



Staffordshire Buddies

the story so far...

Introduction

This year Staffordshire Buddies is celebrating it's tenth anniversary.

Launched in 1993 on 1st December, the day globally recognised as World AIDS Day, Staffordshire Buddies has grown into a very different organisation than it originally set out to be.

However, the story of how Staffordshire Buddies came into existence began three years earlier and this publication sets out to record the definitive history of this remarkable organisation.

Inside you will learn how the organisation was formed as well as how its services have changed, adapted and evolved to meet the ever changing needs of the people it was created for.

It is an incredible journey which demonstrates the determination, devotion and dedication of an awe-inspiring group of people, together with personal memories from some of the many wonderful people who have been involved.

This publication is a tribute to all those responsible for our remarkable success.

Bob Lishman

Chair





The History of Staffordshire Buddies

1990

In February 1990 a group of people living with HIV/AIDS met for the first time at the North Staffordshire Health Promotion Unit. The meeting had come about as a result of discussions between Sue Cannon, a newly appointed Health Advisor at North Staffordshire Genitourinary Medicine clinic and Paul Berrisford, HIV Programme Officer at North Staffordshire Health Authority. Sue was aware that several HIV positive clients at the clinic wanted to meet other people living with HIV for mutual support and the meeting in February was arranged to provide this opportunity.

A handful of people living with HIV/AIDS attended this meeting along with a couple of their friends and carers. The group decided to meet fortnightly and soon afterwards established a helpline running every evening from 7 to 10pm. The group had no premises and the helpline had to operate from group members' homes. There were very few calls but a further three people living with HIV did join the group as a result of the helpline service.

The group decided to call itself 'Body Positive' following the trend set by the first UK HIV/AIDS self help group established in London in the late 1980s.

At this time there were very few services in the UK for people living with HIV/AIDS apart from the services that self help groups like Body Positive set up and ran for themselves. Body Positive groups were leaders in the battle against stigma and discrimination and gave HIV positive people a collective voice in the face of the emerging epidemic.

body positive

Tel. (0782) 201251

· NORTH MIDLANDS SUPPORT GROUP ·

INFO

ADVICE

SUPPORT

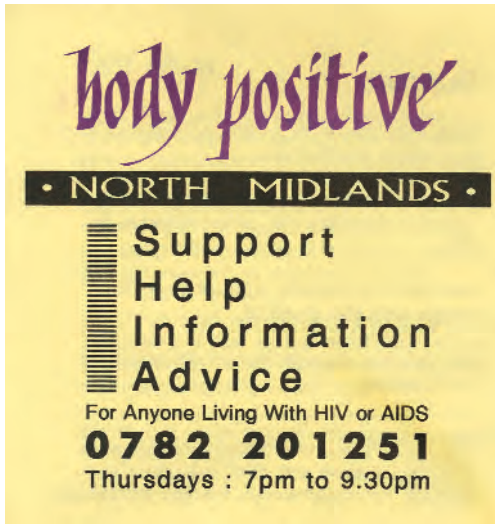
HELP

0782 201251

North Staffs. District Health Education 1980

A confidential service for anyone affected by HIV and AIDS

19690



1991

During the early part of this year Body Positive successfully bid for a significant package of development funding from the West Midlands Regional Health Authority. This led to the group opening a bank account and adopting a constitution to form a Management Committee. The name of the group became 'Body Positive North Midlands' as it was a condition of the funding that services would be offered in Shropshire as well as Staffordshire.

There was a need to find premises in which to effectively develop Body Positive North Midlands' activities but all attempts to find a suitable building failed. The search reached some kind of conclusion for the time being when Druglink North Staffordshire agreed that the group could use a spare office in the Druglink building in Hope Street, Hanley. Neither Druglink nor Body Positive expected that this would be a long-term arrangement, it was only supposed to be a temporary office for use while somewhere more suitable was found. Nobody could have guessed that it would actually be four years before services could move to a dedicated centre.

The funding from West Midlands Regional Health Authority also enabled Body Positive North Midlands to begin recruitment of a full time Development Worker and a part time Clerical Officer. Hilary Dandrea was appointed to the post of Clerical Officer but the post of Development Worker proved more difficult to fill. After a second round of recruitment, Andrew Colclough was appointed as Development Worker and commenced in post at the end of November 1991.

By the end of 1991 Body Positive was meeting regularly at a drop-in on Thursday evenings held at the Druglink building in Hope Street, Hanley. The sessions alternated on a fortnightly cycle with a social and complementary therapies evening one week and a support session facilitated by Pauline Middleton, a Health Authority HIV Counsellor.



The cramped Body Positive office at Druglink offered a modest selection of HIV/AIDS resources including leaflets, magazines books and cassettes.

Some members of Body Positive were actively involved in an arts based programme of HIV education for schools developed by North Staffordshire Health Promotion called 'Someone Like You'. This highly successful initiative was greatly enhanced by the involvement of people living with HIV/AIDS and is the forerunner of the educational work that people living with HIV undertake in Staffordshire even to this day.

The support given to people living with HIV/AIDS was given mostly by other people living with HIV/AIDS or through the Health Authority's HIV Counsellor. A telephone helpline was operated by HIV positive people two afternoons a week. There were no other services specifically for people living with HIV/AIDS and most of the HIV positive members of Body Positive were gay men with just one being an HIV positive woman. There were about six regular users of the support group and roughly twelve people using services on a regular basis.

People were in varying states of health and mostly only being treated with AZT, the first licensed antiretroviral drug. It was remarkable that such a small group of people living with the daily reality of serious illness was able to achieve so much for the benefit of others.






