

Metropolitan Jacksonville Area HIV Health Services Planning Council

Council News and Updates

January 2022

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NEW FACES: GET TO KNOW A MEMBER

By Charles "Chuck" Flaherty, Member

Thank you for nominating me to be on the Metropolitan Jacksonville HIV Health Services Planning Council. It is an honor to serve this community.

I was born sixty-five years ago in Baton Rouge, LA. I "came out of the closet" in 1975 while attending Louisiana State University, where I graduated in accounting with a pre-med minor in biochemistry...but that's another story.

A local Certified Public Accountant (CPA) firm hired me out of college. After I passed the CPA exam, I specialized in corporate, non-profit, and governmental agency financial statement audits and income tax return preparation for corporations, partnerships, and individuals.

HIV/AIDS and I have been sharing this body for almost 40 years now. Thanks to lifestyle changes and twice-a-day shared "cocktail minutes," we reached a peace agreement about 30 years ago and embarked on a healing journey. It was 1980 when a perfectly healthy, vivacious close friend became sick with a mysterious illness and very quickly died from a rare pneumonia. Soon several other friends became sick, withered, and died with great suffering from what became known as the "the gay plague." The next 15 years were a terrifying and horrific time.

One day in 1985, a friend was over for lunch and said, "you're yellow." Turned out I had Hepatitis B. Because I was gay, the doctor also ran the ELISA test for HIV. It came back positive. Since there were a lot of false positives in those days, he then ran the new Western Blot test, which also was positive. I was 28 years old with a death sentence. The only question was when and how. Thankfully, my partner at the time was negative. He graduated with a Master's degree in Sociology and became the first HIV/AIDS counselor in the area working with the newly-created Immunological Support program at Our Lady of the Lake Medical Center. Along with the Franciscan sisters and other members of the community, we formed the first AIDS service organization in Baton Rouge in 1987.

My CD4 count went below 200 in 1989 and I began taking the antiretroviral AZT: two pills every four hours, 24 hours a day. Then in 1991, I noticed an anomaly in my visual field. In February 1992 with a t-cell count of 15, I was diagnosed with AIDS. By March, I was no longer able to see if it was night or day because the fluid in my eye had become so filled with detritus from retinal disease progression. Fortunately, Oschner Hospital in New Orleans was able to successfully treat me and within a month the fluid had cleared. Unfortunately, about 80% of my peripheral vision had been permanently destroyed. I learned first-hand that the saying "the eyes are the window to the soul" is profoundly true and am grateful beyond words I can

still look into the eyes of others.

Despite the concerns of friends and family, I moved to San Francisco in 1993 to become a patient at the University of California-San Francisco HIV/AIDS research center, one of the best in the world at the time. Before leaving, I did a cover story for the Greater Baton Rouge Business Report, "*AIDS in the Workplace*" in order to let others, who rightly feared coming out with their HIV diagnosis at work, know they were not alone and where they could go for help anonymously.

Not long after moving to San Francisco, I learned about Dr. Jon Kaiser and was thrilled when he agreed to become my primary care physician. He had just published the book, *Immune Power, The Comprehensive Healing Program for HIV*, the first to advocate for a combination of Western, Eastern, and alternative treatment methods, including diet, exercise, supplements, and mind/body/spirit practices.

We worked together with some of his other patients to form several Immune Power support groups in the Bay Area for PLWHA. We included people with chronic fatigue syndrome and others with immune system disorders, such as lupus. By sharing our anecdotal experiences in these groups, we learned about drug side-effects and what treatments were working long before the results of scientific studies were published. This is why support groups are and will always be essential when facing any sort of life crisis.

In 1996, I moved to the Kona side of Hawai'i island, the "Big Island," to advance my knowledge and experience in alternative healing modalities through study of native Hawaiian healing arts and culture and their relationship with the natural world. My kumu kupuna lomilomi (elder teacher of lomilomi massage), Auntie Margaret Machado, helped me take and learn her 10-day fast and seawater cleanse. Thirty days later, my CD4 count doubled and pretty much remains at that level to this day.

I did my massage apprenticeship with her and am still licensed to practice in Hawai'i. I have taught massage students about infectious diseases, the immune system, universal precautions, risk management, and personal healthcare advocacy so they can be completely comfortable with clients who may or may not disclose their status.

Because I have been blessed with years of life far beyond what I had ever imagined, I have chosen to give back and serve community to help all life as best I can. Through these years, I have been a co-founder of several non-profit organizations, served on the Board of Directors of many others in various positions of responsibility, and led many community actions involving the protection of human and nature's rights, as well as environmental and cultural resources.

Through my Higher Power, self-determination, and excellent healthcare providers, HIV and I

have finally achieved a relatively healthy relationship. While we are not in an open relationship, we are open about it...hardy-har-har.

Currently, I am on “salvage therapy” because the original HIV strain that infected me has mutated several times within my body over the decades. The blessing has been that each time the virus mutated and became drug-resistant, a new class of drugs was developed. The non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors came in 1992 (ddI), protease inhibitors in 1995 (Crixivan), and integrase inhibitors in 2007 (Tivicay). For me, the virus is no longer the problem. Despite my best efforts, various organs and systems in my body are suffering from the damage that always results from long-term use of HIV drugs because of their underlying toxicity.

I believe we all need to do a better job helping our community understand that long-term use of HIV drugs always results in health challenges, but that these can be reduced and minimized by healthy lifestyle choices, such as diet, exercise, stress reduction, and alternative healing methods. I also believe we all need to do a better job helping our community to understand if a person is infected by someone who has drug-resistant strains of HIV, their treatment options are reduced and that condoms are essential even when using PrEP. This information would enrich our community’s knowledge base and enable people to make informed decisions about safe sex and managing health risks, regardless of HIV status.

