

Hispanic Group Targets HIV Education and Prevention

Union Positiva Brings Healing Hands to the South Florida Community

By Ian Drew

As the number of HIV and AIDS cases rise to new heights in minority communities, one local organization has been working to change the situation in its own sector.

Union Positiva, a non-profit organization based in Miami, has been working for the past four years to service the needs of the HIV affected and infected Hispanic communities in South Florida. The organization uses various outreach efforts to work directly within the communities to help stop the spread of the virus and to improve health outcomes for those already infected.

This comes at a time when state and local HIV/AIDS planning groups and activists are calling out for increased spending within the Hispanic community, particularly for Hispanic men who have sex with men (HMSM). According to current estimates issued by the Federal Government's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 15 percent of young gay men in large U.S. cities infected with HIV are Hispanic. Miami is also the third most-impacted city in the country.

Union Positiva has been directly addressing the trend for the last two and a half years in Miami-Dade County. They

provide numerous services, including HIV counseling and anonymous testing, screenings for related conditions such as hepatitis and high blood pressure, prevention case management and intervention.

They were recently awarded a grant from the Federal Department of Health and Human Services's Substance Abuse and Mental Health Funding Program to work on



The staff of Union Positiva

substance abuse problems in the community for the next three years.

According to Alex Prado, Union Positiva's outreach prevention specialist, there are several distinctions in the Hispanic community that point to its need for a service organization of its own. He says that

bisexuality is rampant in the Hispanic community, and many HMSM do not consider themselves gay. Because of this, numbers of HIV cases among women and children are rising and the organization is working to help the situation.

Union Positiva's staff and board strive to reflect the community they service. All of their Board members are Hispanic and half are living with HIV. They are also all bilingual and equally divided between both genders.

Zaida Castillo, Acting Executive Director of the agency, says that the Hispanic community is in need of the cultural sensitivity that Union Positiva has infused into its services. She says that many larger agencies do not operate or have materials in Spanish, which Union Positiva provides.

The organization operates what is currently the only anonymous HIV testing site in Little Havana. The area is nearly 100 percent Hispanic, predominately Cuban, and it has been recently identified by the Miami-Dade County Health Department as a high priority area for HIV prevention efforts.

HIV counseling and testing are available at the Union Positiva offices, located at 1901 SW 1 Street #220, in Miami. These services are available Monday through Wednesday from 9 am to 5 pm, and Thursday and Friday from 10 am to 6 pm.

Lambda Passages, the popular gay bookstore located at 7454 Biscayne Boulevard in Miami, is also a testing

location on Saturday afternoons from 2 to 6 pm.

Another successful initiative of the organization is its Hispanic Pride Project group, *Projecto Orgullo Hispano*. The discussion group explores ways to navigate towards healthier lives for those at risk of being infected or already infected and is open to all HMSM in Miami-Dade.

The group's discussions incorporate issues of risk behavior and risk reduction, personal commitment to risk behavior change, performance of the behavioral skills needed to reduce risk and social support for the changes.

Union Positiva is also reaching out to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth between the ages of 13 and 20 with its Hispanic Youth Prevention Initiative Project that uses actual youth to address various issues.

The ultimate goal of the project is to encourage youth to do further HIV outreach in the community on a volunteer basis. Outreach sessions are starting to take place directly in targeted Hispanic communities, including Allapattah, Overtown and Little Havana.

Castillo says, "We are growing so fast. I have done so much work that I have to enjoy it all. Four years ago [when we started] you would barely have heard of us, but now we are even collaborating with other agencies to help put our work into action throughout the community."

For more information, call Union Positiva at 305.644.0636.

Community-Based HIV/AIDS Organizations in South Florida

South Beach AIDS Project
306 Lincoln Road, Miami Beach
305.532.1033

It is SoBAP's mission to work with the community to identify and address its local needs for HIV/AIDS prevention, education and care.

Through innovation, the organization's guiding principles are community involvement and empowerment, non-bureaucratic organizational structure, cooperation with other organizations to maximize available resources and to avoid duplication of services, and encourage collaboration.

Their programs also include Project Quest, which targets gay and bisexual men in their 20's.

Wansiki Foundation
1815 E. Commercial Blvd
Fort Lauderdale
954.565.8284

The Wansiki Foundation, founded in 1989 by Marie Wansiki, offers blood testing, counseling, and various medical services to residents of Broward County.

