

POLIO EPIC, Inc.

Serving Arizona Polio Survivors since 1985

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HISTORY OF POLIO EPIC

Polio Epic is a non-profit self-help organization formed in 1985. Membership includes polio survivors, families, health care professionals and community leaders. Polio Epic provides a monthly support group with education opportunities, a bi-monthly newsletter, a library of polio/Post-Polio related literature, media and a web site with valuable links to other polio related sites.

Although somewhat smaller after 30 years, this group continues to serve over 500 individuals and organizations across the country. There are close to 300 official members from Arizona and across the Nation. From this membership approximately 20-35 members, including the Executive Board, meet monthly to work toward fulfillment of Polio Epic's mission. This mission is to provide education, support and community connections that will empower members with the skill and tools required to make the adjustments necessary for a life of dignity and inter-dependence.

There are no salaried positions in Polio Epic. The development of goals, action plans and the work itself is accomplished by the membership of this organization. Through the Executive Health Board's connections with Mark of Dimes, Encompass Health Care, Rotary International and Post-Polio Health International; Polio Epic has developed educational materials for polio survivors and healthcare professionals. One major contribution is a "new member" packet for polio survivors and their families, physicians, therapists, medical students and pharmacists that is regularly revised to remain current and useful for all involved. The Executive Board applied for, and was awarded, grant money to assist in the development of these materials and to attend other educational opportunities. Polio Epic has participated in local Health Fairs along with conferences at Salk Institute, and Post-Polio Health International in St. Louis. Donations and grant money of nearly \$4,000 were received in 2015 to go forward the on-going work of education groups mentioned above. Members also pay an annual membership of \$10. Several times a year one-time awards of \$500 are given from the Wadleigh Fund to individual members for the purchase of specialist equipment to maintain independence of those polio survivors. This fund was made possible by a bequest received several years ago from Frank Wadleigh, a long-time Polio Epic member who wanted to provide short-term financial support to local members.

Most of the members of Polio Epic and its executive board are polio survivors currently dealing with the constant pain, fatigue and muscle loss due to Post-Polio syndrome. This syndrome occurs 10-40 years after the recovery from the initial polio. Most of these individuals are also over the age of 65, facing the common concerns of aging. These are the same individuals that volunteer their time to listen to the struggles of others and to help members find the services they need. They also work to educate families and community professionals on the ways to assist polio survivors.

Recently the serious international issue of immunizations prompted Polio Epic to hold a gathering on April 11, 2015 to recognize 60 years since the Salk Vaccine and to promote the need for vaccines in our country. **Polio has not been eradicated in our country.** Only polio survivors and health professionals seem to know this. It is a serious worldwide concern. Three years ago, polio cases around the world were at the lowest level in history. Those hopes have been clouded by outbreaks in Kenya, Somalia, Yemen and Papua New Guinea. The worry about immunity gaps is serious. The global campaign for eradication continues and is just as necessary in this country because of world travelers and the decline in the U.S. families immunizing their children. The virus is demonstrating a dogged resilience and it will take enormous determination and hard work to extinguish it. Because of this, Polio Epic continues to support the Rotary on its' activities of "Eradication to Rehabilitation", an action group dealing with immunization efforts and ways to help polio survivors who have Post-Polio syndrome.

Thirty years have passed since five Tucson callers made contact with Dr. Lauro Halstead who was speaking about Post-Polio syndrome on a local Channel 9 television program on night. It was the beginning of what was to become a strong and last community effort to support and education hundreds of individuals, not only in Arizona, but around the world. Two of those individuals are still active members of Polio Epic, working tirelessly on the Executive Board.

Recently, approximately 80 members of the Phoenix support, group, Polio Echo, moved under Polio Epic, Inc. Polio Echo officially closed their doors and are now part of Polio Epic. That means that Polio Epic is the only polio/Post-Polio related support group in Arizona. Polio Epic Members have clearly set an example for the community of what it means to "see the possibilities" and to demonstrate to others that when the desire is there, one person can always make a difference in the lives of many.

Written by Polio Epic Board Member, Karla Carr 2015 – Revised 2018