

THE FRONTLINE

SPRING 2011

Spotlight on: Donna Sachet and Gary Virginia

Gary Virginia and Donna Sachet are two of Positive Resource Center's most visible supporters. Both have served on the PRC Board of Directors and currently sit on the Advisory Board. Gary and Donna recently sat down with us to discuss their long-standing relationship with PRC.

Fundraisers' Genesis

Gary Virginia's dedication to PRC is rooted in his own experience with our services. Gary first tested positive for HIV in 1988 and by the end of 1995, he found himself too sick to work. Like so many others in our community, Gary came to PRC in need of our assistance to obtain disability benefits.

"It felt like it was the end of the world," remembers Gary. "I turned to Positive Resource Center (then known as AIDS Benefits Counselors). I still remember the feeling after meeting with my attorney in their cramped offices, which were on Castro Street back then – like the weight of the world was lifted off my shoulders. He was an angel. I thought, 'How is it possible that an amazing service like this exists for free?'"

When Gary's health stabilized, he started feeling restless. He had been working since he was twelve-years-old and being unemployed made him feel like he had no sense of purpose. To remedy this, some friends convinced him to run for Mr. Daddy's Leather and, much to his surprise, he won. With that title under his belt, he started preparing for the competitive Mr. SF Leather title. "To make headway in the competition," he says, "I threw my first fundraising event, a benefit for PRC and AEF, both of which were critical for my survival." With this event, he began his amazing journey to becoming one of our community's great fundraisers.

At the same time Gary was serving as Mr. SF Leather 1996, Donna Sachet was elected Empress of San Francisco. They both worked for many community fundraising events and saw each other a lot. Gary says, "We were both so busy then! My house was basically

like Superman's telephone booth—I'd come home to change clothes and be out the door again. Donna and I earned our stripes during what I hope was the worst of the AIDS crisis. It was truly an emergency."

"There are so many heroes from that time," Donna adds. "We started our work right at the transition, when AIDS went from meaning certain death to the possibility of survival, and PRC was an important part of helping people cope with that."

Shortly after winning Mr. SF Leather, Gary was asked to join the Board of PRC and Donna soon followed. "When Gary asked me to join the Board with him," she says, "I took a leap of faith and did it, especially knowing how closely our personal values were aligned."

Both have remained stalwart supporters. When asked why she has remained committed to PRC over the years, Donna says, "I support causes that are personal to me, and PRC is just that. The work they do affects my friends, my health, my city. It's also

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Note from the Executive Director



Every day I have the privilege of seeing our clients discover that our staff can open new windows of opportunity for them to regain

control of their lives. Many of them come through our doors feeling like hope has run out; but after working with our Benefits Counseling Program, clients like Derek have the opportunity to improve their quality of life, knowing they have access to disability benefits that provide them with the financial and healthcare security they deserve. In addition, our Employment Services Program helps clients identify and secure available employment opportunities. We are collaborators with UCSF on a new study that is currently under way to show that vocational rehabilitation may help our clients to practice healthier behaviors and slow the transmission of HIV. Every community deserves to have services like PRC's—services that have such a direct impact on people's health and security. PRC is lucky to have passionate advocates like Gary Virginia and Donna Sachet, and our community supporters who ensure that we are able to succeed in helping our clients gain stability. Thank you for your support last year. We look forward to sharing our achievements with you in 2011 and hope you will join us in October to celebrate with us at our annual gala, *Windows of Opportunity*.

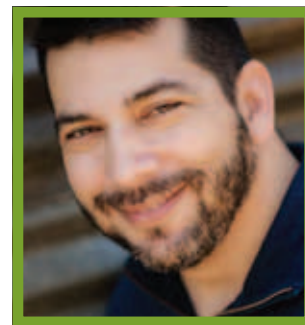
Brett Andrews
Executive Director

We Welcome...

PRC is excited to welcome new Staff Attorney **Ananda Clarke** and returning Staff Attorney **Yumi Maeda**.

