

# Secret to High Testing Numbers

“We get them engaged; we talk about things they normally don’t get to talk about openly.”

**Working as a team,** Margaret Renfro and Carolyn Livsey have tested 1,522 people this year, an increase of 38% over last year (State Fiscal Year: July 2016 – June 2017).

Margaret is the HIV Counselor at the DeKalb Addiction Clinic (DAC), and Carolyn is an RN at Clifton Springs Mental Health. They both work for the DeKalb Community Service Board (CSB). Margaret, who has been in the field of HIV prevention for more than 20 years, coaches Carolyn who is newer to the HIV EIS program.

Together they actively search for ways to provide HIV testing to as many clients as possible. When Carolyn does the nursing assessments at Clifton Springs she encourages clients to learn their status. At the DeKalb Regional Crisis Center, Margaret and Carolyn alternate leading a Health and Wellness group. The focus is HIV and attendance is voluntary. “When they come in to group, I ask if they’d like to know their HIV status,” says Carolyn. “Some have been recently tested, others aren’t ready. But about 8 out of a group of 15 usually want to know their status.”

Carolyn and Margaret credit the way they interact with groups with the better than 50% rate of testing. They educate participants on the use of the female dental dam and give condom demonstrations.



Margaret Renfro and Carolyn Livsey, DeKalb CSB

“We get them engaged,” says Margaret, “we talk about things they normally don’t get to talk about openly. They tell me how they’ve heard you can’t get HIV from oral sex. So I tell them the facts. Then they ask for details about modes of transmission, like ‘What if I have a cut somewhere on my private part?’ Eventually they talk to us openly about everything. That level of openness has everything to do with the way Carolyn and I present.”

Margaret also offers ongoing support to HIV-positive clients to help them maintain their HIV treatment regimen. Many call just to talk, but if they don’t seek her out, Margaret checks on them. “I pull them aside and say ‘Everything okay? What’s going on with you? You know where my door is. If you need me just let me know.’ ”

Rather than focus on numbers, the team spends their energy testing. As Carolyn puts it, “We just test!” ■