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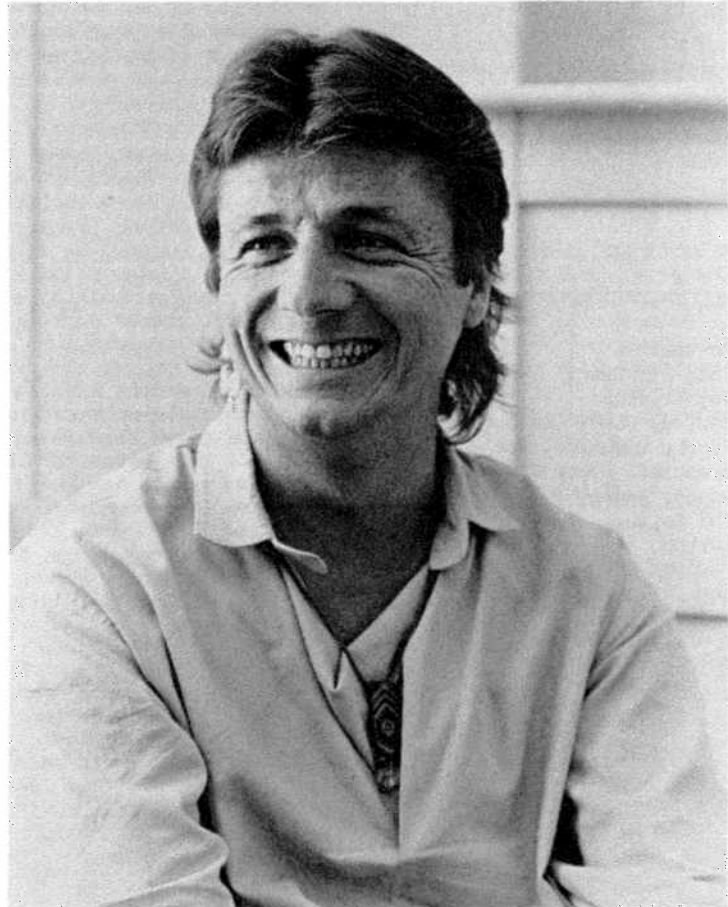
The Shanti Project Newsletter

FALL 1984

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR EXPANDS PROJECT'S VISION

The following article was printed in two parts in the July and August issues of Network. The author, Tom Gschwind resides in San Francisco and in addition to writing is an accomplished violinist.

Shanti, from the Sanskrit, translates loosely as "inner peace" or, "the peace that comes from a fuller understanding". The Shanti Project was conceived in Berkeley in 1974. Being the first volunteer organization of its kind to lend positive support to individuals with life-threatening illnesses, it was originally devoted to helping cancer patients at UC Medical Center. More recently it has come to symbolize the courageous fight against the international AIDS epidemic. Much of this fight has been on supporting people with AIDS (a life-threatening disease) to live with dignity. This major shift in the emphasis of Shanti since its beginnings has continued to transform the traditional perspectives on death and disease in the community at large. Jim Geary, Executive Director of the Shanti Project in San Francisco, sees it this way, "With the present crisis, about 90% of the people diagnosed with AIDS are at least initially seeing themselves as being in the



Jim Geary, Executive Director of Shanti Project

process of recovery, an emphasis on the living rather than the dying process is called for." A welcome new approach towards self-healing and acceptance.

Jim Geary's enduring involvement with Shanti goes far back to 1977. Four years after joining, with the alarming increase of AIDS suddenly becoming evident, he initiated the very first support group for those diagnosed with the malady. Yet hard times always seem imminent where controversy rages. By March, 1982 "the Project basically went broke, the staff left, the Board turned the Project over to the Volunteer Body and resigned." Jim Geary was

promptly voted Executive Director... on unemployment...by the volunteers, who then elected their own Board. Another legacy of struggle destined for success.

After a trying and uncertain year with no substantial funding, the public began its slow recognition of the Project's tremendous power and extraordinary service to our communities. Having always been a non-profit organization, major funding from outside gradually began manifesting with the severe AIDS upsurge. Shanti's present day budget exceeds the \$890,000 mark. Aside from receiving strong support from

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FALL 1984 NEWSLETTER

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Shanti is a Sanskrit word meaning "inner peace."

The Shanti Project logo is an eclipse, a circle within a square. The circle portrays the inner world of the mind. The square conveys the solid reality of earth and body. United, they indicate the wholeness of the human being.

An eclipse is the passage from light to darkness and the return to light. For Shanti Project, it represents the changes brought about by illness and death, the darkness that can fall upon people experiencing these events, and the light that can follow in the wake of helpers who bring love and caring.

Denny Thompson, Coming Attractions Communication Service, created the logo.

