The adjoining bedrooms at Joelyn’s Family Home, painted in warm shades of green, yellow and orange, are still empty. Multi-colored striped bedspreads have yet to be ruffled by sleepy mothers and restless children. The pristine walls of the playroom, outfitted with a toy kitchen set, a gargantuan beanbag and kid-sized tables, haven’t yet been set upon by the tiny, finger paint-encrusted hands of a wayward aspiring artist, as they inevitably will be.

But Rebecca Haag and other staff members from AIDS Action Committee (AAC) left the open house awed by the sense of community embodied there, a new substance abuse treatment program for up to 25 women with children, situated on Long Island in the Boston Harbor. “A community of women with children who have taken a really important step to try to pull their lives together and to be responsible moms while at the same time trying to address their own issues,” is how Haag described the home. “And we couldn’t have been more proud to be a part of that.”

Aside from AAC, Joelyn’s Family Home, owned and operated by Victory Programs (VPI), was made possible with the help of the Boston Public Health Commission, the architecture firm TRO Jung Brannen and longtime VPI benefactors Janet and Jeff Larson of Wellesley. In tribute to a long-time VPI fundraiser, the home is named for Joelyn Scott Fiorato, mother of VPI President and Executive Director Jonathan Scott.

Scott said AAC’s involvement in the process tipped the balance in favor of forging ahead with the multi-million dollar project. “After [AAC’s Board approved a $350,000 grant from selling an underused residence in Mission Hill], our lenders at Wainwright Bank and other donors just said, ‘Well, you’ve hit this milestone where now we really want to invest in the project.’” The grant from AAC is “unprecedented,” said Scott. “I’ve never in my career known another nonprofit to do that. … It is a legacy of the highest order. And they’ve been so understated about this…”

As the construction proceeded, Scott learned last October that his 84-year-old mother was dying of cancer. “We went literally from having dinner with her to a week later she’s telling me, ‘I’ve got cancer everywhere.’” … She [would not] undergo chemotherapy. But Joelyn Scott Fiorato lived a long and colorful life — as a mother and grandmother, the first female movie critic for the New York Times, a best-selling cookbook author and newspaper columnist, among many achievements. … Many years ago, when VPI [struggled], she turned … to raising money for [it]. Near her life’s end, she had renounced nearly all of her earthly possessions.

“The one thing she didn’t want to leave behind was her 20-year AA medallion. And she had that with her when she died,” said Scott.

“[The grant from AAC] is huge. … This money is going to help hundreds and thousands of people for generations to come,” said Scott. “This is going to go way beyond me and Victory Programs.”

“For one brief moment in their lives [the women and children residents] will feel that somebody cared about them,” [Scott] said, “and that they could be in a place of dignity.”

You can end AIDS in the U.S.

AIDS is a national crisis. Every 13 minutes someone in America is newly infected with HIV. The rate of new infections, 40,000 annually, has not changed in 15 years. Over a million people living in the U.S. are living with HIV, only half are in care that can save their lives. Nearly half of new HIV infections occur among African-Americans, and AIDS is the leading cause of death among black women aged 25-34.

In my letters to you over the past several years, I have challenged us to think boldly and call for an end to the epidemic in the U.S. We have been calling for a national strategy with measurable outcomes and established accountabilities. Times are changing, and we are already in the midst of a Presidential campaign. We should call on our next President to end AIDS in the U.S.

I’m heartened to report that a team of national leaders have joined voices to organize a grass roots effort asking our next President to demonstrate such a vision and commitment. The effort has been launched, and you can participate by going to www.NationalAIDSStrategy.org and indicating your support.

In August, I was honored to be among the invited guests to the Presidential Candidates Forum in Los Angeles presented by HRC and LOGO TV. This forum was focused on issues of importance to the GLBT community, and there were many in the audience living with HIV. There were questions related to HIV/AIDS prepared for each candidate, but time did not permit many of them to be asked. There will be other opportunities to educate the Presidential candidates in both parties to understand the need to end this epidemic. You can play an important role.

According to recent polls, health care reform is the #2 priority among issues of concern to the American people. HIV must be a critical part of this debate. In response to the AIDS crisis, we built a service delivery system that works. By providing our clients with housing, nutrition, and mental health support, we have improved health outcomes. Those who are in care and treatment are living healthier, more productive lives.

The response to HIV/AIDS has not been “exceptional” but rather should be viewed as the norm for all those suffering from chronic illnesses. We need to be an important voice in the national debate on health care reform and provide guidance and policy advice. A national strategy to end the epidemic must be part of this effort.

