



Providing service and comfort to people affected by HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C

MENDOCINO COUNTY AIDS / VIRAL HEPATITIS NETWORK

FALL 2013

These People Will Stand by Your Side-Donya's Story

When my sons were 3 and 6, I was going to college to become a respiratory therapist. I was one of only 30 students accepted to the program at Napa Valley College. I had graduated from Yuba College with a 3.64 grade point average. I was taking 17 units a semester, working as a peer advisor for the college and tutoring in English, Spanish and math, raising two children and dealing with an ex-husband.

My grandmother kept calling me and telling me to get tested for rheumatoid arthritis because that's what my mother had died of. When I went to get blood work done I threw in the HIV test because I was pretty promiscuous before having children and settling down. I never used a needle but I had found out my new husband was using meth intravenously. I was finding needles around the house, but he kept denying it.

The only test that came back positive was the HIV test. When I got the results-over the phone, all by myself at home-I died. I died the day I found out I had HIV/AIDS. I had my future mapped out but didn't go on to respiratory therapist school because I couldn't be around all the illness. So my whole career was shot. For three years I was in denial, didn't take meds, didn't take care of myself, but then finally realized I had two children to raise and I needed to go on.

I picked myself up, left my husband (the guy who gave it to me) and went on my own with my two children. I raised them as best as I could for the next ten years. My mother had died, my best friend died, and now my kids were on their own. Then when my grandmother died, I didn't want to feel anything anymore. I shunned drugs before, but now I started using meth-amphetamine. I drank a lot and blacked out a lot. I lost my house.

Two years later my brother Ryan found me. He was going through a major divorce with four little children and needed help to get back on his feet. He needed me and I needed him. I got clean. My brother helped me start my life over and I took care of the kids and helped him rebuild his life.

My Aunt Cindy knew John Weber and his work with HIV. I met John in April of 2010. I felt comfortable here instantly. John was very open, very down to earth. We really connected with all the Indian stuff around here because I'm Yurok Indian. When you have something like this it's hard to talk to people, but I felt that John and Libby really know what they're talking about and with no judgment whatsoever. No matter what you do, these people will stand by your side. That's what I love about this place. It makes me want to cry right now. And they did once save my life.

I was staying at the shelter and they'd kick us out at 8:00. I'd



Donya Ramirez

come over to MCAVHN and wait around till they opened at 9:00. Then I got sick with bronchitis and just wanted to sleep on the couch all day. They kept waking me up and made sure I was drinking fluids. Sylver (a MCAVHN volunteer) helped take care of me and bought me throat lozenges and things I really needed but couldn't afford. One night at the shelter I could not lie down without feeling that my chest was really tight. They rushed me over to the emergency room. I had just gotten back on meds, but they hadn't kicked in yet. I got a rare pneumonia and was moved to ICU. They didn't know how to treat it. John Weber, Libby, Sylver and Don (also a MCAVHN volunteer) came to visit. John came every day. They were there 24/7. That really helped me keep going.

I got better but then took a turn for the worse. I was even making funeral arrangements with my son. My family came up and my children were here. I had tubes everywhere and weighed only 95 pounds. For some reason I knew I was going to be okay. I remember asking God "Am I going to die?" I got this overwhelming calmness that came through me and I said "Okay" and just fell asleep. The hospital had figured out what antibiotic to use but couldn't find it anywhere. They finally helicoptered the amount I needed from the east coast and I slowly came back to life. Thank God.

Tom and Judy (see artwork from Tom on page 2) opened their home to me for two weeks because I still had to have intravenous antibiotics. During the time I was sick John and Libby pushed for my Shelter Plus Care voucher. I now have reasonable accommodation. My oldest son Tyler lives with me as a companion/ live-in aid.

MCAVHN is awesome, absolutely awesome. It's the place where I've transformed myself back into a person again.

Event of the Heart and Private Donations Help Keep MCAVHN Going

Mendocino County AIDS/Viral Hepatitis (MCAVHN) programs are funded by a variety of government and private grants. In the current financial and political environment those grants have been shrinking and have become more difficult to obtain. Yet MCAVHN continues to serve clients with HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C and has also extended services to persons with co-occurring disorders of mental illness & substance abuse.