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the City and County of San Francisco, the community-at-large has also been very generous. Individual and private foundation donors have been essential to the Project's continued operation accounting for about 30% of the entire Shanti budget.

With the primary focus of the past year on keeping up with the newly diagnosed AIDS cases, a current core of 100 volunteers (up from about 60 a year ago) is busy with individual counseling to AIDS patients and their loved ones, as well as offering support groups for both those in bereavement around AIDS and non-AIDS issues. Ongoing trainings every two months add 25 new volunteers to the list in an attempt at keeping up with the ever increasing need for counselors.

In addition, Shanti's growth in service related areas has been encouragingly rapid. A successful Program of Residence Facilities based on the independent living model have been opened, as well as introducing a Practical Support Program with trained volunteers assisting clients in domestic chores such as shopping, cooking and housecleaning. Also, SF General Hospital now employs 5 Shanti trained counselors working directly with hospital patients in their now well publicized Ward 86 and Unit 5B. With 1.4 new cases of AIDS being diagnosed per day in S.F., Jim estimates that Shanti has worked with at least 75% of these, and hastens to include the many parents, friends and families with which Shanti often has direct and prolonged contact on a regular basis.

As regards to the immediate future, the Shanti Board is fully committed to "riding the AIDS epidemic out", their main priority being to continue recruiting, training, and supervising enough new volunteers and related staff members to meet the demand brought about by the epidemic.

Even prior to the advent of AIDS there were some 200 groups modeled after the Shanti Project throughout the country. Many others are still using the impetus of the Mother Project in San Francisco to found new organizations offering volunteer services to those with life threatening illnesses. Jim and other Shanti members often assist in out-of-town trainings after which the new group becomes autonomous and free to create its own programs.

Community support for Shanti's work is a subject of great concern for many. "A major and essential role in the crisis is the power generated by the individual volunteers, often dealing with difficult situations. In Shanti we have a tremendously brave group of people who have gone past their own

fear of developing AIDS...some who may have symptoms themselves...but who feel the need to be there for their brothers and sisters being affected." However, gay media coverage on Shanti's accomplishments have been conspicuously scant. Jim Geary's slight disappointment is easily understood. The "marvelous contributions" of its volunteers seem plainly deserving of undivided acknowledgement by both the gay and non-gay press.

With the frequent exploitation, even misrepresentation of the issue of sexuality by the media at large, Shanti has chosen to deal with it on open and non-exclusive terms. In fact, one might say that for them, sexual preference is hardly an issue at all. Although past years have shown a significant change in Shanti volunteer membership, having currently become about 75% gay identified, AIDS, Jim affirms, is by no means viewed as a gay issue (about 30% of AIDS cases internationally are non-gay identified). Also, a good number of Shanti clients are non-gay, consisting of family members and friends of those diagnosed. Thus the kindred revolution comes full circle.

The ultimate rewards of Shanti's great service to humanity are mostly not visible, not to be seen nor heard nor spoken. They are instead harbored deep within many, the 'inner peace' of a new understanding.

PART II

Personal interviews come in variable and intriguing sizes. Sometimes they evoke melancholy and leave one saddened. Other times they are all bundled up in joy and laughter, the rich charisma of a radiant personality. My recent meeting with Jim Geary, Executive Director of the San Francisco based Shanti Project, reached easily beyond the emotional states of sadness and joy. It left me, indeed, would leave anyone, with an inner peace and fullness transmitted by a mind and spirit in extraordinary harmony. Jim exudes the simple love of self, of humanity, and of serving each of these to the utmost.

Jim Geary's involvement with death and dying has deep roots beginning with the death of his grandparents who were partially responsible for his upbringing. The intensity of observing his grandmother in the dying process for three long years at age 10 helped move him past his fear of working with people facing such crises. His gaze seems somehow grateful when he speaks of the many hours at her bedside "talking to her about visions she was seeing", a seemingly vicarious experience to

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Practical Support Program

By Randy Chelsey

In July of 1983, Shanti was providing a volunteer counseling program for emotional support and a residence program which offered housing for people with AIDS who were homeless. These two programs helped meet many of the needs of people with AIDS. Yet, much was still to do. There was no one to help with the every day tasks that on one level are simple and at the same time directly relate to the physical well-being of a person. These are things like cooking a meal, buying groceries, doing laundry, and providing rides to the hospital clinic for treatment.

I was hired to set up a program to meet these needs. My education and previous employment had been in counseling. I was a Shanti volunteer counselor and had served on the Shanti Board of Directors.

The Community Volunteer Program began in July, 1983 (the name was later changed to Practical Support Program). I arrived to find a desk awaiting me halfway in the hall. I pushed it into the office, found a chair, and got to work. On August 14 we completed the first practical support training. Twenty-two people were available to assist people in San Francisco who had been diagnosed with AIDS.

