/AIDS in Alaska

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October 2014—January 2015

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