

Remarks from Tim Greusel, CCWS Board President

I want to begin my remarks by taking a moment to honor and remember our friend and colleague Doug Shaffer. Most of us were not here when Doug and a few forward thinking and concerned members of our community recognized that there was a threat to public health that only later became known as HIV and AIDS. They organized and took action with little information, much prejudice and few resources and sculpted a response to the disease that 25 years later is Co-County Wellness Services, Berks AIDS Network. Doug confronted this disease head on and the newly identified needs of his community with courage, dedication and ingenuity that are an example for us all to emulate and carry into our agency's future. We are grateful.

CCWS will be 25 years old this year and while it is, of course, noteworthy that we have been meeting the needs of this community for a quarter of a century, it means that we are still fighting an adversary that continues to affect the lives of our fellow citizens in ever evolving ways.

The face of AIDS has changed in the past 25 years from one that initially targeted gay men almost exclusively, to one that affects every aspect of our community; men and women, children, teenagers, young adults, people who are middle age, and older folks. AIDS no longer has any boundaries with respect to income, ethnicity, social status or sexual orientation. Until there is a cure, it is a disease that remains a very real risk that comes from simple and basic human action and need. And because what we do is so intrinsically linked to the most essential parts our human construct, our work is nowhere near complete and must go on for the foreseeable future.

The face of AIDS has changed, and so too have multi-faceted responses to the disease. Education and prevention strategies continue to evolve, medical interventions revolutionize quickly, and funding methodologies continue to change as public health policy shifts in response to political and community will.

The Berks and Schuylkill communities we serve need us more than ever before. This community need and the subsequent response does not take the same form as it did in the past, and it is our duty to define and re-define because HIV/ AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases are with us for any future that we can currently envision. While the context of the disease, its transmission and affected populations may have changed, the disease and subsequent needs that people have for support and intervention has not.

It is imperative that CCWS confronts and adapts to the ever-changing environment in which AIDS is addressed today and in the future, and the role of this Board remains as vital and important as ever. As the governing body of this agency, it is critical that we continue to be articulate and public spokespersons for what we do here. As CCWS continues to define and redefine itself as an organization, it is vital

that we bring our collective experience, creativity and input to the table to work hand in hand with our dedicated and committed staff.

Get to know what we do for the people we serve, offer your ideas, your comments and if necessary your criticisms. This agency's historical success comes from the interdependent ideas and actions of all of us. Bring a new Board member to the table; delve into an aspect of the agency that may interest you - education, prevention, medical services, social supports, case management, fund raising and development, fiscal, management or organizational issues; mentor an agency staff person; or invent and propose a new idea that will enhance the mission of the agency.

People of action and vision founded this organization, and as we move forward into our next twenty-five years, let each of us re-commit to lend our energy and voices to the ongoing needs of our community as we continue to wage war on this disease. It is far from over.