

AIDS

“My journey is gonna be one filled with love and with happiness, peace and serenity, that I do know. I’m me. I’m not just HIV. I’m a person.”

By John Toner
Contributing Reporter

Ninety-degree summer heat irritates the lesions beneath your long-sleeved shirt and pants. Crisp, clean swimming pools are now only a distant memory. Chronic diarrhea tortures your days and washing clothes twice a week is routine because night sweats soak and stain your garments. Pain pierces your neck when you turn to glance over your shoulder – your lymph nodes are three times their normal size. Friends shun you, sleep is rare and shelter is often non-existent. Where do you turn?

For many Winston-Salem area AIDS patients, they turn to family. But the concept of family can’t always be defined by *Webster’s Dictionary*. Often blood relatives may disown you and friends might reject you.

“Family is anyone you embrace with your heart,” according to one volunteer at AIDS Care Service, the multifaceted “family” for people living with HIV and AIDS in the community.

This unique family has grown stronger with time in response to one of the worst epidemics in the world. The service’s humble beginnings speak volumes about the resilience and character of an organization that draws its strength from people who have seen

according to Larry Roth, executive director of AIDS Care Service. The only service offered to those with AIDS was usually helping with a funeral or providing household items to a surviving family.

Today, dedication has shifted to making sure that people with HIV and AIDS are still active members of the community. According to research done by the Mayo Clinic, nearly 900,000 people are living with HIV/AIDS today in America, and since 1995 the number of medications available to treat AIDS has more than tripled.

As time and medical treatments have progressed, AIDS Care Service

Service, didn’t have a chance to hear about AIDS in a pamphlet or campus volunteer organization. Her mother died of AIDS after a short stay at Holly Haven. AIDS Care Service eased the pain of her mother as she passed and also helped Gary cope with depression and the shock of losing a loved one. Now she is glad she can relate to clients and feels that she

needs to be where she is. Gary has found a niche in her life – AIDS Care Service is “like her family.”

Each face of AIDS Care Service speaks the same message, whether it is an individual or an entire section of AIDS Care Service.

Their communal voice pronounces the statement that “the Mission of AIDS Care Service, Inc. is to help our brothers and sisters living with HIV disease improve their quality of life.”

Harmony is found in the collective convergence of people in pursuit of a purer community. It is hard to come by a better example of how to transcend today’s racial, sexual and religious conflicts, say those who live there.

The center offers a brighter outlook on life for those living with HIV/AIDS. For one client of ACS, the future looks brighter with the help of the program. “My journey is gonna be one filled with love and with happiness, peace and serenity, that I do know,” she said. “I’m me. I’m not just HIV. I’m a person.” ■

To become part of the AIDS Care Service family, contact
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to many funerals” and have personal ties to the scary realm of AIDS and HIV.

When HIV and AIDS reached the Winston-Salem community on a large scale in the early 1990s, some doctors would not treat patients because of its mysterious qualities,

and finally to a multi-building outreach service including Holly Haven Family Care Home, a day activities program and Latino Outreach Program. AIDS Care Service’s provides affordable housing, education, mutual support, hot meals, residential services, medication administration and much needed friendships to those with HIV and AIDS.

Roth said he has “the best job he’s ever had.” Now he smiles at the advent of new medicines that allow three-fourths of those who arrive in very poor conditions to walk out the front door.

Mona Gary, the office manager of AIDS Care