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OUR MISSION

The mission of AIDS Services Foundation is to prevent the spread of HIV and improve the lives of men, women and children affected by HIV/AIDS in Orange County.

OUR STORY

A small group of volunteers founded AIDS Services Foundation Orange County (ASF) in the late summer of 1985 because people were dying, had nowhere to turn and desperately needed help. ASF is now the largest and most comprehensive nonprofit HIV/AIDS service provider in Orange County, with a staff of committed and caring individuals, a 23-member Board of Directors, and hundreds of dedicated volunteers.

Each year, ASF helps more than 1,600 men, women and children, along with their families, that are either living with HIV or are impacted by HIV disease. Services include food, transportation, housing, case management, emergency financial assistance, children and family programs, Latino outreach programs, mental health counseling, support groups, HIV testing, and an extensive array of HIV prevention and education programs. We hope for a time when these services are no longer needed. Until then, we work hard each day to prevent the spread of HIV and to ensure that everyone living with HIV and AIDS in Orange County has access to life-enhancing care and services.

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Dear Friends,

As you open this, your first issue of the Voice for the 2015, let me say that all of us at ASF wish you, our dedicated supporters, all the success, prosperity, and joy this New Year offers. And may any changes you encounter be for the best!

Things are certainly changing around ASF right now. As you read this, some major construction is happening at the ASF offices as part of the execution of our three-year Strategic Plan. The changes will certainly be for the better and you can read all about the plan and check out the progress so far in the “Around ASF” feature this month! You can be certain that future editions of this magazine will include updates.

I’d also like to call your attention to this month’s story about AIDS Walk Orange County on page 5. Last year, AIDS Walk debuted the Survivor Club and it turned out to be a moving addition to the event. The Survivor Club is moving forward again this year and we’d like to see it gain even more momentum this year. Acknowledging that HIV is in our midst and ending the stigma that surrounds it is an important step in the fight to end AIDS in Orange County. And that’s what the Survivor Club is all about!

I’d also like to take this opportunity to thank the many supporters who attended our Annual Gala – Shaken Not Stirred on January 24th. In particular, heartfelt thanks go to our event co-chairs Jeff Elder and Karla Kjellin-Elder for their amazing leadership and energy in producing such a wonderful evening. The event was enormously successful and, judging by the electricity in the room, an enormously good time!

As always, I am thankful for your support. And, since the next Voice won’t be published until just before AIDS Walk, I urge you all to join us on Saturday, May 9, and register for Team ASF at aidswalkorangecounty.org!

Sincerely,

Philip Yaeger
Executive Director/CEO
The fourth step in the Continuum of Care states that the client needs to stay in care. It is important for people living with HIV to stay in care so that they continue to receive the life-saving medicines and other treatments they need to achieve viral suppression. Staying in care means, at minimum, semi-annual trips to a physician’s office. It could also mean monthly or weekly appointments with a mental health counselor or attendance at group meetings.

Some people living with HIV, those that are on disability due to their diagnosis, for example, do not have the means to get to and from medical or mental health appointments. It would be unfortunate if the thing that kept someone from staying in care and achieving viral suppression was lack of transportation. To make sure this wasn’t an issue ASF clients had to face, the agency developed our transportation program.

The goal of the program is to reduce any barriers to accessing, maintaining, and adhering to primary health care and related social services.

ASF has the only curb-to-curb, van-based program for people living with HIV/AIDS in Orange County. The first priority of the agency’s transportation program is to help clients access the critical services essential to their health and well-being.

For clients who might otherwise be homebound, the program provides transportation to physician appointments, mental health counseling sessions and to other programs at both ASF and other community organizations. In addition, it benefits other agency programs such as delivering ASF Food Pantry orders and transporting medical equipment to clients’ homes.

ASF currently employs two drivers, as well as a transportation supervisor, who drive vans and buses provided through grants from the US Department of Transportation. And the drivers are more to our clients than just the people who get them safely from place to place. They are trusted friends, listeners, and caregivers. They are one more link in the chain of care.

And ASF’s transportation program isn’t only about the van rides. ASF also offers qualified clients a multi-tiered transportation system comprised of Orange County Transit Authority (OCTA) passes, subsidized coupons for use on OCTA’s ACCESS bus system, and subsidized tax rides.

In 2013, ASF’s transportation department served 393 unduplicated clients. 1,776 one-way van trips were provided to medical-related and support service appointments. 4,889 ACCESS coupons were provided for use on OCTA buses. 3,506 daily passes and 739 monthly passes were provided to clients by ASF. And, ASF arranged for 490 one-way taxi rides.

ASF also uses its vans and bus to transport children from around the county to “Kids Club.” Most of our client parents would be unable to get their children to the ASF offices every Thursday to take advantage of the services available to them. The ability to meet with other kids who have the same issues, to discuss those issues without fear of stigma, and to have a place where they can just be themselves is of utmost importance to the care and well-being of ASF’s client’s children.