For those of you involved in any Presidential campaign, or in a room with a candidate, or participating in a town meeting, please ask the candidate to END AIDS in our country. Show your support, make your voice heard. Be proud to tell your children, friends, and family that you helped end the AIDS epidemic in our country. Every individual can make a difference. Go to www.NationalAIDSStrategy.org now, and sign on.

Rebecca Haag
Executive Director

Black Elected Officials Publicly Tested For HIV

Members of the Massachusetts Black Legislative Caucus (MBLC) and Black State Elected Officials were tested for HIV to highlight the heavy toll the disease is taking on communities of color in Massachusetts and across the nation. While the four pictured were tested at the State House, others tested elsewhere on June 27, National HIV Testing Day, including Representative Byron Rushing and Representative Benjamin Swan.

“I salute these courageous Black State Legislators for supporting HIV testing in Black communities across the Commonwealth and for offering a strong example by getting tested themselves,” said John Auerbach, Commissioner of Public Health for Massachusetts. “I also thank the collaborating AIDS organizations, AIDS Action, JRI Health, Multicultural AIDS Coalition and Healing Our

Land, for facilitating testing for these public leaders.”

“Knowing one’s HIV status is essential to stopping the spread of this disease,” said Rep. Byron Rushing. “The two reasons to get tested are to get into care if you are HIV positive and to stay negative if you are HIV negative.”

When Larry Kessler, AIDS Action’s Founding Director, was arrested in 1987 for leading a sit-in, he could not have imagined that his courage, focus and stamina for social justice would lead to a program at AAC that would bring academic scholars into a curriculum designed to foster another generation of social justice pioneers.

However, August’s end closes the term of the first class of Larry Kessler Scholars, a diverse group of four inspiring young leaders who will now return to their respective posts across the country, with a new perspective on HIV and its intersection with social justice.

Virginia (Ginny) Anderson, a Ph.D. candidate in Drama at Tufts University, will return to writing her dissertation, Beyond Angels: AIDS in American Theatre, 1981-2006 after spending the summer working in housing advocacy with Brenda Rose and our chronically homeless clients.

Tom Byrne will again matriculate at Vanderbilt University, where he expects to earn his B.S. in Human and Organizational Development and Public Policy – to be followed by the pursuit of an MBA or Law School (or both), following a summer working on BE SAFE with Andi Genser.

Lichuya Reda, will be nearby at Northeastern University, far from her native Eritrea, Africa, securing a B.S. in Sociology, having participated in a much needed research project with Public Policy exploring the incidence and prevalence of HIV in the prison population.

Heidi Romero, Venezuelan native and former ballet dancer, will return to Simmons College of Social Work and the Urban Leadership Program to earn a Masters Degree, after working on the new Sexual Health Hotline with Claire Backenstow and Lonnie McAdoo. The Larry Kessler Scholars didn’t limit their work to within the walls of 294 Washington. They were present at the State House on June 14 when the anti-marriage bill was overwhelmingly defeated, and again when the Massachusetts Black Legislative Caucus set an example to the residents of the Commonwealth by being tested for HIV publicly. The Scholars, reported at their end-of-term presentation, that these experiences were their most memorable during their internship.

The Scholars also participated in a special Lecture Series, featuring an array of speakers discussing various aspects of HIV/AIDS.

The first lecturer was renowned author, columnist and screenwriter, James Carroll. Next, Abe Rybeck, Artistic Director of The Theater Offensive and an HIV prevention veteran spoke about the guerrilla outreach he conducts, in coordination with The MALE Center, at public sex environments. Pat Daoust RN, Director for the Global Campaign for the Physicians for Human Rights closed the lecture series, discussing HIV/AIDS from an international perspective.

Susan Tannehill, Director of Client Services, spearheaded The Larry Kessler Scholars Program from its inception, with the support of Lindsay Broockman, AAC’s Volunteer Manager.

The Boston Foundation, granting $50,000 to AIDS Action Committee of Massachusetts (AAC), joins Grand Circle Foundation as a key funder for BE SAFE, a collaboration conceived and created by AIDS Action. Our partners are The City School, Dimock Community Health Center, Jane Doe Inc., The Massachusetts Coalition for Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence and Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts (PPLM).

The Boston Foundation and Grand Circle Foundation are joined by private donors to support this program, which is focused on three inter-related health issues through a holistic, cross-issue approach, targeted and tailored for youth. The three health issues are: sexual health (including teen pregnancy, STIs and HIV), drug and alcohol use and dating and relationship violence.

“We are thrilled that the funders have afforded us this amazing opportunity to work with partners who bring so much to the effort; all of us are totally engaged in working on behalf of youth across the barriers that usually separate our fields,” said Andi Genser, Manager, BE SAFE.

