

## Supporting HIV-positive Consumers

**A**t one time, the focus in HIV prevention was on individuals who were HIV-negative and strategies to help prevent them from becoming infected.

While it is critical to empower consumers to protect themselves, only those who are HIV-positive have the power to say, “HIV stops with me.” In response, a growing number of HIV Early Intervention Services (EIS) workers have become trail guides to resources for consumers who are HIV-positive as they seek to protect others and themselves. This quarter, Geraldine White of River Edge served 19 HIV-positive clients, providing life skills support, transportation to medical appointments, and much more.



Among the first to offer case management to HIV-positive consumers was Ron DeLay of GRN in Gwinnett. The following is Ron’s account of “a day in the life” of an HIV EIS counselor:

My day starts with a trip to the health department to take a consumer with HIV to the health department for removal of genital warts. When we arrive, there’s already a mob and all of them have screaming babies. The health department

is first-come-first serve. He takes a number. It’s 2. We wait for four hours.

This guy tested HIV positive two weeks ago in my office. He cried. A lot. He has a history of physical and sexual abuse, is in treatment for addiction, is married, and has no money.

The health department wants to charge him \$45. They demand payment or proof of no income. He doesn’t have the necessary proof.

Next we stop by the lab to have his blood drawn for baseline CD4 count and viral load (VL).

It’s 5 p.m. when we get back to the office and now I can get ready to make a speech to a group at an alcohol and other drug outpatient center at 5:30 p.m. I have just decided to write a book entitled, *I Don’t Know Why I Even Try*, when the telephone rings. It’s a consumer who was in treatment here three years ago. He’s calling to ask me to give him his 3-years-sober chip at an AA meeting and to tell me that his numbers are good: CD4 of 386 and an undetectable viral load. He says, “I love you. Thanks for helping me save my life.” I love him too.

Thank you God for this wonderful day and allowing me to do this wonderful job.