

Growing need puts financial squeeze on AIDS Project

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DEC 2 2 1993

The number of clients served by the Santa Cruz AIDS Project has more than quadrupled in the last three years, putting the agency in a bit of a financial squeeze and prompting a "year's-end" fund-raising drive.

SCAP has been providing services to people with AIDS — everything from rides to the doctor to support groups and grocery del-

iveries — since 1985. In fiscal year 1990-91 it served 43 clients. In the most recent quarter, July through September this year, that number had grown to 185.

"It's shocking information and we hope more and more people will take notice of it," said Robert Korn, a SCAP board member and chairman of the agency's finance committee.

Korn, who has AIDS, had been a doctor at Watsonville Com-

munity Hospital's emergency room until May 1990, when he became ill. He explained that the disease can have an incubation period of up to 10 years from the time a person becomes infected with the human immunodeficiency virus to the time AIDS symptoms develop. The clients now coming to SCAP were probably infected about 10 years ago.

SCAP's acting executive director, John Laird, agreed.

"We're seeing the effect of the lack of education (about AIDS) in the early '80s," he said. "I think it's going to continue to grow at a similar level for the next few years."

The agency's budget hasn't kept pace with the increased client load. In fiscal year 1990-91, it was \$360,000; in 1992-93 it was \$620,000. At the end of June this year, because of lower-than-expected income from fund raising and grant

applications and higher-than-anticipated costs, SCAP found itself with a \$54,000 shortfall.

To make up the difference, the agency borrowed \$20,000 from the Santa Cruz Community Credit Union and from a number of its own reserve funds.

Korn said SCAP was scrambling so hard to meet clients' needs that it didn't have time to make the internal improvements that were necessary to prevent the

shortfall.

"I think it's not surprising," Korn said, "in agencies that grow so fast (to have something like this happen.)"

Since then, several cutbacks were made, Korn said, including the elimination of 11/2 positions. Steps were taken to improve the bookkeeping system, and a committee that had formerly been charged with both fund raising

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and finance (and had spent nearly all its time on fund raising) was broken into two committees. Korn said the changes will prevent the agency from ending up in the same spot next year.

No cuts in client services were made, and no eligible person seeking help was turned away, Korn said. In fact, an additional social worker was hired to deal with the increased caseload.

The Greater Santa Cruz Community Foundation has offered to match funds raised by SCAP through the end of the year on a one-to-five ratio, up to \$25,000. This means that the foundation will contribute \$1 for every \$5 SCAP raises.

"The important thing for people to remember is that they've gotten their house in order and are providing vitally needed services in the community. That's why the Community Foundation lent its support to this year-end campaign," Grace Jepsen, the foundation's executive director, said in a press release.

Korn said the agency hopes to raise money to cover the shortfall so it can pay back the loan and replenish its reserves. To do so, it has sent a letter out to a list of about 3,000 people who have supported the agency in some way in the past.

The fund-raising committee will also approach businesses and indi-

viduals for larger contributions.

Other fund-raising efforts will be on-going. Jan. 11, the Shadowbrook restaurant will donate 30 percent of its proceeds for that day to SCAP. A fund-raising dance to be held in the new parking structure in downtown Santa Cruz is planned for February.

SCAP is funded through a variety of federal, state and local sources, including the federal Ryan White CARE Act, the State Office of AIDS and the county of Santa Cruz, as well as through private foundations and individual contributions.

It provides what Korn calls "psycho-social" care for people with AIDS or related diseases, including such things as medical referrals, help in applying for disability and Medi-Cal, help finding housing, and support groups for people with AIDS and their friends and family. Through a cadre of some 400 active volunteers, SCAP helps people with the day-to-day details of life that can become unsurmountable to someone with the disease.

It also carries out a significant amount of education and prevention work, with particular programs aimed at the Latino community in the northern part of the county and gay youth. One of its programs, Project First Hand, in which people who have AIDS talk about their experience with the disease, gave 700 talks this year.

Korn said the outreach work is essential.

"Education is the only vaccine

we have," he said.

Both Korn and Laird said that while the majority of SCAP's clients are white gay men — because that's where the AIDS infection began in this country — the infection rate in the gay community has since stabilized. Teenagers and women of child-bearing age are the segment of the population now being infected the most rapidly. That means over time, SCAP's clientele will look very different.

Laird said the agency has to constantly adjust its services to make sure they are relevant to the population it's dealing with.

Of SCAP's current 185 clients, 161 are male and 24 are female. There are also a few children. Of the 183 SCAP has ethnic data on, two are Native American, nine are African American, 20 are Latino and 152 are white.

To make a donation, or for more information about SCAP, call 1-800-400-3901 (from Watsonville) or 427-3900 (from Santa Cruz). SCAP is located at 911-A Center St., Santa Cruz 95060.