

## UTAC Founder Turns the Tide on AIDS

*by Maren Symonds*

Thirty-three million people live with HIV/AIDS. Every day, 6,800 people become infected, and 5,700 die from the disease. Amidst this sea of suffering, it would seem that there's little that one person could do. Kathy Scutchfield, co-founder of Until There's A Cure® Foundation, proved otherwise. With partner Dana Cappiello, she raised millions of dollars for HIV/AIDS-related causes and launched a massive initiative to develop a vaccine. And it all started with a simple idea.



Like many suburban moms, Kathy and Dana became acquainted through their children's school. It was the early 1990s, and everyone in the San Francisco Bay Area seemed to be talking about HIV/AIDS. Dana had the notion to create the AIDS-equivalent of the Vietnam Era P.O.W. bracelets to raise consciousness of the human cost of the disease. She wanted a partner to share her passion and help get the business off the ground.

Having lost her husband to cancer, Kathy was on close, personal terms with the heartbreak of long-term illness and the ultimate pain of loss. She had deep compassion for those who suffered the physical effects of HIV/AIDS and the stigma that came with it. She shuddered at the prospect of a disease that would grow exponentially with scant attention from the scientific community, modest provisions for patient care, and few programs for AIDS awareness and prevention.

"Of all the reasons to care about HIV/AIDS, it finally came down to the children," Kathy notes. "I looked at my daughter and thought, 'What do I say to her? There's this intimate act that you can do, but it can kill you.' It's hard enough to talk about sex with kids. When the stakes are this high, you've got to take action before it's too late."

Isabel Geddes da Filicaia – Kathy's long-time friend and her daughter's godmother – designed the Foundation's signature cuff-style bracelet. It debuted at the at the Macy's Passport '93 Fashion Shows and gained distribution at numerous department stores, specialty retailers, and museum shops. An initial media blitz drew attention to the product and the cause. Celebrities and sports personalities agreed to wear *The Bracelet* in public service advertisements featured in magazines such as People, InStyle, Maxim, ESPN, Today's Black Women, POZ, and many others.



Sixteen years later, the Foundation has sold nearly one million bracelets and distributed over \$9 million dollars in grants toward vaccine development, care services, and education, in addition to generating its own awareness programs through creative outreach and media exposure. Of the hundreds of beneficiaries of Foundation funds, the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI) looms large. This research giant got its start with seed money from Until There's A Cure.

"At the time, there were a number of scientists interested in the disease, but they weren't talking to one another," Kathy recalls. "We funded the first Bellagio Conference [through The Rockefeller Foundation] to bring them all to one place. They framed the issues and mapped out an approach to solve them."

The Bellagio Conference provided the impetus to found IAVI, but the major foundations were slow to respond with funding. Kathy recognized the urgent need for vaccine development and the importance of nurturing the initial sparks of cooperation. Until There's A Cure provided \$200,000 across two years to launch the organization. IAVI parlayed that investment into a \$100 million enterprise with six vaccine candidates that have entered human trials in 11 countries on 4 continents.

"Until There's A Cure is the example that IAVI uses with prospective donors," notes Kathy. "A little bit of money can make a big difference."

While reveling in the Foundation's "marquee" successes, Kathy has never lost touch with the personal stories that accompanied her extraordinary journey. "We get letters all the time. One teenager said we'd saved his life because the bracelet he wore reminded him not to engage in risky behavior. A woman talked about the sister that she'd nursed during her long struggle with AIDS. She wore *The Bracelet* in memory of her," Kathy shared. "Those stories really touch my heart. They're my inspiration. They keep me going."

After 16 years, Kathy's dedication and commitment are as strong as ever. Her vision continues to inspire the staff, the Board of Directors, and everyone she encounters. Unfortunately, there is still a sea of suffering that traces its source to HIV/AIDS. But if enough people follow Kathy's lead, we will surely stem the tide.

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*Headquartered in Redwood City, CA, Until There's A Cure® Foundation is a national organization dedicated to AIDS awareness and prevention education, care and services for those living with AIDS, and vaccine development.*