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The Empowerment Program

WAP Newsletter

My Empowering Moment

I had just walked out of an abusive relationship that wasn't going anywhere after 15 years, for the second time. The first time I left was in 2012. This time, I wanted to get remarried. He said no. So I walked out the door and walked into a new life. I am now staying at a safe house through The Empowerment Program. I attend groups and classes as I wait on a permanent housing list.

The first time I left, I had nowhere to go, no money, and the thought of being on my own frightened me. I had married out of necessity. When I turned 30 I was like, I don't have nothing in this world. Home, car, relationship let alone love? On my 30th birthday I expressed this to the man who was a sex partner and financial supporter at the time. I had just found out I was HIV positive and telling this to another person and not being rejected was big. After telling my whole life and dreams and plans for the future, I knew I would marry this man.

After we were married we moved to Wichita, KS. We bought a house and were living part of the American dream. I started Family Faith Ministries, where I educated family and friends on HIV and me. My husband went to jail and was taking care of me financially from there. After my Paw Paw passed and my husband was released, all hell broke loose. I was back on crack and we were smoking when we were together, or apart. I called It Takes a Village to talk about moving back to Colorado. I got in a 96 Ford Taurus with the man and two pit bulls. I got hotel assistance, stayed with family, and then we got our own place. Good, NO! I was back on crack and lying to myself and everybody. I was ready to move out of town to escape everyone knowing I



failed at my marriage. I was drinking more and more to get away from crack and my anger started to come out in the form of domestic violence. I was so in love one minute and ready to get away from him the next. I caught a domestic violence charge for stabbing him. I moved out, then back in to make it work. More drugs on his part and more anger on mine.

I sought refuge in a safe house and then got my own place. I was still drinking. I started to receive acupuncture at It Takes a Village and joined groups—"Why Not Us", a drug and alcohol outpatient group, and "Healing Ourselves", an HIV+ recovery group. I started coming to Empowerment after taking a Healthy Relationships class offered by two of their case managers. I knew then that I was going to become part of Empowerment.

Now I'm able to come to Empowerment, a women's service agency, where clients come from all backgrounds, including prostitution and prison like myself. I learn so much in every group, it's like "Oh My God, I feel/felt like that!" "Oh, this is how you do that?" "I would do..." Every group I've been to has its own uniqueness. Beyond Violence, Trauma Narrative, TREM, to name a few. They are held in an intimate setting and I can really say and feel how I feel!

As I write I'm coming from Planning Council where I'm blessed to be actively involved. I am in a supportive community through a safe house at Empowerment. I'm blessed to say that this Friday I was lying on the acupuncturist's cot at Empowerment. I have an ongoing appointment every Friday. Seriously, Empowerment will prepare you for a new life if you want it. My first go around I was with an active addict, using, and in an unhealthy relationship. Today I'm living in true sobriety, taking a harm reduction approach on all levels of life. I work my sobriety and the benefits are abundant. I know where my life is headed and what I'm doing. I'm taking my medications, exercising, have a new wardrobe and a new look.

Empowerment has empowered me to be the woman I was meant to be. And all of this only began when I got real with my desire to change. Regardless of any program it starts with me. Empowerment has changed my life with a new address, new clothes, and new classes—it does a lot for a new recovering addict walking the steps to success.

- Mistress Alexiendia Abrams,
ONE EMPOWERED WOMAN

To Advocate, or Not to Advocate?

There I was sitting in the doctor's office, after having surgery and she says, "Well we have a situation, and we want to run one more test on you, because we have an inconclusive test result for HIV!" Then I received the actual result, and now I thought I am part of a group the world despised, I am HIV positive. That was the day the world stood still. That was also the year my now ex-husband walked out of my life. Those I told my diagnosis to started just telling everyone that was in my circle, and soon and abruptly they left my life too. It was just me and my kids left, and with them I reverted back to what the doctor first told me. I told them the test was not right, it was inconclusive. I had to say that to my kids at that time, because I felt I would lose them too.

