Q CENTER MILESTONES
History covering nine-county service area

1998 • ACR Health welcomed the Lesbian and Gay Youth Alliance Support Group

2001 • Three-year grant from the United Way of the Valley and Greater Utica launched the Utica LGBTQ Youth Safety Project

2004 • In CNY, Transgender Support Group started meeting separately from lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth

2005 • In CNY, ACR Health rented stand-alone space to open the Q Center
  • In Utica, first LGBTQ Youth Pride Prom was held

2006 • United Way CNY funded the Q Center director

2007 • David Bohnett Foundation installed CyberCenter at the Q Center

2008 • United Way CNY granted three years of funding to the Q Center

2010 • $300,000 federal earmark acquired to expand youth programs

2011 • Allyn Foundation gave challenge grant for Q Center Development Associate

2013 • 5-year state grant for LGBT Case Management and Cultural Competency workshops
  • First Eddie Fund education award granted

2015 • Q Center Mohawk has a dedicated space at ACR Health offices at 287 Genesee Street, Utica
  • Q Center groups established in Jefferson and Lewis Counties.

2016 • HUD funded Housing grant for homeless LGBT youth 18-24
  • North Country added TransYouth and TransParent groups

2018 • ACR Health and Syracuse Rescue Mission collaborate to establish shelter for homeless LGBT youth
  • Q Center CNY updated flooring and furniture for support group and therapy rooms

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HISTORY AND COUNTING

It’s been 20 years since ACR Health embarked on a mission to support lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth. In two decades of steady forward progress we have built a program that has inspired, unshackled, uplifted, and encouraged thousands of young people; and sought to enlighten residents of our nine-county service area about cultural competency.

HISTORY LESSON

In 1998 volunteer facilitators of the Lesbian and Gay Youth Alliance support group were exhausted and approached ACR Health to assume sponsorship of the group. Our first response was to decline. After all, we had spent the previous 15 years trying to persuade the public that AIDS was not just a “gay disease.” A gay youth support group would surely send the wrong message.

On the other hand, sponsoring the group was the right thing to do. The only prevention messages being relayed to youth at the time were abstinence only and no-sex-before-marriage. “Those messages were irrelevant to LGBTQ youth and they were susceptible to getting HIV,” said Mary Doody, ACR Health Volunteer Director, the group’s first facilitator.

Each year, the number of support groups and the numbers of LGBTQ youth served grew substantially. Mary and her volunteers worked inside the groups to create strong bonds and healthy attitudes, while the young people themselves worked to change laws and demand equal treatment.

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Not so many years ago, February was hibernation time for ACR Health fundraising; a time to kick back and rest up for “the” fundraising season of April to October with its three big Walk/Runs.

Now, with two wildly entertaining events – Sled for RED and BLOWOUT – catching fire with our supporters, February has turned into a blockbuster month.

Final numbers aren’t in yet, but the two events have brought in more than $52,000 to date and, through the terrific media coverage they received, spread awareness about ACR Health’s four cornerstone causes: AIDS, Addiction, LGBTQ Inequality, and Poverty, to the larger community.

We need to keep our services in the public eye so those who need us know that we are here and ready to offer support. We work to help families that live in poverty; or have a family member with a substance abuse problem; a transgender child who is bullied at school; or a loved one with HIV. Many people tell us that they are surprised to learn that there is help available for them.

Many in the community don’t know for instance that we have a syringe exchange, a medical clinic for substance users, and case management services for those with chronic illnesses. There’s no real need to know about these services unless you need help and don’t know where to turn. However, events like BLOWOUT and Sled for RED are a great opportunity for ACR Health services to be part of the community conversation.

We offer programs designed to help the families with specific problems. For example, ACR Health’s Q Centers are a generous support for lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender youth having difficulty navigating the world. Often those youth have no way to get to the Q Center to benefit from grant-funded services. Events like BLOWOUT and Sled for RED raise the money necessary to transport a youth to a support group, or pay for the nutritious food they eat when they get there.

I am immensely grateful for all of the support ACR Health receives year round, but I am especially impressed by participation during our winter “hibernation” in February. Thank you for caring about those we serve who struggle with AIDS, Addiction, LGBTQ Inequality, and Poverty. You have helped make life easier for families who need a hand up. We surpassed our expectations with help from dear friends like News Channel 9’s Jim Teske with his cardboard sled and snow devil attitude and WTVH 5’s Michael Benny with his lively banter and quick wit on the BLOWOUT runway. Many, many thanks!
There were no government grants or programs for LGBTQ youth and meeting spaces were temporary: a church basement or a restaurant’s back room. “We wanted youth to have something permanent to depend on,” said Marissa Rice, Youth Services Director. “Slowly and steadily we applied for grants, recruited donors, and held fundraisers to establish a network of safe-space LGBTQ youth programs that now feature the Q Center Central New York, Q Center Mohawk Valley, and two Q Center groups in Northern New York.”

