

THE *a*LLIANCE

Spring 2021

Your Connection to the Alliance for Positive Health

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LETTER FROM

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

BILL FARAGON



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Dear Friends,

The last year has been difficult as we have watched our friends, family, and community struggle through an unprecedented pandemic. When COVID-19 began its spread, the Alliance for Positive Health immediately began implementing health and safety protocols for our clients and staff. Over a year later, we continue to make necessary operational adjustments to continue our work as safely as possible. Our agency continues to maintain its commitment to our clients and staff despite the challenges we have faced. I could not be prouder of our dedicated staff, who have worked tirelessly to provide essential services to those in need.

Through the generosity of our donors and supporters like you, we have been able to continue serving thousands of vulnerable individuals and their families despite the challenges COVID-19 has presented. You have helped us serve as a lifeline to people across Northeastern New York as we provide them with food pantry bags, care management, telehealth services, housing assistance, health insurance access, and so much more. Through donations and support of our events, you have made a substantial impact on the important work we do.

Your compassion and generosity over the past year has allowed us to continue our mission through the most troubling of times. While we still face challenges to come, it is a comfort to know we have your support. On behalf of our staff, board, and the clients we serve, thank you!

Sincerely,



Bill Faragon
Executive Director

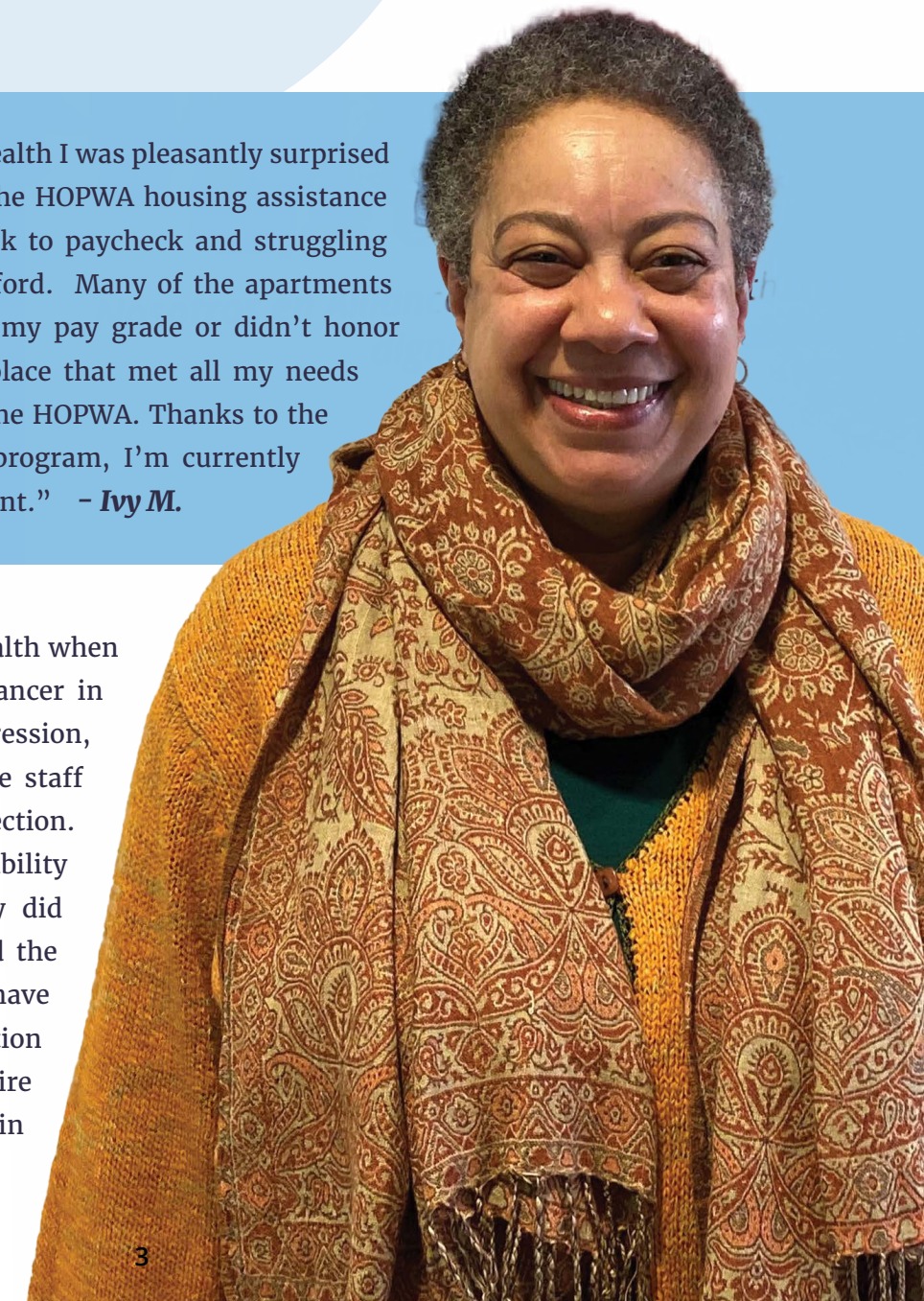
CLIENT TESTIMONIALS

“I took a peer facilitator class about HIV and STDs offered by the Alliance for Positive Health in Albany, NY. We had to do a presentation at the end of the class. One of the topics we could pick to talk about that stood out brighter than the North Star to me was a personal story. I told the teacher I’ll do treatment because I self-carry my medication [some inmates must stand in line to get their therapy]. We had an 8–10 minute window to speak. As I was speaking, I had charts about the medication, what each drug class does. I circled the pills on the chart that I was currently on and showed them my pill box. Through my presentation I got really into it. I got choked up a bit. I wound up speaking for over 20 minutes, but what got me the most was this one guy who said, “I would like to shake your hand” and he gave me a hug. I just try to show people what HIV is today and what it isn’t. I’m just so happy to have people I can actually talk to about this and get the most current information out there. The Alliance for Positive Health gave me a space to talk about my experience and work with others to reduce stigma.”

