



A I D S S E R V I C E S O F A U S T I N
P R E S S R E L E A S E

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Mayor Lee Leffingwell Declares June 5, 2014 Sylvia López Day

Council Member Laura Morrison delivers proclamation

AUSTIN, TX – Sylvia López, 25-year veteran of AIDS Services of Austin (ASA), was honored today at the Women’s Giving Circle Luncheon: Together We Rise. Council Member Laura Morrison was on hand to deliver a proclamation from Mayor Lee Leffingwell recognizing Sylvia’s contributions to the Austin community and declaring June 5, 2014 as “Sylvia Lopez Day.”

Sylvia first became involved with HIV when a close friend became ill in 1986. She took care of him and went on to work as an HIV Test Counselor with a local health department. Sylvia joined ASA on March 20, 1989 as the 11th staff member hired and the first HIV Wellness Counselor. Sylvia is currently the Interim Prevention Programs Manager.

In 1994, Sylvia and Mary Moreno, an ASA client, developed the idea of creating a retreat just for HIV-positive women. Since then, the retreat has grown into the Women Rising Project, a support group that offers opportunities for education, advocacy, growth and community. The luncheon celebrated the past 20 years of Women Rising Project with photos, videos and stories.

“We are here today because we set out on a journey,” Sylvia described during her keynote speech. “We brought together 22 women with HIV and AIDS in April of 1995. None of the ladies knew each other – can you imagine what courage it took for them to come?” At the time, none of the women had ever met another woman living with HIV.

ASA serves nearly 300 women annually, 93% of who are low-income or below the poverty level. Nationwide, around 25% of people living with HIV are women, particularly women of color. Women are adversely affected by HIV for many reasons. Often, they are the caregivers of the family and neglect their own health to take care of their loved ones. Many women are also unaware of their own risk factors, and may not see themselves at risk of contracting HIV. Stigma also keeps women from getting testing and finding out their status.

“Because of stigma, women live in shame,” Eva Roberts, Women Rising Project Peer Facilitator, explained. “They feel that they will be judged. If we can remove that stigma, more women will get

tested, more women will get help. And more women will be able to move forward and tell their story, and by telling your story, you can help another person.”

To learn more about how you can support Central Texas Women affected by HIV and AIDS, please visit www.asaustin.org/women.

About AIDS Services of Austin (ASA)

The mission of AIDS Services of Austin is to enhance the health and well-being of the community and people affected by HIV and AIDS. For more information about AIDS Services of Austin, visit www.asaustin.org.