As I rounded the corner at the U.S. Conference on AIDS in D.C. in August, I was suddenly overwhelmed by the message on an enormous AIDS Memorial Quilt panel before me.

It read, “NO MORE NAMES.”

It had been a long time since I was face-to-face with a Quilt panel, and I was reminded of the beautiful panels RAIN staff and volunteers created to honor our clients. In 1996, I saw the Quilt’s full patchwork laid on The National Mall, covering the distance from the Lincoln Memorial to the Washington Monument. Organizers noted that even the Mall’s two-mile stretch of grass would no longer be large enough to contain the ever-expanding number of panels representing individuals lost to AIDS.

If RAIN volunteers were still creating panels, they would have sewn just 15 in the last two years. Access, poverty and stigma still affect the Southern United States at a greater proportion than the rest of the country, but RAIN succeeds every day at clearing barriers to care for youth, adults and seniors living with HIV.
STIGMA is an underlying scourge that hinders people living with HIV from receiving the social support they need. It also inhibits individuals and communities in general from lending a caring hand.

From a mental health perspective, stigma can be crippling. It increases anxiety and symptom of depression, especially when it is related to disclosing one's status to others. People living with HIV feel increased anxiety about disclosing their status because they worry about how they will be treated and are concerned that they will be rejected. For newly diagnosed individuals, life after diagnosis can be very hard. Self-acceptance is a first step and is oftentimes the hardest to accomplish, especially when coupled with the concern that others may not also accept the diagnosis. They fear being called “dirty” or “a slut”.

**THIS FEAR IS BOTH PERCEIVED AND BASED IN REALITY.**

Stigma is perpetuated by ignorance; a lack of knowledge about HIV. This is especially pertinent when a person living with HIV is in an intimate relationship. Individuals living with HIV say that loved ones and friends “stop listening immediately after hearing three little letters … H – I – V”. Because of this, they are not only burdened with their own personal struggle, but also with the weight of educating others. People living with HIV want to share information that will assuage fear. But they worry that they don't have all of the right answers or complete knowledge to help another overcome their fear. This is complicated by the fact that the language around HIV and AIDS is not well known. Terms like antiretroviral therapy (or ART) and viral suppression or the difference between HIV and AIDS are not widely understood.

Decades of perpetual stigma many times affects the responses that are given to those who are sharing their HIV status with others. That fear is so prevalent that people are unwilling to listen and learn about HIV is a stinging commentary on our society. And so stigma persists. Rooted in ignorance, stigma persists.

It’s time to stand against stigma. Educate yourself and share your knowledge with others.
MEET BRAD PLATT & STEVE CROOK

LETTING YOUR PASSION FOR RAIN LIVE ON.

Brad Platt and Steve Crook have been long-time, active supporters of RAIN. And it all started with one simple action.

Brad was starting a new job in Charlotte and was looking for ways to get involved in something meaningful, engage at the workplace, and meet people. While walking down Church Street, he noticed a sign in the downstairs window at First United Methodist Church (the RAIN offices, at that time) recruiting businesses to develop AIDS Walk teams. Brad signed up a team at his new workplace. They packed a picnic and came out to the Great Aunt Stella Center for the event.

While hanging out on the lawn at the event, Debbie Warren came over to the group, introduced herself and thanked them for coming. Brad thought it was nice that Debbie would take the time to speak to each group. Shortly thereafter, he received a handwritten thank you note from Debbie, which he has kept to this day. Brad was very impressed with this personal attention and wanted to learn more about RAIN. He soon began volunteering and since, has served in leadership positions for the AIDS Walk, Gay Bingo and on the Board of Directors.

Brad and Steve are not only regular volunteers and donors of RAIN, but also planned givers. They took their estate planning decisions very seriously, wanted to support organizations that they “believed in” and trusted “to do the right thing” with their gifts. Brad and Steve value small, local organizations that are flexible in meeting area needs. Brad said that, in deciding to make a planned gift to RAIN, they know that “no matter what happens with HIV, RAIN will always meet needs in the community”.

Brad and Steve have decided to leave RAIN a percentage of their estate. “It makes you feel good to know that after we’re gone, we will be remembered” says Brad. We like that RAIN’s work “grows out of compassion and love.”

You can also make a lasting impact on people living with HIV by making a Planned Gift to RAIN. If you would like to discuss planned giving options, please contact Joyce Brooks at 704-973-9819 or j.brooks@carolinairain.org

SAVE THE DATE
WORLD AIDS DAY LUNCHEON 2017

Celebrating 25 Years of Transforming Lives

Thursday, November 30, 2017
11:30am—1:00pm

Hilton Charlotte Center City
222 East 3rd Street, Charlotte
The Empowering Youth Program (EPY) was founded by Chelsea Gulden and Jaysen Foreman, both current leaders at RAIN. Both diagnosed with HIV as youth, Chelsea and Jaysen then developed a peer based, youth centric program that ensures that someone understands them.