LGBTQ youth are more likely to be kicked out of their homes or to run away; they are more likely to commit suicide; and more likely to be bullied.

- 85% of LGBTQ youth report being verbally harassed in school
- 40% report being physically harassed
- LGBTQ youth are three times more likely to drop out of school than their peers

ACR Health Q Centers provide programming to show youth how to cope, how to ignore, and how to overcome their disadvantages and their tormentors. “Our ultimate goal is to set youth on the path to independent, successful adulthood,” said Rice.

Q Center youth extend their efforts outside their social circles to the wider world, where they advocate and strive to end all forms of violence and harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity. They do this by supporting legislation; educating politicians and the public. They work actively for a world where all youth feel safe and valued, regardless of their sexual identification, HIV status, gender identity and expression, family structure, educational enrollment, physical ability, race, or ethnicity.

The Q Centers have extensive programming, now offering HIV, STD, and Hepatitis C testing; after-school drop in programs, leadership and advocacy training, and special events. Case Management services are available for LGBTQ youth who need assistance with housing, advocacy, medical care, mental health services, and other special needs.

We’ve progressed far in twenty years. Many successful adults credit their Q Center experiences as pivotal to their overall development. The Q Centers have in turn been pivotal to the development of ACR Health as it advocates to create healthy communities by opening doors to those combating LGBTQ Inequality, AIDS, Addiction, and Poverty.

**Q Center Profiles**

**Mikayla Pilon** came to the Q Center four years ago as a high school freshman. She was having trouble making friends; and she also had a lot of questions about her sexuality. “If you say you are gay or bisexual people automatically treat you differently. They make fun of you.” At the Q Center she found fairness, acceptance, and respect; features lacking in her interactions at school.

Many young people come to the Q Center with similar experiences; shy or timid in the beginning and reluctant to speak or participate. Then there’s a gradual blossoming into typical adolescence as they learn how to advocate for and believe in themselves. Mikayla was transformed.

In the beginning she had found it nearly impossible to be authentic and feel accepted at her high school. That changed as she applied the principles she learned at the Q. “Bullies are the ones with a problem. I can’t change them, but I have learned to ignore them and be confident in who I am.”

Sam Mudge grew up in the small Oneida County community of Boonville where his father was a Methodist minister and his mother ran a church camp. Sam had a good relationship with his parents and siblings.

He was assigned female at birth; and as he got older, thoughts fleetted through his mind about the dissatisfaction he had with this body. He was overweight. Was that it? Sam finally understood that he may have been assigned female at birth, but he was in truth and in thought a man.

His parents quickly came to terms with the reality that their child was transgender. After all, he was the same thoughtful and loving child. The Q Center helped Sam with the hard to navigate (and expensive) legal complexities of his transition: changing his name; his gender marker on legal documents, and referrals to affirming medical providers. “It was difficult to figure out on my own. I had tried to fill out all the legal paperwork by myself, but didn’t really know what I was doing. The lawyers at the name change clinic did it all for me, and even helped to get the court fees waived.”

The Q Center also holds weekly support group meetings for transgender youth and young adults. Sam began attending these shortly after coming out and has since become a volunteer, hoping to give back to a group that helped him when he was struggling with his own transition. “It was such a relief to be able to come to group and meet other people like me. It helped to know that I wasn’t alone.”
ACR Health’s Sled for RED broke records this year with the most money raised ($31,000) and the MOST TEAMS EVER! The mid-winter outdoor party fielded 31 entries in the sled-to-sled competition and offered a pitch perfect opportunity for Central New York families to get out and enjoy the snow.

The 8th Annual Sled for RED cardboard sledding derby hit the slopes Saturday, February 10, at Four Seasons Golf & Ski Center in Fayetteville. Sleds jousted for the fastest finish as well as other awards. Check out the winners below!

“Sled for RED helps ACR Health assist clients with needs not met by government grants,” said ACR Health Executive Director, Wil Murtaugh. “Currently we are battling two epidemics: HIV/AIDS and Heroin. The first one, we are winning. We are fighting hard to make HIV/AIDS a controllable disease in New York State. The opioid crisis is still out of control—just like AIDS was in the 1990’s.”