In its decade of service, the clinic has been able to assist many people that would have otherwise gone without treatment of any type.

Currently, the clinic receives about 40 percent of their funding through grant programs such as Ryan White. The remainder of their funding comes from donations and fundraising events.

Federal funding covers the costs of medical services, but does not cover such expenses as utility bills, office rental, supplies, support staff and laboratory services. Standard blood work for routine analyses cost several hundred dollars per patient. Laboratory fees alone for such a clinic can quickly generate bills in excess of \$100,000.

Community Healthcare CenterOne
2817 E. Oakland park Blvd
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33306
954.537.4111

CHC is Broward County's largest community-based, non-profit HIV/AIDS medical, social service and education organization and has served over 14,000 clients.

Medical services include ambulatory/outpatient care for those who have HIV/AIDS, other infectious diseases and medical issues.

Other services include research and clinical trials, case management, transportation, education and prevention as well as holistic therapies.

People With AIDS Coalition of Broward County
2302 NE 7th Ave
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33305
954.565.9119

www.pwa.org

Since 1988, The People With AIDS Coalition (PWAC) of Broward County has been advocating for the needs of people living with HIV and educating affected communities about paths to healing from the most ancient traditional therapies to the latest anti-retroviral combination strategies.

Located in Wilton Manors, the Coalition has frequently served as headquarters when organizing the HIV community for action, and its comfortable livingroom atmosphere always promises a safe space for people affected by HIV.

Their monthly Newslines are distributed to 4,000 people and is now available online.

Greg Scott, president of PWAC of Broward County said, "As the century turns with still no real cure in sight, our all-volunteer coalition renews its commitment to its mission. AIDS isn't over. And until it is, PWAC will be here."

Care Resource
(Call for Locations)
954.772.2242 in Broward
305.573.5411 in Miami
www.whiteparty.org

It is the goal of Care Resource to assist and empower those affected by HIV/AIDS and, at the same time, work to "end the pandemic with programs aimed at reducing the spread of the virus and expediting improved treatments through our participation in regulated trials."

On the heels of their growth in Miami-Dade County, they have initiated a new Primary Medical Care Program in Broward County.

YouthNet is their teen-peer prevention program that has expanded to include more groups and currently operates during evening hours. They have also implemented a comprehensive outreach model for women and expanded their counseling, testing hours and locations.

Jewish AIDS Network
100 South Pine Island Road
Suite #130 • Plantation, FL 33324
Phone: 954.370.2140
www.jewishaidsnetwork.org

Founded in 1996, the Jewish AIDS Network is an interfaith organization aimed at helping to unify the community.

Program Director Joshua Estrin joined the organization one year ago and speaks passionately about the direction and growth of the Network. At a recent memorial service held at Temple Sinai in Hollywood nearly 200 people attended. "That's a strong showing for the Jewish community," Estrin says.

The annual service is planned as close to World AIDS Day as possible to coincide with HIV awareness month.

The Network was created under the auspices of The Jewish Federation of

Broward County, becoming the first Jewish organization to institute comprehensive programming to address HIV/AIDS in South Florida.

Their mission statement reads: "Through the dedication, commitment and vision of its early founders, hundreds have joined in an interfaith, community effort to meet the multi-faceted challenges HIV/AIDS presents in the region."

Broward House
Fort Lauderdale
954.522.4749
www.browardhouse.org

Since 1988, Broward House's mission has been to "improve the lives of individuals living with and at risk for HIV and other health issues by providing high quality services in a loving, caring atmosphere..."

Those services include case management to give clients support and assure their needs are met by assisting them in obtaining services and financial benefits.

Through education they hope to reduce fear, ignorance and discrimination toward AIDS, and to increase community support and understanding through education programs for corporations, parents seniors, and other groups.

Chemical dependency is treated through individual and group sessions. Their program offers specialized treatment that is both educational and therapeutic, and is designed exclusively for people living with HIV.

They also have a 52-bed assisted living facility, which includes 24-hour nursing supervision, meals, medical and personal supplies, and housekeeping assistance.

Housing for families is available at one of their apartment buildings located in Fort Lauderdale, Hollywood, and Sailboat Bend.