AIDS ACTIVISM

Seattle ACT UP

"At the Gay Pride Parade... we did a die-in at every intersection and that meant we were marching with our banners... and then someone would blow a whistle and we would all drop to the pavement as if we were dead. And the crowd went totally crazy, I mean, the cheers and the accolades we were getting as we marched up Broadway were unbelievable."

Interview with Phil Bereano, ACT UP Seattle co-founder. Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project

Seattle's chapter of ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) was formed in October 1988 as, according to their newsletter, "a diverse, non-partisan group of individuals united in anger and committed to direct action to end the AIDS crisis. We confront government and public health officials, we research and distribute the latest medical information. We protest and demonstrate. We are not silent."

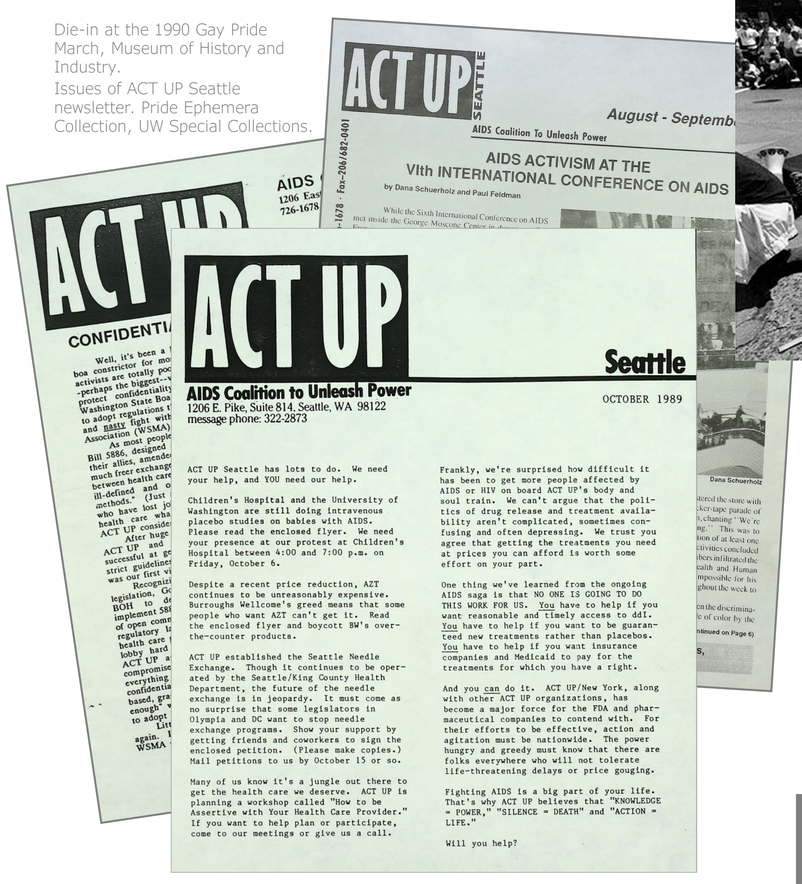


"Even in Seattle—rational, staid, prissy Seattle where people do not cross the street against the light at 2 in the morning—radical activism works. I think we understand the political culture here and how to operate but we need both ends of the spectrum. We need our bad boys and girls... and we need people who understand the issue as well or better than the officials, which we do.

Phil Bereano quoted in "ACT UP: Group Members Push Needle Exchange." Seattle PI, 3 Dec. 1990

Die-in at the 1990 Gay Pride March, Museum of History and Industry.

Issues of ACT UP Seattle newsletter. Pride Ephemera Collection, UW Special Collections.



ACT UP Seattle's major accomplishments include serving as the catalyst for the needle exchange program. Since the city council would not act, ACT UP, working covertly with the health department, started their own exchange in 1989. This pressure led the council to pass legislation making Seattle one of the first two cities (the other was Tacoma) with a government run needle exchange. ACT UP is also credited for overcoming opposition to Bailey-Boushay House by threatening to protest and embarrass those attempting to block the building.

One of the most contentious actions by ACT UP Seattle, and certainly one that garnered much media attention, dealt with the "touchy subject of condom distribution in the schools." The school board had been pondering the issue but had yet to take action so to force the issue, the ACT UP Youth Caucus showed up at Franklin High School in early December 1991 with a brochure that some labeled pornographic and safe sex kits.

