



Tucson Interfaith HIV/AIDS Network

Helping People with HIV to Live Well

NEWSLETTER

Tucson, Arizona

August 2020

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Safe and Sound, Service and Support

by Scott Blades, Executive Director

Every day, we receive more requests for food, CarePackages, help with emergency expenses, and emotional support. Over the past months, we've received a record number of requests from people living with HIV and fulfilled those requests, mobilizing new resources and creating innovative delivery systems.

In a two-month period, we provided an additional 2,000 meals--courtesy of a grant and support from local restaurants. When those grant funds were exhausted, we allocated emergency funding of \$10,000 for the month of July, providing \$40 grocery store gift cards to the 200+ people with the greatest level of food insecurity among our CarePartners with HIV. We secured a \$20,000 grant from the COVID-19 Community Support Fund of the Community Foundation for Southern Arizona to provide food support for two more months, and are now seeking donations from supporters like you to add two more months of food for people most in need. (See appeal in the box below with how you can help.)

We continue our monthly Poz Café meals, providing record numbers of meals. The number of meals to people living with HIV has increased by 54%, with new systems of preparing packaged meals for safe delivery.

We have secured enough of the basic toiletry, personal care, and cleaning items to be able to distribute 55% more CarePackages than last year. Not only has the quantity increased, but so have the cost of the items, the difficulty of securing the items, and the challenges of safely delivering them.

We've provided phones to 15 people, plus two more people have had additional minutes added to their monthly plan, to ensure our CarePartners can be connected to both medical and non-medical support systems. And we've provided weekly check-in calls to 50% more CarePartners than before.

All of these enhanced efforts have been made possible by your support, while we worked to develop and maintain safety protocols to keep our CarePartners safe and supported during these unprecedented times.

While some organizations are inactive or difficult to reach, TIHAN's staff and volunteers – small in number but mighty in passion and service – have worked hard to sustain and increase our support services. A special thanks to our TIHAN staff—Deirdre Demers, Rachel Briggs, and Maggie McCann—for their extraordinary work.

In the past two months, we've received substantial contributions from Long Realty Cares Foundation, Sundt Foundation, St. Mark's United Methodist Church, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Arizona Gay Rodeo Association, and several individual donors. To our larger donors, and to the donors who gave us even \$5 of their precious income, your contributions are adding up, and making a difference.

Thanks to all who have made and will make gifts to TIHAN commemorating lives lived, birthdays celebrated, anniversaries loved, memories treasured, friends cherished, marriages rejoiced, loved ones missed, stories shared, service respected, and legacies honored. Your love is translated into care that is appreciated.

April - July 2020 Program Results - Compared to Last Year



Goal: Matching a \$20,000 Gift for Food Support Now

With 77% of our CarePartners expressing a medium, high, or urgent-level need for additional food support, TIHAN's board committed \$10,000 for new food support for the month of July to provide food gift cards for the CarePartners most in need of food support.

We doubled down on our efforts to connect more people with the Community Food Bank, Pima Council on Aging, Meals on Wheels, and additional local food resources.

The Community Foundation for Southern Arizona's COVID-19 Community Support Fund is providing a generous \$20,000 grant for two more months of food support.

We are now asking you and all of our individual donors, families, businesses, and groups to match the Community Foundation's grant and join in our effort to provide an additional \$20,000 for two more months of food support.

Please make a gift using the enclosed envelope with a notation it's for food support, or contribute via this special website: tihan.ejoinme.org/foodsupport

Please make a gift today to ensure that we can continue to help our CarePartners in the upcoming months and address the unprecedented requests for food support.





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Inside This Issue:

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Amazing people, fun events, life-affirming programs!

To make a contribution in support of our programs and people living with HIV, please send a check to the address on the left, or visit our website www.tihan.org and click on the “DONATE TO TIHAN NOW” button. Only with your support can we continue. Thank you!

Dish Soap, Bleach, and More Items Sought for Care Packages for People Living with HIV

With the current pandemic, we have been focused on cleaning supplies such as bleach and disinfectants. Those are still needed, AND we'd like to request donations of dish soap as well!

With more staying at home to eat, dishes are piling up and we want to make sure all of our CarePartners living with HIV are able to get everything sufficiently clean. Right now we need your help to make that happen.

Please consider picking up a few additional bottles during your next trip to the store and donating them. Your contributions of dish soap, bleach, disinfectants, and other cleaning supplies are greatly appreciated.

Please bring donations to the TIHAN office at 2660 North 1st Avenue on Mondays, Wednesdays, or Fridays between 8:30am and 4:30pm. We have a donation table set up out front for you to safely drop off your donation without contact, and we'll run out and pick it up and send you a donation receipt. Thank you!



**“The smallest act of kindness
is worth more than
the grandest intention.”**

– Oscar Wilde

Remote Volunteer Orientations—You Can Zoom into Being a Volunteer!

Although many of our volunteer roles are “on pause” right now for safety, we do have a few essential and remote volunteer opportunities, and we have re-started our monthly orientation for people interested in volunteering.

