

Positive Lives

Talking Allowed

1st December was World AIDS Day and Staffordshire Buddies ran a highly successful campaign with the local theme of "Talking Allowed". Over the course of five days we had a high profile service in Lichfield Cathedral accompanied by a fabulous exhibition, fundraising events at both ends of the county, a theatre performance in partnership with Vic Borderlines and local young people, a service in Stoke, a world AIDS Day Vigil and much, much, more.

We were keen to get as many people involved as possible this year and we certainly had a good turnout at all the major events and some great coverage in the local media. Turn to the centre pages to see some photographs of the events and read more about what we got up to.



Collecting at The Potteries Shopping Centre

Also in this issue:

Tributes to Keith Groom

Remembering Colin

**Positive Families
Summer Fun**

Maurice's Angle



Positive Lives

Address: P.O. Box 474 Hanley ST1 3HX
e-mail; positive.lives@staffordshirebuddies.co.uk

This publication is available online at:
www.staffordshirebuddies.co.uk

Editor : Janet Lucas
Design and layout: Bob Lishman

Contributors (articles and photographs)

Andrew Colclough

Paul Smith

Joanne Kemsley

Maureen Cuell

Maurice Greenham

Rosie Jackson

Sarah Beech

Scott Ormerod

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

Staffordshire Buddies is a registered charity
(No.1047375) governed by a committee of trustees.

Views expressed in this publication are those of
individual authors and not necessarily those of
Staffordshire Buddies.

Copyright of the articles remains with the author and
items may not be reproduced without their permission.
Any mention of treatment or therapy does not constitute
an endorsement by Staffordshire Buddies.

The mention, contribution or likeness of any person or
organisation appearing in this publication is not to be
taken as any indication of their sexual, social or political
orientation nor of their HIV status.

© Staffordshire Buddies 2007.
All rights reserved.

New Look Positive Lives

Hi everyone, welcome to the new look "Positive Lives". The full colour Positive Lives has become a less frequent publication for all sorts of reasons, one of which is cost. We want to get back into producing the magazine on a more regular basis so we are making each issue a bit shorter and future editions will only have colour on the front and back pages. By doing this we will be able to produce "Positive Lives" four times a year which we hope will help us keep in touch with our readers better. If you have access to the internet you will still be able to download an electronic copy in full colour! If you wish to contribute to any future editions of Positive Lives or if you have any comments please contact Janet Lucas at Staffordshire Buddies.

Andrew J. Colclough
Director



Annual Report

Our annual report this year is titled "Investing in Volunteers" to celebrate the achievement of the Volunteering England "Investing in Volunteers" Quality Mark in May this year. The report contains summarised information about all of our services and achievements for the previous twelve months

including the valuable contribution made to all of our work by volunteers. You can download the report from the Staffordshire Buddies website at www.staffordshirebuddies.co.uk or 'phone the main office if you would like us to post you a copy.

Andrew J. Colclough
Director

Keith Rigby Groom, born on St. Valentines Day 1938, died from a brain tumour on October 4th 2007, in Bradwell Hospital, surrounded by friends.

Keith had been a volunteer with Staffordshire Buddies for nearly twelve years, and during that time he was active in many roles. He was a member of the Executive Committee for several years, proud to be Chair briefly in 2005, then Vice Chair until shortly before his death. He supported many local people living with HIV/AIDS, and worked tirelessly to raise awareness of the issues surrounding HIV/AIDS, confronting the prejudice and discrimination faced by those living with the virus.

As a member of the Events Team, Keith was the main organiser of the WAD vigil for many years and pioneered the touring vigil. He was invaluable as a member of the Training Group, where his flair and originality were the inspiration for many of the Members' Meeting. Keith's commitment to the charity was such, that on one of his last trips out of the hospital, when he was already very frail, he asked to be taken to Staffordshire Buddies stopping on the way to buy flowers for the staff. It was a Drop-In afternoon, and everyone there was surprised and delighted to see Keith, and make a big fuss of him. I am in no doubt that Keith was delighted by this, as he always enjoyed being the centre of attention!

