Fountain of Youth

Chicago’s Center for Gender, Sexuality and HIV Prevention is movin’ on up.

April 30, 2013 By Trent Straube

The Uptown neighborhood of Chicago is the new home of the Center for Gender, Sexuality and HIV Prevention. “Our focus is on children, adolescents and young adults [including] gender non-conforming kids as young as 3,” says Robert Garofalo, MD, director of the center, which is part of Lurie Children’s Hospital. “We want to provide transgender children and adolescents with care early on so that [they will] not have the same high-risk profile that we’ve come to associate with transgender women when they’re young adults.”

The new locale is nearer its underserved populations and offers them an environment less intimidating than a hospital or an LGBT center (some clients, especially the parents, may not be ready to embrace an LGBT identity). Though it’s not a full medical clinic—Garofalo offers clients care at nearby outpatient facilities—he describes the center as “a sort of connector hub” that offers testing for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, linkage to care, walk-in counseling, case managers and private interview rooms. It’s also home to the Gender Identity Clinic and is the base of several HIV intervention research projects, including the Life Skills trial, which was written by young transgender women for young transgender women.

“If I have a young gay man in my practice or a young transgender woman who is HIV negative by the age of 18, that’s a success story we need to nurture. It’s important to focus our primary prevention efforts on younger and younger age groups, so that’s what we do.”

Go Big Fred!
Incidentally, Garofalo is the proud papa of Fred, the adorable Yorkshire terrier from the Fred Says campaign—now with coffee mugs, plush toys and $1 e-cards!—that raises money for teens living with HIV. Visit fredsays.org for more info.

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