

Alliance for Positive Health

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Recently we had the opportunity to take a quick trip down Broadway to speak with leaders from Alliance for Positive Health (AFPH). AFPH provides services in 17 counties altogether, and provides a full continuum of services in 15 of those counties. Their service area ranges from Hudson all the way north to Plattsburgh. After tremendous growth and expansion in recent years, AFPH currently employs around 125 employees across its 5 office locations in northeastern New York.

AFPH has historically focused on the HIV/AIDS population and those at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. When receiving a referral, the organization provides HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis C, and STI testing on site and from their mobile van. Their mobile vans usually attract a large presence from the communities. Once staff locates individuals who are HIV positive or at risk of being HIV positive, they refer them to an onsite location to receive testing and other services. Laurie Lanphear, Director of Program Services, realizes the value of going into the communities, creating relationships, and “meeting people where they are at.” Laurie has been with Alliance for Positive Health since she graduated from college. She did not know anyone who was living with HIV, nor did she have experience working with this population; however, she quickly became passionate and dedicated about working in this field.

Bill Faragon, Executive Director, praised AFPH’s relationship with Albany Medical Center in collaboratively working together to control HIV to care for the high risk HIV population. The PrEP program (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) provides counseling and medication to high risk individuals. These individuals are required to take a daily dosage of a preventive medication called Truvada and must follow up with their prescribing provider every three months. Bill initially started working with Alliance for Positive Health in the 1990s as a volunteer and soon thereafter accepted a position to become the Director of Finance. He held this position for nearly two decades until he took over as Executive Director in January 2016.

Despite their historical focus on HIV care, AFPH also receives referrals for individuals in their communities who may not have HIV but do have multiple chronic conditions. Health Homes refer the high utilizers to their organization for services. Alliance for Positive Health also provides grant funded case management, transportation services, housing, financial assistance services and nutritional services. In addition, the organization provides re-entry services for individuals who are transitioning from correctional facilities back into society.

Bill and Laurie were proud to tell us about the syringe exchange program up in Plattsburgh, which was implemented as a harm reduction strategy in the wake of the growing opioid epidemic. Through the program, AFPH provides clean needles to anyone who comes to their location. The organization also makes arrangements to deliver syringes to people’s homes if necessary. In addition, Alliance for Positive Health looks for opportunities to facilitate drug users who are ready into treatment. This program originally started at the Plattsburgh office in the North Country; however, Bill informed us that AFPH will be expanding these services to the Hudson Falls office and the town of Ticonderoga. The program has been expanding rapidly due to the high demand and need in the North Country- the Plattsburgh location

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As a testament to the success of the new syringe exchange initiative, Laurie shared with us the story of a client who had been revived by Narcan twice due to opioid overdoses. During one visit to the exchange center, she informed Alliance for Positive Health that she was pregnant and wanted to get clean. AFPH helped to link her to treatment and the client is now in recovery, has a full time job, and is pregnant with her second child.

In addition to the syringe exchange program, Alliance for Positive Health has received a grant to support a program to address the ongoing opioid epidemic. The Drug User Health program works with physicians, physician assistants, and nurse practitioners across northeastern New York, with a particular focus in the North Country. The purpose of the grant is to provide patients with short term Suboxone treatment and bridge the gap to longer term care. There is such great demand for opioid treatment and this fills some of the void left by limited care providers. Through this grant AFPH will also provide aftercare for those who have experienced an overdose by developing a plan to prevent another overdose and to address other unmet needs. Cultural competency training for providers concerning best practices for providing services to individuals with substance use disorders.

Another component that has been successful for AFPH is peer-advocates in the link to care program. Link to care uses peers who have overcome barriers to accessing services and provide support for navigating systems to those who are not actively engaged in their respective care or treatment. Laurie stated, "These peers might be HIV positive, therefore, for someone who is newly diagnosed or struggling to take their medications it is helpful to speak to someone who has been there and who has done that." Clients have been so satisfied with their care and their relationship with AFPH that they spread their praise quickly to peers and members of their communities. To our surprise, one of the more prevalent sources of receiving new clients is through current clients referring their peers. "When we hear about that we take pride because it means we are doing something right with our clients," says Laurie.

Laurie acknowledges that it is oftentimes difficult for AFPH clients to maintain active engagement and proactivity in their own health and care. She affirmatively believes that "small wins" and a tailored care plan are "musts" when dealing with their client population. "It is really wrapping around a team for the patient to provide that support, and working on what they are willing to work on. If they are not ready to be adherent to their medications, especially HIV medications, then you cannot start them because you have to be close to 100% adherent, otherwise you are going to build resistance, then you cant take that medication anymore", stated Laurie. AFPH uses the harm-risk reduction model and the trans-theoretical model of change to have a better idea where clients are at and subsequently take appropriate interventions.

Currently, Alliance for Positive Health is involved in the 2.d.i. Patient Activation Measure project with the Better Health for Northeast New York network. The organization is currently integrating it into the workflow of referrals for the Albany office. As clients are referred, the supervisor on duty receives the referral and will PAM that person at point of referral. As part of the health home at risk program, Alliance for Positive Health administers PAMs, provides coaching, and re-administers PAMs within a certain time period.

Laurie strongly believes in the value of the subcommittee meetings convened as part of the DSRIP program. Being a part of various committees allows her to share best practices bi-directionally with other community leaders. They also serve as a way to strengthen the “network of providers” in the region. Bill Faragon states “Albany Med is one who really likes our services and really sees the value of the services we are providing.”

Alliance for Positive Health is doing tremendous work in the community, offering a wide spectrum of services to those who have HIV, are at risk of contracting HIV, and others who may have multiple chronic conditions that require care management. Bill repeatedly recognized the importance of having such a dedicated staff and is grateful and appreciative of their hard work with the populations they care for.

For more information or questions regarding Alliance for Positive Health, please contact Laurie Lanphear or Bill Faragon at llanphear@alliancefph.org and bfaragon@alliancefph.org, respectively.