Talking of which, I am reminded of another role which Keith played in the organisation. His enthusiastic performance in the Staffordshire Buddies adaptation of "A Christmas Carol", as the Ghost of Christmas Present, helped to make this play the huge success it was in the WRVS.... That costume.... That delivery.... Who can forget how Keith produced the Iceland carrier bag from underneath his cloak?.... So O.T.T So Keith.

Love you, Miss you x

Written by Maureen Cuell

Positive Families News

This summer saw the first outings for families. We have parents at Buddies who have pre school children and so are unable to attend women's group or the asylum group or any of the other group's outings as they have childcare issues. This day out was offered to all families and we visited the Zoo, a picnic was provided for all so there was no need to spend any money. This can be an issue for a large proportion of the families as many are on extremely low incomes. 10 families and their children benefited from this activity and we hope to run another similar day in the future.

We also visited the beach this summer, this activity is an extremely popular day with sandcastles built, paddling/swimming in the sea and the children generally enjoying the freedom the day offers. Other children on the beach "tagged" on the group. This seems to happen most places we visit!

Another very popular outing is Ice Skating. One child was heard to utter in disbelief last year **"you have fun in the cold and on ice?"** This year that child impressed us with pirouettes twists and turns beyond belief, so the answer is yes we do have fun on the ice.

Another teenager decided they were giving up the proposed football career and were taking up Ice Skating, but after a rather embarrassing fall in front of a young lady they were trying to impress that decision was soon reversed. The proverb 'pride cometh before a fall' springs to mind!

The First Aid Kit remained un-used so another success. Due to certain restrictions within the allocated budget the children have not attended a residential for the last 2 years. The children's consultant at North Staffs passed on some information to me regarding a free camp in Ireland.

Barretstown Camp is part of a camp originally set up in America by the actor Paul Newman. The camp is for families who suffer from blood disorders. The respite is free with families only required to transport the children to the allocated airport. After further discussions with the camp co-ordinators and parents 8 children benefited from this wonderful experience. Activities included canoeing, horse riding, rafting etc and one of the children commented **"It's a fairy castle and I didn't want to come home ever!"** Another child commented **"I learnt Spanish and I write to my new friend in Spain."** We would have liked more children to benefit but some have travel restrictions due to asylum issues in the UK.

The Christmas Party was on the 8th December with lots of jelly and ice-cream and sweets being devoured. Santa made a flying visit and the children's entertainment for the afternoon was a magician. Again a well attended and much looked forward to day by children and adults alike.

The HIV + teenagers group meets up every month and they often discuss serious issues concerned with their status eg, HIV criminalisation, relationships, teenage pregnancy, contraception etc. But its not all serious, they have "grown up" evenings like meals and theatre trips. Another fun year for the children with numbers increasing by 6 since last January. We often have to restrict numbers to 12 on an activity due to adult/child ratios, so if anyone fancies joining us for lots of fun then please contact me.

Huge thanks to the existing volunteers who assist with the children's group and here's to another fun year.

Joanne Kemsley
Positive Families Project Worker.

It is with great regret and sadness that we report the death of Keith Groom in this issue of Positive Lives. Keith died in October as a result of a brain tumour; he had been ill for several months after collapsing unexpectedly with what was initially diagnosed as a stroke. He was surrounded by his friends in the final moments of his life and passed away peacefully.

Keith joined Staffordshire Buddies as a volunteer in 1996 and received an award for his tenth year of service last year. He was a trustee of the Charity for many years and was actively involved in both delivering and helping manage a number of our services. He has been a huge support to local people living with HIV both collectively and individually in his role as a buddy.

