



AIDS Legal Council of Chicago, Windy City Times Advocates of Year

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The AIDS Legal Council of Chicago (ALCC) and Windy City Times will be hosting the 18th annual Advocates of the Year Awards Thursday, March 22 to recognize several outstanding men and women who are working locally to make a difference in the lives of people with HIV. The reception will be held at Sidley Austin LLP at One South Dearborn in downtown Chicago.

Started in 1994, the Awards acknowledge unsung heroes who, through advocacy, medical care and case management, are working to improve the quality of life of people with HIV.

"These men and women are on the frontlines of the epidemic and represent some of the most dedicated people in HIV care and advocacy today," said ALCC Executive Director Ann Hilton Fisher. "It is an honor for us to pay tribute to them and acknowledge their invaluable work."

This year's winners are:

State Rep. Greg Harris

As Illinois's highest ranking openly HIV-positive elected official, Rep. Greg Harris has provided extraordinary leadership in the fight against HIV.

Working with AIDS Legal Council of Chicago and other advocates, Harris crafted legislation to preserve informed consent in HIV testing, thus protecting people's ability to make informed decisions about their health and their lives. He has worked to protect the Illinois AIDS Drug Assistance Program during tough economic times and continues to advocate for progressive health care policies in Springfield.

As architect of the Illinois civil union bill, Rep. Harris led the fight to grant Illinois same-sex couples the same rights as married couples. Now people with HIV know that if they become sick, their partners will be able to make life-or-death decisions, visit them in the hospital, and take on responsibilities previously granted only to a legal spouse. Harris has made, and continues to make, a dramatic impact in the lives of thousands of people with HIV.

Matthildur "Matta" Kelley

Few advocates have stories as compelling and inspiring as Matthildur "Matta" Kelley, who emerged from drug abuse 25 years ago to become a lifeline for people with HIV.

Hired in 1988 as a prevention outreach worker with Community Outreach Intervention Projects (COIP) , Kelley spent most of her time on the streets, giving injection drug users the encouragement and empathy they needed to manage their health and protect themselves from HIV. No abandoned building was too dangerous, no dark alley too forbidding for Kelley and COIP eventually saw a 70% reduction in new HIV infections among the people she served.

As a Ryan White Case Manager, Kelley drew upon her professional experience in prevention, as well as her personal experience as a recovering addict and single mother, to help the most vulnerable. She once convinced a local hotel

owner to house COIP clients at a reduced cost—often paid by Kelley herself—until permanent housing could be found. Kelley has devoted herself to reaching the most marginalized and transforming, and often saving, their lives.

Cheryl Potts

Cheryl Potts has dedicated her professional life, and much of her personal life, to being a champion for people with HIV.

Upon receiving her master's in public health, Potts went to work for AIDS Foundation of Chicago, where she eventually became director of care and quality improvement and coordinated the Chicago Service Providers' Council and created the first HIV AmeriCorps program.

Potts moved to Washington, D.C., five years later to join the National AIDS Fund, but returned after only two years when dear friends—a married couple with HIV—suddenly passed away, leaving behind their daughter. Potts adopted her as her own daughter, and went back to work, eventually heading to Chicago House to direct its iFour employment program for people with HIV. Under her leadership, the program achieved an enviable 40% employment placement rate for its participants.

Today Potts continues to make a difference, working as executive director of Alexian Brothers AIDS Ministry to provide housing to destitute people with HIV.

Test Positive Aware Network (TPAN)

Since opening in 1987 Test Positive Aware Network (TPAN) has become a national model for peer-led programs that support, serve, educate and empower people with HIV. Whether a person needs an initial HIV test, help filling out an ADAP application, up-to-date information on antiretroviral therapies or to join others in a weekly support group, TPAN's doors are open. More than 60% of the staff and the majority of the volunteers are HIV-positive.

TPAN also publishes Positively Aware, the only nonprofit magazine for the HIV community. The monthly magazine covers everything from dating worries to international rights, medication contraindications to mental health. It boasts a national subscription base of more than 100,000 readers.

Perhaps State Rep. Sara Feigenholtz put it best: "I'm sure all of you have heard a story of an individual, newly diagnosed with HIV, distraught and confused, who has walked through the doors of TPAN and found the support he/she needed. The stories are even more powerful when you hear that the same person, a year later, started leading a support group and helping other HIV positive individuals become advocates."

Friend of the Council Award

Additionally, ALCC will be presenting its Friend of the Council Award to Ed Jeske and John Hern, longtime friends and volunteers who have raised thousands of dollars for the Council, most notably through their participation in ALCC's Run and Walk team, the AIDS Legal Beagles. This award is chosen by ALCC staff annually to recognize outstanding supporters of the Council's mission.

For more information about the Advocates of the Year Awards or to learn how you can nominate someone for the 2013 Awards, contact Ricardo Cifuentes, Director of Development of the AIDS Legal Council of Chicago at (312) 427-8990. Tickets are \$50 and can be purchased over the phone, or online at www.aidslegal.com .

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