

Positive Lives

A Grand Day Out

On 17th March our "Homme" group for gay and bisexual men living with HIV headed off to sunny Shropshire for a cultural day out at Ironbridge Gorge. The day was extremely successful and a balance of healthy exercise, fresh air, good food and supportive company was enjoyed by all, and of course, the day wouldn't have been complete without the obligatory walk across the 'Iron Bridge'. The "Homme" group aims to provide social activities and peer support for gay and bisexual men living with HIV. If you'd like to join us for future activities please contact Steve Manley.

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The famous Ironbridge in Shropshire



Positive Lives

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People living with or affected by HIV/AIDS
(published anonymously)

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Refugee & Asylum Seeker Newsletter

Since August 2007 we have been publishing a 'Refugee/Asylum Seeker' newsletter each month. This contains all sorts of latest information that is relevant to asylum seekers and refugees, ranging from contact numbers for organisations that can offer helpful information to the latest updates from the Home Office.

As it has been going for 6 months now, a questionnaire was sent out with the February edition as to how useful people found it and if there was anything else they felt it could include.

Thank you very much to those of you who returned the anonymous questionnaires. It very much helps us to produce the kind of newsletters that you want to read. We had a few responses, all of them positive, and all of them saying that they wanted the newsletter to continue. A few of them had suggestions for future editions which we will endeavour to include. So the good news is that we will be continuing with the monthly newsletter and if anybody wishes to contribute anything then please contact us here at Buddies.

Janet Lucas
African Communities Support Worker

'Esprit' Women's Group Respite Weekend 8th-9th March 2008

This year 6 women who attend the 'Esprit' group at Staffordshire Buddies went away for the weekend for some 'rest' and 'relaxation'. We stayed at a lovely hotel in Warrington where we were able to enjoy the facilities of the spa, jacuzzi, pool, and a wonderful 'Rocky Horror' party night where everyone dressed up in some amazing and very sexy outfits. As well as having time away from the family and 'everyday life' the women get some 'me' time where they can discuss issues they would not normally have the time or opportunity to discuss anywhere else such as relationships, health, HIV, medication, disclosure etc and get a lot of peer support from the others especially on 'how to cope!' For a couple of the women it was their first time to attend an Esprit activity, and both thoroughly enjoyed it and went home very positive having made new friends.

Janet Lucas
HIV Services Worker



Asylum Seeker & Refugee group

Recently we have had a training day for this group on 'Empowering and Integrating Refugees and Asylum Seekers'.

It was provided by Thandi Haruperi the director of the company, RestorEgo, who came up from London for the day and was held at the NORSACA centre where we were provided with a lovely lunch of fried chicken, dumplings and plantain. Delicious!

We had a fairly good turn out and those that attended found it very useful and thought provoking. Some of the comments made in the evaluation of the day of what they had got out of it were: 'Live your life for today', 'more knowledgeable about others and their situations' and 'learn to make use of your situation'.

The next meeting will be on the 16th April 10am-12noon at Staffordshire Buddies. Jane Howie

(Social Worker for asylum seekers) will be coming in to give a talk on health issues for asylum seekers & refugees.

Please contact Janet / Priscilla if you wish to attend.

Janet Lucas
African Communities Support Worker



Complementary Therapies

Staffordshire Buddies offers a range of complementary therapies for people living with HIV.

Many people use complementary health treatments to go along with the medical care they get from their doctor. These therapies are called "complementary" because usually they are alongside the standard care you receive such as from your doctor, hospital visits and the anti HIV drugs you might be taking.

Living with HIV can be stressful. Some of the common causes of stress may be:

- Dealing with HIV drugs and side-effects
- Financial difficulties
- Social isolation
- Disclosure issues
- Housing concerns
- Lack of support
- Poor eating habits and nutrition

Any of the above may bring about:

- Excessive worry
- Fatigue
- Irritability
- Muscle tension
- Sleep disturbances
- Increased desire to drink alcohol, smoke or use drugs
- Appetite changes
- Difficulty concentrating

The most obvious effect of touch therapies such as reflexology, remedial massage, aromatherapy massage, reiki and therapeutic touch is reduction in stress and tension, bringing about a feeling of well-being and boosting morale. Many health professionals now recognise these therapies as effective in dealing with stress.