Keith was also my English teacher and in what now seems like another lifetime he was the first openly gay man I met some thirty two years ago. Keith was openly gay in a quite outrageous way when it was socially unacceptable and perhaps even downright dangerous to be so. He stuck his head above the parapet and constantly advocated for the freedom and rights that the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Communities now enjoy. Looking back I can appreciate that if it was not for Keith and others like him we'd all be living in a less enlightened world.

Keith will be greatly missed by all the staff and volunteers who have known him. He helped to make Staffordshire

Buddies into the strong and dynamic Charity that it has become; he made a big difference and will always be remembered.

Andrew J. Colclough
Director.



Keith Groom
1938 - 2007

Staffordshire Buddies: World AIDS Day Vigil 2007

The WAD vigil 2007, in Hanley on the 1st December, is certainly an event that I will remember, because for me it was a first. Earlier in the year I had been asked by members of the Events Team at Staffordshire Buddies, if I would co-ordinate the vigil and select material for the readings.

Having agreed to do this, the first decision to make was to decide on a theme for 2007. There were several national and international themes suggested for 2007, all in some way connected with 'Leadership' and 'Communication' - with the help of the Events Team, the local theme chosen was:

'Talking Allowed'

I hoped this theme would reflect the growing sense that HIV/AIDS no longer has a high profile, and generally across society there are increasing levels of ignorance and stigma about the virus. The readings chosen for the vigil (many thanks to Maurice for all his help) highlighted the brave individuals who have 'talked aloud' about HIV/AIDS, to challenge the ignorance and stigma surrounding the virus, over the last 20 years. The vigil itself will always mean different things to different people, but I hope that everyone who attended found it thought provoking, inspiring, reflective or moving.

I have received some very positive comments about the vigil and the readings - thank you for these. I would also like to thank everyone who helped me with the vigil, and to those who were prepared to read at the vigil.

And finally - it is now time to start preparing for WAD 2008 - so if you would like to be involved, please contact the Events Team at Staffordshire Buddies.

Paul Smith



Npower WAD 2007 Display

This is the second year Staffordshire Buddies has been asked by Npower to have a display at their Fenton Office. Colin Ayres, a previous volunteer and now Friend of Staffordshire Buddies arranged for us to have a display with Npower Fundraising Committee.

The display took place on Friday 30th November. Colin informed Npower staff via email of our presence and so during their breaks, staff came over to take a look at the display and ask about the Charity. We received a very positive response from people and we held a competition to guess How Many Ribbons in the Jar. In total we raised £179.74. This money will go directly to supporting people living with or affected by HIV.

Thanks to Npower and Colin for their support.

WAD Service Lichfield Cathedral

On November 30th Lichfield Cathedral hosted a service titled "Facing the Challenge" to mark the eve of World AIDS Day. The service was organised by Staffordshire Buddies and the AIDS Advocacy and Awareness Group, which is a partnership between Church and Voluntary Agencies across the Lichfield Diocese. Among the highlights on the night was an address by Dr Daleep Mukarji, Director of Christian Aid along with music and dance performed by local schools and community groups. There was also an exhibition in the cathedral on the 29th and 30th of November which included panels from the UK AIDS memorial quilt courteously loaned by the George House Trust, a display of powerful and moving images from the "Hands at Work in Africa" charity and a striking papier-mache globe made by local young people from the Lichfield Youth Service. The exhibition proved very popular and attracted a lot of attention from visitors to the Cathedral.



Lichfield Balloon Launch

Over 300 pupils, teachers and staff from King Edward IV High School in Lichfield witnessed the release of 1000 red balloons to mark world aids day on the school playing fields. The balloon launch was aimed at raising awareness of HIV & Aids and also to raise funds for the Lichfield youth service "Hand in Hand Project" supporting HIV work in Ethiopia. The event was broadcast live on Kerrang Radio.

