

Clarmundo and His Golden Rule

by LaRoi Smith

Walking into the front lobby of Golden Rule Services, initially, gives you the impression of a typical business establishment. An office desk with a computer, framed art on the walls, shelves with information about STD's and drug use, and pamphlets discussing an array of gender orientations. There are also a couple of modest chairs for visitors, and not long ago, Clarmundo informs me, the front lobby also had a futon sofa, to add a slightly more casual atmosphere, but it was given to a friend in need.

Perhaps that best illustrates the most striking characteristic of Clarmundo Sullivan, head of the nonprofit organization Golden Rule Services: his profound empathy for others, fueled by a charitable heart. On a daily basis he demonstrates a genuine commitment to the lives of people in danger of contracting, or currently suffering from HIV and AIDS. Sullivan and Golden Rule Services cater to one of the most under served communities of Sacramento, African-American, same gender-loving individuals.

Sullivan's upbringing taught him the value of selflessness. "Even though we were poor," says Sullivan about growing up in the inner city, "for some reason my mom always fed people in the neighborhood. She always felt committed to making sure that everybody had something. It was always important to her to share and to be compassionate."

Sullivan earned a Bachelors degree in Social Work and a Masters degree in Education, and finds they give him the legitimacy and respect necessary to be taken seriously by the academics and professionals his job brings him before. He's also very down-to-earth and able to communicate equally well with the poor, homeless and uneducated. His ability to



Sullivan with MGW/staff writer, Shira Davida Goldberg.



Sullivan receiving the "Fighting AIDS" Lambda Award March, 2005.



sensitivity to what that feels like when you're having to do things that are illegal. As a person that was raised in economically depressed communities, I understand ... when you have that kind

of background you'll have that kind of sensitivity."

Despite such harsh surroundings, Mr. Sullivan managed to navigate his way to adulthood through positive channels, never falling victim to the trappings of the streets around him. He understood early on the difficult path he faced as a poor black male trying to succeed, and has worked hard to get to where he is today. However, his success in life, has in no way diminished his empathy for others who made different choices. He understands that people are more than the sum of their trespasses, and he treats all of them with dignity, respect, love and equality. Student to professional. Beggar to prostitute. He allows for gray areas, understanding that human beings don't fit neatly into social categories, and for this, he has received acceptance in one of the most unlikely of neighborhoods, Oak Park.

Instead of hostility, as one might expect on 33rd and Broadway, Golden Rule Services has been largely embraced by the community. From the very beginning they have been able to reach people across all social lines through genuine acceptance. "Ask any of the street workers who come in here every night and ask for condoms," Sullivan says. "They tell me 'you know what? If you weren't here, I would have had sex with somebody without the condoms, cause there's nowhere else you can get condoms for free at this hour.' So what we're doing is health promotion. We're trying to save some lives because we know that people are going to engage in risky behaviors anyway, so why not give them what they need to be safe until they get to a place where they can make better choices for themselves."

Even with the success that Sullivan has enjoyed, Golden Rules Services is in need of support from both the surrounding community and the gay community at large. How much longer the doors will remain open without vital monetary support is uncertain. But even in the face of such uncertainty, Sullivan is happy and thankful for what he's been able to do. "If we should have to close our doors tomorrow, I can say that we made a difference. We filled a gap where no one else could."