

AIDS group, church pastors form alliance

By Nichole Davis
Sentinel-Voice

As the numbers of AIDS/HIV victims continue to rise among blacks, the fastest growing segment of the disease's population, a new program reaches inside churches to distribute needed prevention information.

The Aid for AIDS Nevada (AFAN) Churches United

Together program trains parishioners to be HIV/AIDS prevention education specialists inside their own churches, said program coordinator Wallace Edwards.

By reaching inside congregations, a largely untapped market in terms of AIDS/HIV education, the numbers of blacks infected by the disease and the social stigma attached

to it will be reduced, he said.

"The church community feels like they're immune to HIV, because those kinds of people don't get it," Edwards said. "But AIDS is an equal opportunity killer.

"You have a lot of bisexual men in church who (sleep with) men and women trying to cover up their (sexual preference)," he said. "Or people can have it from

their past lives (as intravenous drug users or prostitutes), 'cause everybody didn't come in (the church) holy."

Many ministers initially shyed away from Churches United, because they believed that teaching people how to have safer sex promoted loose morals, Edwards said.

"We tell them the only safe sex is no sex, but if you're going to have sex, you shouldn't have to die from it," he said.

Second Baptist Church seminar coordinator Willie Liggins is one of the program's earliest graduates.

Second Baptist's Drug and Alcohol Awareness program,

which Liggins heads, was the first newly-trained group to hold an event last month, she said. And they look forward to doing something else next year.

The Rev. Daryl Davis, also from Second Baptist Church, plans to take the prevention specialist training class soon.

Davis, who serves as secretary/treasurer of the Minister's Alliance of Southern Nevada, has been interested in HIV/AIDS prevention for a while, but the AFAN program created an needed outlet.

"A lot of members of various churches have contracted AIDS and died," he said. "It was always an area of concern. Wallace's

presentation just lit the fire."

But even without specialized training he urged the faithful to treat those affected by the disease with special care.

"Once someone has contracted this HIV and AIDS, they are entitled to all the Christian love we can give them, how they get it is unimportant," Davis said.

"As Christians we can't just withhold our support and ministering because of their classification," as HIV positive or AIDS stricken, he said.

Statewide, blacks make up 7 percent of the general population, but are 21 percent of (See Churches, Page 7)

Cafe

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community service, he said.

Once the idea was sold to top management, Andrews recruited the Las Vegas Housing Authority, the Community Food Bank and the Frontier Girl Scouts as partners in the venture. It was an easy sell, he said.

When it comes to reducing the number of 98,000 estimated Clark County residents who live in poverty and go hungry each day, "it was one of those things where you don't go wrong," Andrews said.

In addition to organizing the Kid's Cafe, Harrah's chefs

prepare the food and hotel security workers deliver it each day at a cost of about \$20,000 a year, officials said.

But "you (really) can't put a dollar value on it," Andrews said adding that Harrah's staff - and officials from the three other partners - also pour into the cafe at least once a week to serve the kids.

"This is the only community food program that feeds children, and we're proud of that," said Thom Hall, Harrah's senior vice president and general manager.

"The Kid's Cafe really embodies what Harrah's is all

about," he said. "It really fulfills the commitment we make to the community."

Like Hinton, 75 percent of the Cafe's repeat visitors come from Housing Authority projects.

The authority's Executive Director Frederick Brown said his agency has transported about 20 percent of the 50,000 kids, who have eaten in the cafe since its inception.

Brown was sold on the idea early on, because "we have so many kids who we know wouldn't have a hot meal in the evening. I knew this would be perfect," he said.

The one surprize at last Wednesday's event was the high turnout.

Normally, 100 kids show up on weekdays for the free meals, but more than twice that number showed up with minimal publicity, said event co-organizer Paula McDonald, the Housing Authority resident services manager.

"We didn't really publicize it," she said. "We just told our residents council presidents and our on-site development managers."

And as usual, program organizers and church officials, she said, did not and "will never turn anyone away."



