Keeping Our Promise to Keep Patients Safe

Escort program going strong a year after the buffer zone over-turned

Last June, when the Supreme Court struck down the Massachusetts law that established a 35-foot protest-free buffer zone around reproductive health centers, the Justices cleared the way for protestors to congregate inches from our health center doors and to aggressively approach anyone coming or going. And the protestors have taken full advantage – often yelling so loudly that they can be heard inside the health center.

Thankfully, hundreds of people from across Massachusetts quickly realized the negative effect the buffer zone ruling would have on our patients. Within weeks of the decision, we received more than 400 clinic escort applications. Clinic escorts are volunteers who stand outside our Boston health center and offer assistance to patients and staff navigating their way through the protesters.

While the Safe Access law we worked to pass in the weeks following the Court’s decision provides some important safeguards for our patients and staff, it does not go far enough to shield our patients from the gauntlet of protestors. Our expanded clinic escort program allows us to keep our promise to our patients and staff: their safety and well-being is our number one priority.

More than just a helping hand, escorts are our eyes and ears on the sidewalk. With the removal of the buffer zone, we realized our escorts would need to play an enhanced role. Their training now includes instructions on filing incident reports and documenting patterns of aggressive behavior. These incident reports are often shared with the Attorney General’s office as part of our ongoing conversations with local and state officials about how to best protect our patients. Escorts are also helping us improve our systems and procedures. For example, at the suggestion of our escorts, patients making appointments now receive better information about what to expect when they arrive at our health center, effectively improving the patient’s experience.

Since last summer, escort coverage at our Boston health center expanded from just one day a week to four days each week, with more than 80 volunteers in regular rotation. Sue F. has volunteered outside our Boston clinic almost fifty times since August. She notes, “While some of us have been involved for 10+ years, there are a lot of new faces in the past year. I’m happy to be part of a multigenerational community committed to keeping women safe.”

We are grateful for our dedicated team of escorts working every day to ensure the safety of our patients and staff. If you meet, or already know, a Planned Parenthood clinic escort, please be sure to say thank you! To be notified of the next clinic escort training session please email volunteer_information@pplm.org.
The conclusion of PPLM’s fiscal year in June makes this a time to look back at the challenges we’ve overcome and to focus on the opportunities ahead.

As you’ll read here, PPLM continues to set the standard, not only for the high quality care we provide, but also for expanding access to comprehensive sexuality education and our commitment to adapting and modernizing how we do business.

And we can’t do it without you. That’s why we are so pleased to highlight supporters and volunteers like you in this issue. Your generosity, and the generosity of people like Abha and Anil Singhal, enables PPLM to be the Commonwealth’s leading reproductive health provider.

We were pleased to welcome Interim CEO Sue Kaufman in April. Sue has served on PPLM’s Board of Directors since 2011, and comes to us with more than 20 years of experience building and leading health care organizations that have successfully executed vision and business strategies in not-for-profit, entrepreneurial, and government environments. In partnership with our senior management team, Sue is committed to PPLM’s continued success. The Board has also established a Search Committee and hopes to introduce you to a permanent CEO by year-end.

Daniel A. Ginsburg, Board Chair

advocate spotlight: Abha Singhal

Investing in Get Real

Abha Singhal credits her grown children with highlighting Planned Parenthood’s work for her and her husband; which is a fitting introduction because the Singhal’s have had a direct impact on the lives of thousands of young people. Through their family foundation, the Chirag Foundation, the Singhals have been instrumental in bringing PPLM’s sexuality education curriculum, Get Real: Comprehensive Sex Education That Works, to more than 56,000 students across the country.

Even before Wellesley Centers for Women confirmed that students who participated in Get Real were less likely to have sex than their peers who did not receive Get Real, the Singhal’s were excited about Get Real’s potential. “Get Real just needed a boost; it was a great place for us to start,” says Abha. The Singhals were drawn to Get Real because it was a tangible opportunity to make a difference in thousands of lives. “We feel good about the impact of this program. It helps young people build confidence and lays the foundation for them to lead healthy lives.”

Thanks to the Chirag Foundation’s investment in the Get Real Teacher Institute, the program’s website has transformed into a state-of-the-art interactive training portal and resource for Get Real educators. It now includes a blog, a library, a database of vetted, medically accurate, age-appropriate answers to frequently asked student questions, and updates to the curriculum. With the Foundation’s backing, the Get Real Teacher Institute has trained more than 350 teachers from 199 schools and organizations.

As Abha notes, “Investing in education is so important because it has the potential to make a permanent change in someone’s life.” We couldn’t agree more.
Get Real Continues to Expand

In February, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) added PPLM’s middle school sexuality education curriculum, Get Real: Comprehensive Sex Education That Works to its list of evidence-based programs. Inclusion on this list requires meeting stringent criteria for effectiveness and now schools and organizations wishing to use Get Real may apply for federal grants to fund its implementation. Get Real is one of only 37 programs in the country included on the HHS list and PPLM is the first Planned Parenthood affiliate to have its comprehensive sexuality education curriculum earn a coveted spot on this list.

In addition, PPLM has been awarded a grant of $50,000 from Planned Parenthood Federation of America’s (PPFA) Fund for the Future to develop and launch a national Training of the Trainer program. PPLM will partner with Planned Parenthood affiliates nationwide to identify, recruit, train, and support a pool of individuals who will facilitate the implementation of Get Real in schools across the nation.

We couldn’t be more excited about what this means for young people and families everywhere.
We were honored to see so many supporters and new faces at our house parties in Lincoln and Newton and our Young Friends Open House.

More than 200 people gathered to benefit the Planned Parenthood Advocacy Fund at Celebration of Choices.

“I do” Support PPLM!

In lieu of traditional wedding gifts, Landis Becker Young and Brace Young invited guests attending their March wedding to consider supporting PPLM. The response was overwhelming. We are fortunate to have such creative supporters!

Images (top to bottom): 1. State Treasurer Deb Goldberg, Naomi Aberly, and Bob Glovsky at Celebration of Choices; 2. Erik Clinton, Katherine Rushforth, and Trevin Lau at Celebration of Choices; 3. Susan Whitehead (co-chair), Senator Olympia Snowe (keynote speaker), Paula Johnson, and Anne Columbia (co-chair) at Celebration of Choices; 4. Joshua Gann (co-chair), Nicole Gann (co-chair), Sarah Rizzo, Rebecca Connors, David Connors, and Joseph Rizzo at the Newton house party; 5. Stacy Osur (co-chair), Ed Kern, Jeff Birchby (host), Jena Salon (host), and Priscilla Kern at the Lincoln house party; 6. Brittni Rubin, Amy Mahler, Catherine West, and Chloe Gotsis at the Young Friends Open House.

Image Credits: Natasha Moustache (Images 1, 2, 3, 5), Helene Norton-Russell Photography (Image 4)

Make your voice heard!

Join PPLM, college student activists, and supporters from across Massachusetts at the State House to rally with activists and meet with your elected officials at Sexual Health Lobby Day June 30. For more information, please contact ajohnson@pplm.org.