1992

As anyone who has worked in the voluntary sector will tell you, one of the biggest crunch points for a new organisation is when it employs someone for the first time. This is the point at which people who have previously led the organisation's development have to become managers and relinquish some of the control over day to day business; a situation which often leads to clashes and conflict. Body Positive was no exception and in the early part of 1992 rumblings of discontent began to emerge from the Chairperson about the new Development Worker.

Things came to a head when a group of Body Positive members tried to move a vote of no confidence in the Development Worker, which was unsuccessful and resulted in the resignation of the Chairperson. The wounds of this conflict created divisions that were slow to heal but in time things did move on.

June 1992 saw the launch of the first edition of Body Positive North Midlands News which subsequently ran for fifteen issues until 1994. This early newsletter was produced by the Body Positive Development Worker to keep people informed about activities and events. Later it would become 'Staffordshire View' and eventually 'Positive Lives', which is currently produced by clients and volunteers.



POSITIVE LINKS

A SUPPORT GROUP FOR FAMILIES,
PARTNERS, FRIENDS AND CARERS

If you
others
The g
and
Peo
Posit
Fo

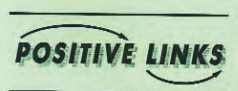
Positive Links

Support for partners, families
and friends who care or
have cared about someone
living with HIV or AIDS

- ✧ Friendly
- ✧ Confidential
- ✧ Information
- ✧ Support

Tel: (01782) 751111

A service of Staffordshire Health Authority
P.O. Box 474 • Hanley • B47 6YU
Registered Charity No. 263057



POSITIVE LINKS

A Support Group
For The Partners,
Families and
Friends of People
Living With
HIV or AIDS

What is a Buddy?

A Buddy is a volunteer who is trained to support and befriend a person living with HIV/AIDS. The term was originally coined by American HIV/AIDS services in the 1980s. In the early years of the epidemic when people living with HIV/AIDS were stigmatised by the wider community, Buddies provided a lifeline of hope, support and acceptance.

1992 was also the year in which it was first identified that support could be expanded through the use of volunteers trained as 'Buddies'. However, proposals to the various Staffordshire Health Authorities requesting funds to set up a Buddy service were unsuccessful.

1992 also saw the launch of the 'Positive Links' support group for partners, friends and relatives of people living with HIV. Although caring for the carers was an important aim, getting carers to care about themselves was a challenge and very few people used the service. This was also the year in which Body Positive established the 'North Midlands Emergency Fund' to make payments to people in situations of exceptional need. The fund was administered by a group of people who supported Body Positive's development but had no need of making applications to the fund themselves.



'I responded to an advertisement in the local newspaper inviting members of the public along to a meeting being held at the CVS building in Leek Road, Hanley in 1993. The organisers of the meeting were looking for volunteers to befriend and support those affected by the HIV virus... I knew a little about the HIV virus and AIDS, but until that meeting hadn't really understood how devastating the diagnosis really was for those affected/infected by the virus. I decided to put myself forward as a volunteer, and consequently became a founder member of Staffordshire Buddies, and the first Chairperson...'

Laureen



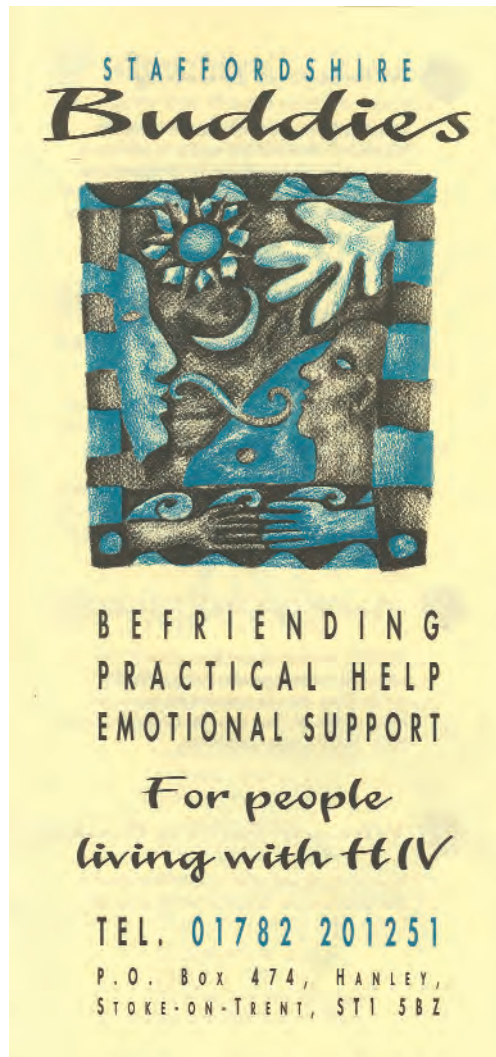
1993

As the number of people using Body Positive grew the demands on services began to exceed the capacity of the few people who were prepared to offer support to others. Furthermore, these same few people were members of the Management Committee and were finding it increasingly difficult to keep up with the demands of the organisation's ever more complex finance and business. The Management Committee was already supported by several people of negative or unknown HIV status but it was clear that if services were to grow, there would need to be more volunteers.

A second attempt at securing funds to develop a Buddy scheme was successful. With around £7000 secured from North and South Staffordshire Health Authorities an ambitious plan was hatched to recruit and train twenty new volunteers as Buddies within six months. A steering group was formed with representatives from the North Staffordshire HIV Co-ordinate, South Staffordshire Health Promotion and Staffordshire Social Services working alongside the Body Positive Development Worker.

In July that year press releases went out Staffordshire wide inviting interested members of the public to attend open evenings to find out more. Prospective volunteers had to complete a written application form and provide two references; about thirty people were interviewed and twenty five proceeded onto the training programme.

