Still a Babe

Pat Migliore cofounded two groups for women living with HIV.

February 24, 2020 By Alicia Green

Pat Migliore remembers when most HIV support groups in Seattle were exclusively for men. She was never discouraged, though. If anything, it sparked her to find more women living with the virus.

“I really wanted to meet other women with HIV,” says Migliore, who tested positive in 1986 and still lives in Seattle. “Apparently, [Kass Anderton and Allison Hunter] did too, and we ended up finding each other.”

The three women connected over the phone, and the rest is history. Anderton hosted potlucks for women with the virus at her home; soon, the number of guests grew.

In 1989, the trio founded the BABES Network, a support program for women with HIV. The name was born out of a conversation about sex during which one woman said, “I was a babe before AIDS, and I’m still a babe,” Migliore recalls.

“We adopted the name because it really did signify who we were and what we talked about,” she says. “It was feeling that we were still ourselves, still worthwhile and still worthy of having relationships and care.”

Since the early ’90s, BABES has hosted retreats for women living with HIV. Earlier retreats included everyone, even those who were really sick. A nurse was always on-site because the goal was for these women to enjoy as much as they safely could.

BABES continues to operate today via a partnership with the YWCA and continues to organize retreats that are educational, fun and supportive. Migliore hasn’t gone anywhere, either. She served on the BABES board for many years and runs a weekly support group on Thursdays.

In 2008, Migliore, along with 27 other women, helped cofound another HIV group for women living with HIV: the Positive Women’s Network–USA (PWN-USA).

“It became clear that other countries had PWNs, but that we didn’t have one,” says Migliore, currently the group’s board cochair. “We needed to do something so that we could have a national voice.”

One of Migliore's most important tasks is to help develop PWN-USA's strategy in order to create a road map for its staff. She also facilitates board meetings and sometimes shares the board's perspective with the executive director.

Migliore hasn't just connected women living with HIV to one another. She has also spent decades educating young people about HIV/AIDS.

"I still have work to do," she says. "There's always a new crop of kids in schools and people who need to learn more about HIV."

Each September, Migliore can be found at the Seattle AIDS Walk, in which she has participated nearly every year since its 1986 launch. She walks in honor of her late husband, Bob, and others who have died of AIDS-related illnesses.

"[Long-term survivors] need to be together sometimes so that we can remember the people who aren't here anymore," she says. "We are the ones who carry the stories. If we don't carry them, they will disappear."

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