The Inspiring Story Behind the Pop-Up HIV Services of “One Tent Health”

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May 24, 2018 By Trent Straube

As a 21-year-old college student in Washington, DC, Mackenzie Copley discovered something unsettling while volunteering at a doctor’s office. Each day, the for-profit clinic turned away about 20 people who came in for HIV testing. As the Washingtonian reports, Copley teamed up with his friend David Schaffer, a medical student in North Carolina, and launched a nonprofit to make free HIV testing and prevention more accessible in DC.

The result is One Tent Health. The concept is simple: Copley and Schaffer and a team of trained volunteers and interns set up a 10-by-10 canvas tent in the parking lot of grocery stores in neighborhoods where HIV rates are high.

“We’re a group of young DC kids trying to do something good for the city,” Copley tells the Washingtonian. “We just want to be a small part of the greater DC solution.”

One Tent Health gets its testing kits from the city’s department of health, and clients who need treatment can go to Whitman-Walker Health for a same-day appointment. Similarly, One Ten Health directs anyone interested in the daily HIV prevention pill Truvada as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to the health clinic.

According to OneTentHealth.org, the group seeks “to minimize the stress and complexity of the path from unknown HIV status to managed care for all individuals—regardless of where they are, have been or will be—by using a community-centered, low-cost approach.” What’s more, it claims to do so for one third of the national average cost. The group’s goal is to conduct 4,000 screenings annually.

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