I am proud of the continued support from young people in Lichfield who work hard in raising awareness and breaking down stigma and discrimination. Mesmen & Staffordshire Buddies provided training to school mentors on the run up to WAD and talking about HIV was certainly allowed.

Scott Ormerod (Mesmen Project Manager)



Potteries Shopping Centre

29th November & 1st December 2007

This year we had two days in the Shopping Centre and were joined again by staff from Health Promotion. We used our new Staffordshire Buddies banners for the first time and everyone agreed they were much more eye-catching. Many more people seemed aware of World AIDS Day this year which was really encouraging, and due to our efforts many shoppers in Hanley were wearing their red ribbons. I would like to say a huge thank you to all the service users, volunteers and staff who helped us this year and to let you know that we collected a whopping £1,377, as well as raising the profile of World AIDS Day.

I would also like to say an extra thank you to Stuart, who counted all the money from the Potteries Centre, over £1000 in coins!

Well done everyone!

Sharon

Memories of Colin

Many people associated with Staffordshire Buddies knew Colin to some extent. Some as his support workers, others whilst carrying out volunteer roles, many as kindred spirits. What we all have in common is the warmth we felt whenever he was around us.

You see, Colin never complained. He never demanded. His last years were not the easiest, yet he always had a smile and a joke. He hated being the centre of attention; he would much prefer to blend into the background [very difficult given his 6ft 2 inch frame!]. Colin was one of those people who didn't always engage in lengthy conversation, however, when he did speak it was to say something usually rather profound, or if he was in a 'naughty' mood it was to crack some dry comment! His addiction to Sky TV meant his sense of humour was regularly fed! Mr Bart Simpson was one of Colin's favourite characters. As was Mr Bean [his children called him this convinced he looked and behaved like him!]

I was lucky enough to have met Colin some 7 years ago. I remember our first meeting well. He was at his mother's home looking rather dazed and really not terribly well. We talked about what services I could offer him [all clean ones!] and we filled in the necessary paper work. Once the official work was done we sat and chatted about his life back home. He talked so fondly of his wife and children who were not here in the UK. He said he missed them dreadfully and that life would be so much better if they were with him. He talked about his noisy wife and how she made him laugh with her constant talking. He told me she was generous and kind and loved to help people. He told me how much he loved her.

In time his wife came over with two of their children. Colin's health improved remarkably. He still had problems, but he seemed more able to deal with them while he had his wife and children by his side. Colin began coming to the centre more regularly. He attended two computer courses and although he remained a quiet man he attracted the attention of many good people. They were simply drawn to him, to his gentle manner and of course to his naughty sense of humour!

In November 2006 although quite poorly he attended the respite/workshop weekend with other male clients from Staffordshire Buddies in Warwick. If honest the weekend was more workshop than respite! [Sarah and I are such slave-drivers!]. Colin managed to attend every session. Not only did he attend but he participated and shared some incredibly intense feelings about HIS life, his family, his wife. The workshops were designed to encourage people to reflect on their lives and to share experiences, which Colin did quietly but with purpose and meaning. By the end of the second session everyone was in tears, including the staff! [How unprofessional!]

Colin developed some strong bonds with the other

participants and without realising it, he had an incredible impact on them and their lives.

Another lasting memory of Colin and his naughty sense of humour was on a trip to Alton Towers. We were a mixed group, men and women, heterosexual, gay, black, white, tall, thin, etc etc.

We attracted a fair bit of attention with our 'mix' and loud laughter.

Colin was in excellent spirits that day and when some of the women in the group encountered a rather 'well developed' man walking through the park, [and accosted him!] Colin found it all rather amusing! The women were having pictures taken with this muscle man and feeling his huge

arms! As we walked away basking in the experience, Colin sidled up to me, made me stop walking, stood in front of me and waved his little finger in front of my face! I immediately knew what he was implying and protested. But Colin said he had 'taken a look' and he assured me he was correct in his measurement! I didn't argue!