Fast forward 13 years. I came back to The Empowerment Program after being gone for over a year. They did not know what happened to me it was like I fell off the face of the earth to them. I was in meeting with my case manager, and she suggested a support group for me to attend, but I refused to go for a short time. But, on a particular day when the subject came back around again, my case manager said, "I believe you might like this group, these ladies are phenomenal!" Due to my situation at the time, I felt this would be a good idea just to get out and be around other

people, but I promised myself, I would be silent and just see what is going on with them. The first meeting I went to was called Colorado HIV Decriminalization. I met with three women and a man at a small apartment, in the basement. The language they spoke was way over my head, but one thing they spoke on was stigma in Colorado and how a person can be charged with a crime. That is where my expertise was, about being incarcerated. I understood the inside of corrections and at that meeting I gave them an inside view of what is like to be a person living with HIV within a corrections environment. They listened, embraced me, and wanted to know more about my experience. Little did I know I was beginning to advocate for others living with HIV/AIDS.

It started with just that one group on that night in a basement. They made me feel I was not alone, and that it was okay to speak out on this subject because the more we speak out the more we can possibly heal on the inside. After that first difficult experience to speak out as a person living with HIV, I did not stop there. These three women were part of other organizations and I wanted to be under their wings. I am proud to announce I am still with CO-Decriminalization (Now called The MOD Squad). We are changing laws on how people living with HIV/AIDS are charged in the justice system. I am also a part of Colorado

Positive Women's Network (PWN). I'm not only a part of the group; I'm also the Recruiter and a SCAT rep. I participate in C.H.I.P, The Children Hospital Immunodeficiency Program, and I also sit on the Denver HIV Resource Planning Council.

It is a great reward to be an advocate in an area that has so much rejection. I understand what that person is going through, when their family is torn apart and they don't want to say anything, and they just want to run and hide. To me this is a special call, and is not for everyone, but I feel when you take that leap into advocacy there is a big reward in it.

And just think, I almost passed up this opportunity in my mind to be free. I don't know if I owe this all to that case manager on that day who suggested that I attend this meeting, or the women and man that embraced me, but what I can say is I am proud of myself that I stepped out and said, "I COUNT AND I WILL BEAT THIS, and so will the people I advocate for!" From a PROUD woman, AN ADVOCATE!



Become an Advocate!



POSITIVE WOMEN'S NETWORK
USA

PWN Positive Women Network

Leadership, policy change, eliminate stigma, mobilize advocates. Meets at Children's Hospital the 2nd Wednesday of the month from 5:30 – 7:30. Contact Barb Cardell 303-946-2529 Barb@BarbCardell.com or Kari Hartel 720-982-7303 Khartel2011@gmail.com. Light dinner and childcare provided. 13123 E 16th Ave, Aurora, CO

MOD Squad

Formally CO-HIV Decriminalization Eliminate stigma, policy change, legislative work Meets the last Tuesday of each month at Children's hospital and the room is on the first floor various locations, they can contact Barb Cardell for room location Barb@barbcardell.com 5:00pm – 7:30pm 13123 E 16th Ave, Aurora, CO

C.H.I.P. Children's Hospital Immunodeficiency Program

Topics that pertain to pregnant women or to mothers with children who are HIV Positive. 5:00pm 7:00pm Light dinner provided. Childcare provided. Contact Kari

Hartel @ khartel2011@gmail.com. 13123 E 16th Ave, Aurora, CO. Meets the 1st Tuesday of the each month.

Denver HIV Resource Planning Council (DHRPC)

Appointed by the Mayor's office and open to the public. These meetings are centered around the standard of care and funding for those living with HIV/AIDS, along with other moving parts that impact those living with HIV/AIDS. Meeting is held the 1st Thursday of each month. From 5:00pm – 7:00pm 200 W 14th Ave Denver, Colorado

WILLOW—What Does it Stand For?

WILLOW: Women Involved in Life Learning from Other Women

The WILLOW Intervention is a social skills-building and educational intervention for adult women living with HIV.

Are you a heterosexual woman who has known your HIV sero status for at least 1 year?

Are you a woman between the age 18-60?

Starting in Spring 2016 we will be offering small weekly WILLOW groups that will last for 4 sessions. Topics will include:

- Gender pride
- Information for women on how to identify and maintain supportive social networks
- Coping strategies to reduce life stressors
- Enhanced awareness of STD transmission and HIV re-infection risk behaviors

- Communication skills for negotiating sex
- Proper Condom Use
- Distinguishing between healthy and unhealthy relationships
- Types of abusive relationships and their effect on a women's ability to negotiate safer sex practices

We will be keep you updated as the Spring arrives !!!



