

Give the People Light and they will find their own way.

The Wisconsin Light

Our 250th
Issue

ARCW Needle Exchange Program Ranked Second Best in the Nation

Milwaukee— The AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin (ARCW) was awarded a \$25,000 grant provided by the George Williams Fund of the Tides Foundation, San Francisco, Calif., for operation of its 1998 needle exchange program in Milwaukee and Racine.

ARCW ranked second out of more than 60 grant applicants nationwide for its successful needle exchange program LIFEPOINT by a committee of national needle exchange experts. ARCW's needle exchange program ranked second best in the country because of its harm reduction philosophy and its comprehensive, non-judgmental approach to working with injection drug users, their spouses and/or sex partners, a group increasingly at high risk for contracting HIV disease.

"We are proud that in Milwaukee we operate one of the finest needle exchange programs in the country," said Doug Nelson, ARCW executive director. "This grant not only recognizes ARCW's proven track record in this area, but it enables us to reach more people at risk for HIV and save more lives."

"The Tides Foundation grant along with the recent selection of ARCW to receive a \$103,000 needle exchange grant from the Wisconsin AIDS Fund will help ARCW expand programming and staff," said Nelson.

In 1997, through five prevention outreach workers, ARCW exchanged over 300,000 clean needles in Milwaukee and Racine. ARCW also referred 191 drug users into its AODA treatment program through its needle exchange program.

Nelson added ARCW will continue advocating for financial support from local, state and federal governments which have historically prohibited use of government funding for the successful needle exchange program.

Nation's Leading LGBT Groups Planning March on Washington in 2000

Washington, DC— The nation's largest Gay and Lesbian political organization and the nation's largest Gay faith-based movement announced plans on February 4th to sponsor a march on Washington in the spring of the year 2000. The event will be produced by veteran march organizer Robin Tyler who brought the organizations together to formulate planning.

The two groups are the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC). Spokespeople for HRC and MCC said that they are exploring dates in spring 2000 for the "Millennium March on Washington for Equal Rights."

Several prominent organizations have signed on as endorsers, including the National Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum, the National Latino/a Lesbian and Gay Organization, the National Center for Lesbian Rights, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, the National Youth Advocacy Coalition, Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund.

Representatives from these organizations and others will be sought to participate on an organizing committee which will help facilitate the organization and presentation of the event.

"This march will set a new tone for a new century," said Elizabeth Birch, executive director of the Human Rights Campaign. "Full equality under the law will be our achievement in the new millennium."

Bill To Limit Domestic Partner Benefits Introduced In Wisconsin Hearing Scheduled - 11:00 A.M., February 19, At State Capitol

A Wisconsin Light Report
By Bill Meunier

Madison— A legislative hearing has been scheduled on a proposal sponsored by State Representative Stephen Nass (R-

Gov. Thompson Chosen to Receive ARCW's Highest Award at Make A Promise Benefit

Milwaukee — The 12th annual Make A Promise dinner & auction Sterling Rose Award and Red Rose Award recipients have been announced.

These Community Leadership Awards are annual awards presented by the AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin (ARCW) to a person, organization or company for outstanding leadership and meritorious service to the community in response to the AIDS epidemic. There will be four awards presented at ARCW's Make A Promise fund raiser on Saturday, March 21.

The Sterling Rose Award, ARCW's highest Community Leadership Award will be presented to Governor Tommy G. Thompson. Gov. Thompson's leadership

Statewide AIDS Hotline Established at ARCW for Teens

Milwaukee — Carrie Staller, 18, a student at Nicolet High School, has been answering phones on the AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin's (ARCW) Wisconsin AIDSline during its teen hours since this new initiative began in July.

She and other teens working on the Wisconsin AIDSline want their peers to ask any questions about AIDS that they may have and encourage teens not to put themselves at risk of contracting HIV. All calls are anonymous.

"I think that it's important that teens volunteer, give something back to the community and prepare to take our positions in society," said Staller. "We are the new generation."

"Together, we will solidify the gains we've made over the past decades and call upon our nation to live out its promise of liberty and justice for all," said the Rev. Troy Perry, founder of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. "This march will set the pace for social justice and human rights."

The organizations are working closely with Robin Tyler to produce the event. Tyler, was an instrumental organizer/producer of the past three marches on Washington dating back to 1979.

"Robin's depth of experience, community commitment and unstoppable energy uniquely qualify her to lead the organizing efforts for this historic event," said Birch and Perry.

"This is a historic time in our movement. Although we have much greater visibility and a measure of cultural acceptance, we must not be lulled into a false sense of security," Tyler said. "This march will once again show the self-esteem, strength and unwavering determination of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender community."

The last march was April 25, 1993, and attracted more than 1 million participants, according to organizers.