The night before Colin passed, I visited him at the Hospice. For the first time it was just him and me. That hour will always remain special to me. Colin was chatty, tired, but still wanting to 'entertain'. We talked about religion, what happens after death and his beloved children and wife. I think he knew.....his main concern was that of his wife and children.....he was incredibly brave.....and did not show any fear.....as I left I kissed him and walked towards the door... as I blew him another kiss he said "Rosie, on your next visit I hope you are going to share this bed with me!" Typical Colin, laughing until the end.....so maybe he really did know that he wasn't going to see me again!

Goodnight Colin, it has been an honour knowing you.....sleep well babe.

Rosie

To All

I want to say thank you to all those who attended Colin's funeral. I don't know how I would have handled it without everyone's words of encouragement. There is nothing better than to see people you know help you through a time like this.

To everyone I would like to say your support goes a long way with everyone. Don't ever stop giving it. Thank you again.

From Priscilla and kids





First, I want to say a big thank you to Anne Williams who put my name forward for an invitation to a Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace. It turned out to be a splendid, memorable and most enjoyable occasion. The gardens were outstandingly beautiful; the tea was delicious, with tasty sandwiches and divine

pastries. There were around 7,500 guests, so I didn't have a chance for a personal chat with the Queen, but I did get a very close view of the entire Royal Party at the end of the afternoon.

By contrast, I felt great sadness at the unexpected illness and death of Keith Groom, a loyal friend and a staunch Buddies' volunteer, as well as the death of another highly respected and much loved member of the community. They will both be greatly missed.

Eventful year

Looking back, this has been an amazing year. Even before the Royal Garden Party, I had already enjoyed some unforgettable experiences. In January I returned to New Zealand. This time my backpacking adventure covered more ground than ever, extending as far as the northernmost point, Cape Reigna, where the Tasman Sea meets the Pacific Ocean, and down to the awesome wilderness of Doubtful Sound in the extreme southwest. I also completed the 17 kilometre Tongariro Crossing (includes Mount Doom) - rated by some as one of the top 10 day-treks in the world - not to mention an intimate, sunset encounter with a family of yellow-eyed penguins at Bushy Beach on the Otago Peninsula. I also had a privileged insight into what life is like in New Zealand from a non-tourist perspective when I stayed with friends in Auckland at the start and end of my holiday - sharing meals, everyday activities and visiting a typical Kiwi holiday 'bach' - these were very special moments. This time, I finally got the chance to participate in the HIV+ men's residential weekend at Vaughan Park north of Auckland. The laughter and conversation of convivial company, together with a well-organised programme, excellent food and idyllic setting made this a truly memorable experience.

Homme Group

Much the same could be said of the residential weekend back home in March of Staffordshire Buddies' gay men's group in the Peak District. Taking over Alstonfield's youth hostel, we enjoyed great company, good food, and healthy exercise in beautiful Dovedale and the Manifold Valley. The group, now called 'Homme', also had an interesting cultural experience at the Potteries Art Gallery and Museum as well as a pleasant country walk and picnic at Deep Hayes near Cheddleton.

NLTSG

It was wonderful to take a break from my Open University courses, to re-charge my batteries at the National Long

Term Survivors' Spring weekend at Shallowford House. I

think there were more new members than on any previous occasion. It was a pleasure to meet new people as well as renewing established friendships. On Saturday the sun came out so it was possible to enjoy a pleasant stroll to Izaak Walton's Cottage and the nearby picturesque village of Chebsey.

Health

In July I had my second set of BioAlcamid injections to counteract facial wasting. The theatre team at Selly Oak Hospital, Birmingham were fabulous - however, the operation was no less painful than the first time - luckily, the pain soon goes and once I was home, everything seemed fine. That was until I developed a post-operative infection that made the left side of my face swell up - I looked like the Elephant Man! A short course of Flucloxacillin, quickly brought the situation under control. A second flare-up was less dramatic and in agreement with my wonderful GP, the abscess was left to heal normally. OK! I may not pass for Brad Pitt, but at least I no longer look like a hamster with toothache. On a recent trip to see friends in London, I discovered that post-op infections following BioAlcamid implants are not uncommon - they put it down to the large sized needles used in the procedure.

