

Reaching Clients Where They Are

When clients leave treatment are they still clients?

Outreach is really an extension of Highland Rivers' on site HIV Early Intervention Services program says Kimberly Godfrey, RN, Infection Control Nurse, and HIV & HCV Lead Nurse for the agency. Clients with a substance use diagnosis frequently relapse, returning to their families or to homeless shelters between attempts to get clean. Making HIV testing and education available in the community is one way to reach those clients.

When she was a charge nurse, the questions Kim most frequently heard from clients in treatment were, when can I get out? and, what have I got to do to leave? In response she would ask, do you have anywhere to go? "A little over half would say they were going to go stay with family," says Kim. "The rest had no idea, so we would take them to homeless shelters." Kim provides testing at shelters because they are a place where those who are at risk can be found.

Kim also provides HIV testing at the Community Kitchen. Positioned just outside the entrance is a billboard announcing health fairs and similar public events. Inside, many know each other and share information about their test results, encouraging their friends to be tested.

This quarter, Kim and a team of Highland Rivers nurses tested 32 people for HIV and hepatitis C at the Irwin Mitchell Health Fair in Dalton. "The nurses did a tremendous job," says Kim. "I want to thank each nurse and every supervisor for committing to HIV and Hep C testing."



Kim Godfrey, Highland Rivers

Kim is a believer in continually developing relationships with local resources for the invaluable support they can provide. For example, when a homeless client tested HIV-positive, Kim was able to link them to care with a face-to-face, on site introduction, thanks to her participation in a quarterly symposium at the local Ryan White Clinic. She called the director of the clinic, who sent someone to Highland Rivers to meet with the client. Barbara Bush from the South East Public Health District in Rome came as well to lend her support. Kim is convinced that the extra support was critical to getting her client to enter treatment. ■