The mantra is that transportation is care. And for that reason, the program is one of ASF’s core services and is critical in assuring that all clients have access to primary care and treatment services.
FIGHTING STIGMA ON THE PATH TO END AIDS

AIDS WALK ORANGE COUNTY & RED RIBBON 5K FUN RUN: SATURDAY, MAY 9, 2015

It isn’t very often that a small addition to a large fundraising event ends up having significance far beyond what was originally imagined. At the 2014 walk, a Survivor Club was added as a registration option for anyone that wished to identify as living, or more notably, “surviving and thriving” with HIV. The recognition of that group of individuals at the walk turned out to be one of the most poignant and powerful moments in recent walk memory.

With AIDS Walk Orange County now in its 29th year, the Survivor Club offers the walk the potential to create a monumental shift in the way the public thinks about people living with HIV. The larger this group becomes and the more willing people are to stand up and be counted, the fewer stigmas will surround the virus and AIDS. With less stigma, people can talk about HIV/AIDS more openly … and that’s one weapon in the arsenal to end AIDS in Orange County.

The AIDS Walk Orange County Survivor Club was an idea brought to the event steering committee by Renee Austin, a member of ASF’s Positively Speaking program and longtime survivor of the virus. She felt it was time for people living with HIV to step out of the shadows and be recognized. Said Austin, “Putting a face to the disease of AIDS is the only way it will begin to lose its stigma. And what safer place to stand up and be counted than a walk supporting your very cause?”

At the time of registration, participants were asked if they wanted to be recognized as survivors living with HIV. Fewer than 50 registrants indicated they would like to participate in the walk as members of the Survivor Club. Each received a specially designed AIDS Walk t-shirt that designated them as survivors and had space for them to indicate the number of years they’d been living with the virus.

On the day of the event, even more survivors chose to identify themselves and the number quickly grew to nearly 70. Austin stood tall and proud as a member of that group along with noted local artist and HIV activist and educator, Kurt Weston. AIDS Walk organizers hope that the reception they received will not only empower the members of the Survivor Club, but also empower each participant to be vocal about HIV in our community.

AIDS Walk will once again offer the Survivor Club as a registration option and it is hoped that the 70 or so walkers who stood together last year to be recognized and honored will grow to at least twice that number this year!

AIDS Walk Orange County & Red Ribbon 5K Fun Run will be held Saturday, May 9, at the William R. Mason Regional Park in Irvine. The registration fee for the event is $25 and that fee can either be paid at time of registration or raised through donations. Registrations and donations are now being accepted at aidswalkorangecounty.org.
“KILLER” T CELLS TRAINED TO ATTACK DORMANT, MUTATED HIV

Finding the key to coaxing HIV out of dormancy and permanently finishing it off has been the focus of numerous research hours. However, new findings from a Johns Hopkins-led study show that the latent virus is not merely out of reach; it is also genetically transformed to evade recognition by the immune system, even after latency reversal.

HIV eradication endeavors have been hindered by the virus’ ability to mutate in such a way that it becomes unidentifiable and resistant to destruction from the immune system, even when lured out of hiding. The scientific team behind the study has found a way to train the immune system to recognize, attack and subdue mutant HIV once coaxed out of dormancy.

In a description of their “proof of principle” research, the team says they tamed mutant HIV by training a class of immune sentinel cells known as killer T cells to spot and eliminate HIV-infected cells capable of evading immune surveillance and impervious to immune system extermination.

While sounding like something out of a sci-fi movie, the team’s strategy manages to address one of HIV’s most challenging behaviors. HIV has an ability to hijack a class of immune cells known as memory CD4+ T cells. After infection the virus goes into hiding and becomes dormant, undetectable to the immune system and unreachable by antiviral drugs.

"Our results suggest that luring HIV out of hiding is winning only half the battle," says senior investigator Dr. Robert Siliciano, professor of medicine, molecular biology and genetics at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore, MD.

"We found that these pools of dormant virus carry mutations that render HIV invisible to the very immune cells capable of disarming it, so even when the virus comes out of hiding, it continues to evade immune detection."

All viruses and bacteria carry key protein identifiers. Intact, these identifiers are spotted by the immune system as “foreign,” triggering an immune attack. However, soon after infection, HIV quickly alters these “marker” regions, making them unrecognizable to the immune system.

Siliciano and colleagues report that every HIV-infected cell preserves a small portion of the original viral protein intact — a feature that could be exploited and used as a solution to the problem of the immune system “recognition” issue.

Researchers hypothesized that if these killer T cells were somehow nudged to spot the tiny segments of unaltered virus, they would kill the entire HIV-infected cell. To put the hypothesis into action, scientists isolated killer T cells from patients and mixed them either with mutant forms of HIV or with a cocktail that contained both mutated and non-mutated lab-made masses of HIV protein.

Each group of killer T cells was exposed to cells infected with HIV obtained from patients carrying the escape mutations.

The killer T cells primed with the cocktail of mutated and non-mutated HIV destroyed 61% of the HIV-infected cells. By contrast, killer T cells primed with only mutant HIV destroyed only 23% of HIV-infected cells. Siliciano comments, "It’s as if the immune system had lost its ability to spot and destroy the virus, but priming killer T cells that recognize a different, non-mutated portion of HIV’s protein reawakened that natural killer instinct."

