

GOLDEN RULE SERVICES TESTING AND LINKAGE TO CARE PROJECT (GRS-TLC)

by Contributing Writer, Cheryl D Howard



Clarmundo Sullivan is the Founder and Executive Director of Golden Rule Services (GRS) in Sacramento, CA. GRS offers a variety of HIV, STD and Hepatitis C testing, counseling and outreach services to the LGBT and people of color communities. GRS's motto speaks volumes of who they are. "Treat others the way you want to be treated, but even better!"

THE HUB: Who is Clarmundo Sullivan?

SULLIVAN: I am an Afro-Latino same gender-loving male born and raised in Sacramento. I have a BSW from San Francisco State and a master's in education from UC Davis. Growing up in Sacramento was a challenge because of the intersectionality of growing up with three minority statuses. I have 30 years work experience addressing health inequities experienced by people of color in Sacramento.

THE HUB: How did Golden Rule Services come about?

SULLIVAN: I started GRS because of how frustrated I was with culturally incompetent service providers in Sacramento. This frustration was not just my experience, but the experience of my peers. Another reason was because of the disproportionate rates within health, education, employment, criminal justice disparities and statistics affecting people of color in Sacramento County. I was inspired to do something about health disparities after reading in 1990 the California Legislative Black Caucus's *The African American Male, an Endangered Species* report. That report highlighted disparities prior to starting GRS. Originally, in our first year we started out focusing on juvenile justice activities to try to prevent juvenile males from entering jail or juvenile hall. We offered, with schools, court ordered life skills counseling in anger management for first time juvenile offenders.

THE HUB: Your program has completely changed since then. When and what brought about the change?

SULLIVAN: For 20 years, GRS in partnership with the Sacramento County Health Department, has been providing free rapid HIV, STD, and Hepatitis C prevention, testing and outreach services. For people who are HIV negative, we provide free rapid HIV testing, STD testing, rapid HCV testing, PrEP assistance, clean syringe access, and condom distribution. For HIV positive clients, we provide STD screening, HCV testing, and non-medical case management services to ensure they have access to medical services.

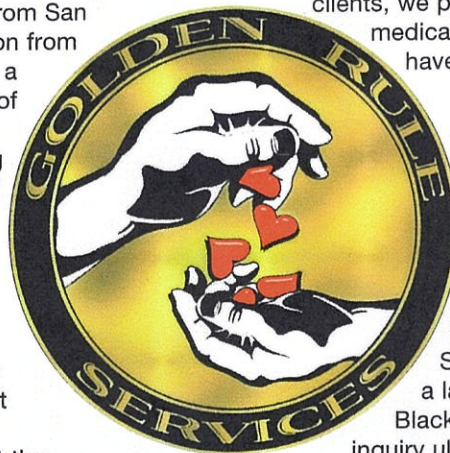


THE HUB: You were in the first two years of the clinic. What caused the program to quickly evolve?

SULLIVAN: Our first programmatic focus was on first-time juvenile offenders. However, in early 2001, we changed our programmatic focus to HIV prevention. GRS approached the Sacramento County and asked why was there a lack of HIV prevention services targeting the Black community when the rates were so high? This inquiry ultimately resulted in a small \$5000 to conduct a needs assessment regarding HIV in the Black community.

THE HUB: Why do you feel your program was so essential? Why is it particularly essential in the African Community?

SULLIVAN: In the beginning, culturally competent HIV prevention programs for African Americans really didn't exist, especially for black women, young people, and gay males in the midst of an HIV epidemic! Our rates of HIV, at that time, were at much higher rates than other racial/ethnic groups. The programs that did exist were not culturally competent. We understand our communities better, so we began the services that we have now.



THE HUB: What affect, if any, has COVID had on the functions of the clinic?

SULLIVAN: In response to COVID-19 we started distributing PPE (personal protective equipment) to our clients. To address those not comfortable leaving their homes for services, GRS is launching telehealth services and home-based HIV and STD testing and condom delivery. Our telehealth services will instruct clients on how to self-administer HIV and STD tests. For those who are comfortable coming to our clinic, they are pre-screened for COVID-19 and administered a temperature check before obtaining services on site. They are provided hand sanitizer, masks and gloves each visit.

THE HUB: Is the location of your clinic deliberate?

SULLIVAN: In the past 20 years GRS has moved three times in three different communities. We have strategically re-located, not only to communities with people of color, but to underserved communities such as Oak Park, Midtown, and South Sacramento. We use epidemiology reports to show us where the most HIV and STD cases were reported by zip codes. We are currently located at 4433 Florin Rd #860, Sacramento, CA 95823.

THE HUB: GRS has had many accomplishments since its inception 20 years ago. Can you tell us about accomplishments that you are most proud of?

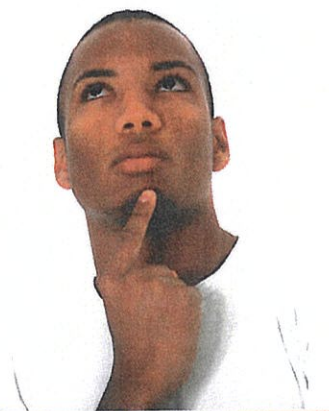
SULLIVAN: Well, for one we have kept our doors open for the past 20 years! As a small, minority-based non-profit organization, it's a huge accomplishment. Two, we have saved thousands of lives. We have documented testimonials of patients who have remained HIV negative because of GRS. Let me tell you something really important, "Black lives have always mattered at GRS!" Thirdly, and this demonstrates GRS's level of commitment, we have provided services to our clients for years without funding! It's not about funding, it's about the needs and that is the Black experience. Income and transportation should never be a barrier to obtaining needed services

Testing and Linkage to Care Project



If you are HIV negative, we would you like to offer you:

- One-on-one HIV risk reduction counseling sessions on how to reduce your risk for HIV and STD infection.
- Information on how to remain HIV negative when dating HIV positive partners.
- Information and access to non-occupational Post Exposure Prophylaxis (n-PEP).
- Information and Access to Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP).
- Information about ways to get PrEP co-pays paid.
- Access to free rapid HIV testing and STD screening.
- Access to a variety of free condoms and lubricants.
- Access to free sterile syringes.



THE HUB: Congratulations on an upcoming 20-year anniversary, what would be a milestone during changes in past 20 years?

SULLIVAN: "Not only does GRS serve people who are HIV negative, but we can provide non-medical case management for people who are living with HIV. We do this through the Ryan White program (a federally funded program that provides HIV care and support services for low-income people living with HIV). That is a huge milestone! It took us 20 years to obtain Ryan White funding."

THE HUB: What are you hoping to further accomplish with GRS?

SULLIVAN: GRS is currently working on a plan with the California State Office of AIDS to eliminate the HIV epidemic in California. One strategy in the plan is to increase HIV testing in vulnerable communities which would include African Americans. Approximately 15% of them don't even know they have it. Secondly, we enroll people into the PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis, the pill) program. PrEP is 99% effective in preventing HIV. We also educate people about Undetectable = Untransmittable. If people living with HIV take their HIV medications and get to undetectable status, it is impossible to infect others

THE HUB: You mentioned some reasons why you started GRS. What was the real concept behind the name?

SULLIVAN: I know how it feels to be treated different. I know because I'm a minority. I told my mom if ever I become a success, I don't want anyone else to feel that way. So, it became my golden rule, because I was treated less than.

Sullivan states that if you want to help him and Golden Rule Services, they are looking for donations, volunteers, and board members. ■

Contact (916) 427-4653 or visit www.goldenruleservicesacramento.org