

HOME WHERE THE HEART IS: Center Creates Holiday Spirit for Homeless Youth

For many of us, fall and winter are times to gather with friends and loved ones to celebrate our traditions, whether those traditions include stuffing a turkey, trimming a tree, hitting the road for Palm Springs or navigating the ski slopes.

But for the approximately 10,000 homeless youth in Los Angeles County—an estimated 30 to 40 percent of whom are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender (GLBT)—the holiday season is much like the rest of the year—a time of loneliness, fear and the day-to-day struggle to survive.

The L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center's Youth Services program offers a different possibility for the young people it serves. The Jeff Griffith Youth Center, a day shelter in the heart of Hollywood, has provided a refuge to thousands of young GLBT people living on the streets. At the Jeff Griffith Center, youth receive two meals a day, hot showers, clean clothing, counseling and case management, HIV testing and education, and many other life-sustaining services. The newest offering is a Graduate Equivalency Diploma (GED) study program.



Above: Program Manager Lisa Phillips, left, with youth residents of the Center's Kruks-Tilsner Transitional Living Program

Right: K-T House residents sleep in homey four-bunk bedrooms, much like college dorm rooms.

For youth ages 18 to 23 who are ready for a more structured program, the Gay & Lesbian Center's 24-bed Kruks-Tilsner Transitional Living Program offers room and board, counseling, HIV prevention education, and training in such life skills as job interviews, money management, study skills and household chores. Youth live in homey, four-bunk dorm-style rooms, which they are encouraged to decorate. They eat meals together in a common dining room and take turns using one of three personal computers to do homework or polish resumes. Each is required to help with household chores, including meal preparation, clean-up and laundry, and all are required to attend school or work.

Upon completion of the 18-month program, or a shorter one specifically designed for an individual's needs, youth are prepared to live independently and to continue their employment or educational goals.

In addition to providing counseling and support, Center staff and volunteers also offer something that is, to many homeless youth, just as important—the opportunity to experience the family and community connections that so many have lost or have *(continued on inside back page)*

YOUTH SERVICES BY THE NUMBERS

- ▶ 8,400 client visits to Jeff Griffith Youth Center every year
- ▶ 70 residents of the Kruks-Tilsner Transitional Living Program per year
- ▶ 41,000 meals served to youth each year
- ▶ 864 gallons of milk consumed by K-T residents each year

PRESERVING ACCESS TO Rx DRUGS: A Community Call to Action

Michael, a middle-aged man living with HIV, no longer has the energy to jump through the many bureaucratic hoops to obtain the growth hormone drug he needs to prevent his dramatic weight loss, so he no longer tries. He has quickly lost a large percentage of his body fat.



Olga, a senior citizen with an irregular heart beat, has seen the numerous medicines she takes triple in price, so she has stopped taking some and orders the others online from Canada. Sometimes those arrive on time, sometimes they're late, and several times, Olga received the wrong prescriptions.

West Hollywood Mayor John Duran will moderate a forum on access to medications Nov. 30 at The Village.

Stories like these hypothetical ones have become all too common. Lack of access to life-saving prescription drugs has become a nightmare for millions of Americans. National healthcare programs are dramatically under-funded at local levels, forcing thousands to live with frightening uncertainty: Will I live long enough to endure the Medi-Cal red tape? Can I afford both rent and medication this month? Will my prescription from Canada arrive in time?

On Tuesday, Nov. 30, the L.A. Gay and Lesbian Center and Being Alive will co-host a public forum addressing these questions, in search of ways to lower the barriers that prevent patients from receiving needed medications. The forum will be held from 6:30 to 9 p.m. at the Renberg Theatre in the Center's Village at Ed Gould Plaza, 1125 N. McCadden Place, Hollywood.

The goal of the forum, *Preserving Access to Prescription Drugs—A Community Call to Action*, is to generate meaningful dialogue about access to prescription drugs necessary to people living with HIV and AIDS, cancer, heart disease and other illnesses.

West Hollywood Mayor John Duran will moderate the discussion, which will feature government officials, medical researchers, providers, healthcare advocates and patients.

"Residents of West Hollywood are not alone in their frustrations and fears today that they may not have access to the drugs they need tomorrow," Duran says. "The situation has reached crisis proportions."

Duran says that he suffered in the past from HIV-related wasting, but was fortunate enough to secure access to the drug needed to maintain his weight. "Thousands of others have not been as fortunate," Duran says. "We must preserve everyone's access to prescription drugs; anything less is simply not acceptable. Join us November 30 as we search for answers."

For more information about the forum, call 323-993-7623.

See At The Village Inside



From the CEO

The post-election scramble to explain the results has been infuriating. The media's presumption that "moral values" are synonymous, almost exclusively, with anti-gay sentiment is flatly wrong. Yes, it was a disheartening defeat to lose every anti-gay ballot measure. But the explanations are not as simple as some suggest.

Still, several lessons are perfectly clear. First, GLBT religious people—clergy and otherwise—and progressive religious allies must take a stronger, more vocal and visible stand on behalf of the "moral values" we support. Values of justice and freedom for everyone; values of fairness and love; values that are clearly superior to those of bigotry and discrimination. For too long, we have wrongly ceded the moral high ground to right-wing zealots. We can't afford to do it anymore.