Lastly, I would like to share the most profound lesson I have learned from having HIV: out of life’s greatest pain can come life’s greatest blessings. Hold your faith close while being open to learning, loving, and change in every situation, no matter how difficult or challenging. After all, the word, “healthy” comes from the 1,500 years old Old English word, hælþ, which means “wholeness, a being whole, sound, or well.” For me, being healthy means caring for all aspects of being in order to be whole in mind, body, and spirit, in sickness, in health, and even unto death.

Faith combined with a positive attitude makes us whole and healthy.

May you have a blessed, healthy Happy New Year and many more to come!

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Get to know other Planning Council members featured in our past newsletters:
<https://www.coj.net/departments/parks-and-recreation/social-services/ryan-white-c-a-r-e-act,-part-a/planning-council>.



SAVE THE DATE: MONTHLY CALENDAR – JANUARY 2022

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
3	4	5	6	7
10	11	12 Membership Committee 1809 Art Museum Dr 2 - 4 pm	13 Community Connections 515 W 6th St 12 - 1 pm <hr/> CCC Committee* 1809 Art Museum Dr 2 - 4 pm	14
17 <i>MLK Day Office Closed</i>	18 Executive Committee 1809 Art Museum Dr 2 - 4 pm	19	20 Needs Assessment Ad-hoc Location TBD 2 - 4 pm	21
24	25	26	27 Planning Council UF Towers Charter Room 580 8 th St W 3 - 5 pm	28
31				

*CCC = Continuum of Care Coordination

HOW TO ATTEND PLANNING COUNCIL MEETINGS

Members of the public are welcome to attend all Council and Committee meetings. The current options for attending include:

- Physically Present: Members of the public are welcome to attend meetings in person. Due to COVID 19 distancing guidelines, meetings are taking place in several locations and masks are strongly encouraged.
- Electronically: At this time, the option for guests to attend electronically via Zoom is only available for Planning Council meetings and not Committee meetings.
- For more information, contact PlanningCouncil@coj.net or 904-255-3346.

MEETING MINUTES

See what we've been up to! Read our meeting minutes here:

<https://www.coj.net/departments/parks-and-recreation/social-services/ryan-white-c-a-r-e-act,-part-a/planning-council/about-us#MEETING%20MINUTES>

PARTNER ANNOUNCEMENTS

The City of Jacksonville does not endorse any of the following events.



UPCOMING EVENTS:

The Facts: HIV 101 (Virtual)

January 11, 2022 9 a.m. – 12 p.m.

Register: <https://www.maaetc.org/events/view/19594>

Demystifying HCV Treatment in At-Risk Populations (Virtual)

January 11, 2022 12 – 1:30 p.m.

Register: <https://www.neaetc.org/events/view/19035>

Care of Gender Non-Conforming Patients (Virtual)

January 11, 2022 1 – 2 p.m.

Register: https://www.seaetc.com/event/?ER_ID=83270

HIV and Opioid Use Disorder (Virtual)

January 13, 2022 12 – 1 p.m.

Register: https://www.seaetc.com/event/?ER_ID=83636

Providing Mental Health Services for Women Diagnosed with Cancer and HIV/AIDS (Virtual)

January 13, 2022 12 – 1 p.m.

Register: https://www.seaetc.com/event/?ER_ID=83517

Motivational Interviewing & Crisis Intervention for Newly Diagnosed HIV Clients (Virtual)

January 20, 2022 11 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Register: https://www.seaetc.com/event/?ER_ID=82834

January HAB You Heard Webinar

January 20, 2022 2 – 3 p.m.

Register: https://hrsa.gov.zoomgov.com/webinar/register/WN_9jtCVg_xQoufHQjxWHdIrQ

5th Annual HIV/AIDS Brunch

Make AIDS History: Eliminating the Stigma Through Awareness

January 22, 2022 1 – 3 p.m.

Beaver Street Enterprise Center

1225 W Beaver St, Jacksonville, FL 32204

Suggested Donation: \$10

Register: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/make-aids-history-eliminating-the-stigma-through-awareness-brunch-tickets-228485966677>

ONGOING EVENTS:

COVID-19 Vaccine and Testing Locations in Jacksonville

Click here: <http://duval.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/infectious-disease-services/COVID-19/index.html>

Additional Info on COVID-19 Vaccines and People with HIV:

<https://www.hiv.gov/hiv-basics/staying-in-hiv-care/other-related-health-issues/coronavirus-covid-19>

Beacons of Hope HIV Support Group at Lutheran Social Services

Every 1st and 3rd Wednesday of each month 3 – 5 p.m.

4615 Philips Highway Jacksonville, FL 32207

Refreshments will be provided. For More Information Please Contact James Perrigan at 904-739-7015.

UF CARES Community Advisory Board (CAB)

Every 3rd Tuesday of each month 11:30 a.m. – 1 p.m. via Zoom

Email michael.kyger@jax.ufl.edu or call 904-244-5466 for more information.

HIVCareNow Testing and Events Calendar

<http://hivcarenow.com/calendar/testing-calendar.html>

New FDOH HIV 101 Video

<https://vimeo.com/651650169/db56daaa5a>

The Planning Council is a legislatively mandated group of diverse community members who work to improve the availability, accessibility, and quality of HIV/AIDS health services. The Planning Council members participate in processes including identifying community needs, assessing the capacity to meet those needs, and allocating Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program (RWHAP) resources.

We are always looking for new members! Members go through a rigorous interview process and are appointed by the Mayor of the City of Jacksonville to represent a particular demographic.

For more information, please contact the Planning Council Support Staff at PlanningCouncil@coj.net or 904-255-3346.

For more information about the RWHAP, please visit <https://hab.hrsa.gov>.

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