Music

In June, I acted as piano accompanist for a musical garden party to raise funds for the Donna Louise Trust, the Douglas Macmillan Hospice and Staffordshire Buddies. The event raised over £1,000 much to the delight of its organiser Anne Goldstraw. Progress on my other keyboard instrument, the organ, has been slow but steady; I got a chance to play on the magnificent concert organ in the Victoria Hall, which was a terrific experience once I overcame my initial anxiety.

Studies

I am happy to report that my final assignment for my Open University Humanities course received a rare top mark (100%). Amazing! And, hugely encouraging for someone who had a very low opinion of himself and his capabilities only a few years back. I have completed both German and Humanities' courses and have already started a Beginners' French course, and now await my results for this year.

World AIDS Day 2007

I can't recall there being so much interest in my personal story since I first spoke out as a gay man living with HIV over a decade ago. Frankly the fuss doesn't bother me; I suppose, like my mum, I quite like being the centre of attention, so all the interviews and photo-shoots have been fun rather than burdensome. As for the events I took part in, I felt it a privilege to be associated with those who prepared and took part in them. From the joint production at the New Vic Theatre on Saturday to the last service at Keele on Monday, I also found heartening the warm public response to Staffordshire Buddies theme: 'HIV: Talking Allowed'.

Keep well.

Maurice

maurice's

angle

New Look Website

The Staffordshire Buddies website has had a makeover this year with a major update to all of the information about our services for people affected by HIV/AIDS. We've improved the look of the pages for downloading electronic copies of "Positive Lives" and added a new page for downloading reports and publications. There is also a new page on the origin and symbolism of the Staffordshire Buddies logo in which you can learn about the facts and myths surrounding the "Stafford Knot" and its appropriate motto "The Knot Unites!"

Over the last few months the web site has been encouraging people living with HIV in Staffordshire to complete the Sigma Research "What Do You Need?" survey. We hope to report on the main findings of this research in a future edition of Positive Lives.

We also added a completely new section for World AIDS Day which offers free downloadable posters and resources for schools, churches and community groups. Although World AIDS Day is over for this year we'll maintain these pages all year round and update them on the run up to each World AIDS Day. We hope you like the new web site, do take a look at www.staffordshirebuddies.co.uk



Clients and volunteers who don't have internet access at home can access the internet free at our Hanley Centre. We hope to offer an accessible computer with free internet access for clients and volunteers from the Lichfield Centre soon.

Andrew J. Colclough
Director

“ I first found out that I was HIV positive 7 years ago whilst pregnant with my youngest child. At first it was extremely hard to deal with. My main fear was for my unborn child but with medication through the pregnancy my child did not contract the illness and is now a healthy 6 year old. Over the years I have come to terms with the illness due to all the support I have received from Staffordshire Buddies, and Lichfield Drop In. Lichfield Drop In Centre provides so much for people living with HIV, from the support workers who always manage to put a smile on your face, to therapies which when you're feeling stressed and tense, work absolute wonders, down to being able to meet people like myself who are living with HIV. Also the activities which are planned from theme parks to bowling, even the Christmas meal, all bring everybody together and provide a lot of enjoyment for the service users. I personally believe that being able to talk openly and frankly about the illness brings much more awareness to those who live with HIV. Unlike myself who have family and friends for support too, for those who can't confide in those who are closest to them, Drop In gives them a chance to be themselves and relax in comfortable surroundings with some really great people. Through the years I have made some really good friends and met some really great people from coming to the Lichfield Drop In, and it's because of these people that I find living with HIV a lot easier now!!! ”

Service User - South Staffs