

GEORGIA: Director of AIDS Athens 'Inspired' from Helping Her Patients

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AIDS Athens, Incorporated diagnoses five or six new HIV cases each month, according to Executive Director Olivia Long, and most of those newly infected individuals are 18–24–year-olds. The nonprofit organization serves 10 northeastern Georgia counties by assisting individuals with HIV/AIDS and those affected by the disease as well as preventing the spread of the disease through education and outreach. Long said that approximately 88 percent of AIDS Athens' patients have an undetectable viral load. She expressed her great satisfaction at getting people in to be tested and for them to adhere to the treatment program.

The organization offers monthly free testing events and testing through appointments and provides anonymous oral testing without blood or needles. AID Athens, Incorporated has been operating for 25 years. Its two biggest goals are educating the community about HIV prevention and treatment and reducing the stigma associated with the disease. She felt that the way to decrease stigma and to get more people in to be tested is to spread the word in the community. When necessary, AIDS Athens can provide financial assistance for individuals with HIV or AIDS. Long stated that the organization's annual income has increased from \$300,000 to \$1.3 million throughout the last six years.

Long said the organization tries to get involved with the University of Georgia's (UGA) campus whenever possible. The group has worked with the School of Social Work, teaching how to more effectively work with individuals with HIV infection, and with the Institute for Women's Studies educating them on the ways that HIV/AIDS affect women. Long noted that 10 percent of the AIDS Athens' client population with HIV infection are students from UGA and nearby colleges. AIDS Athens also provides volunteer and internship opportunities for UGA students who assist with prevention education programs and planning and executing special events.

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