Complementary therapies also help strengthen the immune system, relieve side effects and symptoms of drug therapy, relieve pain and help maintain good nutritional practices and appropriate exercise regimens as well as promoting a general sense of health and well-being.

People who responded to our recent "Have Your Say" questionnaire said:

"Excellent service I always feel completely relaxed and stress free after having my therapy"

"Wonderful I couldn't live without it"

"My neuropathy would be a lot worse if I didn't have therapies"

"Makes me feel relaxed and calm"

"Very relaxing and beneficial"

"The therapy helps with my self esteem and personal health, lowering stress levels and improving my mental wellbeing"

"Lyn is excellent at what she does"

"Reflexology has helped me walk better, and practically cured my lack of balance"



Some of the therapies offered include:

Reflexology is a holistic and therapeutic foot treatment that uses gentle massage and applies a pressure technique to certain parts of the feet in order to promote relaxation and healing elsewhere in the body. A reflexology treatment is calming, relaxing and rejuvenating. During a treatment the many nerve endings in each foot will be stimulated improving blood circulation and lymphatic flow to the body enhancing the body's own healing process. This feels incredibly good! When the body is in a relaxed state many physiological changes take place which are beneficial to good health. Stress reduction is what reflexology does best.



Massage Therapy is a therapeutic deep tissue massage that can treat musculoskeletal problems and injuries. It provides wonderful relaxation if you are stressed and soothes sore, tired muscles. Massage relieves anxiety and stress, brings about relaxation and can bring relief from chronic and limiting conditions.

Aromatherapy Massage uses massage and essential oils derived from plants to achieve therapeutic benefits. Aromatherapy massage has powerful, beneficial effects on the body, mind and spirit and is a great relaxing, rejuvenating experience. As well as providing a wonderful pampering experience, an aromatherapy body massage is effective where stress and depression is a major cause of health imbalance.

Reiki is a gentle yet powerful complementary therapy that may be used with confidence alongside orthodox healthcare. Reiki is a natural healing technique involving the placement of hands on to the fully clothed body in order to channel energy. Reiki is a technique for stress reduction that allows everyone to tap into an unlimited supply of 'life force energy' to improve health and enhance quality of life. Reiki is now being used in GP surgeries, hospitals, hospices, cancer support groups, post-operative surgery, drug rehabilitation, prisons, the care of the elderly and HIV/AIDS centres.

All complementary therapists at Buddies have produced formal evidence of training and are fully insured. Therapy sessions are held at Hanley and Lichfield drop-in centres and at GU Medical clinic at Queens Hospital, Burton-on-Trent. For further details or to book an appointment please contact:

Hanley – contact Steve on 01782 201352

Lichfield and Burton GU Clinic – contact Matt on 01543 418770

Article written by **Lyn Harvey**,
Complementary Therapist for Staffordshire Buddies

CPS Publishes New Guidance

On Friday 14 March 2008 the Crown Prosecution Service published a Policy Statement and Guidance for Prosecutors on cases involving the intentional or reckless sexual transmission of infection in England and Wales. Although the guidance does not specifically mention HIV, all thirteen prosecutions that have taken place in England & Wales since 2003 have been for the reckless transmission of HIV.

Staffordshire Buddies is, in general, opposed to the prosecution of the reckless transmission of HIV in all but the most extreme cases as we believe prosecutions undermine efforts to encourage people to take individual responsibility for protecting themselves and for those at risk to get tested. Along with other HIV organisations we have consistently lobbied the CPS on these issues and although it hasn't been possible to prevent the new policy from coming in to force we are pleased to see that the guidance on prosecutions has improved considerably since the 2006 draft.

The National AIDS Trust have published a useful summary of the policy which is enclosed with this issue of Positive Lives. If it is not enclosed you can download it from www.nat.org.uk/document/419 or contact us and we'll post you a copy.