The training consisted of a two day introductory 'Facts and Issues' weekend followed by an intensive residential Buddy training weekend designed to prepare volunteers with the skills and emotional resilience needed to support someone with HIV/AIDS. By now, some clients of Body Positive were in a state of poor health and so it was envisaged that Buddies would primarily be needed to work with people with serious illness and those near the end of their lives.



'...the training was of the same high quality as the interview and the first time we volunteers gathered together we could not have been a more motley crew! Yet the laughs and tears we went through together, gradually trusting one another, moulded us into a very supportive bunch. At the end of one of the early sessions we had to write affirmative words down on a piece of paper about each other. I still have my envelope with those words in and if I ever need cheering up I turn to those words ...'

Anne

For most of 1993 the new service was known as 'Staffordshire HIV Support' then, at a crucial 'visioning' meeting following the training programme, the volunteers were asked to decide what the new organisation should be called. 'Buddies are what we are and so Buddies is what we should be called' was the response. That is how the organisation came to be known as Staffordshire Buddies.

Everything went pretty much to plan and the volunteers completed their Buddy training on 14th November 1993. On 30th November volunteers met to adopt a draft constitution and form the first Management Committee. The following day on 1st December 1993 Staffordshire Buddies announced that it was launching itself to help meet the challenges of HIV/AIDS in Staffordshire. The day was World AIDS Day and the global theme for the day was 'A Time to Act'.



'... I remember visiting Andrew in a tiny room at Druglink, with Hilary the part-time secretary and a huge photocopier, that seemed to take up half the room. I used to attend the regular Thursday night drop-ins at Druglink – a bigger darker room was used that smelt of smoke. Complementary therapies were provided by Steve, who did aromatherapy and Kate who provided Shiatsu. We would sit and talk, and laugh – it was so good...'

Jenny Read



1994

There had always been the intention that Body Positive and Staffordshire Buddies would work closely together providing a complementary range of services. The idea of having a shared centre had also been around in Body Positive from the time it first began to float the idea of the new volunteer based service. The first half of 1994 was the period in which this shared vision was to become a reality and the volunteers of Staffordshire Buddies began meeting with the Management Committee of Body Positive for the first time.

Detailed and specific strategies were drawn up to clarify the relationship between the two organisations and a shared vision of a new centre to provide space for HIV/AIDS services. However, even as these plans were being laid, illness and burnout was affecting more and more of the members of Body Positive North Midlands. Key decisions were taken by Body Positive that it would soon cease to hold its own bank accounts and manage funds enabling members to concentrate solely on self-help and mutual support. This decision came as a relief to many people in Body Positive who were worn out with the work needed to manage finance and staff. However, the decision also raised questions about whether Staffordshire Buddies would be ready to take on the management of bank accounts and employment responsibilities.

Things were resolved with very little time to spare. Staffordshire Buddies took on the management of staff and the main service related funds from 1st April and Body Positive resolved to dissolve itself as a legal entity that held its own funds at the Annual General Meeting on 19th May. The decision by Body Positive was not straightforward and there were several people living with HIV who wanted Body Positive to continue as an organisation in its own right. However, despite these feelings there were no longer sufficient people living with HIV/AIDS prepared to stand for the Management Committee. So by default the only option remaining was to proceed without a committee with the support of Staffordshire Buddies.

Staffordshire Buddies Support Fund

**For people living
with HIV or AIDS
in financial need**

We can help pay for essential
things you need that you can't
afford yourself

Ask for an application pack

Tel: (01782) 201251

A service of Staffordshire Buddies
P.O. Box 474 • Hanley • Stoke-on-Trent • ST1 5BZ
Registered Charity No.1047375

In most respects this momentous decision had little impact on the services previously managed by Body Positive. People living with or affected by HIV/AIDS continued to meet on Thursday evenings at Druglink's Hope Street Centre in Hanley, the complementary therapies service, Positive Links support for partners, friends, family and carers and the North Midlands Emergency Fund all carried on as before. Body Positive renamed itself 'Body Positive Staffordshire' recognising that it no longer had any remit for Shropshire and that the name now referred to the group of people who met to support each other and not to an organisation.

In addition to these well established services, new things began to happen as a result of Staffordshire Buddies beginning to develop. The first 'Buddies' were linked to people living with HIV/AIDS and a new support group was established for Haemophiliacs affected by HIV/AIDS. The North Midlands Emergency Fund was brought up to date and re-launched as the 'Staffordshire Buddies Support Fund'.

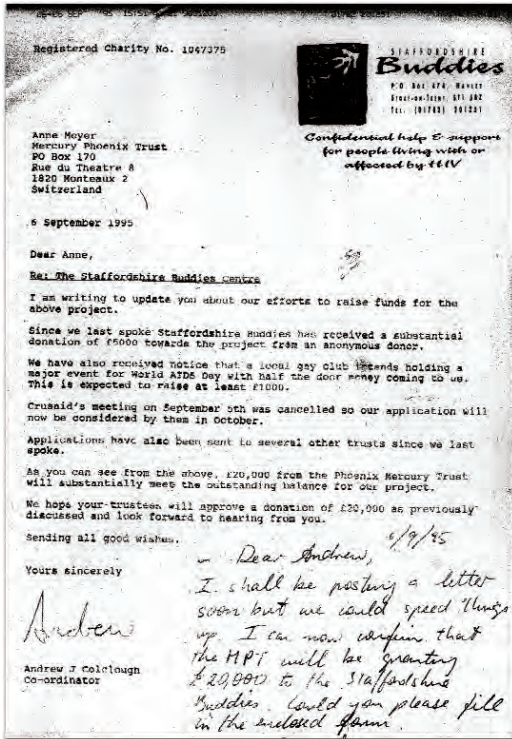
The main thing holding services back at this point was a lack of space. A great deal of energy was channelled by staff and volunteers into a search for suitable premises to lease or rent. Needs assessments had been conducted to establish the best location. The ideal was considered to be Hanley or Stoke in self-contained discreet premises on good public transport routes. Despite all the effort expended on the search, no suitable premises were found.