Jamahl Freeman and his daughter Michelle enjoy a Kid's Cafe meal last month.
Photo by Savoy/LVS-Voice

To the voters of
Clark County School District C



Thank you for
believing in my
ability to serve
you and your
children's future
educational needs.

Shirley Barber

for

Clark County School District C Trustee



Youth benefit from trial by peers

By Nichole Davis
Sentinel-Voice

In her very first court case, high school senior Shamika Abbott handled a battery involving two junior high school-aged children who had fought for the first time.

Her client, the defendant, was accused of beating up a young man who had hit her almost a dozen times previously. One day she just got tired of the abuse, blackened his eye and knocked out two teeth, Abbott said.

It wasn't an easy case, but with a little bit of ingenuity and a lot of hard work, the 17-year-old Abbott got her off, she said.

That was three years ago. As one of 84 counselors who have participated in the Clark County Bar Association (CCBA) Trial by Peers program during its three-year history, Abbott, who attends the Advanced Technologies Academy, has already gotten her feet wet in her chosen profession, the law.

Like every peer counselor, Abbott went through an eight-week training course during the summer and was sworn in more than two years ago.

Since then, she has managed a case load, like a lawyer, doing legal research and presenting her cases in real court of law.

This year she could reasonably expect to handle as many as 15 cases during the next year, depending on her schedule, said program director Humberto Rodriguez.

Abbot said importance of a program like this is that students ability "get the experience of being around real lawyers and to get the experience of being around our whole legal system."

Former CCBA President Nancy Oesterle, who is also a Clark County Justice of the Peace, credits herself for starting the work on the program, which is privately funded.

Oesterle said she brought the program to the Las Vegas Valley while serving as president of the Clark County Bar Association.

The program itself is modeled after similar ones in Salt Lake City and San Diego and has been highly successful for several reasons, officials said.

For one, recidivism rates for the program have been estimated to be as low as two percent, said Dara Goldsmith, who sits on the CCBA Board of Directors and chairs the Trial by Peers committee. "It's much lower than the juvenile court recidivism rates, because (defendants) get so much personal attention," Goldsmith said.

For another reason, it cuts down on Juvenile Court congestion by lowering the number of cases that go through the system, Rodriguez said.

Finally, it's a win-win situation for defendants, who get no criminal record, see the program up

close and experience sitting in judgement of another youth, and peer counselors get a chance to see if they want to pursue law enforcement as a career, Goldsmith said.

"You (even) have some kids who have gone through the program who decided they wanted to be attorneys," she said.

Trial by Peers cases can only be referred from the Juvenile Court or from Clark County School District School Police if the defendant agrees, officials said. In court, they have the same options as other defendants: plead guilty or stand.

Legal representation and sentencing procedures are the biggest difference.

Peers represent and try cases. Youth juries also have few sentencing guidelines in deciding what sentences, if any, should be imposed on guilty defendants, Rodriguez said.

For those found guilty, "it affects the kids, because they just had their peers tell them it's not cool (to break the law), what they did was not acceptable by them," he said.

Eight to 15 hours of community service, essays, letters of apology and restitution are just a few of the sentences commonly handed out to those found guilty, he said.

In addition every participant must also agree to serve on one to three juries before they come to court.

The program "gives the juveniles that are participating the chance to not only view the system, but to be involved in it and understand how it works," Oesterle said.

This program is also popular among other local judges who call it one last chance for teen-agers to straighten up problem behavior.

"It's a very holistic approach in dealing with a juvenile," said Clark County Family Court Presiding Judge Terrance Marren. "Rather than dealing with them as criminals of tomorrow, it deals with them as juveniles of today."

"Some kids I know get a lot of benefits out of that," said Marren, who works on the program more than five hours a month.

Another local jurist applauds the program's intensity.

The quality an enthusiasm of the juries and the dedication and work ethic of the counselors is unbelievable, said Clark County Justice of the Peace Deborah Lippis, who hears cases several times a month.

"Of all the cases I've heard, I've never had to expel someone from the Trial by Peers program, because they failed to fulfill their court-ordered obligations," she said, a situation that often happens with adults.

For more information about Trial by Peers, call 387-6011.