



## **Center on Halsted Strives to Assist Chicago LGBTQ Community and Conducts a New Study**

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CHICAGO, IL -- Ever since 1973, community service organization the Center on Halsted has made its cultural mark in helping the needs of nearly every different member in the LGBTQ community in Chicago.

The organization which was first titled as Horizons Community Services was first started in 1973 as a volunteer-run information clearinghouse and a meeting place for gays and lesbians. It started off as a hotline, for people who had a sexual encounter and the need to access information and referrals for social, professional, recreational, and medical purposes.

Throughout the decades of its existence, senators like Barak Obama and elected officials and other corporations helped fund it to the public. The official building for the center opened in 2007.

"The mission is to not only advance community but also secure health and well-being of the LGBTQ people of Chicagoland," said Peter Johnson, the Center's Organization Director of Public Relations. "As part of a community, it is our job and mission to provide services to those who are less fortunate and need services who can't get them otherwise. We do that through testing and a lot our funding comes from HIV/AIDS work."

While the center is known for being a community center, it is also a social service organization, open to provide services to everyone. This includes cultural programs such as volleyball, dance performances, cooking classes to rapid HIV testing, group therapy and vocational training.

In addition to the STD testing and activities, the organization also has a youth and a senior program, which focuses on two different groups of individuals who seek separate needs. There is a youth group ranging from 13-24 years old that focuses on the concept of accepting yourself. In most teenager's youth, they are coming out, programming to find positive in youth for coming out for first time.

"There are other organizations that have specific goals that have legal political goals that work the system," Johnson said. "We are a broader based community that is meant to be flexible with the community. When the community changes vastly and abruptly, we try to change and adapt with it."

The Center on Halsted is nonprofit organization, with most of the services coming from funding. A lot of marketing and outreach comes from our HIV research, where it shows up on websites. The center is geared towards mainly the LGBTQ community, but it also offers help to allies who need testing. Like parents who don't define as LGBTQ need a space to talk about their issues.

"The programming is nice for people who are looking for a safe place," Johnson said. "Its realizing that gay people have the same needs as other people, and part of that is physical activity and wellness of the mind and body. We don't just want to provide gay specific things like HIV testing, we have the space to play."

One study that is currently being conducted as a collaboration between Center on Halsted and the John Snow Incorporated and

other organizations in Kansas City and Fort Lauderdale, is Messages4Men. This study is specifically geared towards for homosexual black and Latino men and their high risk for contracting HIV/AIDS.

This is being researched to help out the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention develop information, and have a better understanding on why the rate is either rising or slowing in these communities.

"The purpose of this study is to understand HIV prevention methods for men who have sex with other men," said Jeremy Holman, JSI Senior Consultant. "We wanted to find out how to share messages about these methods and the high infection rates among CDC data on who is affecting the most.

The study was recently launched, in its third week of data selection. Each center is aiming towards recruiting 300 men to take part in the study in the next three to four months. If any men are interested in taking part in taking part in the online survey they should go to the Messages4Men official website. This survey asks a variety of questions to help people understand the messages and awareness of the prevention of HIV in this day and age.

"It's a great way for people in the community to share what they think and help the center communicate how to stay safe," Holman said. "The study itself is trying to create better communication between the centers and these communitiestes on how to properly behave and be aware."