U=U
Undetectable equals Untransmittable

By Becki Hearan, Case Management Director

In September 2017, the CDC released the following statement, “People who take ART daily as prescribed and achieve, as well as maintain, an undetectable viral load, have effectively no risk of sexually transmitting the virus to an HIV-negative partner.”

What does this mean for those living with HIV and our community as a whole? It means if you take your medications every day, and obtain an undetectable viral load, for at least six months, you can reduce the amount of virus in your body. It is possible to reduce your viral load to levels so low, that HIV cannot be transmitted through sex. The science is clear in supporting the effectiveness of an undetectable viral load in preventing new transmissions. Combined data from multiple studies from 2008-2016 showed that there were ZERO linked HIV transmissions after more than a hundred thousand condom-less sex acts between partners where one partner was HIV positive but had an undetectable viral load. This is a game changer! It means that individuals living with HIV, no longer have to fear transmitting HIV to their partners, as well as it having the potential to transform people’s social, sexual & reproductive lives.

U=U is a step toward ending the HIV epidemic. It can play a huge part in decreasing the fear and stigma that still exists in our communities, seeing that it will have positive implications in the way health professionals, the public, employers and policymakers make decisions.

On Saturday December 1st, a cold blistering World AIDS Day evening, we heated up downtown Springfield at The Historic Gillioz Theatre. Over 330 of us welcomed the hilarious Emmy award winning Leslie Jordan to the stage! To say he was hot in his performance, would be an understatement. He kept everyone in stitches and tears throughout his entire performance.

Together we were able to raise nearly $6,000!

A huge thank you to our sponsors who helped make this year’s event a huge success! Dr. Stephen Adams, Law Offices of Kristoffer Barefield, Hirschbach, MIX Ultralounge and MAC Cosmetics.
“START”ing 2019 On The Right Foot!

By Lynne Meyerkord, Executive Director

Hello folks! As we START (APO’s theme for the year) 2019 in full swing, I have been reflecting back on the accomplishments of 2018. We have been in the new building a little over 12 months now and our achievements are remarkable. We have doubled the number of clients seen in the clinic from 500 to 1,000, and most of the increase is because we are now able to provide medical care to those who are not living with HIV. We see people for primary care, transgender services, and Hepatitis C care, in addition to our HIV medical services. This is very exciting and a great START to the new year. A huge shout out to our clinic leaders, Dr. Stephen Adams and Melissa Tiffany. Of course, we can’t forget our entire amazing clinic staff!

Our case management services have grown by nearly 150 clients over the past two years. Because of medical advancements and the work done by our dedicated staff, people are living longer and living fuller lives. Hats off to Becki Hearon and Lauri Massey, as well as all those involved in the variety of case management services available through APO and our partners at the Burrell Center.

It’s not a lie when I tell you that we were a little concerned when we moved, that HIV/STD testing clients wouldn’t be able to find us as easily. Seeing that we are busier than ever, with increased testing at the office and APO Downtown, it’s safe to say our fears were unfounded. Thanks to Bob Holtkamp for his steady leadership over this.

None of these successes are possible without the leadership of our financial, billing, compliance and support staff. Thanks to Sandra Terrell, Paula Howell and Cecelia Havens, along with the staff members who handle all the details that keep an agency functioning. Sometimes in the background, but always deserving of recognition, is our board of directors and our many volunteers. As we START a new year, we are fully aware of how fortunate we are to have such a tremendous team and serve such a diverse and worthy community. With all the above mentioned, and all of you our friends, APO is off to a great START for 2019!

Farewell Our Dear Friend

By Cecelia Havens, Project and Compliance Director

It is with great sadness that we must say goodbye to our beloved friend and board member, Byrne “B” Blackwood. While B was known by many to be a legend of local theatre, we considered him to be an icon of APO.

B has done so much for our community. He was the founder of Tent Theatre on the campus of MSU. He was a pillar and contributed heavily to the arts in this community & beyond for over 60 years. His set designs were stunning, his Tent Theatre commercials were inspired and the classes he taught at SMSU/MSU were a delight. While we were never in any of his classes, we know his students adored him. He had a whole huge life apart from APO, but he was huge part of our APO life.

He worked tirelessly for APO for more than 25 years. He helped guide and build an agency that helps serve those living with HIV. He made a HUGE difference in a thousand ways. That is what we should all strive for. To love life so much, to give so freely and to contribute in hundreds of small & gigantic ways to make a difference.

B was a good role model and we are honored to have called him our friend. We loved him dearly and he will be terribly missed.

Be in the “Loop”

Many have asked if there is a way to help APO financially, on a regular basis, without all the hassle of writing and sending a check, or bringing cash to the office. We are happy to announce you can become part of the “Red Ribbon Loop” monthly sustainer program here at APO.

Your monthly gift can do so much to help so many. There is no amount too small. Did you know that for $19 we can house a homeless client for one night? Or for $50 you are helping with mental health counseling for an HIV+ client. For $75 your gift helps pay for a medical wellness visit. Your gift of $125, $500 or even $1,000 helps us provide anything from lab work and medication assistance to long-term and safe housing assistance!

With your monthly gift, you are playing a huge part in making a difference in many lives each and every month! Our funding needs cannot be met by grants alone we can do so much more with your help.

With your commitment to our community, and with a desire and passion to help your neighbor, family friend, spouse, or even a stranger, we can continue to make substantial improvements in the health of our community.

To join the “Loop”, head to our website at www.apo-ozarks.org and visit our donation tab for more information.

Help Us Stock our Hygiene Pantry Shelves

Hygiene Pantry’s are an essential commodity because food stamps do not cover non-food related items. This leaves families without vital necessities such as toilet paper and soap. The products that we have available within our pantry depend almost entirely on your generous donations.

Thank you for all who have donated to our hygiene pantry and have helped keep it stocked during the holiday season! A Special Thank you to both Closer Walk Christian Church and the Pantry Patrol for adopting us and always lending a helping hand!