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Liberty, Acceptance and  
Respect.

**Community Mobilization:  
Addressing the HIV  
Epidemic in Laredo  
through Community  
Conversations**





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## How It All Began

### TX DSHS Phone Call

- Provided an overview on Community Mobilization Project
- Discussed concerns over HIV infection trends among MSMs in Texas especially on the border
- Encouraged our participation in generating community ownership and empowerment (community conversations)



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## A Little About Community Conversations

- It's a process designed to generate ideas, hope, and interest within a community in hopes of creating "change"
- It's about providing space and chance for active interaction, dialogue, introspection, reflection and sharing without any fear and discrimination
- It's about empowering people to think through the way their behaviors, values and practices-and those of their families and neighbors –affect people's lives, and to reflect on and discuss these issues with others



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## Community Conversations and HIV

Community Conversations can be an effective vehicle in the fight against HIV because communities have the capacity to:

- Prevent HIV transmission

- Care for those affected

- Change harmful attitudes and behaviors

- Sustain hope in the midst of the epidemic



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## Methodological Framework





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## Why Laredo?

### **HIV Infection Trends in Laredo**

- An average of 70% of all new HIV infections within the last 3 years were among MSMs
- Access to at-risk GLBTQs in Laredo was becoming more limited
- Increased hostility and stigma from the local community towards GLBTQ individuals was identified as a barrier to HIV prevention services



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## Initial Steps initiated by TX DSHS/CLHD Staff

### Engage people from GLBTQ community to organize meeting

- Recruit participants (gatekeepers, community advocates, members from local GLBTQ population)
- Secure food and beverages (pizza, sandwiches, chips, soft drinks, coffee, pastries)
- Secure location for meeting (gay friendly establishments, church halls, business board rooms)

### Conduct discussions on what issues are impacting MSM community regarding HIV

- What risky sexual and/or needle sharing behaviors are they or their peers engaging in
- What is influencing the HIV risky behavior
- Are there any barriers that inhibit them from accessing HIV screening and counseling services



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## What Happened

- A total of 30 group meetings were conducted during a 16 month period
- A total of 425 different people participated in at least 50% of the group meetings
- We spent approximately \$1,000 on food and beverages for group meetings
- A “mini” community assessment was conducted by CLHD staff and group volunteers using a tool designed to obtain information from people on what issues were impacting the local GLBTQ community
- 10 focus groups were conducted with members of the local GLBTQ community on topics pertaining to HIV related risk behaviors among their peers
- A formal name and logo were created and adopted to represent the group
- A mission and vision was created to give the group focus and direction
- A strategic plan was created to move forward with the groups’ plan to address disparities in services for people from the local GLBTQ community at-risk for HIV or living with the disease



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## What we Learned about Laredo's MSM community

- Youth (15-24) within MSM community do not perceive HIV as a serious threat
- Condom usage is not a priority among MSMs
- Mental Health issues among MSMs (depression, emotional trauma associated with victimization, suicidal ideation, social alienation, discrimination) influence their behavior
- Homelessness, sexual assault/abuse, drug use/abuse are all factors impacting MSMs and their behavior choices



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## What we Decided to do

- Form a non-profit organization that could form an alliance with our HIV prevention program to serve our local GLBTQ community
- Enlist support from local elected officials and policy makers
- Recruit volunteers from diverse backgrounds to serve as our Board of Directors
- Cultivate alliances with local entities that work with people from the GLBTQ community especially youth (schools, drug rehab centers, youth clubs, etc.)



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## What we Decided to do

### Create a framework for project services

- Engaged in Recruitment of Project Staff/Volunteers
- Developed Policies and Procedures for Project
- Created Project Forms
- Secured Project Space
- Identified and Reached Out to Potential Project Funding Sources
- Worked on Social Marketing Campaigns/Community Awareness
- Devised a Strategic Plan for Project
- Conducted Skill Building Workshops and Training Sessions with Staff/Volunteers

# MISSION

**PILLAR promotes the health and well-being of people from diverse communities by furthering effective suicide, bullying, and homophobia prevention through collaborative activities and information sharing in order to ensure individual growth, personal success, saving lives, and advancing the respect of human rights.**