In 1994 Hilary left to take up a new post at North Staffordshire Health Authority and Sarah Beech came on board as a Clerical Officer to replace her. Sarah was to become Staffordshire Buddies longest serving employee.

'At the beginning of 1994 I felt like I was running up a crumbling staircase. On the one hand things were moving ahead very well with the newly formed Staffordshire Buddies growing from strength to strength. On the other hand, many of the people who had driven Body Positive for the last four years were running out of steam. The big question for me was whether Staffordshire Buddies would be ready to take on all the responsibilities of finance and employment before Body Positive gave them up. I remember a Staffordshire Buddies Executive Committee meeting on 12th January 1994 in which the committee had to decide whether it would take all these responsibilities on. I left the meeting to take a walk while the committee decided. All that is recorded in the Minutes for that night is "We had to decide whether to remain a small organisation or become one of the main providers of care and information for those with HIV/AIDS. We opted for the second choice". This courageous decision made by volunteers, who were less than two months into managing Staffordshire Buddies, secured the future...'

Andrew Colclough





1995

In January 1995 the search for a centre took on a new life. Ideal premises had been found close to the bus station in Hanley. The only problem was that the building was up for sale and not available to rent or lease. Staffordshire Buddies didn't have enough money to buy the property but after searching for nearly a year volunteers and staff were determined not let the opportunity go. Requests for donations were sent out to grant-making trusts and charities all over the UK. They all came back with refusals; raising funds to buy a centre was not going to be easy.

Despite this, Staffordshire Buddies made an offer on the premises and employed a solicitor and a surveyor. This was a risky strategy, as at that point the organisation did not have sufficient funds to complete the sale. Months passed by and the seller became more anxious, it began to look like the sale would not go ahead and that the property would be lost to another buyer.

Meanwhile the pressure to move out of the Druglink building was growing. Not only was there insufficient space but what space there had been was now being used more and more by Druglink itself. It was clear that services would become untenable by the end of the year unless a new centre could be found.

By some stroke of good fortune, a national HIV/AIDS trust called Crusaid had a representative visiting the North Staffordshire area to look at a funding request from Ward 70 at the City General hospital. Although Crusaid said they were unlikely to have money for premises they agreed to visit and have a look at the Body Positive/Staffordshire Buddies offices while they were in the area. They were so appalled at the conditions and lack of space that they said they would do their best to help.

As a result of representations made by Crusaid, the Freddy Mercury Phoenix Trust agreed to donate £20,000 towards the purchase of the new centre. This, along with an anonymous donation of £5,000, money from World AIDS Day fundraising and £4,000 from Crusaid, enabled the purchase to go ahead.



1995 was also the year in which Staffordshire Buddies branched out into HIV prevention work. Following an approach from South Staffordshire Health Authority, Staffordshire Buddies submitted a bid to develop a new HIV prevention project to target gay and bisexual men. The Health Authority was under a lot of pressure to establish such a project following the results of a regional needs assessment. The need for the project was beyond question but at that time the Health Authority felt that providing services just for gay and bisexual men would be too sensitive to do 'in house'. After thorough consideration Staffordshire Buddies decided to take the challenge on and this is how what became known as the 'South Staffordshire MesMen Project' was born.

MesMen was established primarily to undertake outreach work in public sex environments providing condoms and health information to men who have sex with men. There was no gay scene in South Staffordshire so working in public toilets and parks was one of the few ways of undertaking any kind of direct HIV prevention activity with this population group.

The decision to undertake HIV prevention work as well as care services marked an important stage in the organisation's development. It signalled that Staffordshire Buddies was no longer just a Buddy Service but was prepared to tackle all aspects of the HIV epidemic.

By the end of 1995 Staffordshire Buddies was a registered charity with around fifty volunteers and premises in both Hanley and Stafford, the latter having been rented to accommodate the newly appointed MesMen project workers.

The need for HIV/AIDS services had never been greater. Body Positive continued to meet under the new name of Staffordshire Body Positive maintaining the long established ethos of people living with HIV/AIDS supporting each other. However, there were now increasing numbers of clients who used the Buddy Service and other services without becoming part of the Body Positive group. A lot of people were unwell with serious illness and bereavements were an all too regular occurrence. Volunteers, Buddies Staff and Health Authority professionals met regularly to support each other as the epidemic took its toll on both clients and colleagues.

'I remember very clearly September 6th 1995. I had spent months trying to raise the funds we needed to buy our new centre and every application to trusts and charities that I submitted had been refused. Hopes of a significant grant from Social Services were fading and it seemed that despite all our efforts we were going to lose the only suitable place we had been able to find in almost eighteen months of searching. I sent a fax to the Freddy Mercury Phoenix Trust in Switzerland asking if they had been able to decide on our recently re-submitted application in the light of the new support we now had for our cause from Crusaid. About ten minutes later the fax I had sent started to come back through the fax machine. It was strange, as I'd never heard of a fax bouncing back before! As I watched my letter coming back out of the fax machine I saw a note handwritten on the bottom of the fax. It said that they had approved £20,000 towards the centre and I knew then that we were going to be okay. I shouted, jumped up and down and almost danced for joy, it was one of the most amazing moments of my professional life.'

