Acting Up

ACT UP chapters reemerge to combat AIDS apathy and service disparities.

November 1, 2009 By James Wortman

For more than 20 years, the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) has given those living with and affected by HIV/AIDS a voice and an outlet to enact social and political change. It came as no surprise, then, that in the wake of California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's crippling HIV/AIDS budget cuts last spring—which slashed more than $80 million in HIV programs and services—a dormant ACT UP chapter was resurrected in San Diego to speak out against the governator's actions and, in turn, terminate AIDS ennui in the state.

"There's been a complacency that's developed around HIV, and it's reached epidemic proportions," says Mike Tidmus, who leads the ACT UP San Diego rebirth. "The powers that be need a kick in the ass."

That ass-kicking spirit apparently crosses state lines. This spring, ACT UP Wisconsin reformed, with Madison-based AIDS activist (and former *POZ* cover boy) Bob Bowers at the helm. While still in its infancy, the chapter is already causing a stir. Local newspaper *Isthmus* reported that Karen Dotson, executive director of AIDS Network, has dubbed the Wisconsin chapter a "handful of embittered dissidents" after the group accused the local AIDS service organization of shortchanging clients.

Is that a bad thing?

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