

"You know, we are so often the first - and last - place people affected by HIV and AIDS turn to." / Sharley McLean of The Terrence Higgins Trust.

Contributors

McLean, Sharley
Terrence Higgins Trust

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Wellcome Collection
183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE UK
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
E library@wellcomecollection.org
<https://wellcomecollection.org>



“You know, we are so often the first – and last – place people affected by HIV and AIDS turn to.”

Sharley McLean of The Terrence Higgins Trust

The Terrence Higgins Trust



Terrence Higgins Trust Counselling "Where people turn to first..."

Here are excerpts from a conversation with Sharley McLean about the two aspects of her work for The Terrence Higgins Trust.

"To test or not to test?" We talk people through the implications of testing. If they decide they want to – and it's entirely their decision – then we counsel anyone who tests positive."

"By far the most calls we get are from people who are perfectly well but really worried. Guilt about something that has happened recently can lead someone to question their entire past."

"We are not here to judge but to allay immediate fears – what I call applying sticking plaster. If needed, we arrange sessions with a psycho-therapist."

"The most important part of what I do is listening. There are many times when I wouldn't know what to say anyway."

"We help people come to terms with their situation. I'm often asked, 'When shall I tell my parents?' ...I remember one young man who was joking about the whole thing, but then his mask cracked and he broke down..."

...survival

"One lady, a refugee who had lost everything as well as having AIDS, was sitting alongside me on the settee and she started to cry. I just asked her if she wanted a hug and she nodded..."

"I've never been a do-gooder. I like people, I think we all have to choose between humanity and inhumanity..."

"I'm now counselling people, who are dying, who are quite a bit younger than my own children."

humanity...

"We counsel anyone, it doesn't matter who or what they are..."

The Hardship Fund "Where people turn to last..."

"We're not talking about luxuries here, we're talking about survival"

"It can be very stressful, clients put us under a great deal of pressure – but then they're desperate."

...essential

"People with AIDS are like any other group of people, so of course there could be scroungers amongst them. But our system is geared to weeding them out."

"The cheques we send to people don't have our name on them. Confidentiality is as important here as with counselling."

"To anyone with AIDS, a good bed with a comfortable mattress and lots of changes of bedding is essential. What we can afford to give is woefully inadequate."

"We helped a mother, who was finding it impossible to travel to visit her 3 year old daughter who has AIDS in hospital, with the costs of transport"

"Many people with AIDS are subjected to terrible threats and abuse by ignorant neighbours. One man returned home from hospital to find his windows smashed. Until we could help rehouse him, we put in replacement windows and security devices."

"They turn to us when there really is nowhere else for them to go"

...positive



"We get thank you notes and charming phone calls from those we've helped. I'm amazed at how pleased people are with very little."

The Terrence Higgins Trust

LEADING IN THE FIGHT AGAINST AIDS

The Terrence Higgins Trust is the leading UK charity working with HIV and AIDS.

We channel the efforts of over a thousand people, the vast majority of whom are volunteers.

Through education, we encourage people to practise safer sex. And anyone directly affected by HIV and AIDS or their families or friends can turn to us for help.

Our telephone helplines currently receive in the area of 400 calls a week – and the number is rising all the time. Regardless of age, gender, race or sexuality, people can call us at any time. We can arrange for anyone who needs further counselling to receive it, from someone like Sharley. She can also call on the assistance of our specialist counsellors on legal and other matters.

In the first 8 months of 1991, the need for counselling rose by 20%. It will undoubtedly continue to rise.

The aim of our Hardship Fund when it was first set up was to improve the quality of life for people with AIDS: for instance, sending them on a much-needed holiday. Now, because more and more people are calling on its resources, we are limited to helping people out with essentials.

Most requests are for help with bills like gas, electricity and telephone. Or for essential items like heaters, where we advise what's best and pay what we can towards the cost. Every request is carefully screened.

We urgently need more money to maintain our services at even the current level, since demand for them all continues to rise. So it is up to you to make sure we are here when anyone wants us. We have achieved so much thanks to the generosity of individuals. There is so much more to be done.

*Thank you for
whatever you can spare.*



52-54 Grays Inn Road, London WC1 8JU.

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