Andrew Colclough



'...the situation at Druglink became untenable and we had to move before the new centre was ready. For months we ran the organisation from a building site. I remember joining the volunteers at weekends to strip woodchip wallpaper and put on new paper and paint. All the decorating was done on a shoestring budget by dedicated and hard working volunteers...'

Andrew Colclough



1996

1996 was the year in which services took big leaps forward in development. Following the purchase and renovation of the Hanley Centre a day time drop-in service commenced for the very first time.

Increased numbers of clients led to greater needs and additional funds were obtained from Health Authorities and Social Services enabling the appointment of a new 'Community Services Co-ordinator'. This was a big step for care and support services which until this time had been co-ordinated just by the full time worker Andrew, and part time clerical officer Sarah

The MesMen project moved to more suitable premises in Lichfield and continued to expand its services.

After all the organisational developments of the previous year 1996 was a year of consolidation in which services became much better established.



'... 1996 saw the introduction of highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) and I was amongst those able to benefit (and suffer from the side effects) of protease inhibitors and later non-nucleoside inhibitors (more user friendly). During this time my involvement with Staffordshire Buddies increased; you might say that I became a bit of an AIDS activist. I certainly remember campaigning for service user representation on the executive committee and passionately expressing the need for the voice of the newsletter to be that of positive people.'

Maurice Greenham

'... Buddies turned out to be so much more than I could have expected. Don't get me wrong; everything is not perfect, what is? "Discussion" can be heated but in the end, respect for each other means we agree to disagree. But I have discovered the meaning of true friendship, concern, regard and self-esteem...

...at the drop-in I've become pretty nifty at making a mean cup of coffee and a 'selection of fine teas' while we all gather to chin wag. Being greeted when you enter with a smile, a hug or a peck on the cheek shows you are welcome for who you are and helps to raise your self-esteem and confidence. Regardless of differing sexualities, ethnicity, gender, backgrounds and age (me being so young and all), we are all capable of sharing our lives in various ways by telling our own personal stories, having a laugh...'

Jody



'I remember the Red Ribbon RIOT, a World Aids Day fundraiser at The Club. Maurice was hosting the raffle and the (female) Chaplain from Keele was ushered out of the room as the male stripper came on to do his stuff. I was left to fend for myself...'

Father Brian



STAFFORDSHIRE
Buddies

1997

For the last five years many HIV positive clients had been battling with increasingly severe bouts of illness and deteriorating health. Many people, some of whom had been involved with Body Positive from the earliest years had died or become seriously ill. But around the mid 1990s HIV treatment drastically improved with the advent of 'combination therapy' which involved taking two or three different kinds of anti HIV drugs at the same time. By 1997 it was obvious that for many people the new combination therapy regime was working. Many clients were healthier and became more interested in becoming volunteers and members of the Executive Committee. This new complexity of HIV medication itself raised many new needs - support around adhering to the drugs, coping with side effects and information about the new treatments to name but a few.

To ensure that clients had a voice on the Executive Committee Staffordshire Buddies agreed to routinely co-opt service user representatives at each Annual General Meeting.



'... out of gratitude for the care and loving kindness given to me by Staffordshire Buddies and Ward 70, I organised a concert of classical music for World AIDS Day to raise funds for them both. The success of the concert, and no doubt the frustration I encountered trying to organise it, led to the creation of an independent group MUSICAID, whose events continued to generate funds and raise HIV/AIDS awareness locally until the end of the century...'

Maurice Greenham



Following the successful establishment of the South Staffordshire MesMen project, Shropshire Health Authority invited Staffordshire Buddies to submit proposals to manage their Gay and Bisexual Men's Health Promotion Project. A lengthy negotiation concluded with Staffordshire Buddies taking on management of 'Shrop Gay Health' from April 1997. The project included a drop in centre for gay and bisexual men in Shrewsbury with two full time staff and a team of sessional workers.



'Staffordshire Buddies has helped me so much. I came from my home country and didn't know anyone. I did not know I was HIV Positive but was tested due to a serious chest infection. It was then that my CNS put me in contact with you. I don't think I would have managed without the help and kindness I have received. I attend the Esprit Women's Group and meet others like me, both African and European. Everyone is so friendly and welcoming. Whenever I have a problem with housing or people from other places of work I ask Staffordshire Buddies and they always help me sort things out. Thank you.'

