

# First Testing Event a Success

How Melanie Baker lets clients know that free, confidential HIV testing is available.

In the two years that Melanie Baker, LPN, has been the HIV EIS worker at Behavioral Health Services of South Georgia in Valdosta, her confidence has grown. "I'm still getting a handle on what I'm doing, but since the annual meeting, I don't feel new anymore," says Melanie.

Inspired by stories from the *Quarterly Report* about events that other HIV EIS nurses have organized, Melanie hosted her first-ever testing event for Behavioral Health Services clients at her facility in Valdosta. "I wanted to do something to put the word out there - to let everyone know that HIV testing is offered here. It's free, it's confidential, and not only are you going to get a free HIV test, but you get an education."



Melanie Baker, Behavioral Health Services of South GA, Valdosta

Gold and white balloons, a poster, and flyers with statistics helped advertise the event and a raffle for a gift card served as an incentive.

Melanie credits her success, and the success of the event, to the support provided by her supervisor, Veronica Williams, and the front desk staff who helped make it possible for her to test 18 clients in a single day. That support is not limited to an event, says Melanie. "Everyone involved cares deeply about HIV prevention.

Working in this field has prompted her to hone her interaction skills. The art of putting clients at ease is one of the most important things she's learned. She starts by spends a few quiet moments with them. She lets them know that everything they say is confidential and she encourages them to talk. "This is your test," she tells them. "I want you to ask me any questions you want." When she sees the lowering of shoulders or the opening of a clenched fist, she knows she's had the impact she intended: that of giving them a safe place to learn their HIV status. ■