



**Bridging the Health Equity Gap for
People Living with HIV/AIDS &
the LGBTQ+ Community**

ANNUAL REPORT

2023

A Message from ARE's ED

Like many nonprofits coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, AIDS Response Effort, Inc. (ARE) experienced funding challenges in 2023. On the upside, this also challenged our staff and program directors to get creative and agile to maintain the high-quality and reliable services our clients and the LGBTQ+ have come to expect from us. By the end of 2023, we experienced significant growth—programmatically, geographically, professionally and personally.

For more than 30 years, ARE's mission has been to provide crucial healthcare, information and compassionate support for those impacted by HIV/AIDS, homelessness and human service needs as well as the LGBTQ+ community at large in the Northern Shenandoah Valley region of Virginia.

While The HIV epidemic has changed over the years, the needs of those living with HIV in our community have not. Our team of healthcare professionals are dedicated to providing high-quality care in a nondiscriminatory and nonjudgmental environment where all are safe and welcomed.

By expanding ARE's network of community partners and dreaming big, our stellar team of professionals and volunteers have reached more individuals in need of medical, mental, housing and emotional support than ever before. Some highlights:



- ✓ ARE launched the first Comprehensive Harm Reduction program in the Northern Shenandoah Valley (NSV).
- ✓ ARE launched the first LGBTQ+ Center in the City of Winchester, serving all counties of the NSV.
- ✓ ARE's new mobile unit has expanded our ability to offer free testing and harm reduction services and resources to underserved individuals.
- ✓ ARE's case management team created our first food pantry to address the needs of food-insecure clients living with HIV.
- ✓ ARE was voted Best Nonprofit in Winchester by the Winchester Star Awards.

We are grateful for our supporters and could not have achieved what we did without them. Read on for more detail about our inspiring programs.

— Katie Vance
Executive Director

ARE's Impact in 2023



709

people tested
for HIV & STIs



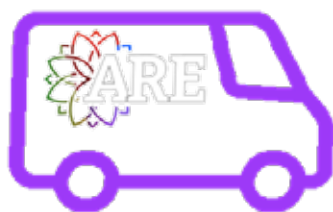
300+

people saved from
homelessness



100

people received
free case
management



NEW

mobile unit to
prevent spread
of HIV & STIs



NEW

free food pantry
& community
garden



HIV Health & Wellness

For more than 30 years, ARE has remained true to its original mission of providing individualized HIV support care services to those impacted by HIV. Through comprehensive Medical Case Management services, ARE facilitates connections to a variety of community partners to ensure optimal health care access to:

- ✓ HIV medical care
- ✓ Medication access
- ✓ Insurance enrollment
- ✓ Entitlement enrollment
- ✓ Mental health support
- ✓ Substance use disorder support
- ✓ Housing assistance
- ✓ Dental services
- ✓ Nutritional support
- ✓ Transportation

Our Medical Case Management team provides a safe and nonjudgmental environment for people living with HIV in which to feel comfortable in accessing life-saving medical services.

ARE practices an integrative approach to health care, treating the entire person through comprehensive and preventative health care approaches.

In addition to medical case management, ARE offers wellness and support group services, which can improve mood, stress-levels, decrease blood pressure, and naturally improve immune system responses.

New in 2023 was the establishment of a healthy food pantry, where food-insecure clients may shop at no cost. The pantry also offers fresh produce from ARE's LGBTQ+ Center community garden throughout the growing season.

Because HIV has long been a stigmatized disease, ARE works diligently to dispel stigma, helping people to understand that HIV can be a manageable condition like heart disease or diabetes. We are making an impact!



ARE's Medical Case Managers guide clients living with HIV to better health, including access to ARE's free food pantry.



Prevention & Education

Sexual health is just as important as physical and emotional health and wellness. ARE offers a variety of sexual health services, performed in confidential, judgment-free spaces.

Testing

Over the last two years, ARE has expanded its testing capacity to meet growing demand from the community. In 2023, ARE provided free testing to 709 individuals across five counties of the NSV. For those who test positive for HIV or HCV, ARE's Education Team provides support and education on next steps to access care and treatment.

Prevention

ARE offers PrEP navigation to both uninsured and insured community residents. PrEP, or pre-exposure prophylaxis, is a preventive medication used to reduce the risk of HIV infection by 92%.

ARE's Prevention Team helps individuals access PrEP at no cost, in addition to linking

them to medical services and information related to PrEP usage. ARE also offers condoms and related prevention methods for HIV and STDs, free to the community.

Comprehensive Harm Reduction

New in 2023, ARE now offers comprehensive harm reduction (CHR) services and resources. Designed to prevent the spread of HIV, Hep C and other infections, CHR also helps reduce the negative impact of drug use for those who are unable to, or ready to, stop using IV drugs.

Also new in 2023 is ARE's mobile unit for remote testing and CHR services. The van is proving to be an effective tool for serving hard-to-reach populations.