Over 1,000 youth ages 13 to 24 have been served over the last 11 years; 112 in 2016 alone. EPY is highly respected for effectively engaging youth in medical care, assisting with transitioning from pediatric to adult care, and providing psychosocial support. Although Chelsea and Jaysen serve in new positions at RAIN, they still mentor and guide the current Peer Navigators, one of which is an EPY graduate.

Mecklenburg County had the most cases of HIV of any area in NC with 5,382 at last reported count (12/31/2015). Of these, 4% or 225 are youth between the ages of 13 & 24 year old. Mecklenburg County also had the largest number of new diagnoses in 2015 with 289. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) states that 1 in 5 new HIV infections occur in people younger than 25. When applied to our area, that would mean that 45 of the new diagnoses were among youth between the age of 13 and 24 in a single year in Mecklenburg County. The CDC also notes that there are significant gaps in care for youth living with HIV which ultimately lead to poor health outcomes.

The Committee on Pediatric AIDS (CPA) notes that youth typically transition from pediatric care into adult care before the age of 25. Moving to adult care can create many barriers for youth including: concerns over confidentiality; being overwhelmed by the adult care system and nervous about asking for assistance; uncertainty about healthcare decisions; and low health literacy – thus making them vulnerable to dropping out of care.

RAIN’s EPY program uses Peer Navigators – young adults living with HIV - to provide services, serve as mentors, and bridge the gap between pediatric and adult care. EPY is the only dedicated program serving youth living with HIV in the Charlotte / Mecklenburg region. For the past 11 years, EPY has managed relationships between the pediatric and adult clinical care facilities, other youth organizations, and social service agencies to ensure clients have the highest quality of care possible. Peer Navigators provide referrals for linkage to care, housing, food, substance abuse, and other necessities. RAIN has on-site mental health counseling and social support opportunities through youth-only support groups.
MEET
CHRISTOPHER JONES
AKA BARBARA BURNING BUSH

RAIN: Of all the wonderful nonprofits there are in Charlotte, why do you choose to volunteer your time with RAIN?

CJ: The leadership at RAIN is phenomenal. I have known Debbie Warren and Nathan Smith a long time and have total confidence in the leadership and direction RAIN is going. I appreciate the direct impact RAIN has in Charlotte and like seeing the immediate results of the work in the community.

RAIN: What benefit do you, personally, gain from volunteering at RAIN?

CJ: I receive personal satisfaction from volunteering with Gay Bingo. It is so wonderful to see the community at large come out to have fun and to get connected to RAIN through the event. I am pleased to help raise money for RAIN. I am amazed that folks will buy raffle tickets and support BVD's and the Who Wants to be a Diva challenge even after purchasing an admission ticket. The total outpouring of support for RAIN is thrilling and I’m proud to be a part of it.

RAIN: What would be your one minute elevator speech on why others should volunteer with RAIN?

CJ: I truly believe that RAIN has a good, well-defined direction. They have a strong dedication to their mission and the ability to grow and change with the times, expanding their outreach to other groups when needed. They know what to do and where they are going.

MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT & CEO
Continued from page 1

This fall, RAIN celebrates 25 years of care and advocacy for people living with HIV. Our work is still about supporting people to live healthy lives with respect and dignity. The stigma of HIV can be overwhelming, and more often than not, the daily challenges of poverty and access are insurmountable. These issues, discussed in detail in the recent Charlotte-Mecklenburg Opportunity Task Force Report, impact our clients deeply.

The good news is that if we can help overcome the barriers that keep individuals from accessing and staying in treatment, we have the medical tools to end AIDS.

Research validates U=U: HIV treatment that leads to viral suppression prevents transmission of the virus. Undetectable = Untransmittable.

Every day, RAIN’s staff and volunteers work to create a world where there are “NO MORE NAMES.” Thank you for your role in supporting us as we care for each and every individual name who comes to us for support.

May each be healed, may each be comforted, and may each be loved. - Debbie Warren
UPCOMING EVENTS

OCTOBER 11
RAIN Volunteer Orientation
Children & Family Services Center, Room 376, 6:00pm,
Info: s.burleon@carolinarain.org

RAIN Volunteer Orientation
Children & Family Services Center, Room 376, 6:00pm,
Info: s.burleon@carolinarain.org

NOVEMBER 11
Phantom of the Bingo
Grady Cole Center, 301 N. Kings Drive, Charlotte, 7:30pm
gaybingocharlotte.org

OCTOBER 14
San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus
+ Oakland Interfaith Gospel Choir
Interfaith Worship Service
First United Methodist Church, 11:00am
Free and open to the public

NOVEMBER 30
RAIN’s World AIDS Day Luncheon
Celebrating 25 Years of Transforming Lives. Hilton Charlotte Center City, 11:30am
Info: j.brooks@carolinarain.org

OCTOBER 14
Lavender Pen Tour Concert
Oven Auditorium, 7:30pm

DECEMBER 13
RAIN Volunteer Orientation
Children & Family Services Center, Room 376, 6:00pm
Info: s.burleon@carolinarain.org

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

PATRICK HEGE, Community Leader | CHAIR
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Make an investment in RAIN’s services at carolinarain.org/give