**On September 22, 2010 PILLAR was granted  
a 501 ( c ) ( 3 ) nonprofit status**

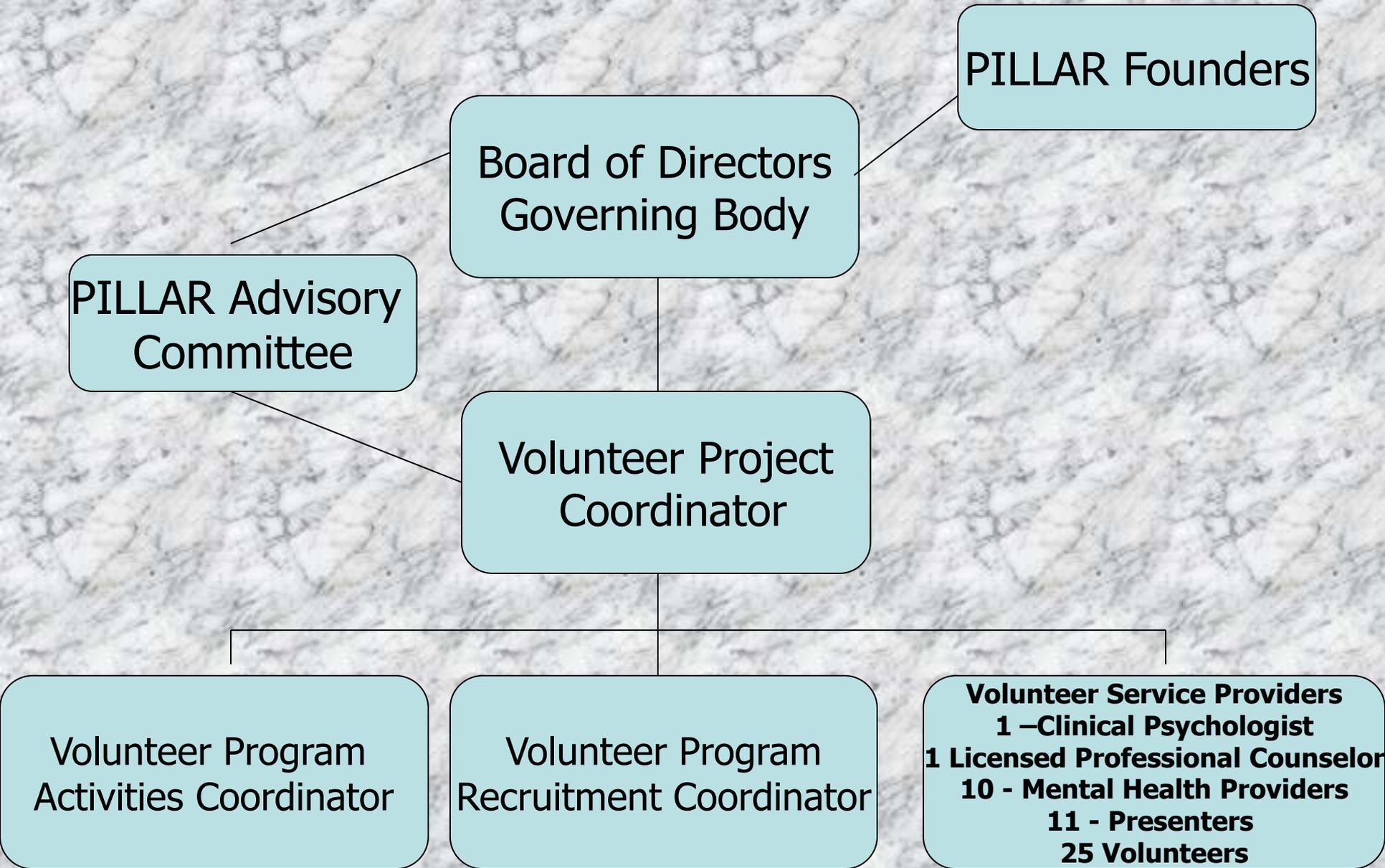
**Location: 1502 Laredo St.**



# PILLAR Board of Directors

PILLAR also has an Advisory Committee  
comprised of 7 members

# PILLAR ORGANIZATIONAL CHART





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## **Why PILLAR is Important?**

- Gay youth are 2 to 3 times more likely to commit suicide than other young people
- Suicide is the leading cause of death among GLBT youth
- Gay youth gets bullied (45% of males and 20% of females)
- Gay youth make up 25% of people living on the streets



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# Laredo/Webb Data



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## Why PILLAR is Important?

### Suicides in Laredo (2008-2012)

2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
12 males	11 males	13 males	9 males	5 males
4 females	2 females	4 females	2 females	4 females

Source:

City of Laredo Health Department

Vital Statistics Program

**Total # of  
Suicides = 66**



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## Anonymous Poll

120 local high school students

### Results

53%----- had experienced bullying

28% -----reported emotional/mental health issues

18% ----- were struggling with sexual identity issues

22% -----had attempted or thought of committing suicide



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## PILLAR Offers 4 Core Services

- Educational workshops/presentations at schools to create awareness and help reduce the incidence of bullying, suicide attempts, stigma and discrimination among youth
- Individual and group counseling sessions



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## PILLAR Offers 4 Core Services

- A 24 hour crisis helpline
- A resource center where youth and families can have access to a large volume of books and videos on the topics addressed at our organization

Additionally, HIV, HCV, and Syphilis screening is offered Monday through Friday and on some weekends

# Outcomes

The work being proposed under PILLAR is designed to:

- Increase access to MSM youth
- Engage MSM youth in HIV prevention and care services
- Identify new HIV infections
- Increase early linkage to care for new HIV positives
- Reduce suicide rates
- Decrease bullying incidents
- Increase support towards the GLBTQ population

# PILLAR Funding Sources



**Hair Cut-A-Thons**



**Golf Tournaments**



**Plate Sales**



**Bucket Brigades**

# PILLAR Funding Sources



**Silent Auctions**



**Wine Tasting Events**



**Dances**



**Dinner Engagements**



**Art Auctions**

# Community Awareness Venues



**Public Forums**



**City Hall**



**Faith Based Organizations**



**College Campuses**

# PILLAR Hosted Events



**Bi-National Proclamation**



**Youth Fair**



**Anti-Bullying Rally**



**Suicide Awareness Vigil**



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Thank You

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