– **Anthony D.**

“When I enrolled at the Alliance for Positive Health I was pleasantly surprised when I was informed that I was eligible for the HOPWA housing assistance program. At that time, I was living paycheck to paycheck and struggling to find a suitable living space that I could afford. Many of the apartments I looked at were not up to code, way above my pay grade or didn’t honor housing subsidies. When I finally found a place that met all my needs the landlord was more than happy to accept the HOPWA. Thanks to the great staff at the Alliance and the HOPWA program, I’m currently living in a safe, secure, stress-free environment.” – **Ivy M.**

“I registered with the Alliance for Positive Health when my partner of 45 years died of pancreatic cancer in 2016. I had a problem coping with depression, anxiety and grieving, and I was suicidal. The staff counseled me and pointed me in the right direction. A few workers would come to check on my stability regularly and stay for an hour or so. They did this for me for a few months until I reached the maximum extension. I don’t drive and don’t have a car, so they offered me medical transportation services. I’ve been using that ever since. I admire the Alliance for their efforts to help people in need.” – **Juvenal V.**



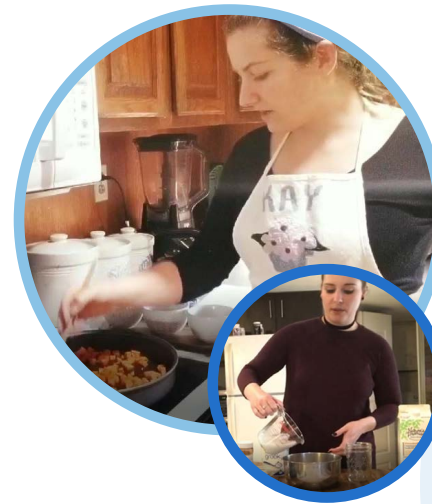
NAVIGATING A PANDEMIC

Food4Life Videos

While 2020 proved to be an unprecedented year of uncertainty, the Alliance for Positive Health has remained dedicated to thousands of clients across Northeastern New York. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we have found new and creative ways to adapt our vital program services that allow these vulnerable individuals to be cared for in a safe manner. Despite the unexpected barriers we continue to face, our staff has maintained their unwavering commitment to provide these clients with the care and support they need. Here are some of the highlights of what our team has been doing to ensure the health and wellbeing of people in our local communities.

Food Pantry Bags

Staff in all five of our offices have kept busy throughout the COVID-19 pandemic ensuring that our clients have access to food. With a lot of hard work and determination, they have been able to secure thousands of food pantry bags. Countless hours have been spent picking up items, packing bags, coordinating orders, and making deliveries. In addition to the food pantry bags, staff were also able to obtain grocery store food vouchers for clients to ensure they did not go hungry during difficult times.



