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LGBTQ gives free HIV testing, raises AIDS awareness

BY JAKE MARROCCO
Contributing News Reporter

Twenty percent of people who are infected with HIV are unaware of their status and at risk for spreading their disease to others. In an attempt to prevent this from occurring, faculty members at the University of Rhode Island are taking actions.

In honor of World AIDS Day, which took place Dec. 1, Annie Sar, the coordinator of the LGBTQ Programs and Services at the LGBTQ Center, and the rest of the team will be giving free HIV testing for those who want to participate.

The confidential practice, which will be held in Room 111 of the Commons residence hall from 3-5 p.m. on the first Wednesday of each month, is intended to raise awareness for AIDS around campus and provide the service for students who wish to utilize

In attendance to christen the event were the group AIDS Project Rhode Island and Naomi Thompson, the University of Rhode Island's chief diversity

officer and vice president of community, equity and diversity.

"I hope to spread awareness [of AIDS] and create a more welcoming and inclusive environment where people appreciate and understand differences," Thompson, whose position oversees the Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity, Multicultural Center, Women's Center and the LGBTQ Center, said.

Before the testing commenced, AIDS Project Rhode Island took the stage to give a presentation on the malady that plagues millions worldwide, but restricted their discussion to solely Rhode Island.

The group, which was founded just more than 30 years ago, is centered on providing assistance and relief to those who are infected or affected by HIV and AIDS.

Along with the dangers inherent with the disease, AIDS Project Rhode Island doled out facts concerning unprotected sex and rates of sexual intercourse involving teenagers overall in

Rhode Island.

Their slides provided numerous revelatory statistics: since 2007, sexual activity between teenagers has fallen more than four percent. However, the rates of unprotected sex have risen by more than six percent.

"What stand out to me [at URI] are the existence of the Equity Council and the commissions and the levels of institutional diversity," Thompson said. "I'm impressed by [URI President David M. Dooley's] commitment to creating the position and the resources that have been dedicated to the Community, Equity and Diversity Council."

The presenters said Rhode Island ranks first among the six New England states in teen birth rates between the ages of 15-19. Twenty-nine births out of 1,000 that occur in the Ocean State are from this demographic, which places it in front of second-place Maine (26).

According to the statistics presented, among communities

of color and intravenous drug users, the rate of HIV infection has decreased 66 percent and 89 percent, respectively. However, it has increased by a staggering 100 percent among gay/bisexual men.

In comparing Rhode Island with Massachusetts, the latter experienced a 48 percent decrease in new HIV infections since 2000, dropping from 1,192 to 622 per year. Rhode Island, however, has only witnessed a 16 percent fall in the same time span, remaining at about the same level: 126 to 106.

"There's \$1.5 million dedicated to the construction of a free-standing LGBTQ center," Thompson said. "The commitment of the president, the leadership and the provost really stand out to me and the level of commitment of the folks who are invested in these issues."

In their final words, organization officials urged those who believe they may have the infection to be tested because medication can be administered to deter its effects.

Student Senate recognizes new religious group on URI campus

BY JAKE MARROCCO
Contributing News Reporter

The University of Rhode Island Student Senate recognized a new group during their meeting on Wednesday night.

The Campus Ministry International (CMI) organization is centered on promoting a public forum in which all members can openly discuss and study the teachings of Jesus Christ.

"We don't just want to learn more about each other, but [also] our spirituality," Raquel Mendez, the president of CMI and member of senate, said. "[This group] is different than most of the organizations that just focus on religion."

Due to their former president being too busy and missing a number of meetings, the club