

A&A
ASKED & ANSWERED

Getting straight to the point
with **Brenda Goodman**

BY CHRISTOPHER LISOTTA



FOR MORE THAN 23 YEARS, THE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION AID FOR AIDS HAS worked to provide people suffering from HIV/AIDS in Los Angeles County with what it calls a "tapestry of support." While other organizations lobby for government money or provide health care, Aid for AIDS is focused on primary needs, like making sure AIDS sufferers don't become homeless, or that they have transportation to their doctor's office or can cover moving and apartment-deposit expenses. Besides its Best in Drag beauty pageant in October and its Dining Out for Life event in April that coordinates with dozens of area restaurants to raise money, Aid for AIDS is one of many charities that rely on direct donations, particularly during the holiday season. For Brenda Goodman, the president of AFA's board of directors, the need for basic services in LA. is as acute as it has ever been.

FRONTIERS: What would you say Aid for AIDS' main mission is?

BRENDA GOODMAN: To provide direct financial services to people—men, women, and children, individuals and families—affected by HIV and AIDS below the poverty line. It is mainly housing, utilities, and even the delivery of fresh food. The basic necessities of life.

It seems in the general consciousness we're seeing people with AIDS living much healthier lives. They can work full-time; people may not be showing symptoms. Because of that, do you have less need now than you did five or 10 years ago?

No, not at all, especially among minorities. Things are different in the white population, but there is really a need in underprivileged communities. It's on the rise, especially among women.

Has the kind of person you are serving changed? What is your typical client like?

It's not a gay white disease anymore, basically. That's the point. Men, women, family, and kids.

Because there are so many more women with

AIDS, are we seeing a rise in children's and pediatric needs?

I believe we will eventually. Not at the moment, but right now the women are on the rise. Eventually it will be the children as well.

Do you find your clients or do they find you?

They find us. We do some outreach, but most of the time, because we have a fixed amount of funding, they come to us. They have heard of us over the years. Every time I go to something, someone says, "Thank you, you helped me 10 years ago, or five years ago." It's amazing.

How important is this time of year for your overall funding?

It's very important. We do a beautiful request for money. Our Best in Drag show is based in October, and we raised a quarter of a million dollars. So that's a huge amount towards our budget. But we do need people to give now, and whenever we are out we request that people think about us.

How do you get people involved if they think AIDS is not the issue it was 10 years ago? Have

you changed your message?

We do case management, we do a lot of outreach to minorities. We'll have 400 people coming to an AIDS task-force management [meeting], and we tell them about our services and reach out to them that way. We also have a program that reaches out about housing and utilities.

Is it harder to get potential donors to AIDS groups involved than it was in the past?

Much, much harder. It's really hard to get people to realize it's not going anywhere.

How do you keep your overhead from going up? How much of your job is spent managing those things?

We spend a lot of time making sure we keep our overhead down, that the staff is minimal. We run a very lean, mean machine, basically, because 90% of our funding goes to client programs. So we have to continually make sure we are keeping the salaries down. We don't go overboard on expenses. That is a constant challenge, I must say, keeping our expenses down so that the money goes to programs. And keeping good people employed is tough. You want to stay here because of the good work we do.

Are things going to get more challenging before they get easier?

I think so. They are more challenging than they have been, definitely. It is more challenging to get the word out that AIDS is not going away. And then you get those billboards that say, "AIDS is a gay white thing." It's hard to get people to understand AIDS is a black, white, pink disease.



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