When the coronavirus began its rapid spread, the Food4Life team ceased their weekly face-to-face nutritional health and cooking classes. Fortunately, staff overcame this obstacle by creating a series of videos that clients could watch to continue their education. Each week, pantry bags with food ingredients were dropped off by the Food4Life team. Clients were then able to watch the step-by-step videos on the Alliance YouTube page and follow along with staff to create healthy and delicious meals including Shepherd's Pie, Healthy Taco Casserole, and Turkey Meatballs.

COVID-19 Task Force

Last spring, a COVID-19 Task Force was formed in an effort to ensure the safety of our clients and staff as we navigated this new pandemic. The group developed strategies to keep our offices in compliance with New York State health guidelines. Social distancing floor decals were installed, masks were procured, and protocols were enforced to create a safe environment for those in the office. The COVID-19 Task Force continues to keep staff up to date and provide guidelines based on the latest developments from the NYS Department of Health.



Client Advisory Board

Conducted by a diverse committee of Alliance staff, Client Advisory Board (CAB) meetings provide a space for current and former clients to provide constructive feedback about the services they receive from the agency and address programmatic issues which affect their lives. The statewide pandemic shutdown occurred just weeks before the first CAB meeting of 2020 was to be held, putting the status of the traditional in-person forum in doubt. The CAB committee elected to move these essential meetings online through Zoom Telehealth. Despite changing the meeting format, attendance and client participation began to increase. Virtual groups became an easier way to connect with these clients, eliminating the need for travel arrangements and providing more confidentiality if desired. Over the summer, the CAB committee strategized new ideas to incorporate meetings with a more targeted subject focus including People of Color, COVID-19 impact, and Substance Use. The Zoom CAB meetings have become a great way to obtain the feedback the Alliance for Positive Health needs to assess its program services.

Virtual Support

At the start of the pandemic, most existing education and support groups moved virtual. The **HIV & Aging** support group was formed at the start of the pandemic for all members of the community who are HIV+ and 45 years or older. The group is presented in a health education format including a brief presentation on a variety of topics including mental health, managing finances, dating and relationships, stigma, and more. Participants are able to attend sessions of their choice and share personal experiences and concerns related to that week's topic. The **HIV & Aging** group was one of the most successful virtual groups of 2020.

Towards the end of the year **Making HERstory**, a virtual group for women was created. Representing the diversity of women in the local community, this group covers topics including motherhood, family support, trauma & coping, and LGBTQ+. Sessions were introduced in December 2020 and continue through 2021.

Harm Reduction Services

Our Harm Reduction team was busier than ever throughout 2020. With over 600 individuals enrolled in the Syringe Exchange Program, services were shifted to delivery throughout six counties. With overdose reports increasing throughout the COVID-19 crisis, staff traveled hundreds of miles to provide Narcan, sterile syringes, and harm reduction supplies to clients in need. Our Drug User Health Hub remained active as well, providing Telemedicine services to individuals. Throughout the crisis, no client has gone without a script.



Testing

The Alliance HIV and STI Testing Program recently discovered that sexually transmitted infection (STI) rates have doubled since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the dramatic rise and an increased risk of HIV, a new drug-resistant strain of gonorrhea has emerged. While Alliance for Positive Health offices are mostly closed, free and confidential HIV, STI, and hepatitis C testing services has remained and will continue to remain available by appointment only. Testing staff continue to prioritize the safety of our clients.



Featured SPOT

RHEANNON CROY

How long have you worked at the Alliance for Positive Health and what is your current role?

I have been with the agency for 3 years and currently work at the Plattsburgh office as the Assistant Director of Program Services. I oversee the Opioid Overdose Prevention Program, Syringe Exchange Program, Expanded Syringe Access Program, Hepatitis C Navigation Program, and the Drug User Health Hub.

What about working for a non-profit organization appealed to you?

For me, working for a non-profit organization seemed like an opportunity to be a part of something that will profoundly impact society and the community I live in. Our agency has so many programs and serves such a diverse population of people. I also thought it would be a good chance to meet new people from various backgrounds, with the hope of becoming a more well rounded professional.

What does a typical day at work entail?