BE SAFE will maximize the opportunity for out-of-school programs to reduce risk-taking behavior among their youth and strengthen the young adults’ ability to participate successfully in school, work and programs. BE SAFE will achieve this by improving the skills of staff, creating safe and healthy program environments, addressing parents’ concerns and harnessing the strength of youth participants.
Larry Day, Manager of Community Relations, is in the first class of graduates of the Initiative for Diversity in Civic Leadership, a program that develops a new generation of leaders of color committed to public service, including running for elected office. Governor Patrick keynoted the graduation that followed the 16-week intensive program, created by Oiste, Suffolk University, MassVOTE and The Boston Foundation and others.

Phill Wilson, Executive Director, Black AIDS Institute, was hosted in Boston by AAC and held an intensive set of activities, meeting with Black GLBT leaders, The Urban League, Harvard Medical School students of color, Boston Globe Editorial Board and concluding with a Town Hall held at Hibernian Hall.

Deb Fournier, Esq., Associate Director of Public Policy, was honored by Cambridge Cares about AIDS at its annual Rays of Hope reception, where she received the Sister Jennette Award. The award signifies the dignity, courage and actions to deliver social justice that Sister Jennette embodied and that each year’s recipient shares now.

AIDS Action kicked off Pride week in Boston with the annual Pridelights celebration on the Boston Center for the Arts plaza. Abe Rybeck, Artistic Director of the Theater Offensive was honored with the Spirit of Stonewall award for his contributions to fighting HIV/AIDS in the GLBT community. Mayor Thomas M. Menino and other dignitaries were on hand to enjoy the evening as co-Hostesses Verna Turbulence and Kris Knevil along with Kathy St. George, Erika Van Pelt, members of the House of EVESU and Eileen Dover kept the record large crowd entertained.

The 18th Annual Bayard Rustin Community Breakfast was held on April 28. The breakfast honors the work of LGBT people of color and allies working to end the AIDS epidemic. This year’s theme, Love in Action: Ending the Epidemic was a call to action addressed throughout the program by all the speakers and honorees. The breakfast presented awards to Phill Wilson, Executive Director of the Black AIDS Institute, and the Women of Color Roundtable, all advocates for taking action to end the epidemic in the black community. Cambridge Mayor Ken Reeves, accepted the award for Phill Wilson, and JRI Health’s Executive Director Douglas Brooks gave the keynote address.

The Boston Center for the Arts was full of foodies on March 13 for the 12th Annual Taste of the South End. More than 40 of the South End’s finest restaurants participated offering delicious tastings of their creations. This year’s event also featured a new pre-event private chefs’ reception, a private post-event party and a successful culinary and entertainment-focused silent auction.
The 22nd Annual AIDS Walk Boston featured nearly 450 teams, including Team Stop & Shop, who doubled the amount of money raised from last year, Northeastern University with close to 100 participants, Team MAC Cosmetics, who quadrupled the amount of funds they raised compared to last year and Brown Middle School, whose 217 participants raised an unprecedented $23,734! And of course, an AIDS Walk Boston favorite, Casual Male, with their 300+ member team adorned in the familiar ice-orange shirts. Our Walkers, along with the nearly 700 participants of The Larry Kessler 5K, raised well over $1 million to support the programs and services of AIDS Action. Thanks to all our participants and their supporters. We are still accepting donations, so don’t forget to send in your gift if you have not already done so!

SAVE THE DATE! AIDS Walk Boston, Sunday, June 1, 2008

Our Sincere Thanks to:

AAC EXPANDS, ELECTS NEW CO-CHAIRS

Catherine Vaughn and Lester Payne were elected Co-Chairs of AIDS Action Committee’s Consumer Advisory Board (CAB), and they are enriching the quality and scope of input the CAB provides to inform how AIDS Action delivers services to its more than 2,500 clients.

“Our Consumer Advisory Board provides valuable consumer input and helps us plan the delivery of our services,” said Susan Tannehill, Director of Client Services. “Recently, I sought their advice in preparing a grant application to serve those with substance use issues and HIV.”

Catherine Vaughn’s dedication and experience surrounding HIV issues includes care, services, support, prevention, policy and research. She works at the Boston Living Center (BLC) and has a full plate and selfless heart in giving back to the community. Having been HIV positive since 1988, Vaughn served on the Ryan White Title I Planning Council, is Vice Chair of Community Research Initiative of New England’s (CRI) CAB, and is an AIDS Watch member, representing her District from 2006-2007. She is also a member of Healing Our Community Collaborative (HOCC), celebrating its 10th year and housed at AIDS Action. Vaughn is also a member of Positive Providers, a support group for HIV positive providers, which meets at AIDS Action. Vaughn proudly states her age as 61.