Gender Identity Training

ARE's Education Team offers "Gender Identity" training to health systems, schools and businesses on understanding the LGBTQ+ community, gender, sex, and terminology that help reduce health disparities, stigma and discrimination.



LGBTQ+ Center

AIDS Response Effort, Inc. (ARE) established the LGBTQ+ Center in 2023 to address a variety of needs of the LGBTQ+ community in the Northern Shenandoah Valley, including healthcare disparities, mental health support, food insecurity and the spread of HIV, among others.

Located in the City of Winchester, the Center is an affirming and nonjudgmental hub of support where community members and their families may attend educational workshops and support groups as well as receive sexual health support and comprehensive harm reduction services.

The Center also offers:

- ✓ Queer Connections social & support network
- ✓ Nutrition & wellness classes
- ✓ Trans closet
- ✓ LGBTQ library
- ✓ Meeting space for affinity groups
- ✓ Transportation services

In addition to the services above, the Center established a six-bed community garden, installed in 2023 with the help of community partner Home Depot. The garden produced bountiful harvests of fresh vegetables for the ARE food pantry, even into the winter months. The produce was also available at no cost to food-insecure individuals in the community.

Also launched in 2023 was the LGBTQ+ Center Founder's Campaign to raise funds for much-needed repairs and renovations to the building. This campaign will continue throughout 2024. For more details on the campaign, visit <https://aidsresponseeffort.org/lgbtq-center/>



Housing Services

ARE provided a variety of housing assistance services to the counties of Frederick, Clarke, Warren, Page, Shenandoah and the City of Winchester in 2023.

In response to the increasing rate of homelessness and lack of affordable housing in the Northern Shenandoah Valley region, ARE expanded its services to reach the general community by offering housing programs such as:

- ✓ Rapid Rehousing
- ✓ Homeless Prevention
- ✓ Tenant Based Rental Assistance (TBRA)
- ✓ HOPWA (Housing Opportunities for Persons with HIV/AIDS).

Specific housing resources provided to eligible individuals included:

- ✓ Security Deposits
- ✓ Rental Assistance
- ✓ Utility deposits
- ✓ Utility assistance
- ✓ Housing case management-services planning, goal setting, health assessment
- ✓ Financial literacy (budgeting) counseling Services
- ✓ Collaboration with local healthcare systems to facilitate discharge planning for homeless individuals exiting the hospital Linkages to support services, such as food pantries, CCAP and job training, etc.

In 2023, also introduced a Mail Program, in which individuals with no fixed residence may have their mail delivered to ARE's LGBTQ+ Center for pick-up, allowing them to access benefits like SSI and Medicaid as well as health information from their providers.

ARE's Housing Program saved more than 300 individuals from homelessness in 2023.



Testimonials

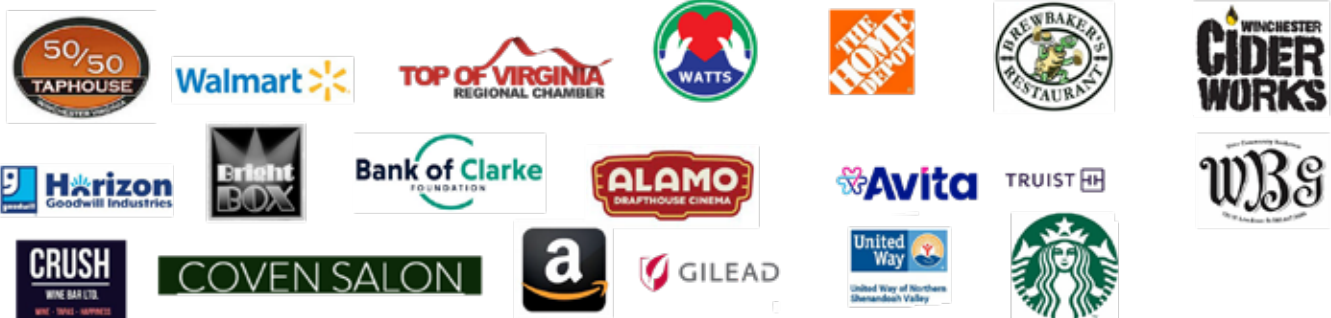
“Fifteen years ago, ARE saved my life! I was in the hospital with PCP, ARE was there by my bedside, giving me hope and strength to fight; and they were there from day one. After being released from the hospital, they provided me with an excellent infectious disease physician and life-saving medication.”

“The dedicated staff of ARE was there assisting me when I needed help in applying for SSI and Section 8 housing, and ARE continues to assist in paying my copays for labs and doctor appointments, along with dental care. If it wasn't for ARE, I would have no teeth.”

“I feel blessed because the caring and devoted staff of ARE are just a phone call or e-mail away always willing to listen, support, and encourage all of their consumers.”

“Just as a person, the realization that you have the virus...it all comes down to the help that this organization gives you. I was completely lost, and if it wasn't for ARE, I would still be living in my van. I sometimes feel like I take the help for granted, but I am just so grateful for the help.”

Community Partners



Contact Us



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<https://aidsinancial> documents are available upon request.