A typical day for me is usually never the same—which I love. We have participants that come in for services throughout the day to access Syringe Exchange services, HIV & HCV testing, Buprenorphine services, and support to treat their hepatitis C. I supervise five employees who run the Harm Reduction programming, four of which work out of the plattsburgh office and the other in Glens Falls. A large portion of what I try to do is provide them with the support they need to best do their jobs. Our catchment area covers six counties in Northeastern New York, in which I sit on multiple county-side coalitions. There is a lot of travel involved for things like that.

What do you like most about your job or what aspect of your role do you enjoy the most?

I always say that I look at the staff I supervise as my clients. I love to teach them and support them to grow as professionals. It is really rewarding to watch them become more confident in their roles and connect with our participants. I truly love the type of work we are doing as well.

What do you find most challenging?

The most challenging thing for me is when we have to deal with push-back from people or areas that still carry stigma around Harm Reduction. It has gotten better, but so many people still do not understand addiction and continue to judge individuals with Substance Use Disorder as well as the types of services we provide.

What is your proudest moment at the agency?

Over the last two years, the Harm Reduction Program has grown quite quickly. I am very proud of the team that I have been able to build and all the new program services they are providing to the communities we serve. Most recently, we opened a Buprenorphine bridge clinic and began prescribing life-saving medication to our participants. I think I am most proud of how hard I have worked to get this program off the ground.

What advice would you give to someone considering a role as a Program Manager?

I would advise them to go into the role with an open mind and a willingness to learn as you go. There is so much you can learn from people who have experience supervising staff, so leaning on others in leadership is helpful. You can also learn a lot from the staff you supervise if you remain humble and teachable. That is how you grow as a team.

What three words would you use to describe yourself?

Solution-oriented, honest, and grateful.

What is your favorite thing to do outside of work?

Practicing and teaching yoga.

What other hobbies do you have?

Dancing and spending time with my husband and children.

Where did you grow up and what was it that drew you to this area?

I have lived my whole life in Plattsburgh, NY.

What is something about yourself that people would be surprised to learn?

I am a tap dancer.

DEVELOPMENT UPDATES

Dining Out For Life®

On April 30, 2020, the 17th Annual Dining Out For Life® event raised thousands of dollars for our program services for people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS. While unable to physically dine at restaurants, people across Northeastern New York provided support by ordering takeout, delivery, and purchasing gift cards from their favorite local restaurants. With the pandemic continuing to affect the lives of people across the country, Dining Out For Life® in 2021 will be pushed to Thursday, June 10th. The later date should provide for more outdoor dining opportunities while takeout, delivery, and gift card purchases will still be encouraged. Stay tuned for more information.



Columbia~Greene Garden Party

The 2020 Columbia~Greene Garden Party virtual event launched on September 5th. In this unique virtual experience, a variety of garden designers from across the Hudson Valley provided an exclusive look at their beautiful properties. Filming was completed over the summer with social distancing guidelines in place. The virtual event also included cooking demonstrations from Simons Catering as well as wine tastings. Wine baskets for Honorary Committee members were made available to enjoy from the comfort of their own home. We also debuted our very first virtual silent auction, which proved to be a success.



BOO-jolais Ball

The premier Halloween event of the Capital Region took on a virtual format on Friday, October 30th. The 2020 BOO-jolais Virtual Event presented by Gilead Sciences combined all of the event's signature elements in a fun and interactive format. Through a "Secret Agent" theme, guests were invited on a "mission" to raise funds to help the Alliance for Positive Health's program services. Unlike the Garden Party's pre-filmed content, BOO-jolais was a live virtual experience, featuring a costume contest, trivia competition, online auction, and delicious food and drink packages provided by local restaurants, caterers, and bakeries. While we don't know what pandemic obstacles we may have to overcome in 2021, we will continue to make the BOO-jolais Ball a fun and memorable evening no matter what!

For the most up to date information Alliance for Positive Health's events, follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram or visit www.allianceforpositivehealth.org

DONOR ADVISED FUNDS

Helping your Donations Do More for You and the Charities You Care About

Charitable giving is among the highest of human aspirations, woven into the fabric of organizations, countries and societies around the world. While many individuals and families have a deep commitment to philanthropy, charitable giving is not limited to those with significant wealth. Donor advised funds are among the easiest and most tax-advantaged ways to give to charity for donors across the spectrum of wealth.

A Donor Advised Fund can help you and your family:

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