BABES With AIDS

December 1, 2009 By Willette Francis

Pat Migliore found out she was HIV positive 25 years ago. Back then, she discovered, there were plenty of support groups in Seattle—for men only. She embarked on a quest to meet other women living with the virus. Soon, she befriended Kass Anderton and Allison Hunter, and within five years of Migliore's diagnosis, the three cofounded BABES Network.

"[We began because of] a lack of services for women. [We wanted to] help end the isolation we were feeling," Migliore says. To find positive women in need of support, the founders reached out to doctors, social workers and case managers. Through these connections, the organization expanded rapidly and outgrew its meeting space.

It was at one of those early meetings—during a group discussion on everyone's favorite topics, sex and relationships—where the name, BABES, was born. "We were always being told how toxic we were," Migliore recalls. "So one of the women stood up and said, 'I was a babe before AIDS, and I'm still a babe.'" And everyone agreed: We're BABES with AIDS. The name embodied their differences from men living with the virus and showed the world that their sense of humor would remain intact.

Now, 20 years later, BABES is no longer an independent nonprofit—it is a YWCA program. The result? They're BABES Network-YWCA, and they're better than ever. "It has worked out really well," says Migliore, noting the potential crossover in the women each group serves. In addition, she says, "It has helped our women receive services that they haven't had access to, and it has opened the door to do some inreach to other YWCA branches."

BABES has birthed many successful programs, including the HIV/AIDS Outreach and Prevention Education (HOPE) project, which trains people living with the virus to share their stories with the public at venues ranging from juvenile centers to senior centers. It's one way they help educate about the epidemic, combat stigma and stop the spread of HIV. And BABES members raise money to benefit HIV-positive women by making and selling their popular Booga Bags.

BABES has changed the lives of many women and girls (and men) in Seattle and the surrounding communities. Here's to another 20 years of inspiring hope, giving support and creating awareness to those affected by and living with HIV/AIDS.

For more information, visit babesnetwork.org*.*

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