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Mending of the Hearts Memorial Project

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Recommended Citation

Mending of the Hearts Memorial Project, "Flyer for Mending of the Hearts Memorial Project" (1992). *Event Flyers and Pamphlets*. 17.

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Western New York

Mending of the Hearts



Memorial Project

On the morning of Saturday, October 24, 1992 staff and volunteers from AIDS Community Services



Students from Nichols School were among the many volunteers at the Mending of the Hearts Project Day. Said one of them during the course of



the day, "making a panel makes the threat of AIDS more real. We have to fight this disease with more education."

gathered in the Social Hall at Buffalo State College for the second annual Mending of the Hearts Project Day.

filled with many of the completed fabric panels from the Mending of the Hearts Memorial Project. Some of the volunteers carefully sorted and emptied boxes of colorful fabric swatches, paints, ribbons, sequins and braided trims. The staff prepared trays of cookies and set out cider. By one o'clock the large empty room was filled with activity and anticipation.

Throughout the day over one hundred people gathered to create 17 new fabric panels for the Mending of the Hearts

Memorial Project. The Social Hall hummed with the sounds of sewing machines and the voices of people creating designs for their fabric panels. These were people

"Making a panel is a way of celebrating someone's life; the panels created for the project are colorful memorials to those who have died." -Dennis Long, Director of Volunteers

from all walks of life, most of whom had lost someone to AIDS, each of whom was invited by AIDS Community Services to take part in creating a memorial to their loved one. Paul LaDouceur, a Case Manager at the agency was unprepared for what

he would experience that day.

"When I entered the room that afternoon, I was filled with emotion. I realized that this was more than another agency event; it was a life experience."



A pile of fabric becomes a warm and loving creation for Rosa. Said one student who helped make the panel, "It's a personal gift from our sorority to let Rosa and her family know we are thinking of her today."



Family members talk with Wayne Zimmerman, Director of Development during the creation of a panel for their loved one, Tom. "I hope the people who see this panel know that this wasn't another number in the AIDS epidemic," said Tom's sister, "but that he was my brother and he was special."

"As I entered the hall that morning, it seemed so big and empty," said Constance Webster, Special Services Coordinator. "I wondered if our event would seem small and insignificant."

The spacious walls of the Social Hall were soon

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The *Mending of the Hearts Memorial Project* was begun by AIDS Community

"The project also serves as a visual message about AIDS and its effect on the Western New York community."

Services with several goals in mind. One is to give people a creative, supportive outlet for expressing their grief after losing someone to AIDS. Dennis Long is the Director of Volunteers for AIDS Community Services and helps coordinate the *Mending of the Hearts Memorial Project*.



Family members carefully sketch their designs onto fabric. Said one volunteer from AIDS Community Services, "when I saw all of these panels I realized that AIDS isn't just a gay disease. I feel a great responsibility to help educate people about AIDS and this project is a wonderful way to do that."

"Making a panel is a way of celebrating someone's life," he said. "The panels created for the project are colorful memorials to those who have died."

The project also serves as a visual message about AIDS and its effect on the Western New York community. Nancy, an agency volunteer who lost a son to

AIDS, believes in the power of the fabric panels as educational tools. "I hope someday we can display all of the panels in one of our city parks," she said, "so that the community will stop being judgmental about people with AIDS."

As the day unfolded, designs were transferred from paper to cloth. Fabric swatches, ribbons, pictures and paints were transformed into beautiful tributes to people whose lives were cut short by AIDS. Family members worked side by

side with volunteers from AIDS Community Services and students from Buffalo State College and Nichols School. Each one contributed a part of themselves to the panel they helped create. Said one agency volunteer, "panel making is important for me because people who have lost someone to AIDS are often denied part of the mourning

process due to society's attitudes about AIDS. Helping people make panels might help give them back some of that process."

By eight o'clock that evening the final touches were being glued or sewn on the fabric memorials. People who had worked together all day gathered around their panels and made sure their work was complete.

Feelings of pride were mixed



Andrew Mattle, Director of Client Services, talks with participants about their panel. "As a professional caregiver, the *Mending of the Hearts Memorial Project* is a way to reconnect with families and friends of all the great people I have worked for over the years."



Dennis Long sorts through piles of donated fabric with a volunteer in preparation for the Second Annual Mending of the Hearts Project Day.

with sadness as each panel was carefully folded and packed away to become a permanent part of the *Mending of the Hearts Memorial Project*. One woman who worked all day with three generations of her family said, "it gives me great comfort to know that my two granddaughters can visit their father's panel, wherever it is displayed, as they get older; he will always be remembered and honored because of this panel."

Our thanks to Phil Santa Maria, Marsha Jackson and Barb Keen of Buffalo State College, and all the families, friends, volunteers and supporters of AIDS Community Services who helped make this day possible.



Another finished panel. A tribute to another life lost to AIDS.

To learn more about AIDS Community Services or The Mending of the Hearts Memorial Project, call 716-847-0315.