The Universal Fellowship of Community Churches is the world's largest and oldest predominantly Gay Christian spirituality organization. Founded by Perry in 1968 with a commitment to social and spiritual justice and headquartered in West Hollywood, Calif., UFMCC is composed of more than 300 local congregations in 15 countries.

Whitewater) that would prohibit the use of state funds to pay for Domestic partnership benefits.

The proposal, AB-759, would in effect eliminate the possibility of the state pro-

viding health insurance benefits for the partners of its unmarried employees involved in same sex and opposite sex relationships including those working in the state university system. In addition it would have what some call "a chilling effect" on efforts to convince local government units to offer such benefits by forbidding them from using state funds to pay for them.

The hearing on AB-759 will take place on Thursday February 19th at 11:00 a.m. in room 417 North of the state capitol. The hearing will be held by the Assembly Committee on Insurance, Securities and Corporate Policy.

According to a memo circulated by Nass prior to his introduction of the bill, AB-759 is a response to the Madison School Board's granting of domestic partnership health insurance to Madison teachers.

Domestic partnership benefits are growing in popularity throughout the country. A large number of corporations now offer them to their unmarried employees as do a growing number of local governments including the City of Chicago.

The Madison school board is reported to be the first local governmental unit in Wisconsin to offer these benefits.

Gay and Lesbian leaders were quick to condemn the proposal which has twelve co-sponsors, all of them Republicans.

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When working on the Wisconsin AIDSline, she finds that there is one question most commonly asked:

Caller: "Where can I get tested?"
Staller: "There are anonymous testing sites, where names are not kept on file and confidential testing sites, where medical records are kept but not revealed, in all Wisconsin counties. Would you like to hear about the ones in your area?"

She knows the answer to questions about AIDS because she and other teens who serve on the three-hour shifts, 3:00 to 6:00 p.m. or 6:00 to 9:00 p.m., Monday through Thursday, have taken extensive training at ARCW.

"The teen hours appear to be the practical way to supply correct information in an easily accessible form," said Neil Albrecht, ARCW regional director.

He explained that it began in response to suggestions from focus groups. "We wanted to learn what kind of prevention efforts would be effective with teens and the focus groups came back with peer education as the best tool," said Albrecht.

"Teens need to be able to talk to other teens. Peer education is a highly effective prevention strategy," said Albrecht. "In recent months, teen calls to the Wisconsin AIDSline have nearly doubled."

Estimates are that 50 percent of all new incidences of HIV infection are in people under the age of 24. One recent study co-sponsored by Yale University and MTV Cable indicated that many teens seem to be uninformed about the risks of contracting the disease through the exchange of bodily fluids, namely sexual intercourse.

Ten teen volunteers have completed a minimum 25 hours of training plus three, 3-hour shifts of observing other Wisconsin AIDSline operators. Teens staffing the Wisconsin AIDSline will be supported by an adult at all times and generally work two shifts a month.

Posters and informational flyers have been sent to principals at public middle schools and high schools across the state, and to some private schools. Posters and flyers have also been sent to coffee houses and other teen gathering places.

This program is funded by a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention through the Wisconsin AIDS/HIV Program, Madison.

Teens in the Milwaukee area may call the Wisconsin AIDSline at 414-273-AIDS, and those across the state may call 800-334-AIDS.

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PrideFest Announces Addition of Youth Activity Area

Milwaukee, PrideFest is pleased to announce the addition of the Youth Activity Area to its 1998 line-up. Due to the success of the 1997 Youth Stage, and elaborating on the 1998 theme, "Many Worlds, One Community," PrideFest is expanding the stage to its own designated area for two full days of activities that will be of interest to Wisconsin's LGBT youth.

LGBT youth organizations throughout the state were contacted two months ago and solicited for ideas for the new Youth Activity Area. A youth/adult committee has been formed and is meeting periodically to plan different events, but most of the work has been done by the youths themselves.

"We are very pleased at how the younger members of our community have focused on this opportunity," said Michael Lisowski, coordinator for Gay Youth Milwaukee. "They realize that they have valuable input as to what they would like to see at PrideFest and the ideas they are coming up with will interest not just youth, but everyone."

Suggestions so far include a fashion show, skits and plays, a parody of a popular home fix-it program renamed to "This Dyke's House", a talent show, poetry readings, family and spirituality panels, performers, a dating game, and youth male and female impersonations.

The committee is also considering assembling its float entry in the Youth Activity Area before the parade on Sunday in an effort to get more youth involved.

The committee is actively seeking volunteer members to join. Dedicated, hard working volunteers with ideas and suggestions are encouraged to either call 414-272-FEST, write P.O. Box 93852, Milwaukee, 53203, e-mail pfyouth@aol.com or fax 414/272-3391 to get involved.

To keep up on the latest developments or to add you name to our mailing list, visit our website at pridefest.com. You can also e-mail PrideFest with any suggestions or comments at pride-milw@aol.com.