

Our Story

A legacy of caring...

*In 2014, Piedmont Care is marking
20 years of service to our community.
These are some of our stories of
remembrance, thanks and hope.*





By Kristin Taylor

Public health in our community began to change in 1988 in response to the devastating AIDS epidemic. That year, the Community Long Term care (SCDHHS) waiver for people living with HIV/AIDS was approved and the first World AIDS Day was recognized. The AIDS Support Network of Spartanburg, Community Long Term Care, and South Carolina DHEC worked together to coordinate agencies and partnerships began to form.

As the epidemic worsened, the federal response increased and formal mechanisms of care and financing were needed. Bonnie Landers, RN DHEC, organized the HIV/AIDS Pediatric Committee which pulled together agencies, medical providers and community organizations to plan and provide input for the needs of Spartanburg, Cherokee and Union counties. The landmark Ryan White CARE Act began funding HIV/AIDS services in our community in 1990, coordinated by Bonnie Landers.

In 1994, the Ryan White program inside the local health department became a nonprofit organization, Piedmont HIV/AIDS Care Consortium. The Consortium became independent in 1998 and hired the first executive director, Tracey Jackson. The first office space was a small room provided by Greater Spartanburg Ministries with a desk and chair. The telephones, staff and computers would come later.

Eventually, the Consortium became Piedmont HIV/AIDS Care and finally Piedmont Care, Inc. Piedmont Care services developed through the tireless efforts of public health workers and local advocates. Special thanks to all those early warriors and to those who continue the fight against HIV/AIDS in our community today.



By Kathy White

“Are you sure you wanna work with AIDS patients...what if you can get it from ‘em? Aren’t you scared?” These were the remarks I heard when I told friends and family that I was going to work for an organization that provided services to people who were HIV positive. I knew I wasn’t afraid. I’d researched it enough to not be afraid, but did I really want to work with people who were HIV positive? How could I help “those people”? My only certainty at the time was that I would surely go insane if I stayed in my current job, and I hoped that I’d gain a few skills along the way to move onto something better. Little did I realize the impact that Piedmont Care and the people we serve would have on my life and continue to have on my life 12 years later.

I began my work with Piedmont Care as a case manager, transitioning later into the role of Case Management Supervisor. It didn’t take long for me to realize that “those people” weren’t so different from me after all, and that the many faces of those with HIV were not unlike the faces I saw at church, at school, in restaurants, and yes....even in the mirror. They had all the same successes and the same failures; the same joy and the same anguish; the same contentment and the same disappointment. The one thing that set them apart from me and all those other people was not the HIV, but their strength. The support and services received from Piedmont Care helped them to develop the strength needed to battle a disease full of ever-changing challenges, ignorance, and fear. Being a part of Piedmont Care helped me to develop the passion and desire needed to fight that same battle.

I left Piedmont Care in 2005 to take the position of Ryan White Project Director with Spartanburg Regional Hospital overseeing the medical services provided to individuals with HIV. Although it was an administrative role, my passion and love for those we helped continued to grow. Today I am proud to say I serve as Vice President of the Board of Directors for Piedmont Care with the same passion and desire instilled in me by this organization 12 years ago.



By The Rev. Donna Stroud

The client called and asked me if she could come in the back door for her appointment. She parked in a parking lot a block away. She looked furtively around when she entered the door and quickly went into my office. “Joan” (name has been changed), is a 64 year old African American female. She has been HIV positive for 15 years. Her family does not know. Her friends do not know. She is active in a church that she believes would shun her if they found out about her status. Joan is confident that her son and other family members would isolate her from the family if they ever found out about her status. Unfortunately, her story is not unique. Patients have died from complications with HIV/AIDS without their families knowing that they had the disease. I remember being in a hospital room once where the doctor advised me that the patient had not told his family and they believed that he had died of pneumonia.

These are situations that create a need for organizations like Piedmont Care. Clients need help with medical, housing, transportation, counseling and support assistance. These services are just a few of the support systems that Piedmont Care provides. People often have no insurance and no stable support system. For twenty years, Piedmont Care has been there for them. Staff and volunteers understand specific needs related to HIV/AIDS. The need for these services has not decreased. Instead, the need for education in our schools, our churches and our community has increased. Without the voice of Piedmont Care, HIV/AIDS would be a silent scream to people that often do not understand what being HIV/AIDS positive really means.

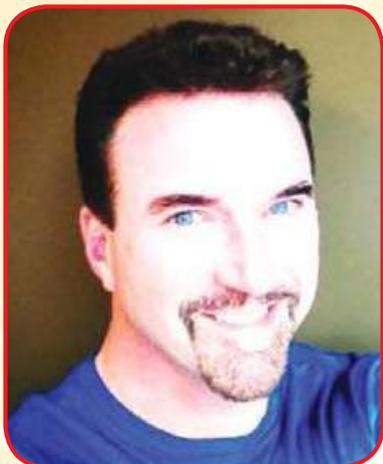
Thank you Piedmont Care for 20 years of excellent service!
Your presence makes our community a better place.