I had decided that support groups, patterned after those of the volunteer counselor program, would be necessary to provide supervision and support to the volunteers. We met in my home every two weeks until a few volunteers had enough experience to function as group leaders. After completing group leaders' training for the volunteers, the support groups began to function on their own. There have been very few problems in the groups. In some cases the members have become 'family' scheduling regular dinners and even vacations together. One very enjoyable part of my job is attending support groups and maintaining contact with the volunteers.

I am amazed over and over about the work done by the volunteers. I am in awe. I interview prospective volunteers- secretaries, beauticians, architects, doctors - they tell me all they want to do is help. They don't need glory. They know that people are sick, people are dying and they want to assist in any way they can. One of the volunteers described his work as "doing what needs to be done." And that's exactly what they do.

One extraordinary volunteer accompanied his client to the Philippines where he was seeking alternative treatment. The client became quite ill in Manila and the

volunteer, an attorney, arranged for emergency care. The client died the day after they returned to San Francisco.

Another group of volunteers worked with people with AIDS in Shanti's Residence Program. They coordinated a menu, did food shopping, cooking, and clean up for the household every day of the week. The volunteers joined in eating the meals and socializing. Strong friendships were made.

Volunteers do almost everything. They have helped do taxes, applied hot and cold compresses for someone undergoing hydrotherapy, given haircuts, found accommodations for visiting family, sat with people as they died, and officiated at memorial services.

Some have been volunteering for over a year now continuing to "be there" in every way, week after week. In many cases, they see their client weaken and die. They grieve the loss. And, then they call me to say they are ready to work again.

We now have 40 volunteers and have hired an Assistant Director, Steve

Lessure. Steve began as a volunteer in November, 1983. He also served as a group leader. His endless energy and wonderful sense of humor coupled with his sensitivity has made the administration of the program a pleasure.

The newest staff member of the Practical Support Program is Daniel Brewer. Daniel, a volunteer counselor, serves as van driver and residence cleaner. Previously, our biggest unmet need was medical transportation. Daniel is now available to transport people with AIDS to their clinic appointments on a prearranged schedule. The residence cleaning is also needed because it is very important that the living environment of people with AIDS be as germ free as possible.

All in all, this has been a year filled with much hard work, grief and many rewards. Practical support volunteers have provided over 10,000 hours of help to people with AIDS and their loved ones. What makes this all possible is the knowledge that in "doing what needs to be done" we do make a difference.



Practical Support Van Driver Daniel Brewer with Shanti van used for transporting persons with AIDS to scheduled medical appointments.

LEARNING TO LIVE

By Jim Rulon

Six months ago today I mailed in my application to become a Shanti volunteer counselor and I have been matched with my friend and PWA (person with AIDS) for over four months now. How different my experience has been than I thought it would be! I thought I would be helping people die. Instead, I'm learning how to live.

I've never had a particular fascination for death. In fact, I thought "Harold and Maude" was a strange movie. The truth is I volunteered because of a growing feeling that my life was becoming increasingly self-centered and selfish. I wanted to do something for someone else—to feel needed, and I was touched by stories in local gay press about the predicament of PWA's.

The emotional support training, which is mandatory for volunteer counselors, literally changed my life and helped me seek new directions. The training is intense and while it contains much technical information the primary focus seemed to be "gentle nudging" – an invitation to explore my own feelings of where I had been and where my present journey was taking me. The safe environment created during the training through hugs, emotional stroking and an incredible sense of bonding with the other trainees enabled me to take risks – to examine hurts that I had blocked from the past and to heal the wounds that had resulted from them. When I left the training I felt that I had a clean slate. I was able to engage in some self-examination that helped me be more comfortable with who I am. I could now make changes in my life more easily and open more of myself to others without being afraid that they might see me and disapprove. And, I was ready for Jerry, who had been diagnosed with AIDS about the time I began the training.

I will never forget how frightened I was as I walked down the hallway that first time and knocked on the door to Jerry's apartment. My



Emotional Support Volunteer and Shanti Project Administrative Assistant Jim Rulon

stomach felt queasy, I was sweating, and worse, I dropped my motorcycle helmet just as he was opening the door. I wasn't sure at the time whether the "clunk" was the helmet hitting the terrazo or the gulp of my adams apple as I tried to draw breath.

I wasn't nervous because I was afraid of getting AIDS from Jerry. I had dealt with those fears in the training and knew that AIDS is not spread through casual contact. Several PWAs who participated in the training with me helped alleviate this fear. Self-imposed barriers and fears had fallen as I had dealt with the initial shock of seeing someone with Kaposi's sarcoma lesions for the first time and became comfortable with hugging, touching and interacting with PWAs. My fear was the fear of saying or doing the wrong thing.

