



# In Memoriam Kaye McDuffie

**March 19, 1954 to  
January 29, 2014**

*by Jacob A. Distel, Jr.*

*On January 29, 2014, the Lansing Area AIDS Network lost one of its own, Kaye McDuffie. I cannot share the extent to which this loss has devastated me, this agency, or more importantly the community. For over two decades, Kaye was a pioneer in HIV work and in all realm of social justice. She will forever be missed and can never be replaced. In her memory I would like to share with you comments that I made with a very heavy heart at her Memorial Service.*

Until I met Kaye I had never met a super hero, a trite remark, perhaps. but justified. This feeling is why her passing is so shocking to so many of us. Although Kaye's struggle was clear during the last year of her life, somehow we felt, and hoped, that this injustice would we leveled, that this guardian of justice would remain among us. Silly notions, perhaps, but notions that probably filled many hearts.



**Kaye McDuffie**

More than any other individual that I have been privileged to know, I feel that Kaye was an agent for change. This room is filled

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with the lives of those she has changed, lives that she has improved. Everyone that I have spoken with during these last few days have been consistent with their sorrow, their praise, and have shared stories of the generous support that they received from Kaye and referenced that universal hug of hers.

Over the course of the last few days many have shared that Kaye loved LAAN. I believe this. During the last few days, however, I have asked myself what it was about LAAN that had instilled such passion in Kaye. Finally, and as ego-deflating as it was, I finally determined that her passion for LAAN had little to do with me, with the staff of LAAN, or the agency itself. It was really about the people we serve. It could have likely been any agency that had given Kaye the opportunity to champion for those who needed a hero. She loved the agency simply because she was absolutely passionate about working against social injustice, helping the weakest among us, speaking out against stigmatization of all kinds, against racism, against homophobia, and against all forms

of prejudice and inequity. LAAN was just fortunate that she had landed on our doorstep. I was fortunate that she had landed into my life.

I have never met anyone, and I suspect that I never will, whose passion for the work she did was so clear and so directive. Kaye was a person of the cleanest integrity, honesty, loyalty, and compassion that you would ever hope to meet. I believe that we all share that sense of appreciation for Kaye's work and the manner in which she lived her life and impacted each one of us.

There was a vitality about Kaye that was present even as she began to close the last chapter of her life. That raucous laugh of her was present in each of my conversations with her even after she had left the agency, even as illness had swept over her. That laugh, her welcoming hug, and the brief peck of a kiss that became her greeting are things that I hope will remain with my spirit forever. I have lost a loving friend and mentor. We have all lost an agent of good and a guardian of truth. Kaye was indeed a superhero. I'd like to share a favorite quote of mine that I have used before but probably never more appropriately:

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When through one person  
A little more love  
And goodness.  
A little more light  
And truth  
Come into the World  
Than that person's life  
Has had meaning.

Kaye's life had tremendous meaning.  
For that and for so many reasons she will  
forever be my hero.