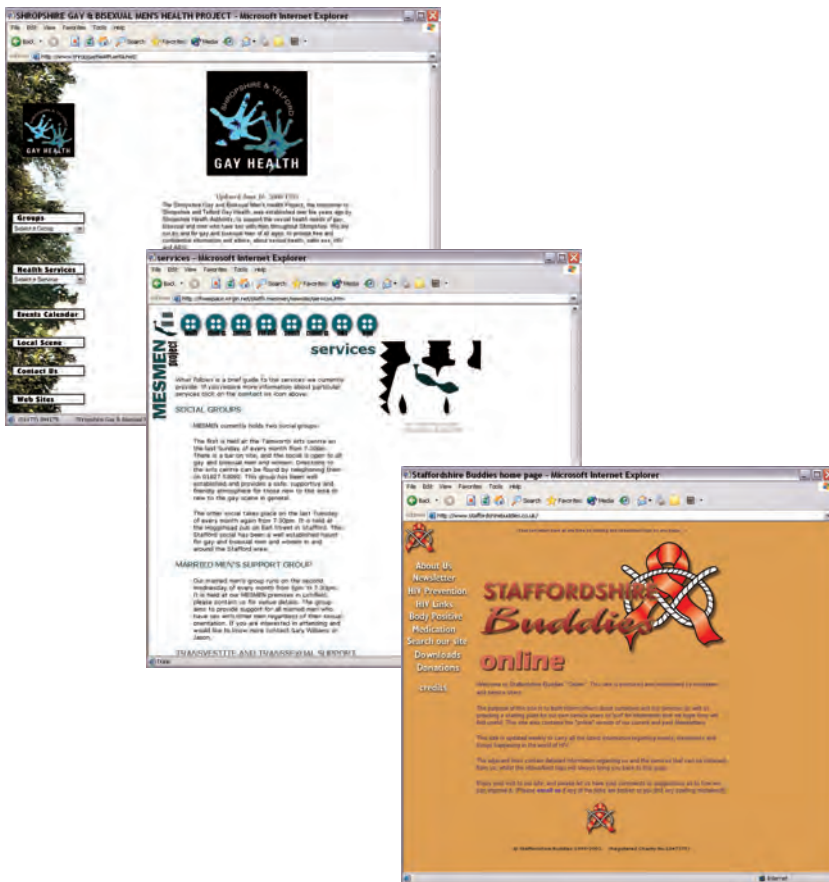
African Women Service User



1998

By the end of 1998 both the number and the diversity of clients living with HIV/AIDS had increased dramatically. The number of new diagnoses was increasing due to the maturity of the HIV epidemic; many new diagnoses were people infected several years previously. A small but significantly growing number of new clients living with or affected by HIV/AIDS were heterosexual men and women, often in families with children. The diversity of clients and their needs led to an expansion of volunteer roles and new services. The Buddy service was still very active but now represented only a fraction of the work undertaken by volunteers and by the organisation as a whole.

South Staffordshire MesMen Project recruited a Counselling and Community Development Officer enabling the project to provide counselling services and support groups for gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men.



'I was introduced to this particular man, when he was already very ill and on Ward 70. His family visited whenever they could but he was alone for long stretches of time. So I would 'phone the ward and if he didn't have visitors already I would visit him. To begin with he was able to go outside in a wheelchair for a cigarette, and we'd sit and pass the time of day together. If any of his family arrived I would leave soon afterwards. It wasn't long before he was confined to bed more and more and not long after that he was put on morphine. I still visited him whenever I could and sat and talked to him about anything and everything really, without knowing whether he could hear me. Or I would sit quietly and stroke his hand or arm, not knowing whether he could feel my touch. The last time I ever heard him speak in my presence, he suddenly roused and said "it's alright to have a friend". I'll never forget it.

Maureen

Shrop Gay Health undertook an ambitious health promotion programme on the gay scene called 'Get Sorted'. The campaign included new resources tied in with gay scene based work.

Both MesMen and Shrop Gay Health piloted new HIV Prevention Strategies based on the national 'Making it Count' strategic framework. The Staffordshire and Shropshire strategies were widely copied across the whole West Midlands region.

As the world of IT advanced Staffordshire Buddies kept pace by developing websites for its services for people living with HIV/AIDS, the South Staffordshire MesMen Project and Shrop Gay Health.



'...I consider myself to be a very lucky person; I enjoy my job immensely, and have learnt and gained so much, both professionally and personally, from the people I work with. Thank you'

Sarah Beech



1999

Improved health meant that more and more HIV positive clients were able to become actively involved as helpers and volunteers. There was a sense in which the original vision of an organisation that had strong involvement of people living with HIV/AIDS was finally coming to fruition. The Staffordshire Buddies constitution was amended to require election of service user representatives every year to recognise both the diversity and increasing number of clients.

Shrop Gay Health had by this stage developed into a very active and highly successful gay and bisexual men's health project. To further expand services, space was rented at premises in Telford to begin offering services there.

Andrew Colclough resigned from post to undertake a two year placement with Voluntary Service Overseas in Africa. Andrew had been the most senior staff member in Staffordshire Buddies since it began and his departure meant that the organisation would have a new Director for the first time. Janine Hunt was appointed as the new Director commencing in October 1999.

'I first came to Staffordshire Buddies in 1999, a short time after my HIV diagnosis. I was 18 years old and very confused; ... I felt very different to other service users because of the age difference between me and them but none the less, the service users, staff and volunteers made me feel welcome and supported me through those first few difficult months. After using the centre for a year and getting all the support I needed, I decided to join the Executive Committee as a service user representative. I feel that I'm putting something back and that being HIV+ will benefit other people. I never thought that I would really have a "life" after I got told I was positive but now I'm starting college to do A levels and really looking forward to what life has to offer me. I don't think that I would have got this far without the help and support offered to me by all the staff, volunteers and service users at Staffordshire Buddies.'

Jonathan



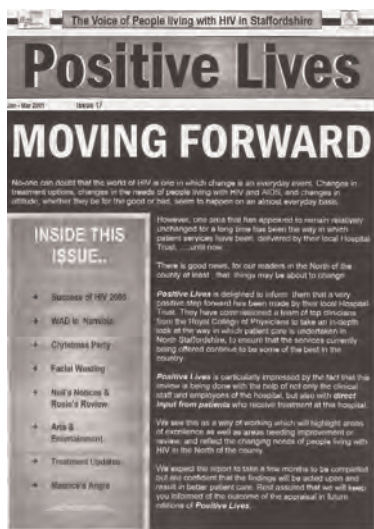
Structured Children and Families Services began to be developed in 1999 and the organisation had to adapt to the fact that gay and bisexual men were no longer the only significant group of people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS. Staffordshire Buddies led a regional development forum looking at the complex ethical and safety issues around providing children's activities placing the organisation at the cutting edge of national developments in the HIV/AIDS field.



'The people at Staffordshire Buddies have helped me understand my diagnosis. They have given me information about the illness and helped me come to terms with what is happening to me and what could happen in the future. Whenever I have a "panic" about my status I know I can telephone or call in to see them and they always have time to care and listen. I don't think I would ever have been able to face my diagnosis without the care and support they provide.'