I wanted desperately to "do a good job", to "be there for him" and "not make an ass out myself". Although I still worry sometimes about whether I have said the right thing, I have learned that what is most often helpful to Jerry is for me to listen to him while he sorts through his problems and concerns. I've also learned to express my helplessness to him when I feel helpless.

The first thing Jerry asked me after we settled into comfortable chairs in his living room was "How many people have you counseled before?" I have seldom felt so inadequate or defensive. "You're the first", I stammered. "Well, this is the first time I've had AIDS", he countered. We both smiled and the tension melted.

When Jerry called the Shanti office to request a counselor, he told the coordinator that he wanted to talk about "death and dying". We were matched together by the Shanti coordinator because we had some things in common. We had both attended the same local church, we both identify ourselves as a part of the South of Market gay community, and, perhaps more importantly, the coordinator had a "feeling" that we would "hit it off". She was right.

Despite his initial indication that he wanted to talk about death, Jerry found that he wasn't ready to do so. Although it comes up now and then, such as when he asked me to find out about legal services to assist in the preparation of his will, most of what we talk about has to do with the problems of living as a person with AIDS. How do you tell your loved ones? How long am I going to feel well enough to do the things

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A Letter To The Mayor...

And Her Response...

We sometimes receive letters from the loved ones of our clients but don't always have the opportunity to share them. Following is one that generated a response from Mayor Feinstein.

Dear Mayor Feinstein:

Our son ---- died from AIDS in San Francisco on June 14, 1984. He became ill last October and was hospitalized several times, but during the intervals when hospital care was not required, he needed assistance that was not available except through the Shanti Residence Program.

In our hometown in ----, physicians suggested that we should not bring our son home, claiming they had no knowledge of how to treat AIDS, and the hospital staff threatened to walk out if AIDS patients were ever admitted. Even admitting to homosexuality is not comfortably permitted in this city so the service offered by Shanti was an answer to our prayers.

The Shanti Residence Program not only moved ---- into a room with his personal furnishings, but also arranged for 24 hour nursing care, much needed companionship, personal counseling, assistance with his banking, car care, ordering and preparing favorite foods, and taking him to appointments when death was drawing near. Our son chose to stay with his family at Shanti rather than be moved to a hospital atmosphere.

We spent as much time as possible in San Francisco to be with our son. The knowledge of the Shanti staff on how to deal with this illness and his death was invaluable to us. We would have been lost without their loving guidance and shall always be grateful to everyone associated with this worthwhile program.

Please consider the importance of funding for the AIDS Home and Hospice Care Unit. We shall contribute in the future, and hope you share our concern.

Sincerely,

AND THE RESPONSE FROM THE MAYOR

Dear Mr. and Mrs. ----,

Thank you for your moving letter regarding your son and the services he received from the Shanti Project.

Please be assured that I will continue to ensure City funding for the Shanti Project. The City calls upon Shanti to provide a wide range of services to AIDS patients. In addition to the residential program your son participated in, Shanti administers counseling services for AIDS patients and their families and loved ones, services at the special AIDS ward at San Francisco General, information and referral, and other services. I appreciate your advising me of the type of treatment you and your son received from Shanti; it is consistent with the positive reports I have received from other sources.

I have forwarded a copy of your letter to the Executive Director of the Shanti Project, so that he knows of your appreciation. I have also forwarded a copy to the San Francisco Director of Health, who administers the Shanti Project.

Please accept my sincere sympathy on your son's death. He was fortunate to have such loving and understanding parents.

Warmest regards,

Diane Feinstein
Mayor



The Shanti Project, a volunteer-based organization, welcomes financial contributions from those who appreciate our efforts and want to help. Please send your tax-deductible donation to the Shanti Project, 890 Hayes St., San Francisco, CA 94117.

☐ I would like to support the Shanti Project with a donation of
☐ \$15.00 ☐ \$25.00 ☐ \$50.00 ☐ \$100.00 ☐ Other \$ _____

☐ I am interested in becoming a volunteer

☐ The enclosed is a Memorial Gift from _____
 IN MEMORY OF _____

☐ Please notify the family members at the address below:

Name _____ Phone _____
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 City _____ State _____ Zip _____

☐ I have moved; my new address is:

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SHANTI VIDEOTAPES

The Shanti Project is proud to announce the availability of our complete volunteer training program on videotape. Videotapes of the training program can be used by any group wishing to start an organization to provide volunteer counseling to people with AIDS, their loved ones and friends. These training materials are designed to be used both as a resource by the organizers of a new group and in the training of volunteer counselors.

For more information about the Shanti training videotapes, call the Shanti Project office at 415/558-9644.