Working It Out: Employment Services as a Risk Reduction Strategy

This year, Positive Resource Center's Employment Services Program, in partnership with the UCSF's Center for AIDS Prevention Studies (CAPS), launched a study measuring the short and long-term effects of vocational rehabilitation on people living with HIV/AIDS. PRC's Managing Director of Employment Services, Joe Ramirez-Forcier, and Dr. Adam Carrico from CAPS will serve as Co-Principal Investigators of this two-and-a-half-year long research project, funded by a highly competitive California HIV/AIDS Research Project (CHRP) - Community Collaborative grant.



Joe Ramirez-Forcier, Managing Director – Employment Services

In the last two decades, Highly Active Antiretroviral Treatment (HAART) has dramatically improved the health of HIV-positive people, allowing them to live longer, more active lives. As a result, many more people are able to return to the workforce to pursue career ambitions and achieve greater financial security. Since 1992, Positive Resource Center has successfully guided thousands of HIV-positive people through the process of returning to work, offering a unique combination of career "road-mapping" and assessment, job skills building workshops and trainings, and job search assistance.

Despite advances in medical treatment, structural factors like poverty and homelessness continue to place HIV-positive people at great health risk. Over half of the approximately 15,000 people living with HIV/AIDS in San Francisco are unemployed, a staggering number, even at a time when we are accustomed to double-digit unemployment figures. Financial instability can lead to people disabled by HIV falling off their HAART regimens and engaging in sexual behaviors that increase the risk of HIV transmission.



Dr. Adam Carrico, Center for AIDS Prevention Studies

"We have already seen evidence that HIV-positive people with a higher socioeconomic status are less likely to report engaging in risky behaviors and have better physical health," says Carrico. "However little is known about whether programs designed to increase socioeconomic status like PRC's Employment Services Program can meaningfully improve health behaviors, such as HAART adherence and safer sex practices of people living with HIV/AIDS."

The study will examine whether the proven vocational rehabilitation strategies of PRC's Employment Services Program have a positive effect on its clients' behaviors. The study will also demonstrate vocational rehabilitation's impact as an HIV prevention intervention, much as housing is a commonly used prevention strategy.

"Our program has had great success in helping our HIV-positive clients secure sustainable employment and gain access to employer-paid health insurance," says Ramirez-Forcier. "We are looking at the broader implications of the services we provide; we will be able to understand the impact of PRC's Employment Services on clients' decision making around treatment adherence and risk behaviors." PRC Executive Director, Brett Andrews adds, "Knowing that vocational rehabilitation is effective in reducing the risk of HIV transmission could potentially transform the way people view HIV prevention nationwide in the future." ●

Positively Fantastic!



▲ Cheer San Francisco raised an incredible \$20,000 for PRC during their 2009-10 season! Here PRC Executive Director, Brett Andrews, poses with the Cheer SF Board of Directors, San Francisco Supervisor Scott Wiener, and State Senator Mark Leno during the check presentation ceremony last December.



▲ Queen II Deana Dawn and Queen VI DivaD greet the crowd at Krewe de Kinque's 14th Annual Holiday Leather Brunch for PRC at The Edge.



▲ The men of the 2011 Bare Chest Calendar broke all records, raising over \$162,000 for PRC and AIDS Emergency Fund. The men pose with Donna Sachet before their dates at Starlight Magic, the prize for the First Annual Dinner Date Auction Gala.



▲ Board Member, Julius Turman, and Board President, Kent Roger, pose with supporter, Michael Monagle, at PRC's Year-End Stakeholder Reception at the JW Marriott.

Spotlight on: Donna & Gary

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important to me that an organization keep the overhead low. I care strongly that as much as possible of the money raised goes to the work and the clients." In 2010, 78% of PRC's expenses went directly to client services.

