

Success at Highland Rivers Supported from Very Top



Robin Davis, RN

In February of 2007, Ann Davies, Director of Highland Rivers' Crisis Unit, gave Infection Control Nurse Robin Davis both the responsibility and the authority to run the HIV Early Intervention Services program. "She gave me a copy of the contract, a copy of the budget, and trusted me to make things happen," says Robin, who quickly set about building a team to serve the 11-county service area.

"With 11 outpatient sites and two residential detox units 65 miles apart, I realized that I needed to get some help." And she did.

Robin sums up her approach to recruitment with a single word: persistence. She began with a phone call to each site manager to ask if they had anyone that they would be willing to send to HIV training. Whenever the answer was no,

she waited two months and called again.

Her persistence paid off. Since she began, testing at Highland Rivers has climbed steadily. In the 12 months before she started, the program conducted 140 tests. Last year (July 2007 through June 2008) HIV EIS counselors at Highland Rivers tested 585 consumers, had a 63% rate of post-test counseling, and identified one new HIV-positive consumer. Already this year (July—December 2008) the team has conducted 300 OraSure tests and 39 rapid HIV tests.

Highland Rivers is not the first CSB to recognize that a team of HIV EIS workers has the potential to make services more accessible. But as a rule, counselors who are solely responsible for their program report more testing, get better post-test results, and identify a higher number of new positives than do groups of counselors. More than one bright, committed HIV EIS coordinator has worked hard to build a team. But never before has a coordinator had the authority that Robin does. Not only is she

backed by Crisis Unit Director Ann Davies, but Region One Coordinator Charles Fetner has made his support for the program clear.

Also contributing to the success of the Highland Rivers team is Robin's belief in allowing workers to lead with their strengths. Ann Giles is an addictions counselor with a gift for engaging groups, so she and Robin do HIV education together. Some nurses primarily do HIV counseling and testing. And one nurse, Sherry Dunnaway, does most of the post-test counseling at her facility, insuring that consumers get their results before departure.

Robin speaks particularly highly of Cathy Newton, LPN, who is currently the only nurse doing rapid testing at the CSB. "Having Cathy on the team has been a tremendous help," says Robin. "She has a passion for this work."

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I hope that I'm making a
difference to somebody.*

- Cathy Newton

Cathy speaks equally highly of Robin, "I've



Cathy Newton, LPN

been fortunate enough to do testing with Robin. I've learned so much and the respect she commands is inspiring."

"I've been a nurse since 1983 and I remember the days when we were afraid to touch someone with HIV," says Cathy whose goal is for every consumer to know their HIV status. At the facility where she is based, "some of the consumers are still high when they first come in and they refuse the test. But as soon as they're through the recovery, they come to my door and ask to be tested. That touches me because it means they're ready to take care of themselves. I guess deep down in my soul I want to hope that I'm making a difference to somebody."

Robin echoes the sentiment, "Curbing the spread of HIV is so important; I feel privileged to do this work."