As we currently understand matters, the key points concerning the prosecution of the reckless transmission of HIV are as follows:

1. There has to be scientific evidence to support the claim that the defendant infected the complainant.
2. The defendant has to have 'known' that he or she was infected when the relevant transmission took place.
3. The defendant has to have understood that he or she was infectious to other people and how the infection is transmitted.

4. The complainant must not have known of the defendant's HIV positive status. The informed consent of the complainant to the risk of HIV infection is a defence against a charge of reckless HIV transmission.

5. The defendant will not have taken steps to protect their partner from infection. Consistent condom use is a defence against a charge of reckless HIV transmission

6. HIV transmission must have taken place. There is no crime of 'attempted reckless HIV transmission'

If you are a person living with HIV and you are worried about how the new CPS policy might affect you please talk to a member of our HIV Services team who can explain things to you in more detail.

The full CPS policy can be viewed at www.cps.gov.uk/publications/prosecution/sti.html

Andrew J. Coldlough
Director

The information in this article is provided in good faith and is not a substitute for appropriate legal advice. Anyone personally concerned about the possibility of prosecution should contact us to be put in contact with expert advice as soon as possible.

Reckless or Intentional Transmission of HIV?

In legal terms "reckless" transmission of HIV can occur when a person living with HIV does not tell their partner they have HIV (or they lie) and they do not take precautions to prevent transmission (such as using a condom).

"Intentional" transmission means that the person living with HIV actually wanted their partner to get HIV infection and they maliciously passed the virus on to them.

To date all the prosecutions in the UK have been for the reckless (not intentional) transmission of HIV.

Positive Voices

We'd just like to say a big thank you to all the users of our services who took the trouble to complete and return our recent "Have Your Say" questionnaire. We really value all of your feedback as it helps us to keep improving things and to demonstrate to our funders that what we do for you is worthwhile. We had a whopping fifty two completed questionnaires back which (among other things) told us that:

- More than two thirds of you think our services have improved your knowledge of HIV
- Almost two thirds thought that our services had improved their self esteem and confidence and more than a quarter specifically said we had improved their mental health.
- Nearly half of you said that services had improved social isolation.
- The quality of seventeen out of the nineteen services we listed in the questionnaire were rated at an average score of more than 4.5 out of a maximum of 5 marks which means that most of you think they are excellent. The other two services both achieved average scores higher than 4 (rated good)

Among the comments we received were:

"Since moving to Staffordshire from London, where I accessed many of the services there I was very surprised at the level of personal

interest taken in me and my welfare. I can honestly say that without the team at Lichfield I would not be enjoying the quality of life I'm currently experiencing."

"An excellent service that has improved my quality of life well beyond what I expected – Thank You"

"Fantastic – service has been really, really helpful".

"Without the support I have received I feel I would be in a mess, and my life would be very difficult and complicated"

"At the centre everyone is welcoming, friendly and you cannot stop laughing despite the fact that you could have spent a few days without a smile".

"Without the help, advice and support I have received via Staffordshire Buddies my mental health issues would undoubtedly remain unchanged instead of being improved greatly"

"The service I personally have had has been exceptional. Any time I have been told something it has been explained in simple to understand terms and without bias"

I'd like to say a big thank you to everyone who took part in the survey. We have compiled a detailed summary of all the feedback we received and we will use your comments and suggestions to help us maintain and further develop our services over the coming year.

Andrew J. Coldclough
Director



Being positive is not easy. Yes you may live a better life knowing you are, but that does not compensate for being positive.

When things are not well, you wake up with a cold, you question yourself, is this it? Am I going to die? You take supplements, you take herbal teas in the hope that it might disappear but you think, who am I kidding, it's still there.

Being positive is not easy. But at the end of the tunnel you see the light. Yes it does work taking the meds, herbals and it gives you strength to go on.