By Page Rogers

Just out of graduate school, and having absolutely no experience with HIV/AIDS, I began a new job as an AIDS Health Educator. The intent of the job was to provide community education around this topic. I learned very early that this was a huge challenge in 1987, given the social hostility, prejudice and discrimination that often occurred towards people with HIV. For one of my first AIDS 101 presentations, I was asked to present to students at USC-Union. I happened to be acquainted with a young man from Union who was HIV positive, and asked him to accompany me. I felt that it would be beneficial for students to see a vibrant, healthy person living with HIV – one that essentially looked just like them. He agreed; however, I received a phone call the day before the presentation. He was too afraid to do it, believing that the ramifications would be severe. He did offer a letter he penned, and instructions to read it aloud. I did so and it was indeed impactful; but as I was reading – I looked up and saw him sitting in the back row of the auditorium. That was an insightful moment for me, highlighting the importance of embracing the human face of HIV/AIDS. My friend and I worked together for many years to come, trying to tear down walls of misunderstanding and fear. I'd like to think we made a small difference. I am forever enriched by the individuals I encountered, and learned much about love, selflessness and human understanding.

Fortunately, with caring and compassionate organizations in place like Piedmont Care, the environment has improved and there is more support for persons living with HIV/AIDS. I commend them for the important preventive services they provide in our community, and for their kind and thoughtful care to individuals and families living with the disease.



By Phillip Hudson

In the late 80s I was asked to volunteer with a newly formed AIDS organization so that Spartanburg could prepare for this new epidemic. We wanted to help meet the needs of people living with HIV/AIDS who were coming home to Spartanburg to be cared for by family members. We were armed only with the facts of how HIV was spread and our compassion for these newly diagnosed individuals struggling with this horrible disease. Effective treatment was non-existent but we did our best to help these individuals and their families cope with this nightmare. Many newly diagnosed individuals were abandoned by their families and friends, either out of fear for their own health or the shock they felt in learning their loved one was gay. We, as volunteers, did the best we could to help these individuals cope with misinformation, lack of care, discrimination and even their own death.

It was just a dream at that time – a local organization like Piedmont Care. But, these volunteers were paving the way for the future. This early organization became known as the AIDS Support Network of Spartanburg and, I believe, it was key to the success of the first Ryan White CARE Act grant in this community. With the Ryan White grant came the creation of Piedmont Care, Inc. What an amazing organization to meet the needs of those living with HIV today in our community!

So much has changed over the past 25 years with HIV prevention and treatment. The dreams of those early volunteers have come true with the organization of Piedmont Care, its full time staff, life saving medication, access to medical care, case management and the list goes on. It's hard to look back and think of all those beautiful souls we lost to this infection, but so empowering today to know that HIV positive people live normal lives with the help of organizations like Piedmont Care. So many people have worked hard over the years to build Piedmont Care into the professional, life saving organization it is today. I am so thankful for them all and I will continue to do my part to support Piedmont Care for the years to come.



The 3-Legged Desk

By Tracey L. Jackson

I can remember my first desk at Piedmont Care. At one point, it was a fully functional four-legged tool of efficiency wielded by a passionate and fearless younger version of myself. I lost that fourth leg pretty quick and maybe some of my fearlessness, too.

I had become executive director of Piedmont Care in 1998, just out of graduate school. That first day on the job had me hauling boxes from the health department to Greater Spartanburg Ministries, my short-term office. No phone. No fax. No computer. No CLUE!

Three days into this adventure and I didn't know a Ryan White from a HOPWA, but I had bought a fax machine and it turned on me. I heard the wheels spinning on that fax and it spit out a 50 page document of terror – straight from DHEC – with charts, graphs, and lots of blanks for me to complete. It was annual report time. WHAT?! I survived, with help, and so did Piedmont Care.

I embraced this new position with energy and enthusiasm. I went everywhere and spoke to everyone – or at least tried to. There were hard lessons to learn. I was chased to my car. I was threatened with bodily harm. People threw things at me. Some refused to shake my hand or stand beside me. I was even damned to hell a few times.

I was learning that people did not want to talk about HIV/AIDS and they didn't want me to talk about it, either. Seems there was an unofficial gag order – and that was going to be a problem for me and for them. I felt a bit like that three-legged desk of mine – a little unsteady, but unbreakable.

I came to know many of our clients and their families. I felt the first loss of a client and experienced grief with families. Fortunately, there were mentors and advocates to help me. Those

early years were rich with life lessons of faith, hope, compassion and love.

Today, people are living longer and better with HIV/AIDS thanks to Piedmont Care. Clients now have access to a support group, mental health care, primary health care, and insurance assistance. Piedmont Care has led efforts to improve and expand HIV prevention services to include robust education, HIV testing, and condom distribution. These services were out of the question in 1998.

I think of those living with HIV/AIDS and those otherwise impacted by the epidemic who struggle daily, but continue to stand strong – like my 3-legged desk. I am happy to report that my current desk is whole and stable, with four functioning legs. Serving people and helping them find stability in their own lives has been, and will continue to be, Piedmont Care’s lasting mission.



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Fighting HIV/AIDS through care, prevention & advocacy

Special Recognitions

Bonnie Landers is recognized as the founder of Piedmont Care. Her tireless efforts with SC DHEC helped secure the first Ryan White program. Without her leadership, foresight and compassion, Piedmont Care would not exist to bring essential HIV and AIDS services to our community.

Early financial contributions from The Spartanburg County Foundation, the Milliken Foundation and the Spartanburg Regional Foundation made the creation of this independent nonprofit organization possible. Their vision and investment combined to hire the first executive director.