

Cape-Tip Support Groups Struggle To Assist Persons With AIDS



Sandra LaRoe (left), Bill Furdon, and Irene Rabinowitz of the Provincetown AIDS Support Group.

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By Michael Paterniti
Bureau Chief

Provincetown nurse Alice Foley tells the story of a Colorado man who was dying of an AIDS-related disease in 1982. Realizing he would not receive proper treatment in his home state, this Person With Aids (PWA) packed his car with his life possessions, drove cross-country to Boston's Mass General Hospital and, after undergoing treatment, went on to Provincetown in December.

This was his Christmas. Having heard of the PWA's arrival in town, Preston Babbit, a Provincetown resident, found him a place to sleep and bought him a bag of groceries and a Christmas tree. The man died that spring.

In 1983, Miss Foley and Mr Babbitt, with help from many others, formed the Provincetown AIDS Support Group. And, with a growing need for additional information and education about AIDS, a second, more politically oriented group, the Provincetown Positive People with AIDS Coalition, was founded by a separate group in 1988 in hopes of empowering PWAs.

The Support Group

"The intent when we founded the Support Group was to offer someone with AIDS physical assistance," Miss Foley says. "We provide the PWAs and their families practical assistance to minimize the stress that everybody faces around a devastating illness like AIDS."

According to national projections by the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, 100,000 men will be diagnosed with AIDS by the end of June and over one million will be tested as HIV-positive, running the risk of becoming PWAs themselves. In Provincetown alone, there are roughly 30 PWAs being treated for AIDS-related illnesses.

"It's awesome. I've been in nursing 38 years and I've never seen anything like it, never will see anything like it again," emphasizes Miss Foley, a direct, caring woman who shows, by the tone of her voice, some of the weariness associated with fighting a disease that continues to take clients she has befriended.

While the Support Group provides education to its clients, it perhaps is more well-known for an extensive volunteer corps that provides round-the-clock care to PWAs.

"I can't educate you if you're sick and scared," the nurse explains. "First, let's take care of you and then make sure you take care of yourself."

As part of this caring, clients are reimbursed for non-traditional treatments such as massage, acupuncture and Chinese herbs. Presently, one client receives \$125 a month for such treatment. In the past, the Support Group has flown a PWA to Washington, D.C., and then to



Marian Roth of the Provincetown Positive People with AIDS Coalition.

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California to say goodbye to friends and family. Then, when he became very ill, the group flew the man's parents to Provincetown.

"We're a very caring group. We've developed plans to take care of a PWA's dog or plants or cat, whatever is in the patient's life, so they're in a position to focus on their health," Miss Foley says.

The Support Group presently has 50 active volunteers who work on a one-to-one basis with PWAs. To qualify, the volunteers must first undergo a 12-week course during which they are trained to help the PWAs understand the impact of AIDS and help them maintain control over their lives. Volunteers often will go shopping or help the PWA with household chores. Sometimes they simply may sit and watch a movie with the client.

According to Miss Foley, the Support Group receives about \$60,000 a year in donations and with a Barnstable Health and Environmental Department grant for \$91,000 was able to buy an office at 9496 Bradford Street and hire a three-member staff.

The Coalition

About a half-mile up, on the right side of Bradford

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