Staffordshire Buddies Service User

I think this is the first opportunity I have had to write about my New Zealand adventures whilst they have still been fresh in my mind. At the time of writing, Body Positive New Zealand is holding its annual Retreat for HIV+ men, which I was fortunate to attend last year. The later date of the Retreat this year meant that I could only be there in spirit. Nonetheless, my decision to spend more time in fewer places, enabled me to get to know some of the volunteers who help run the BP Centre in Auckland and to share experiences with them as well as having the pleasure of sitting down together to enjoy lunch.

This year I went with no fixed itinerary, just a wish list which included staying at the Tree House Lodge in the rain forest, exploring Great Barrier Island, as well as paying a visit to the Pacific side of the Coromandel Peninsula. As all



of these are in North Island, it was possible to spend enough time in each location to get a feel of each place, to get to know people better and to inspect spectacular scenery and fascinating wild-life at close quarters. One of the most exciting moments came in the middle of the night when I was disturbed by the patter of tiny feet, and switching on my torch I caught sight of a possum stretched up on its hind legs staring, shocked, into its beam. Of course highlights like close encounters with wildlife and breath-taking magnificent sunsets were counter-balanced by unpleasant incidents such as getting drenched on the Waitekere Ranges and having to cope with an arson attack on the refuse and recycling bins I had left outside my friend's house in Auckland. Thankfully, in this instance, the kindly next-door neighbour had largely dealt with the incident, getting the council to clear away the burnt remains and replace the bins.

Raglan, became an additional location to visit after reading Tony Bennet's 'A Land of Two Halves' In his book he gives Raglan an enthusiastic report. The place is best known for its spectacular surf, Monau Bay having one of the best left hand surfs in the world...needless to say, I left the surfing to the experts and contented myself with a kayaking excursion to the limestone caves in Raglan harbour where I rapidly improved my boat handling skills by having to negotiate numerous, narrow passages. My most strenuous achievement was to reach the summit of Mount Hobson, the highest mountain on Great Barrier Island. It would have been hard enough at my own pace,

but the speed was set by a companion who was younger, taller and fitter than me with a keen desire to arrive at our pick up point ahead of schedule...this we achieved convincingly with over half an hour to spare...and that's after allowing time for a dip in the hot springs pools... it took me a couple of days to recover.

maurice's

angle

Health concerns

Before leaving home in December 2007, I had bloods taken to re-check a viral load blip of 520. In the past, a re-check usually came back undetectable. You can imagine my concern when, I found on my return, a letter asking me to contact the clinic. I had a viral rebound of 4,000. I went round first thing the next day to have blood taken for another viral load and resistance tests...then waited patiently. After three weeks, I called for the results so that I could prepare myself for an informed consultation about changing medication...only to discover that the viral load test had come back undetectable! Naturally, I was delighted if somewhat confused. It will be interesting to see what explanations are put forward at my next regular check-up in April.

Open University

Despite cock-ups in my Humanities' exam, I passed both courses with decent marks. At present I'm finding this year's German course hard, but hopefully things will improve. By contrast, the French course is going quite well; of course, it is a lower level so it should be easier.

Music

Whilst away, I had great fun playing on a variety of old and not so old keyboards in New Zealand. The Whittaker Collection of historical musical instruments on Whaiheke Island in the Hauraki Gulf was a treasure store of mainly keyboard instruments. The volunteer guides dug out some music for me. I selected the vocal score of HMS Pinafore and played the overture on a magnificent 1897 Bechstein concert grand that had belonged to Paderewski. He toured the world with this instrument in the 19th and early 20th Centuries including two trips to New Zealand. My less than virtuoso performance was rewarded with a warm round of applause from a grand audience of two! On the organ front, my progress has been slow but steady. Whilst on a recent trip to North Wales I had the pleasure of playing on a number of excellent instruments, the jewel in the crown being the fine newly restored four manual organ in Bangor Cathedral.

Volunteering

I am hoping to continue helping out with the same Staffordshire Buddies activities as last year, although I also have to find time for Age Concern, a charity that I became involved with last year. Well, at least, nobody can accuse me of being idle!

That's all there's time for

Keep well.

Maurice