



BEHIV Completes Healthy Relationship Sessions

By [Gay Chicago Magazine](#) , [Gay Chicago Magazine](#)

Chicago, IL - Better Existence with HIV (BEHIV) recently completed its first Healthy Relationships cycle of the year. Healthy Relationships is a five-week group dedicated to helping people develop the skills to reduce risky sexual behavior and disclose their HIV positive status.

"The most impressive part of the group, for me, was to see people of vastly different backgrounds relating to each other and helping each other cope with disclosure to potential partners," said BEHIV case manager and cofacilitator Jodie Bargerone.

Healthy Relationships, funded through BEHIV's contract with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), is open to people of any gender or sexual orientation. The focus of the program is not to force people to disclose their status to any particular person, but to help foster the skills to allow them to communicate with the people in their lives.

"At the start of the group one participant said, 'I just feel like trash' because of the perceptions of HIV positive people," Bargerone related. "At the end of the group he said, 'Now I have some new tools when I start seeing someone new.'"

Cofacilitating the group with Bargerone is Marcus Waller, a long-time BEHIV volunteer and former client. Walker brings his own experiences to the group, allowing him to relate directly to the fears, stigma and doubts that HIV positive individuals often feel.

"Participants realize they are not alone in dealing with this affliction. Every one of us deals with it in a different and unique way. This is a very important concept," Waller said. "I can remember two situations where participants said they felt 'dirty' and like 'damaged goods.' Afterwards, they both thanked the group for allowing them to recognize that there is life after HIV. That's why I facilitate Healthy Relationships."

BEHIV is recruiting participants for future Healthy Relationship cycles. For more information on participating, call Jodie Bargerone at 773-293-4740.

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