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Reaching Out to Communities to “Stop AIDS: Keep the Promise”

ATLANTIC AND CUMBERLAND COUNTIES, NJ—The international theme for World AIDS Day this year was “Stop AIDS: Keep the Promise” and the South Jersey AIDS Alliance (SJAA) has made the commitment to do just that.

In celebration of World AIDS Day, December 1st, SJAA invited communities to open houses in Vineland on November 29th and Bridgeton and Atlantic City on November 30th. Nearly 200 people gathered in all to enjoy a generous and nutritious luncheon, bow their heads for a moment of silence to remember those who died this past year from AIDS and learn about the organization’s essential support and prevention programs and services.

SJAA’s executive director, Keith Egan, “We are doing everything we can do to stop HIV. As our mission states, ‘We are a caring, compassionate organization dedicated to the fight against HIV/AIDS’ and to that end one of the things we have done is to increase our support services for clients with all of our efforts directed to insuring that they receive medical care and multi-drug therapies and remain adherent to both. We also provide an evidence-based prevention program to keep people at risk from contracting HIV.”

Cathy Fields, SJAA’s Cumberland County director who heads the Vineland center believes, “The most important thing that our organization provides is helping to keep people alive during intervention—holding their hands to take the steps needed to reach their goals.”

Bridgeton’s Prevention House co-supervisor Nicole King agrees, “...getting directly involved with positive clients to facilitate their needs—medical, financial and social—and improving their quality of life.” King believes that to stop AIDS, education and commitment to prevention and case management are key.

On the back wall of the Bright Horizon’s large upstairs classroom, where the open house took place, hung a white paper banner that captured the thoughts and feelings of clients and visitors written in red—the color of the ribbons symbolizing. Laia Mortimore, Atlantic County Prevention Supervisor stated, “The one most important thing we do is to keep our promise that our services will be here for our clients.”

According to UNAIDS estimates, there are now 33.2 million people living with HIV, including 2.5 million children. During 2007 some 2.5 million people became newly infected with the virus.

In the United States there are an estimated 1,039,000 to 1,185,000 HIV-positive individuals and approximately 40,000 new infections each year.

And the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services reports that New Jersey has the highest estimated proportion of women living with AIDS and the third largest proportion of children living with HIV/AIDS.

The first World AIDS Day took place in December of 1988 after a summit of health ministers realized that a united global effort was needed to halt the spread of HIV and AIDS. World AIDS Day is an opportunity for organizations throughout the world to highlight the HIV pandemic in order to raise awareness and bring about change. It is a reminder that there are many things still to be done to ‘Stop AIDS: Keep the Promise.’

SJAA's programs and services span 1,300 square miles in three counties—Cumberland, Cape May and Atlantic—and serve around 2500 people annually. To learn more about SJAA's programs and services, please go to its website at www.southjerseyaidsalliance.org or call 800-281-AIDS.

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