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The Golden Rule to STI Awareness

September 16, 2022

I AM A WORK OF ART

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Cristy

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The Golden Rule to STI Awareness

How Golden Rule Services Combats HIV and AIDS Through Educational Outreach.

by Kelby McIntosh, Freelance Writer

When understanding the plights of many disenfranchised communities, what are the biggest ones if asked? While you could provide myriads of responses, the one answer that seems to get overlooked is the one causing people of color a severe amount of damage. *Human Immunodeficiency Virus*, better known as *HIV*, has been ravaging humanity since the 1980s. With the introduction of Reaganomics and a crack epidemic – HIV hit lower-income communities with a fatal crushing blow, creating many black and brown casualties.

“Whether unconscious bias or structural racism, they feel they’re not getting the treatment services they deserve.” – William Rhodes, Non-Medical Case Manager

While HIV trampled through communities with fear and lack of knowledge in the 1980s, many new medical discoveries, preventative knowledge, and awareness programs – like *Golden Rule Services* have been at the forefront of HIV education for their community. “Our Executive Director, Clarmundo Sullivan, has been fighting for over two decades for HIV awareness in communities of color,” stated William Rhodes, Non-medical Case Worker for Golden Rule Services.

Since August 2000, Golden Rule Services has provided various services, from SCD and HIV testing to prep navigation and educational outreach. William stated, “You hear the words ‘cultural humility,’ right? We get people who come to our agency who know we’re a black organization, which is a comfort for them.” William further stated, “I get a lot of clients who are frustrated because of the care from other organizations – they don’t feel heard, but we understand their struggle.”

“For my clients, the stigma or idea of having HIV or AIDS is what leads to severe mental trauma, substance abuse issues, or criminal behavior.” – William Rhodes, Non-Medical Case Manager

According to [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov), in 2019, an estimated 1,189,700 people aged 13 and older had HIV in the United States, including an estimated 13% of people whose infection had not been diagnosed – of which 42% are African Americans. “When it

comes to other organizations, retention rates are low; we have to ask ourselves, 'why are they dropping out of care? Whether unconscious bias or structural racism, they feel they're not getting the treatment services they deserve,'" William stated.

A significant portion of Williams's job is seeking those who have dropped out of the program and bringing them back into care. In contrast, the California of Public Health database and paperwork that follows a diagnosed HIV and AIDS person can feel like a daunting stigma. Still, Golden Rule understands that its clients consistently fight different social and racial battles. *"For my clients, the stigma or idea of having HIV or AIDS is what leads to severe mental trauma, substance abuse issues, or criminal behavior."* William further stated, *"changing the public perception of those who have HIV or AIDS is another uphill battle we [Golden Rule Services] face."* Still, Golden Rule Services aims to alleviate the stigma of HIV through educational outreach and various support services for the black and brown community.

In Williams' words, "HIV now is treatable; you can live an everyday lifestyle with proper medication and dietary changes. On the horizon, there are new forms of medicines and research that are consistently improving, even the possibility of a single-use pill. HIV is not what it used to be 30 years ago, and there are so many federal and non-federal resources – all you have to do is seek it."

If you or a loved one want to receive more information on HIV and AIDS awareness, reach out to sacgrs.org or your local state agency.

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