

DeKalb Veteran Leads Testing

This year, Margaret Renfroe tested 1276 people, a 50% increase over last year and more than any other EIS worker in the state.

When she heard the news, Renfroe said, “We all need a pat on the back every now and then. For someone to recognize how hard I work made me so happy!”

On June 27th alone she tested 77 people. “I want to give kudos to Natasha Tyson and Cosby Eskridge,” says Renfroe. “On National HIV Testing Day they came over and did the pre-test counseling for me. Cosby worked all morning and Tasha covered the afternoon. Without their help, I could never have done 77 tests.”

Leading up to National HIV Testing Day, Renfroe also had support from DeKalb Community Service Board (DCSB).

Community Relations Manager Michelle Potter listed the event on the DCSB website and

included it in the June issue of *Staff News*. Whitney Sullins, also of Community Relations, sent signs to all the DCSB sites; distributed a calendar notice to numerous media/websites; and provided a sign and helium balloons to post outside DeKalb Addiction Clinic where Renfroe is based.

An EIS veteran with more than a dozen years in the field, Renfroe knows the importance of testing. “If we can

diagnose everyone who is positive, we can link them to care and stop the spread of this virus, so I’m on a mission.”

On National HIV Testing Day, the first walk-in was at 7:30am and Renfroe says she would have stayed all night. “If there’s one person waiting for an HIV test, I refuse to leave until I’ve tested them.” It’s not unusual for her to open clinic doors early for people seeking an HIV test. “Although this building doesn’t open until 8:15, I make it a priority because I know that if somebody got up that early to come to get an HIV test, something has happened recently and they really need to know their status.”

In tandem with testing, Renfroe believes prevention counseling helps promote behavior change.

She invites clients to participate with her in a personalized risk assessment.

To foster a candid disclosure of risk behaviors, Renfroe relies on compassion, respect, and a non-judgmental stance. “I don’t care what anyone has done. I’m honest and I encourage clients to be honest with me because I can’t help them if I don’t have accurate information. And once you close that door, people just pour their hearts out. They get gut level honest about what



Margaret Renfroe, DeKalb Addiction Clinic

they’ve been doing. From there, we can talk about what they might be willing to do to make themselves safer. And I want to help people be safer. In fact, my ultimate goal is to get them to the point where they don’t

need this test.”

Renfroe’s dedication to HIV work stems from a friendship. “My best friend in the whole wide world died from AIDS and I made a commitment to her to do everything that I possibly could do to help stop the spread of this virus.”

“I’m living sometimes one day at a time,” says Renfroe. “But it would make me really happy if in my lifetime I can see transmission decreasing. One day I’d like to see a cure for this. But in the meantime I’m gonna do everything that I can possibly do to keep people from becoming infected and to get those who are infected linked to the right medical care so that they can live a longer life.”

“It has always been and probably will always be the work that I love to do,” says Renfroe. “And I’m so grateful to have the connection with other HIV EIS workers. I thank my peers for being there - for keeping on. Each of us has earned the right to say that we are making a difference.”