Test results show that any curative strategy designed to eradicate HIV infection would need to include the use of killer T cells primed to recognize non-mutant forms of HIV.

Reprinted from Medical News Today
GOING TO THE DOGS … AND CATS

From November 28, 2014, through December 31, 2014, Banfield Charitable Trust held its 9th annual pet food drive. Participating Banfield Pet Hospital locations included Santa Ana, Costa Mesa, Fountain Valley, two Tustin locations, Rancho Santa Margarita, and Lake Forest.

Banfield Pet Hospitals are located in Petsmart retail locations, so donations were collected from both Banfield and Petsmart customers. As an annual recipient of Banfield Charitable Trust's grant funding, ASF was invited to receive donations from the pet food drive.

As a result, ASF received two SUV's full of dog and cat food, along with miscellaneous pet products, to be distributed through our food pantry to clients with pets.

HARD HAT AREA

One tenet of ASF's most recent strategic plan is to "Improve Operational Excellence." Part of that improvement was to upgrade the environment for ASF clients and staff. As a means to that end, the agency has embarked upon an ambitious remodel to its existing location.

Beginning Thursday, January 8, more than 2/3 of ASF’s employees began moving offices … doubling, tripling, and sometimes quadrupling, up with other employees to vacate the center section of the ASF offices. It took two days to get everyone relocated, reconstruct the computer server room, and get back up and running. This move marked the beginning of Phase One.

Once the area was clear, walls were removed, new walls were constructed, and the heart of the new ASF was created … a large, open-plan, work area that will eventually be a hive of ASF activity. The new space will hold 28 work stations and will be surrounded by enclosed offices and client meeting rooms.

These photos show the space mid-construction during Phase One.

Right, bottom three photos: The new space will eventually be flooded with natural light from walls of glass. And the new floor plan will greatly improve ASF's ability to serve our clients and their experience when coming to ASF for services.
A roomful of excited guests gathered beneath a canopy of swag fabric and lilting strands of lights at the Marconi Automotive Museum on Saturday, January 24th, to celebrate ASF’s Annual Gala – *Shaken Not Stirred*. The event was the first gala not to be helmed by ASF founders Al Roberts and Ken Jillson. And co-chairs Jeff Elder and Karla Kjellin-Elder knew they had big shoes to fill.

With 265 persons in attendance and a budget-busting $310,000 raised so far (matching gifts have yet to be received), it can safely be said that the shoes were filled quite well.

Guests arriving for the event were greeted by a row of red “super” cars which led to the red carpet and a row of vintage and late-model Ducati motorcycles. Once inside, there were scores more cars to view from makers such as Lamborghini, Ferrari, Mercedes-Benz and Aston Martin. And that’s where the fun begins!

The cocktails were flowing, quite literally, from the start. A martini luge poured specially-made drinks concocted for the event by Tito’s Handmade Vodka. Guests were also treated to delicious passed hors d’oeuvres like Persian Pistachio Lamb “Lollipops” and Truffle Mac and Cheese bites.

Highlights of the evening included a high-energy, live painting exhibition by acclaimed artist and performer Stephen Fishwick and an entertaining and profitable live auction session conducted by professional auctioneer Zack Krone of California Coast Auctions. Zack auctioned off the still-wet painting as well as a specially commissioned portrait by Fishwick of Al Roberts and Ken Jillson.

But the truly inspirational moment of the evening came when Renee Austin, a member of ASF’s Positively Speaking Program, spoke about her 20-year history with HIV, the stigma she’s encountered, and how, with education, testing, and community, we could stop HIV in Orange County right now. She brought the gathering to their feet with thunderous and appreciative applause.

Dinner included Black and Blue Angus Sliders and Indian Pulled Chicken Sandwiches as well as a risotto bar and several soups and salads provided by Soiree Catering. The meal definitely kept our guests coming back for more! And desserts didn’t disappoint either. Sweet selections included cherry and apple pie pops, key lime tarts, and chocolaty mousses!

And for the first time in over a decade, ASF corporate and private donors provided nearly 100% event underwriting so that just about all of the funds raised that evening can be directed toward life-saving client services such as case management, mental health services, children’s and family programs, transportation, nutrition, education and HIV testing and prevention.
The outstanding leadership and commitment of its generous supporters are essential aspects of ASF’s ability to help individuals living with HIV and AIDS. Major donors contribute $1,200 or more annually to ASF through both event and non-event related means. Many ASF donors give through member groups such as Patron’s Council, ASF’s major donor recognition society; Women’s Leadership Council; and the Getting to Zero Guild. Major donors are vital to the success of the agency and ASF applauds their unwavering commitment to people living with HIV/AIDS in Orange County.

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IN MEMORY OF STAN STROUD
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Pet Food Distribution / Services Program

Saturday, May 9, 2015
AIDS Walk Orange County
William R. Mason
Regional Park, Irvine
aidswalkorangecounty.org

Saturday, October 24, 2015
OC Ride for AIDS
William R. Mason
Regional Park, Irvine
ocrideforaids.org

Saturday, January 23, 2016
ASF's Annual Gala
Location TBD