Events like Sled for RED provide resources ACR Health needs to create healthy communities by opening doors for those fighting AIDS, Addiction, LGBTQ Inequality, and Poverty.

ACR Health wants to thank our sponsors: 95X, Aegis, Bell’s Brewery, Elevatitit, Empower Federal Credit Union, Century Heating and Cooling, Colonial Laundermat, PharmBlue, and WSYR NewsChannel 9 for helping bring the 8th Annual Sled for RED to life.
ACR Health Outreach Specialist Mike Shelton was a man on a mission, taking the floor at the December staff meeting to challenge his co-workers to help him raise $1,000 for the Eddie Fund. If each staff member would contribute five dollars, Mike promised to put up $500 of his own money as a match. Shelton told his co-workers, “Education has gotten you where you are now, and has given you the hope of advancement with financial stability.” Mike has made it his mission to help the Q Center youth with their educational expenses. Calling ACR Health “my family and rock,” he considers it his duty to the next generation.

“We work and live in some of the poorest counties, cities, and towns within New York State,” said Shelton, explaining why the Eddie Fund is so important to him. “No matter the job title we have all met someone who is truly working to improve their life, but hit walls that can truly crush them.”

Eddie “Future Greatness” educational awards, founded by Cindy Seymour, Laura Serway, and Paul Mahalick, are available to all LGBTQ youth and their allies, 16-26, who are registered in an accredited post secondary institution. Former ACR Health Board of Directors member David Reed has supported the Eddie Fund since its inception in 2013. “The Eddie Fund is one of the best investments I can make in our community,” said Reed.

By the time January’s staff meeting rolled around, Shelton had fulfilled his goal and written that $500 check to the Eddie Fund.

Four $500 awards are given each year. The Eddie Fund supports education and the day to day needs of the Q Center.

If you would like to apply or invest in the next generation: ACRHealth.org/youth/eddie

We were moved by the generosity of spirit and human kindness shown by our 2017 Holiday Angels. ACR Health Executive Director Wil Murtaugh who founded the program years ago still finds it to be personally inspiring and fundamentally necessary. “Poverty is a constant companion for some of our clients and their families, who struggle financially year-round. Thank you, Angels, for easing their burden.”

313th Recruiting State
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Melissa Swald Cannman
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Robert & Diane Caine
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Sally McSween
Sandra & Chuck Spencer-Florack
Sandy Jarvis
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Sharon Ranftle
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St. Joseph’s Interventional Radiology
St. Lawrence County DA Office
St. Mary’s Church Baldwinsville
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Syracuse Gay & Lesbian Chorus
Teens for a Better World
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The Hartford’s Prof. Women’s Network Group
The Robert Angelo Henty Foundation Inc.
Thea van der Ven
Theresa A. Deegan
Tom Angiolillo
Uzzi Group-Sage Upstate
Victoria J. Walters
Wendy Povers & Bethany Michaels
Westhill Central School – St. High – Activities Fund
Wil Murtaugh & Bill Lauer
William Blake II

Mike inspired his colleagues with a Henry Ford quote about the Success of Teamwork. Mike gave a $500 donation to the Eddie Fund and with the help of his co-workers it turned into $1,000.
When the very first Hike for Life stepped off at Hamilton College in 1999, John Leech was the leader of the pack. He had raised $3,275 and was the top individual fundraiser by a landslide.

His team, A Catered Affair, took top honors as well. That Sunday was a very good day for John and only in part because he had done such an outstanding job raising money to fight AIDS.

He was also gratified that the whole community had been unified in the often very lonely fight against AIDS. “My most cherished memory of the very first Hike for Life was the intoxicating enthusiasm and sense of unity from the participants especially the younger generation,” said John Leech recently as he talked about his plans for the 20th Hike for Life and his personal battle against a new epidemic.

HIV/AIDS seemed unstoppable a generation ago, but we are making steady progress in New York’s quest to End the AIDS Epidemic by 2020. Now, the fight is against the staggering toll the Opioid Epidemic has taken on the Mohawk Valley. “The key is awareness and people not being afraid to speak out,” said John. “I am so thankful that ACR Health has stepped up and has made its presence known in the community to address this situation by having a Syringe Exchange Program as well as Case Management for those dealing with Addiction.”