Female service user

2000



2000

Following recruitment of a new part-time worker, the TnT (Tots and Teens) group commenced as a new service for children and young people affected by HIV/AIDS.

The larger number of women clients with HIV led to a new support group specifically for women.

Staffordshire Buddies hosted the 'HIV 2000 Conference' with guest speakers (photo right) to highlight the changes that were taking place in the needs of people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS.

Workshops were organised to help clients understand the ever more complicated world of HIV treatment issues and treatment became a regular topic in the Positive Lives newsletter.

'...I remember the HIV 2000 conference as a great day for both the people and the organisation... It was fantastic having guest speakers from all over the UK coming to an event organised by Staffordshire Buddies... I remember feeling very proud that everything went so smoothly ...and the excitement of everyone meeting our celebrity guest, Julie Hesmondhalgh, who plays Haley Patterson in Coronation Street...'

Bob Lishman



2000

'...I remember the World AIDS Day vigils and Father Brian's services at Holy Trinity when we all get together to remember. They're good but sad times, lives to be remembered and celebrated...'

Maureen



2001

2001

Plans were drawn up to move to larger premises in Stafford as a central location for services in Hanley, Lichfield, Shrewsbury and Telford. As with any major change this led to debate and uncertainty.

Meanwhile, the organisation suffered a significant setback when it failed to secure the contract for continuing gay and bisexual men's HIV prevention work in Shropshire. This led to the closure of Shrop Gay Health and set the tone for what proved to be a very turbulent year.

Janine resigned as Director in the middle of the year leaving the organisation still debating the benefits of the move to Stafford. The proposed move was eventually shelved after further consideration of the financial and logistical implications.

The increasing number of people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS in South Staffordshire led to the appointment of an HIV/AIDS Services Development Worker for South Staffordshire. This was the first time that HIV/AIDS Direct Services had a dedicated worker based in the south of the county.



'I like coming to the TnT Club because I meet up with lots of friends and we go to really good places like Alton Towers. My mum is really happy when I go because she says it gives her some peace! I wish we could go more often though because I miss everyone when I don't see them for ages.'

TnT Member (aged 6)

By the end of 2001 stability returned in the form of Chris Woolls who took on the role of Director towards the end of the year:

The organisation changed its approach to volunteer training by introducing a system of 'mentoring' in which experienced volunteers work one to one with new volunteers to guide them through six modules. This replaced the previous training weekends that have become largely redundant due to the greater diversity of volunteer roles.

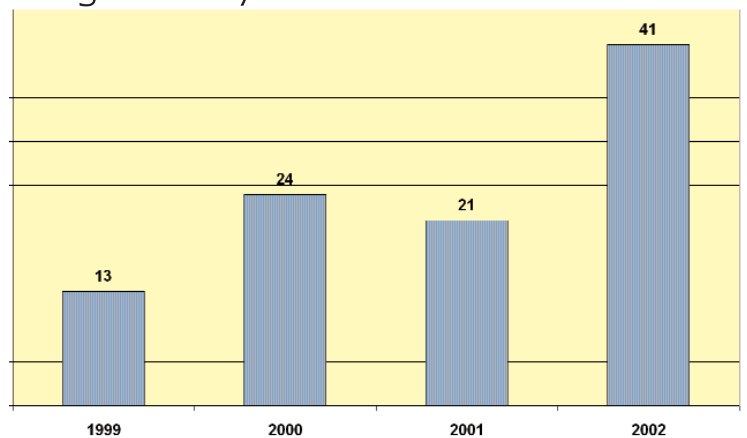


'My younger sister and brother had been on TnT outings but I didn't go because I thought it was for the little kids. But Rosie asked me one day to go to Alton Towers and I did. We had a great time - we jumped all the rides because we had special wristbands on. The other kids are great! But sometimes the younger ones get on my nerves because they want me to pick them up and play with them. Rosie tells me they may start a group for older kids who are HIV Positive and I think that this would be really great. Sometimes it is nice to be able to talk with people about being HIV+ because my family get upset if I talk about it too much at home.'

TnT Member (aged 15)

2002

Staffordshire Buddies **new** clients living with HIV/AIDS



2002

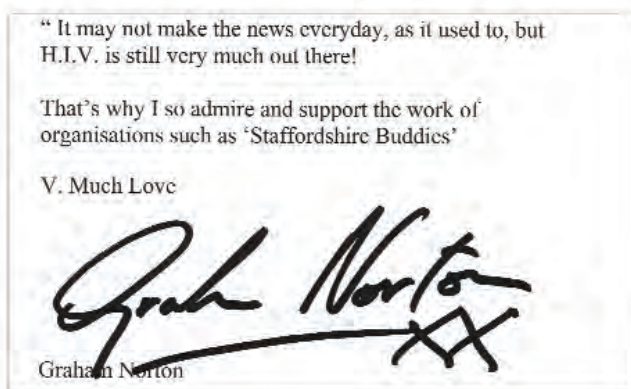
2002 is memorable as the year in which the number of new referrals to Direct Services doubled compared to the previous twelve months. Almost half of the new referrals were asylum seekers or refugees with complex needs reflecting the new national trends in dispersal of asylum seekers.

Recruitment of an additional Direct Services worker to patch up the overstretched Direct Services team commenced towards the end of the year but difficulty in finding a suitable candidate meant that the appointment had not been made by the time the year closed.

Andrew returned from Africa and although he had not originally intended to return to Buddies he applied for and was appointed to the vacant position of HIV/AIDS Direct Services Manager.