Even in the best of times, funding that covers program services often falls short of covering operating expenses. This becomes a perennial problem for non-profit organizations: how to pay for day to day operating expenses such as rent, utilities, office supplies, postage and internet.

The largest fundraiser for MCAVHN is the Event of the Heart (EOH). In the past, the proceeds from EOH were enough to supplement our federal grants. Now that those grants have been reduced dramatically, we need to increase fund raising or face the very real possibility of reducing services.

Your tax deductible donation to MCAVHN will help us continue the services we provide and keep our doors open for additional people to be welcomed and cared for in the future. No amount is too small - please consider donating today.

If you would like to become a cash sponsor for the Event of the Heart or if you have an auction item to contribute, please refer to the enclosed list of sponsorship opportunities and donor information form.

Thank You from All of Us

MCAVHN is a 501c(3) non-profit



*Event of the Heart Auction Preview
Artwork donated by MCAVHN client Thomas Simiril*

Ways You Can Help

Volunteer at MCAVHN House
(training provided)

Donate at Any Time
(use PayPal online or send us a check)

Donate an Auction Item for Event of the Heart
(see insert)

Become a Sponsor for Event of the Heart
(see insert)

Buy Tickets Early for Event of the Heart
(available in January)

Bid Generously for Auction Items

Watch for Other Events During the Year

Consider Serving on the Board of Directors

New Client Services Advocate Started as Intern

Encourages everyone to volunteer and the place will "open up for you"

After completing her AA degree in general education, Joann Brewer needed to do an internship as part of the human services paraprofessional certificate from Mendocino College. She was listening to her classmates talk about the various options and decided to follow her friend Christy Perez and intern at MCAVHN.

Joann is now employed at MCAVHN as a client services advocate. She plans to continue studying toward a bachelor's degree in social work, but is currently taking a semester off to focus on learning the job at MCAVHN.

Describing her work she says "I love people and think everybody has good inside them and can make something of themselves. It's a matter of figuring out how. I'd like to be here to educate people and help them make the right choices for themselves."

"Being at MCAVHN is a dream come true" for Joann. She is grateful for all she has been learning from executive director Libby Guthrie and client advocate John Weber. She adds that "Libby is an amazing supervisor. She

makes it so I want to come to work and always makes sure I get credit for the things I do" and that John is "an awesome person to learn from" for how he works with the clients and the way he truly listens to them.

Asked if she had any words for potential volunteers, Joann sums it all up, "Everybody has the skills needed to help out at MCAVHN. There's so much that can be done and so much love that can be shared. People can help each other in lots of different areas. You just need to come down and meet the clients and get to know the place and it'll open up to you."



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A Few Facts About Hepatitis C

- 1 in every 12 persons in Mendocino County is affected and many do not know it.
- Effects may not be felt until decades after the time of infection.
- 73 % of all HCV mortality rates are among baby-boomers, and it is the leading cause of liver transplant in the U.S.
- All persons born between 1945-1965 should be tested regardless of risk factors such as injection drug use.
- There are treatments and lifestyle changes that can reverse the virus's effects on the liver, and in many cases even cure the infection.



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Do we have your current contact information?
Or if you would like to receive
future correspondence 1-3 times per year via email
please contact us at mcavhn@yahoo.com
or call 462-1932 and ask for Judy.

Did you know?

New CDC recommendations state that
all baby boomers
born between 1945 and 1965
should have a single, one-time
screening for Hepatitis C
76.5% of all chronic Hep C
infections occur within this age bracket.
See page 3 for more information,
then talk to your health care provider
or call us at 462-1932.

MCAVHN invites you to

Celebrate



THE 27TH ANNUAL EVENT OF THE HEART
UKIAH VALLEY CONFERENCE CENTER
FEBRUARY 8, 2014

*MCAVHN's Mission: To provide services & comfort to persons & families affected by HIV/AIDS,
hepatitis C & the co-occurring disorders of mental illness & substance abuse.*