A Signature Event

"PRC's services were vital to my survival," Gary says. "I vowed always to give back so that PRC is there for the next person that needs them." And give back they have! Each June on Pink Saturday, for the last 12 years, Donna and Gary have hosted Pride Brunch as a benefit for PRC. PRC Board President, Kent Roger, says of Pride Brunch, "I have been so impressed by Pride Brunch every time I've attended. The event is the very definition of a community celebration and speaks so much to Donna and Gary's commitment to PRC and to the city's LGBT community as a whole." Donna recalls, "Just as every organization looks for a signature event, we wanted to create one for ourselves. One night, we were sitting around at the Edge Bar looking at the calendar for Pride Weekend, and we saw that while there was party after party in the evening, there were no brunch events during the whole weekend." From there things developed quickly and the event became a space for the community to interact with the Pride Parade's Grand Marshals and to support Positive Resource Center.

"My first thought was, 'Wait, *another* thing to do during Pride Weekend?'" says Donna. "But like all events, this was an investment. When we first started Pride Brunch, it was more of a fun party, rather than an important fundraiser. I can't believe we're in our thirteenth year *and* raised over \$17,000 for PRC last year."

Gary interjects, "I think it was always more than *just* a party! As we planned the first brunch, we immediately thought of it as a way to support PRC."

Staying Involved

Donna and Gary have remained deeply committed to PRC for more than fifteen years. Even after stepping down from the Board of Directors, they still wanted to help. Donna says, "The Advisory Board's formation was initially our idea. We wanted our passion for the agency to have an outlet."

They say that their continued role with PRC as Advisory Board members remains extremely important. "Organizations like PRC need the grassroots, to stay connected to their constituency, and we're able to help with that," says Gary. "As a former client, I'm in a strong position to advocate for PRC. The staff at PRC is passionate about justice for their clients, but they are stretched to the limit and can't reach everyone in the community. Donna and I can be there to speak on PRC's behalf."

They both feel that PRC remains extremely relevant to the community, even with the shifts in the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Donna reminds us, "I don't think the need for PRC's services has gone away. There are still people up against the wall, in difficult situations, who need help. Even though things have changed tremendously since those early years, there are still people coming to PRC feeling like it's the end of the world, like their life is over. And the staff is there to tell them that there are systems out there to support them, that they're entitled to these benefits."

Lucky for Positive Resource Center and our clients, we have committed supporters like Gary and Donna to ensure that our services will remain available now and in the future for all those who need them. ●

POSITIVE RESOURCE CENTER

The mission of Positive Resource Center is to assist people affected by or at risk for HIV/AIDS through culturally appropriate counseling, education, training, and advocacy. As a result, our clients can make more informed choices that maximize available benefits and employment opportunities.

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Derek's Story

Much of the important work of PRC's programs happens behind closed doors, one-on-one between our clients and our staff.

Derek, a client in PRC's Benefits Counseling Program, met with us to share his story with the community.

With a Bachelor's Degree in Hotel and Restaurant Management from a prestigious college and a job lined up with a nationally known restaurateur, Derek moved to San Francisco in 1998. The restaurant industry is infamous for high rates of drug use among staff and Derek's experience was no exception. After being introduced to crystal methamphetamine, he was eventually arrested for drug dealing and served time in federal prison where he stopped using illegal drugs.

In 2006, he was transferred to a new prison facility where he got a life-threatening fungal infection, particularly dangerous for those with HIV, known as 'Valley Fever'. Within three weeks, Derek became gravely ill. "They couldn't understand why I had gotten sick so fast," he says. "They gave me an HIV test, and even though I had tested negative a year before, I was already down to 22 T-Cells and had a viral load of forty-thousand. The future looked very bleak."

Fortunately, Derek's health was stabilized and he continued to receive medical care when he was released. But not everything about Derek's post-prison life went as simply. Although his T-Cell count improved, his kidneys still plagued him. When attempting to find housing, his felony conviction was a red flag to potential landlords, despite the fact that he had not used illegal drugs for years. "These rat holes in the Tenderloin, which I could barely afford anyway, would turn me down," says Derek.