Further, in spite of our disappointment, we cannot lose heart or give up. We must be brave. The key is to engage, not surrender. And there is good news. In exit polls, 61 percent of the voters said they supported either civil unions or same-sex marriage.

This is a dramatic shift from even one year ago. I know that we are tired of waiting for equality, yet I believe to the very core of my being that we will win in the long run. How long? Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said it best: "...however difficult the moment, however frustrating the hour, it will not be long, because truth crushed to earth will rise again. How long? Not long, because no lie can live forever. How long? Not long, because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

Lorri L. Jean

Group Therapy Offers Community, Support System

One of the fastest-growing programs at the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center is Mental Health Services. In fiscal year 2004, the program served 1,350 people for a total of 16,000 one-on-one counseling visits. Six health insurance plans now cover the Center's mental health services.

The program's most dramatic growth has been in the number of group therapy opportunities it offers. Therapy groups are now available to help people who are dealing with methamphetamine use, male-to-female and female-to-male gender transition issues, body image and eating disorders, sexual compulsivity and living with HIV. Also available are several groups for victims of domestic violence or partner abuse and, separately, one of the nation's few approved GLBT-specific court-mandated groups for batterers.

"In group therapy, clients get to see other people who are struggling with the same issues they are," said Joni Lavick, director of Mental Health Services for the Center. "Seeing how others are handling things versus how you are is a great reality check."

Gaetano Vaccaro, who with Lavick co-facilitates Relationships, Intimacy and Sexual Compulsivity groups at the Center, said group therapy is critically important in helping clients with all types of addictions. "Addictions are a distorted relationship with a substance or a behavior that replaces real relationships with people," Vaccaro said. "Group therapy allows addicts to learn to cope with their own anxiety and interact with others without shrinking into back their own internal world. Addictions are relational; they originate in relationships, and they can only be healed in relationships."

Counselor Amy Wertheimer said one advantage of group therapy is that it helps clients to realize they are not alone in their struggle. She is currently seeking participants in a group for gay men who experience distress about any of three areas related to body image: (1) those who consider themselves too heavy or too thin; (2) those who compulsively eat too much or too little; and (3) those who exercise excessively or not at all. Observations from the group, which is free to clients, will be part of a research study.

"It's very comforting to hear that you are not the only one," Wertheimer said. "If you get two guys in a group, and one is working out all the time and is very buff, but he's depressed and feeling it's never enough, and another guy is out of shape and depressed and anxious about that, they start to realize that they have very similar attitudes. And they begin to realize that it's not how their body looks on the outside; it's work they have to do inside." *For more information about the body image group, call Amy Wertheimer at 323-860-5811.*

Mental Health Services also currently has openings in groups for methamphetamine use, sexual compulsivity, and a psychotherapy group for HIV+ individuals. *For more information, contact Mental Health Services at 323-993-7669.*



Director of Mental Health Services Joni Lavick

Legal Services Offers Couples Answers as AB 205 Deadline Approaches



Attorney Diane Abbitt will present an AB 205 workshop Dec. 7 at The Village.

January 1, 2005, will mark a historic change in the lives of thousands of California same-sex couples. That's the day when AB 205, the Domestic Partner Rights and Responsibilities Act of 2003, will take effect. Even couples who registered as domestic partners prior to that date will be subject to the provisions of the new law, many of them dramatic and far-reaching, such as partner inheritance rights, parental rights and responsibilities, and mutual obligation for debt.

In an attempt to answer questions and address concerns about AB 205, the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center's Legal Services Department will present a workshop on estate planning and related domestic partnership legal issues, featuring expert GLBT family law attorney Diane Abbitt. Abbitt is president of Equality California, the sponsoring organization of AB 205, and a regular Legal Services volunteer. Abbitt's presentation will address the question of whether, under the strengthened provisions of AB 205, couples still need estate planning tools such as wills and trusts.

The workshop will be held on Tuesday, Dec. 7, at 6:30 p.m. at the Center's Renberg Theatre, The Village at Ed Gould Plaza, 1125 N. McCadden Place, Hollywood.

The free one-hour workshop will be followed by brief one-on-one consultations with an attorney on a first-come, first-served basis. A notary public also will be available to notarize domestic partnership applications at a cost of \$10. There also will be a \$10 fee for a one-on-one legal consultation, waived for those who live, work or own a business in West Hollywood. No one will be turned away for lack of funds.

"As the effective date of AB 205 approaches, it is essential that all members of our community be aware of the drastic changes in rights and responsibilities for California domestic partners," said Roger Coggan, the Center's director of Legal Services. "Some couples may decide to dissolve their domestic partnerships as a result of AB 205; others may decide that it is essential to register. But we must be sure that everyone in our community has access to the information they need to make the best possible decisions for themselves and their families."

For more information about the Dec. 7 workshop, contact Legal Services at 323-993-7670.

Home Where the Heart Is (continued from front cover)

never known. The impact of that experience is never more evident than during the holiday season.