Lester Payne, who volunteers at the Boston Living Center, is also on the Ryan White Planning Council and on the Massachusetts Statewide Consumer Advisory Board (CAB). He is a member of the Peer Support Work Group of the Greater Boston/Metrowest HIV/AIDS Service Coordination Collaborative (SCC), which, along with staff from JRI Health, created the Peer Support Guide, a valuable resource for consumers. Payne is also a member of the Consumer Advisory Board for the Community Research Initiative of New England (CRI). His dedication to his community as an African-American HIV positive man, is demonstrated by his scope of involvement and depth of service.

AAC BOARD ADDS FIVE NEW MEMBERS; EXPANDS COMMUNITY REPRESENTATION

AAC’s Board of Directors named five new members: Cheryl Bartlett, RN, Lisa Cruz, Louis K. Eaton, Raul Medina and Thomas P. Webber and welcomed a returning Board member, JT Jacoby.

Cheryl Bartlett, RN, is Executive Director, Sconset Beach Preservation Fund and a long-time AIDS advocate, administrator and clinician. Her history includes public policy development and advocacy for health and human services issues, she and conducted strategic analysis and planning in non-profit management. Bartlett was formerly Executive Director of Community Action Committee Cape & Islands and of Nantucket AIDS Network.

Lisa Cruz is Community Liaison, Tibotec Therapeutics and formerly Associate Director of HIV Education Programs at AIDS Action and Education Outreach Manager at Community Research Initiative of New England (CRI) for more than two years previously. Cruz’s work is dedicated to HIV prevention and education, working with professional associations, patients and clients and the community.

Louis K. Eaton is Help Desk Analyst for Grand Circle Travel, directing network management, system stability and technical support for 300 users worldwide. He is an African-American gay man active in the faith community, has been involved in the AIDS epidemic for more than 20 years. Eaton helped found a gay men’s health group years ago that today is part of the Multicultural AIDS Coalition (MAC). Eaton has been involved with AAC through the Bayard Rustin Breakfast and as a Walk Team Captain for Grand Circle Travel. Grand Circle Foundation has been a long-time supporter of AAC as premier Walk sponsor and now as lead sponsor of BE SAFE.

JT Jacoby is Senior Director at Fidelity, having just returned to Boston recently from an overseas, multi-year assignment to India. JT served on the Board up to his departure to India. He spearheaded, along with his fellow AAC Board members, a three-part community project titled “Community Conversations,” which was the precursor to the formation of The MALE Center, a community and wellness center for gay, bi and trans men and a program of AIDS Action Committee.

Raul Medina is Corporate Relations and Business Development Manager, Hispanic News Press, publisher of El Planeta, the largest circulation Spanish-language newspaper in New England. Last year, Medina through El Planeta organized a very successful city-wide health fair for the Latino community held at Boston University’s Agganis Arena. Medina is the President Emeritus of the Boston Chapter of the National Society of Hispanic MBAs (NSHMBA).

Thomas P. Webber recently retired from the Gillette Company where he served various roles in Human Resources since 1986, including most recently Vice President of Human Resources, Global Compensation, Benefits and Learning and Development. He has served on various Boards including the Human Resources Leadership Forum and the Human Rights Campaign (HRC). He has also been very involved with the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC). Webber, well-known and highly regarded in Boston’s business community, has been a long-time supporter and major donor to AIDS Action.

Not pictured: JT Jacoby and Thomas P. Webber.
Harbor to the Bay
Support Team AAC on Sept. 15

AIDS Action Committee is proud to be a beneficiary of the 2007 Harbor to the Bay, a one day bike ride from Boston to Provincetown that improves community awareness and care for people living with HIV and AIDS. Their mission is to give 100% of what is raised to their beneficiaries! Please consider supporting Team AAC, which consists of several staff members and clients, all riding as one to raise awareness and funds for our programs and services. The ride is Saturday, September 15, 2007. Please call Shkeya Brittle at 617-450-1517 or go to www.harbor-to-the-bay.org for more details on making a donation or volunteering.

Save the Dates

- Imperial Court Coronation
  Saturday, November 17, 2007 • Park Plaza Hotel

- Sappi Auction
  Friday, November 30, 2007 • Downtown Boston

- AAC Dance-a-Thon!
  December, 2007 • More details on our website soon!

Calling all Volunteers!
For information on volunteer opportunities, call:
617-450-1261 or email: volunteer@aac.org