

## **Grad Party for AIDS: One Person Can Make a Difference**

*by Maren Symonds*

High school graduation is a rite of passage. For most, it's the first step from the shelter of youth to the responsibility of adulthood. It brings family and friends together in joyous celebration, often with a bounty of gifts in tow. Katy Kruse of Glen Ridge, NJ chose to make her first step count for something more than a mark of personal achievement. She hosted a benefit for Until There's A Cure® Foundation (UTAC).

Katy developed a heart for serving others at an early age. She noticed how folks shied away from the special education students at her West Orange elementary school and made a point of including them in her circle of friends. "I was always a sensitive person. It was easy for me to put myself in other people's shoes. It made me feel good to make their lives a little better," she mused. "I never thought having lots of money was all that important." So, when the time came to plan her June 24<sup>th</sup> graduation party, Katy decided once again to focus on others.

At her request, friends and family honored Katy's graduation with donations to UTAC. All of the young people received UTAC jelly bracelets as party favors. And Katy's four best friends sported the UTAC silver cuffs that Katy gave them for graduation. When asked about her friends' response, Katy said: "They think it's cool. They really like the bracelet." Proceeds from the event will raise awareness for HIV/AIDS and the impact of the pandemic worldwide.



With roughly 45,000 AIDS patients among the nation's 15-24 years olds and 2,500 new cases joining the ranks annually, AIDS remains an undeniable force with which young people must reckon. Katy applauds the work that UTAC does to get the word out. "We need to let people know that it's OK to talk about AIDS. I think it's great that so many celebrities wear *The Bracelet*. Folks my age look at their example and think, 'If they can support it, maybe I can, too.'"

Katy plans to lead a life in service to other people. For now, she's off to Emory University to get a college degree. She hopes to join the Peace Corps when she graduates. After that? Who knows. One way or another, Katy Kruse will change the world.

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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.*