

Alliance for Medical Marijuana Struggles to Survive

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Recent federal raids and financial woes have created a buzzkill for organization

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After a devastating raid in September 2002, the Wo/Men's Alliance for Medical Marijuana (WAMM) has been struggling financially to maintain its service of providing patients access to the controversial drug.

WAMM is the longest-running marijuana-supplying clinic in Santa Cruz. Its medicinal marijuana supply is produced on a cooperative farm, where individuals work together on a grassroots level to grow and distribute the plant collectively.

The co-op also provides educational information about the benefits of medicinal marijuana, weekly meetings to allow patients to share their experiences, and comfort to the terminally ill.

WAMM co-founder Valerie Corral has spent 15 years fighting to keep her health center operating. Corral stressed the importance of medicinal marijuana for the terminally ill.

"One of the most amazing things [medicinal marijuana does] is help open the door to death readily," she said. "It provides a sense of well-being."

Corral must face the constant threat of another federal raid, and the inability to serve those in need.

"We're scared there would be another raid, but we have to face the aggressor. The ability to give relief to patients facing death is the most important motivation keeping me doing this work," she said.

After the federal government swarmed the co-op, WAMM faced with a huge financial loss. WAMM's patients were not only in danger of possible price increases, but risked losing their medical dispensary entirely.

Dale Gieringer, state coordinator of the California chapter of National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML), has worked with Corral to fight the federal government's sanctions against marijuana use.

2 Gieringer was outraged at the Drug Enforcement Agency's (DEA) response to WAMM's cooperative.

"Federal policy reached its worst in September of 2002. It was the most evil action of the DEA," Gieringer said. "They still haven't changed their stance."

Gieringer added that WAMM was "considered the gold standard" of marijuana clinics, and that he, as well as NORML, have started a fund-raising initiative aimed at supporting WAMM's financial woes.

"We just launched an e-mail campaign asking people to donate," he said.

Jean Talleyrand, a doctor at the Ukiah Medicann clinic, evaluates patients to see if medicinal marijuana would be a healthy treatment.

Talleyrand said that he was "surprised and impressed" that WAMM survived the DEA raid."

"The fact that they were able to get their medicine back was incredible," Talleyrand said. "It shows the potential of the [medicinal marijuana] movement, and that it is really patient-centered, not financial."

Talleyrand went on to explain that, under the right circumstances, marijuana is a better treatment than over-the-counter drugs.

"Alternative medicine has a lot more positive results. Over-the-counter medications can be dangerous," Talleyrand said. "That doesn't happen with marijuana. The side affects are not toxic, they are euphoric."

With all this support, Valerie Corral and the people at WAMM continue to operate an efficient business. But in order to enact change in the federal government, supporters of medicinal marijuana need to band together and make their voices heard.

"Nothing great ever came from the top down," Corral said. "It begins with us."