AIDS in Seattle

Chicken Soup Brigade

The Chicken Soup Brigade (CSB), a buddy-system to help those living with AIDS, was a volunteer initiative created through the Seattle Gay Clinic by Tim Burak, Josh Joshua and others in 1983. Volunteers did everything from taking patients to doctors' appointments, making meals, cleaning apartments, walking dogs, and perhaps most importantly providing companionship. By 1994, CSB had 1,000 volunteers working 65,000 hours: providing meals to more than 600 people, doing home chores for more than 300 clients, and driving patients to more than 1,700 appointments.

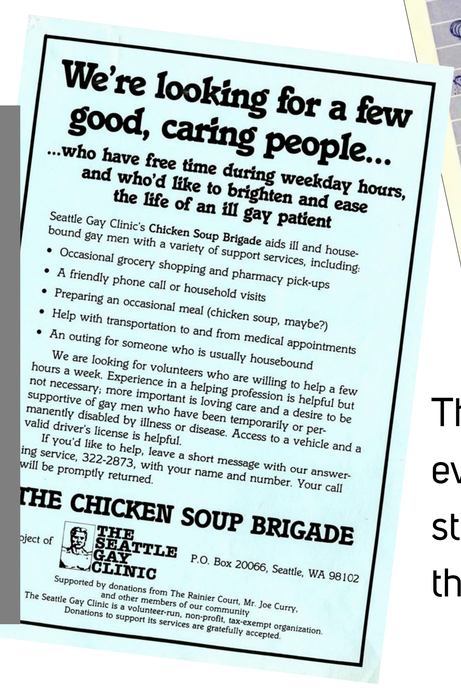


1983 Chicken Soup Brigade brochure. Tim Burak Papers, UW Special Collections



1997 advertisement calling for volunteers ran in the Lesbian Resource Center's newsletter, LRC News. Archives of Sexuality and Gender.

> *"These were passionate people—and I knew from the moment I walked in the door that these were heroes. They changed people's soiled linens, they offered to wash people's clothing, they would empty kitty litter boxes, and they would go to the market and buy groceries with their own money for somebody they had never met. "*
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> *Carol Sterling, quoted in Gay Seattle: Stories of Exile and Belonging, University of Washington Press, 2003*



1983 Chicken Soup Brigade call for volunteers. Tim Burak Papers, UW Special Collections

The *Seattle Gay News* is full of CSB fundraising events: dances, rummage sales, running thrift stores, and most famously hosting the first in the nation,"Gay Bingo" (aka drag Bingo).

> *"He really wants to get out of the hospital, he just does not want to stay at the hospital but I know there is no one at home to help him because his lover has left him and his family has disowned him and he's kind of an angry guy... I just decided that I would meet this guy at home the day after he was discharged and figure out what we might be able to do... So I said, well I can help you get some groceries, we've got these other volunteers who can help you if you need to get to a doctor's appointment... he said, well I really need someone to clean out my bathtub. So ok this is where we learn by doing and so I just stayed with him and helped him get settled in his apartment."*
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> *Tim Burak, describing helping the first Chicken Soup Brigade client, 2015 interview for the HIV-AIDS Oral History Project*



Images: 1995 *Seattle Gay News* ad for dance; 1991 Chicken Soup Brigade benefit poster. (Museum of History & Industry); 1992 *Seattle Gay News* ad for Gay Bingo

Later CSB focused primarily on food – setting up food kitchens and delivering meals while Shanti/Seattle, another volunteer effort growing out of the Seattle Gay Clinic, provided emotional support and companionship. In 2001, the Chicken Soup Brigade merged with the Northwest AIDS Foundation to form Lifelong AIDS Alliance. CSB is now Lifelong's food and nutrition program providing services "to improve the health of individuals living with serious illnesses such as cancer, kidney disease, HIV, and other diet-related chronic health conditions."

The legacy of the Chicken Soup Brigade is captured best in the obituaries published in the *Seattle Gay News* during the height of the AIDS pandemic. Many end in the same way: "In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions can be made to the Chicken Soup Brigade." "It was requested that any tributes be given to the Chicken Soup Brigade in his memory." "At Dan's request memorials and gifts are to go to Chicken Soup Brigade."

CSB newsletters from the Seattle Municipal Archives and the Pride Foundation Ephemera Collection, UW Special Collections.