"We try to make it as fun and memorable as we can, especially for those who haven't had a home to celebrate in," says Dave Lopez, residence manager of the Kruks-Tilsner program's "K-T House."

At the Jeff Griffith Youth Center, local Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) members prepare and serve a Thanksgiving feast for about 100 youth, complete with all the trimmings. This year, Du Tel Telecom of North Hollywood and Corporate American Aviation of West Hollywood will provide funding for the meal.



Youth Services staff, from left, Lance Laforteza, Gary Glickman, Director Dylan Gailey, Lisa Phillips and Dave Lopez

"The kids really appreciate it," says Mark Tomey, a West Hollywood psychotherapist and PFLAG member who helps organize the Thanksgiving meal. "They say it's the best meal they've had all year."

In December, Out at Warner Bros., a group of GLBT employees of the film studio, will serve a holiday meal at the Jeff Griffith Center. In addition to the party, each youth will receive a new backpack filled with such necessities as toiletries, McDonald's gift certificates and movie tickets.

Lopez says holidays at the Jeff Griffith Center are especially moving for staff and volunteers. "It's amazing, because you know that these youth are living on the street," he says. "It's very touching; you see the gratitude in their faces, that someone cared enough about them to do this for them."

At K-T House, staff and residents work together to create homelike holiday celebrations.

About two weeks before Christmas, residents spend an evening trimming their own holiday tree. "It's their tree, their house," Lopez says.

On the evening of the 24th, K-T residents and staff share a holiday dinner, which the youth also help to prepare. After dinner, the youth receive gifts; socks, underwear, toiletries, T-shirts and stocking-stuffers. Many years, anonymous "angels" provide unexpected gifts; last year, thanks to one such angel, each youth received a \$100 certificate for shopping at the Hollywood and Highland retail complex. Staff also try to provide one special gift that each youth really wants.

"I have had clients say to me, 'This is the best Christmas I have ever had,'" Lopez says. "They open their gifts and come show staff, 'Look what I got!' When we personalize their gifts, it's like the little kid and Santa Claus."

Sadly, recent budget cuts have had an impact on programs for the Center's youth clients. In 2004, an annual \$200,000 federal grant that had been the mainstay of the Kruks-Tilsner Transitional Living Program for more than 10 years was not renewed.

"Due to the loss of funding we lost a full-time dietary technician who prepared lunch and dinner five days a week," says K-T Program Manager Lisa Phillips. "Currently house staff (youth advocates) and the residential supervisor are preparing meals for the clients. We also lost one mental health therapist and had to eliminate several Relief Youth Advocate positions, which has resulted in less staff coverage in the residence."

Still, Center staff are determined not to allow funding cuts to impact holiday spirit. According to one former client, the best memories come from being part of a home and community during the holidays. "Jack," a recent graduate of the K-T program who is now pursuing a history and political science double major at UCLA, has good memories of helping to prepare last year's holiday dinner and celebrating with the staff and residents.

"It brought about a great feeling of community," he recalls. "People tried to create a lot of cheer. I think that was meaningful, all sitting together and stuff."

For more information about Youth Services programs and how you can support them, contact Dave Lopez at 323-993-7467.

Allstate Helps Youth Prepare for Sound Financial Future

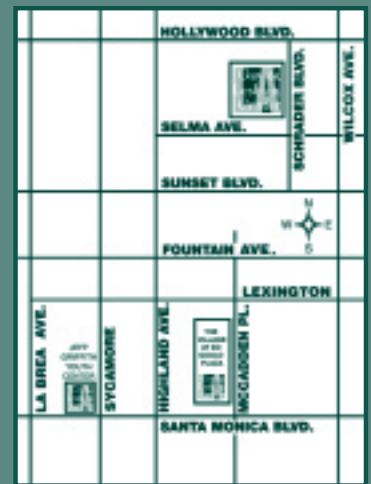


Allstate exclusive agent Michael Pohl presents Youth Services Director Dylan Gailey, left, and CEO Lorri L. Jean with a "big check" for \$15,000.

Because learning how to manage personal finances is one of the most valuable skills a youth can learn, Allstate Insurance has generously offered to conduct a series of four free personal finance seminars aimed at helping the youth residents of the Center's Kruks-Tilsner Transitional Living Program begin their new lives with good money-management skills.

The seminars, conducted by Allstate exclusive agent Michael Pohl, will be a key part of the program's life-skills curriculum. "If we want youth to become more successful and financially prepared in the future, we've got to give them the tools to get there now," said Pohl. "Allstate Insurance is pleased to partner with the Gay & Lesbian Center in its continued efforts to change the lives of young people and empower them to live their lives to their fullest."

Allstate also made a \$15,000 cash contribution to the Youth Services Department.



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323-993-7400

The Village at Ed Gould Plaza
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Health & Mental Health Services
Jeffrey Goodman
Special Care Clinic
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Los Angeles, CA 90028
323-993-7500

Jeff Griffith Youth Center
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Los Angeles, CA 90038
323-993-7501

The Spot
745 N. San Vicente Boulevard
West Hollywood, CA 90069
323-993-7440

California AIDS Clearinghouse
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