Become a WILLOW Facilitator!

Are you a woman living with HIV who has known her diagnosis for at least one year looking to become more involved in your community?

Are you interested in encouraging other women such as yourself in helping them reduce their risk of HIV and other STI transmission?

Then you should consider becoming a WILLOW facilitator!

The Denver-Aurora HIV Prevention Partnership at The Empowerment Program is looking for additional peer facilitators this Spring in helping to spread the word and to lead our WILLOW groups.

Want more information? Contact Rebecca Elliott at 303-320-1989 ext.206 or at rebecca_elliott@empowermentprogram.org.

Get to Know Your Provider

University Hospital HIV Clinic

The first case of AIDS in Colorado was seen at the University of Colorado Hospital (UCH) in 1982. The HIV clinic within the Infectious Disease Group Practice (IDGP) opened in 1989. Since then, UCH-affiliated HIV clinics have opened in other communities around the state, including in Grand Junction, Durango, Pueblo, and Fort Collins.

The HIV clinic at UCH provides many services including primary medical care, mental health services, pharmacy services, urgent and inpatient care, HIV-Hepatitis care, and OB-GYN services. Substance use-related services are provided through the ARTS program in Denver. Across the state, UCH and affiliated clinics see about 2400 people living with HIV, including 300

women.

The HIV clinic at UCH employs social workers Tracy Scott, MSW and Kendra Dickson, LSW, who are specially trained to work with people living with HIV. Tracy and Kendra work with participants to address any barriers to care, with the goal of helping participants get medications, stay on medications, and stay engaged in care.

The IDGP at UCH is located on the 7th floor of the Anschutz Outpatient Pavilion. Urgent appointments can often be scheduled if you call as early as possible. Walk-ins can only be accommodated if appointments are available at the time. Speak with your care manager if you would like a referral to the HIV clinic at the IDGP at UCH!



Free STI Testing

HIV, Hep C, Gonorrhea, Chlamydia

Walk-in hours

Monday 9:00–11:00 and 1:00–3:00

Tuesday 9:00–11:00

Wednesday 9:00–11:00 and 1:00–3:00

Thursday 9:00–11:00 and 1:00–3:00

Friday 10:00–11:00 and 1:00–3:00

Or by appointment. Call 303-320-1989 to schedule.

We are located at 1600 York Street, Denver, CO 80206



The Empowerment Program

1600 York Street
Denver, CO 80206

Phone: 303-320-1989
Fax: 303-320-3987

Services for women.

**www.empowerment
program.org**

Meet Your Team



Staff Spotlight: Andrea Stachowski

Andrea Stachowski is a Colorado native and has worked in the field of human services for 4 years. She received her Bachelor of Science in Human Services with a concentration in addiction counseling at Metro State.

Andrea interned at ARTS inpatient treatment facilities The Haven and The Haven Mother's House before her final internship at the Denver Colorado AIDS Project. Andrea started work at Empowerment in July of 2014. She loves the Broncos and serving the Denver community.

March 10th is National Women & Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day!

The 11th National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day is on March 10, 2016. The purpose of the observance is to raise awareness of the impact of HIV/AIDS on women and girls.

For more information visit <http://www.womenshealth.gov/NWGHAAAD/>



Community Resources

Scales Pharmacy

Located at 1999 Pennsylvania, Denver, CO 80203

(303) 974-5424



Scales Pharmacy is an independent pharmacy in the Denver area. Their mission is "to be the pharmacy that our community wants us and needs us to be, and we will do so by providing unmatched customer service and patient care and through our ongoing commitment to community service and charity."

Services offered:

- New ADAP preferred pharmacy
- Delivery and mail options
- Medication box filling and consults/Compliance check-ins

- Financial assistance navigation
- Pharmacist run PrEP clinics for all client demographics

Scales pharmacy is dedicated to spending the time needed to make sure every patient is taken care of. The staff is compassionate, friendly, and of course, good looking!

Check them out!