

AIDS caseload rises, funds needed

By Loren King

Like most non-profit, social service organizations feeling the financial crunch in this recessed economy, the Provincetown AIDS Support Group is struggling to provide services for more clients than ever, while funding is becoming harder and harder to acquire.

The support group's caseload has more than doubled over the past year, said Alice Foley, co-founder and executive director. Last year, the PASG had 42 clients. This year, the figure is 92 with the group averaging two to three intakes a week. That figure does not include those infected with HIV but not symptomatic, she said. In addition, the PASG is seeing more people across the spectrum for HIV infection, from asymptomatic to advanced stages of the disease, said Foley.

For the last three years, the PASG has been level-funded with a grant from the state Department of Public Health. This is supplemented by large and small fundraisers throughout the year so that the group can continue to provide education, referrals, services and support to clients with HIV and AIDS.

"We have been fortunate because of people's generosity," said Foley. "But everyone is feeling the recession. Many of the cuts are hurting a lot of people."

The largest fundraiser for the past four years has been an auction for the benefit of the PASG. Last year, the auction, which has become an much-awaited event for art and antique collectors and an enjoyable social evening as well, raised about \$60,000 for the PASG, said Michael Baranowski, fundraising chairman on the board of directors. Most of that money goes to reimburse clients for expensive treatments and services not



Advocate photo by Loren King

Alice Foley, founder of AIDS support group

covered by insurance.

Baranowski said the group restricts this reimbursement to clients who have established a one-year residency in Provincetown. Even with that, last year's funds were "just enough to see the program through a 12-month period," he

said. "With our rising case load, even \$60,000 may not be enough. What happens to clients if we fall short?"

As Baranowski made the rounds of local businesses soliciting contributions for the auction, he understood the strain placed on businesses that are asked to

contribute to many fundraisers over the short summer season, he said. "Everybody's need is great," he acknowledged. "But ours can literally mean the difference between life and death."

Baranowski said it is difficult to keep reminding people of that. Complacency among the public is common to all AIDS service organizations, he said. Here in Provincetown, where the PASG has "been around as long as the disease," some take the services for granted. In addition, there is a "danger of people focusing their anger, frustration and loss back on the organizations" that administer care to those battling the disease.

Foley agrees that despite the fact that the numbers are rising and the need for services is expanding, "people get lulled into a false sense of complacency," she said. "They are not paying attention. People still assume this is a disease of the disenfranchised - gay men and IV drug users. It is frustrating."

Foley pointed to statistics that show over 2,000 U.S. teens between 13 and 17 years old infected with HIV, making teen-agers the highest risk group, she said.

Baranowski said there is a difference here in Provincetown that makes it easier to ask people for financial support. Larger AIDS organizations administer levels of service so broad that donors may feel a small contribution accomplishes little. But in Provincetown, "I can tell you how each dollar is spent," Baranowski said. "We provide direct client services. That is our strength."

For example, a recent small fundraiser that netted \$5,000 for the PASG replaced an engine in the van that shuttles clients back and forth to Boston every day for treatment. "Those are the kinds

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of things we can point to when faced with initial complacency," Baranowski said. "There is a direct way of impacting this illness through donations."

As the need for AIDS programs and services grows Cape-wide, the PASG has also expanded its mission to all of Barnstable County, said Foley. Since the PASG has the longevity and experience in administering these programs, it has now tried to bring other agencies, such as the Cape Cod AIDS Council, "up to speed" so they can better serve the rest of Barnstable County, Foley said.

The PASG is sustained largely by a dedicated group of 80 volunteers who take on tasks like driving the shuttle van to Boston or sitting with clients in their homes for two to 10 hours a day, said Foley. "I never get over the dedication of the volunteers. They are incredible," she said.

Other services the PASG provides for its clients include a laundry service for physically-challenged clients, prescrip-

tions runs to Orleans, and arranging for home care including equipment such as hospital beds. Nothing comes cheap, said Foley, but the group will pay for the "simple things out of the Medicaid loop," like a device on a hospital bed that allows it to be raised, Medicaid will cover the bed, but not the raising device. That cost \$25 extra, Foley said, and the PASG puts up the money.

Future programs in the planning stages include a "meals on wheels" program for physically-challenged clients or those too ill to leave their homes and a system for serving congregate meals in the new space at the PASG offices, said Foley. When planning programs, Foley's thought process is simple. "I think, if I felt lousy what would I want? But it takes time, effort and money."

The Fifth Annual PASG Auction is one of the key events to raising that money. As with all previous years, the auction will showcase fine art and antiques geared to the collector, as well as jewelry, gifts, dinners, trips and services.

There will be many unusual surprise items, such as a gold lamé high top sneaker signed by the Go Go's, a pair of Cher's high heels, a motorcycle, a 1975 restored Volvo and a two-store white birdhouse built by Jim Manning, said Pasquale Natale, auction chairman.

Artists represented at the auction will include Hilda Neely, Lois Griffel, Nancy Wharf, James Hansen, John DiMestico, Mary Hackett and Donna Flax.

Added attractions at this year's auction include food, a fashion show, and one of the best people-watching opportunities of the summer season. The auction takes place Saturday, August 31, at 7 p.m. at the Unitarian-Universalist Meeting House, 236 Commercial St. in Provincetown. Registration begins at 6 p.m. Items can be previewed August 30 from 3 p.m. to 11 p.m. and again on August 31 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. In addition, a silent auction will be held on August 30 from noon to 10 p.m. at the PASG offices at 96-98 Bradford St. in Provincetown.