'My three children have been going to Staffordshire Buddies TnT Club since it began about 4 years ago. They always have a good time and the staff and volunteers provide an excellent service for us all. I look forward to the days the children are taken out as it means I can have some much needed rest! Sometimes I just sleep all day whilst other times I visit friends. I don't know what I would do without the TnT Summer Scheme!...Thank you Staffordshire Buddies.'

Parent who has children in the TnT Club



As Chris, the new Director, settled into post the organisation took on the monumental task of bringing its services up to date to meet the challenges of current needs. Practically every policy, procedure and service description was in need of review.

2002

'...on its tenth anniversary Staffordshire Buddies can take pride in its achievements.

This anniversary is as challenging a time as any in the history of the charity. However, with a committed staff, a dedicated band of volunteers and a wealth of past experience, I have no doubt that Staffordshire Buddies will continue to thrive and overcome whatever obstacles the future may present...'

Maurice Greenham



3002

2003

The increased client numbers and the diversity of clients has opened doors to new sources of funding. A part time Children and Families Worker was appointed with funding from BBC Children in Need and a part time African Communities Development Worker was appointed with funding from the Community Fund to name just two of the significant new developments.

Despite the new sources of funding, the resources for most services have stood still as client numbers continue to increase at unprecedented rates. In consequence many services have had to adapt to prioritise those most in need. The development of volunteer roles has become even more essential as a means of expanding services without an increase in resources.

As Staffordshire Buddies reaches its milestone tenth anniversary the services of the organisation have diversified considerably compared with the original Buddy service.

Looking to the future...

10 years and going strong. The charity has achieved this by both maintaining excellent relationships with our core funders, and by matching our clients needs with non-traditional grant making bodies. We'd like to thank those core funders: The 8 Staffordshire Primary Care Trusts, Staffordshire County Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council for their ongoing support.

That we've come this far has been made possible by the dynamic way in which the efforts of the volunteer and staff teams have ensured that the charity remains responsive to the needs of all our service users.

Obviously this process needs to continue, so that, in a sense, we are now engaged in an ongoing process of renewal and modernisation.

This charity is now very different to when it first started. If you think about the diversity of our service users now - there has been a massive amount of change. However, our core aims remain the same, focusing on Health Promotion and Support and Social Welfare.

Guided by those aims we should look to the future and new priorities; strengthening the relationship with our volunteers; recruiting volunteers from a diverse range of backgrounds; refurbishing our centre in Lichfield; developing services for young people both affected by and living with HIV; starting an LGBT youth group and a focused drive on LGBT Community Safety issues.

Beyond the new, our overarching priority must be to continue delivering quality services to all our service users, and ensuring that those services remain responsive to changing needs. In that way we ensure the charity is well placed to tackle future challenges and build upon a creditable 10 years hard work.

Chris Woolls
Director



'When first diagnosed I couldn't believe what the doctor was telling me. I was given Staffordshire Buddies telephone number but for two weeks was too scared to ring. I hadn't told anyone about my diagnosis. Eventually I did telephone and spoke to a Direct Services Worker. She encouraged me to meet with her. I am so glad I did. She explained so much to me. She answered all the questions that had built up in my head and she helped me through my fears, of dying, of disclosing to family members/friends. I do not attend the Esprit Women's group as I am still too scared about disclosing my status. But the Direct Services Worker and myself text and telephone each other. I know she is there to help me when I need her. One day I will be able to come to the centre regularly and hopefully become a volunteer'

Young Teenage Woman (17)



Direct Services

for People Living With or
Affected by HIV/AIDS



Information, Advice and Assistance
with benefits, housing, finance,
social care related issues and all
aspects of HIV/AIDS.

Buddies to provide one to one help
and support.

TnT (Tots n' Teens) activities for
children and young people.

Drop-in for people living with
HIV/AIDS on Tuesday and
Thursday afternoons in Hanley.

Women's Group

Heterosexual Men's Group

Social Evenings, Trips and Away Days

Transport to essential appointments.

Complementary Therapies provided at
the Hanley Centre or through
home visits.

Emergency Fund to pay for essential
items in emergencies and crisis
situations.

Positive Lives Newsletter

Resource Library of leaflets, periodicals,
books, videos and cassettes.

Computers with Broadband internet
access for client research,
education and recreation.

Condoms and Lubricant free from the
Hanley and Lichfield centres.

Signposting to other services.

Website

South Staffordshire MesMen Project

for LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual
and Transgendered) People.



Social Events every month in towns
across the area.

Youth Group

Internet Access

Support Groups for married men and
transvestites/transsexuals

Regular Newsletter

Condoms and Lubricant free from the
Lichfield centre or by post.

Access to Gay Press

Workshops & Training Events

Hate Crimes Reporting system and
support

Counselling or one-to-one support

Outreach HIV Prevention work in
public places, gay saunas and on
the internet

Information Resources

Signposting to local sexual health
clinics

Website

'The History of Staffordshire Buddies' was written by Andrew Colclough

Design and layout: Bob Lishman

Whilst reading this publication you may have noticed how few pictures contain people. Unfortunately, even in 2003 stigma and discrimination is such that very few people living with HIV/AIDS feel safe being open about their HIV status. Volunteers also have to be discreet in case they inadvertently identify someone living with HIV/AIDS by association.

While the stigmatisation of people living with HIV has reduced in recent years it still remains a major problem.

Acknowledgements

Staffordshire Buddies would like to thank:

**Staffordshire Coalfields
Community Chest** managed by
the Staffordshire Environmental Fund

Boehringer Ingelheim

Merck Sharp & Dohme Ltd
and an anonymous public donation
for sponsoring the 10th Anniversary
Event and the publication of this
History Book.