While talking to a social worker at San Francisco General Hospital's Ward 86 where he was receiving medical care, Derek mentioned how

difficult he found it to work, due to extreme exhaustion. "I was forcing myself to work for a catering company and running myself ragged," he says. His social worker referred him to PRC for benefits counseling. Derek was shocked: "No one had ever told me I had the option!"

Last March, he met with PRC Staff Attorney, Lisa Ruff. "I was so happy working with Lisa," says Derek. "I never felt like I was just another file. She always kept me informed and I could tell she was doing her best for me." Lisa secured Derek's medical records and prepared him extensively for his hearing with the Social Security Administration. In May, a month after his hearing with the SSA, Derek got a phone call from Lisa. Derek remembers: "'You're not going to believe this,' she said, 'but you've been approved!' I was so surprised! I thought the whole process would take much longer."

Since getting on Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Derek's quality of life has significantly improved. He now lives with four roommates in a sober-living home in the city. He shares his success story at prisons and locked hospital wards and he also volunteers for local nonprofits. "When I was in prison, I worked with the people in the prison's mental health facility, which I found very rewarding," says Derek. "When I got out, I wanted to keep giving back. Some of these people have nothing and I can at least be a light for them, to show them that someone like me can be okay."

When reflecting on his time working with PRC, Derek says, "There are very few organizations that I'm proud to have been affiliated with and you all are one of them. I make sure I tell folks to go to PRC." Even after winning his SSDI claim, Derek still receives assistance from PRC. "I recently called Lisa with a question," he says, "and by the end of the day I had an e-mail from her with a response."

"When I was first diagnosed, I thought it would be so difficult to be HIV-positive," Derek says. "But now I know, as long as you can take care of yourself, you can be okay. It's because of PRC that I'm able to do that and I'm very grateful." 🌟

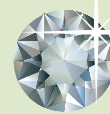
Ways to Give

Please help disabled people access financial resources and healthcare.

There are many ways to support PRC. However you decide to help, please consider making a tax deductible gift today.

- * Donate by check or credit card using the donation envelope provided.
 - * Leave a legacy by naming PRC in your will or trust. Speak with your financial advisor.
 - * Make a secure online donation at www.positiveresource.org/donate.asp.
 - * Donate used items at Community Thrift Store.
 - * Increase your gift's impact with employer matching gifts. Ask your employer how.
 - * Attend fundraising events.
- Visit www.positiveresource.org/support.asp for more easy ways to show your support.
- Contact PRC's Development Department for more information at 415.777.0333 development@positiveresource.org.

Be a G.E.M. and Give Every Month



With an ongoing monthly pledge, you can help Positive Resource

Center assist clients with HIV/AIDS and mental health disabilities to obtain disability benefits and employment opportunities that enable them to maintain their health and improve their quality of life.

Monthly giving provides PRC with a dependable source of income to further our efforts, while allowing you to spread your generous contribution over the course of the year. For example, a monthly gift of \$25 may mean forgoing

a week's worth of lattes, but will add up to \$300 a year for PRC — enough to provide one client with 12 computer-training workshops to help them succeed in this competitive job market.

By giving just \$15, \$25, \$50 or more per month, you are helping to make our work possible.

To join the G.E.M. Circle, log onto <http://www.positiveresource.org/donate.asp> and select "Monthly" from the Frequency drop-down menu. Or, for more information, please call Kenyon DeVault, Development Projects Manager, at 415.972.0872.

PRC is 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation. Donations are tax deductible as allowed by law. Our tax identification number is 94-3078431.

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Upcoming
Events

SAVE THE DATE

Windows of Opportunity

PRC's Annual Celebration and Silent Auction

Tuesday, October 4, 2011

6 - 8:30 PM

RF80

80 Missouri Street, San Francisco

E-mail KenyonD@positiveresource.org for more information.