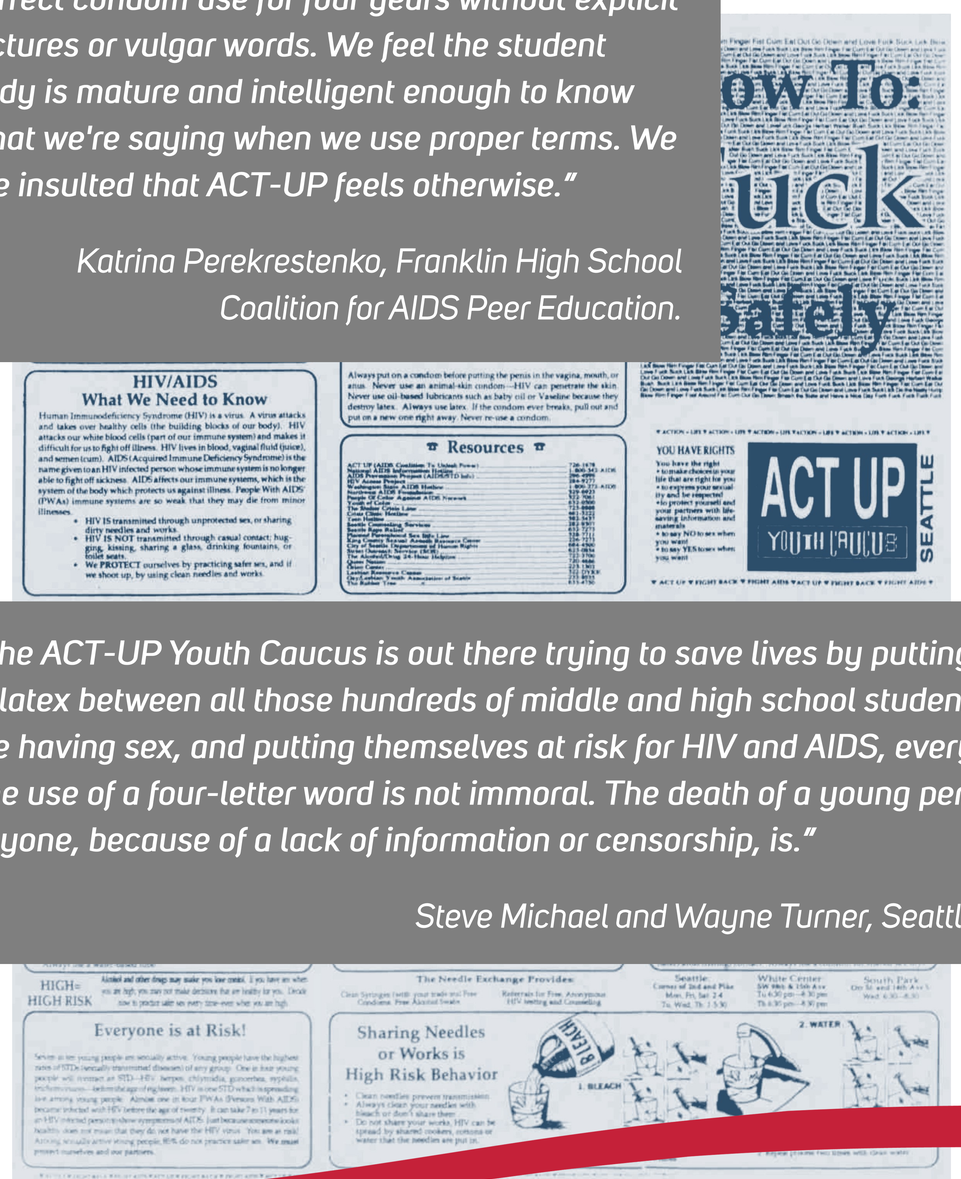
The following week, the Seattle School Board, after a nine-hour contentious meeting, decided for condom distribution in Seattle public high schools. Actual implementation was delayed until April 1993.

"As peer educators, we have been teaching correct condom use for four years without explicit pictures or vulgar words. We feel the student body is mature and intelligent enough to know what we're saying when we use proper terms. We are insulted that ACT-UP feels otherwise."

Katrina Perekrestenko, Franklin High School Coalition for AIDS Peer Education.

"I as a parent am outraged! The obscene material distributed by the group ACT-UP to my 14-year -old daughter last Monday outside the Franklin High School grounds was in total disregard of my child's right to remain protected from pornography."

Nancy Diers



"The ACT-UP Youth Caucus is out there trying to save lives by putting a piece of latex between all those hundreds of middle and high school students who are having sex, and putting themselves at risk for HIV and AIDS, every day... The use of a four-letter word is not immoral. The death of a young person, or anyone, because of a lack of information or censorship, is."

Steve Michael and Wayne Turner, Seattle ACT-UP.

The *Seattle Gay News* included a grainy image of the pamphlet in the 6 Dec. 1991 issue. The quotes are taken from letters to the editor, *Seattle Times*, 12 Dec. 1991.