John’s 2018 Hike for Life team is “Friends of Recovery Mohawk Valley” and will be one of many teams hiking on Saturday, April 28 as ACR Health is welcomed to the exciting new course at SUNY Polytechnic Institute in Utica.

“ACR Health is a valued local resource, helping foster informed and responsible decision-making for those with chronic diseases, face substance use or suffer from serious mental illness, in addition to providing targeted prevention services. SUNY Poly is proud to assist ACR Health’s community mission,” said SUNY Poly Interim President Dr. Bahgat Sammakia.

John’s goal is to raise $10,000 and raise awareness about the good work ACR Health has done in the Mohawk Valley. 100% of the money raised at the Hike for Life stays in the Mohawk Valley to support ACR Health’s mission to create healthy communities by opening doors for those fighting AIDS, Addiction, LGBTQ Inequality, and Poverty.

To register or to learn more about the Hike for Life: ACRHealth.org/events or 315.475.2430.
BLOWOUT 2018

BLOWOUT 2018 presented by Gilead Sciences and sponsored by GOLDWELL NY, rocked the Landmark Theatre Sunday, February 18, when Central New York’s most acclaimed salons put their styling skills on the line. This year’s theme – SuperHeroes and Villains – set off a clash of good and evil inspired creations with stunning models strutting across 70 feet of runway, competing for cash, prizes, and bragging rights. BLOWOUT 2018, hosted by WTVH’s Michael Benny, showcased live superheroes - original concepts displayed through exotic and glamorous designs.

“BLOWOUT is our way to shine a spotlight on women-owned businesses in Central New York and celebrate them in a truly unique way. This event is dynamic, exciting, with a strong dose of compassion and a whole lot of hairspray,” said Maureen Harrington O’Neill, ACR Health’s Assistant Development Director.

All BLOWOUT proceeds support ACR Health’s mission to create healthy communities by opening doors for those fighting AIDS, Addiction, LGBTQ Inequality, and Poverty.

ACR Health would like to thank our sponsors: ReJuvN8, Syracuse Woman Magazine, Attilio’s, Lamar, FOX68, Santangelo’s, MilkShake, CNY Central, Colonial Benefits, John Dickquest, Sola, Visual Technologies, DJ Mike Red, Cloud City Comics, and The Landmark Theatre.
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UPCOMING EVENTS

April 28, 2018 - Saturday
20th Annual Hike for Life **NEW LOCATION**
Join us on our exciting new course at SUNY Polytechnic Institute in Utica, featuring lively festivities. Hike begins at 1:00 p.m. Come celebrate the 20th Annual Hike for Life. #HikeForLife2018

May 29, 2018 - Tuesday
Paint the Town RED
Annual kick-off press conference to a week of AIDS, LGBTQ, Addiction and Poverty awareness that culminates at AIDS Walk/Run: 10:00 a.m. Clinton Square, downtown Syracuse.

June 3, 2018 - Sunday
26th Annual AIDS Walk/Run-5K walk/run and 10K timed run
Central New York’s oldest and most successful AIDS fundraiser begins at 10:00 a.m. at Beaver Lake Nature Center, Baldwinsville.

Motivate, empower, and deliver with our new fundraising website.

• Use social media to ask friends and family to donate
• Track your progress
• View event photos
• Watch the power of your money impact the causes you care about

All proceeds support ACR Health’s mission to create healthy communities by opening doors for those fighting AIDS, Addiction, Poverty, and LGBTQ Inequality.

Q CENTERS FOR LGBTQ YOUTH
Resources throughout Central, Northern, and Mohawk Valley regions. For information call 800.475.2430 or email QCenter@ACRHealth.org
Group times listed ACRHealth.org/youth

TESTING SERVICES
HIV, gonorrhea, chlamydia, syphilis, and Hepatitis C. Testing@ACRHealth.org

NARCAN TRAINING
Monthly trainings at ACR Health offices. Appointments: Narcan@ACRHealth.org

SYRINGE EXCHANGES
• Syracuse: 637 West Genesee Street and Outreach Van at corner of Dudley & Fitch Street
• Utica: 287 Genesee Street
• Watertown: 135 Franklin Street
SEP@ACRHealth.org

DRUG USER HEALTH CLINIC - SYRACUSE
Provides onsite access to acute medical care, medication assisted therapy, and linkage to additional medical resources.

HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAMS
Health insurance enrollment and advocacy. Navigator@ACRHealth.org

GET INVOLVED. JOIN THE TEAM.
For more information on all programs or if you wish to unsubscribe from the newsletter:
information@ACRHealth.org or 800.475.2430