Historic AIDS Group GMHC Marks Founders Day and 40th Anniversary

The world's first AIDS service organization, GMHC, will honor cofounder Larry Mass, MD, and ex-CEO Kelsey Louie at its fall gala. Plus: Listen to a gay podcast episode on GMHC's history.

August 15, 2022 By Trent Straube

Founded in 1982 in New York City as Gay Men's Health Crisis, GMHC is celebrating its 40th anniversary and also gearing up for its Fall Gala on September 22, which will honor cofounder Larry Mass, MD, and former CEO Kelsey Louie. To commemorate its history, the organization held a Founders Day gathering, August 11, at the New York City AIDS Memorial.

The world's first HIV and AIDS service organization, GMHC was born in 1981 out of a meeting of 80 men in the apartment of writer Larry Kramer to discuss what was then referred to as a "gay cancer," a mysterious new illness mostly showing up in gay men. That meeting led to the foundation of Gay Men's Health Crisis the following year. The six founders were Kramer, Nathan Fain, Paul Popham, Paul Rapoport, Edmund White and Larry Mass, MD.

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A post shared by GMHC (@gmhc)

Today, GMHC serves nearly 10,000 people each year in the five boroughs of New York City, according to its website. Over 60% of the clients are people of color, about 75% identify as LGBTQ and over 80% are living at or below the federal poverty line.

GMHC continues to provide an array of services, including testing for HIV and sexually transmitted infections, housing support, food and nutrition programs, substance abuse counseling, legal help, mental health and emotional support.

Learn more about GMHC's backstory in "Coming of Age in the AIDS Crisis," an episode of the podcast Making Gay History. The episode is posted below, followed by a related Facebook post by GMHC on the the world's first AIDS hotline:

The organization is currently led by Kishani Chinniah-Moreno, MA, LMHC, who serves as interim chief executive officer and chief operating officer. The previous CEO, Kelsey Louie, stepped down in June 2021 to head The Door, a nonprofit that offers comprehensive youth development services.

For details about the September 22 Fall Gala, including information on how to purchase tickets, visit this page on GMHC.org.

In its timeline of the organization's history, GMHC highlights the following accomplishments from 1982:

- Nathan Fain, Larry Kramer, Larry Mass, Paul Popham, Paul Rapoport and Edmund White officially establish GMHC.

- An answering machine in the home of GMHC volunteer Rodger McFarlane (who became GMHC's first paid director) acts as the world's first AIDS hotline—it receives over 100 calls the first night.

- GMHC produces and distributes 50,000 free copies of its first newsletter to doctors, hospitals, clinics and the Library of Congress.

- GMHC opens its first office on West 22nd Street.

- GMHC creates the landmark Buddy Program to assist PWAs (people with AIDS) with their day-to-day needs.

In related news, a new program at New York City AIDS Memorial highlights music of the early epidemic. To learn more, see “Do You Wanna Funk at an AIDS Memorial?”

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