For more information about volunteer opportunities, and signing up to attend an upcoming Volunteer Orientation via Zoom, please contact Maggie McCann, Operations Manager, at (520) 299-6647 ext 204 or VolunteerCoordinator@tihan.org



Jeremy's Story of Living with HIV: Resiliency and Perseverance, Along with Support from the Community, Helps Him Thrive

Six years ago, "Jeremy" was at a crossroads. He had just moved to Tucson, had no job, no car, knew no one here, and was starting over in a halfway house after being released from eight months of prison. Today, you'd never know he'd faced those obstacles. He has a job (including a recent promotion to supervisor), a car, an apartment, and a strong support system. And he's healthy and happy, with his HIV under control – Jeremy's viral load is undetectable.

TIHAN, he says, has played an important role in his journey of empowerment. His successes, however, are a testament to his own resiliency and perseverance.

"I have grown a lot since I've been in Tucson," Jeremy tells us. "I started out with nothing. Through the kindness of TIHAN and some others I've met, through my faith, through my hard work, I now have a place to live, a car, a really good job, and my HIV is undetectable and it's not holding me back."

Jeremy had been incarcerated for eight months. "I was on probation for possession of stolen property, and a rules violation made them say I had violated my probation," he relates. After serving his sentence in prison, he was sent to a halfway house in Tucson for a year. "When I was in prison," he recalls, "they didn't give me my HIV medications. I had to beg for any medical attention." Eventually, his advocacy got him his life-saving meds, and he got his HIV back under control.

Having a criminal history made it tough for Jeremy to get a job. "Plus I didn't have transportation," he recounts. "I had to sell my belongings to get money for food. I was doing odd jobs for people. I went months without a job, with no income, just food stamps. I was accessing services and food boxes and public benefits to get by." It was a tough time for him. "Someone at TIHAN gave me \$80 so I could buy a bicycle. It was probably breaking the rules because it came out of their pocket. But that was my gateway to get a job. I rode that bike to work for a year before I could get a car." That \$80 bike, he says, was his "gateway" to a new life: getting a job. Then his hard work and kind nature helped him overcome the obstacles in his path.

Jeremy says he has always been resilient. "I found out in 2002 that I was HIV-positive," he remembers. "I had decided to get tested because of an encounter with a guy who I later found out was positive." Jeremy recalls going through various stages of grief: shock, denial, anger, bargaining. "I was in great physical shape—the best shape of my life. So I was in shock to find out I had HIV. I was feeling great, but then I found out I had this virus. It took me a few months to get to a level of acceptance, but I did. I'm pretty resilient. I'm a survivor."

"I was taught to never ask for help and to never tell anyone about my problems. It took me a while to learn that sometimes it really is important to reach out for help."

Today, Jeremy is focused on empowerment. "Now that it's possible to have HIV and keep it controlled through medications, you can have it but take care of yourself and not get sick or die from it," he shares. "For me, it's important to take responsibility for myself and be my best self. It may be a hindrance to have HIV, but there is still the chance to live a rich and fulfilling life, and that is what I am doing."

"We do the things we have to do to make ourselves safe and those around us safe," Jeremy explains. "We take medication and we do lab work, and keep our appointments with our doctors to stay healthy and keep our loved ones healthy. This gives us a sense of empowering ourselves – HIV is still here, but it doesn't have to be the controlling factor in my life."

Jeremy reflects on how HIV has impacted his life. "Although I don't like having HIV, I probably have met more people and have been able to build a better support system because of my diagnosis. In some ways, having HIV has helped my mental health and made me stronger and more resilient."

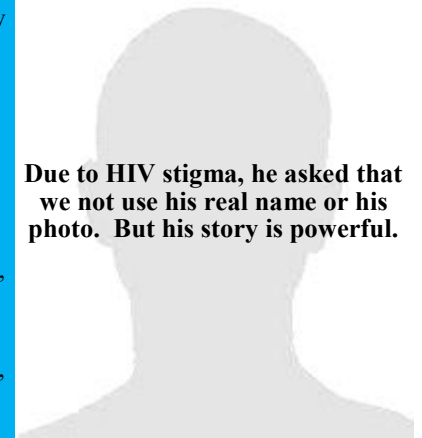
Jeremy is eager to tell his story, but, because of his work, he's hesitant to share his real name and photo for this article. "There's still judgment. HIV stigma is still there," he says. "Even if it's not as strong as it used to be—it's definitely still a challenge. I could be discriminated against or lose my job." Even so, he says that Tucson is much more progressive when it comes to being open about HIV.

Jeremy grew up in the Midwest, and certain values were instilled in him—some that have served him well and others that have not. "I was taught to never ask for help and to never tell anyone about my problems," Jeremy shares. "It took me a while to learn that sometimes it really is important to reach out for help. That was a big lesson for me." Jeremy encourages people with HIV to utilize the network of love and support that exists. Here in Tucson, he says, agencies foster the growth of people living with HIV.

"TIHAN is unmatched," he tells us. "There's nothing like TIHAN that I am aware of in any other city. TIHAN is a trendsetter – you provide services that others don't offer. And the overall makeup of TIHAN—with strong people of faith coming together to help. That's very unique and very important to me. My experience has been that Christians condemn gay people and people who have HIV—whatever their orientation. Some of TIHAN's staff and volunteers are strong believers in the Lord, and yet they still love us clients. They show compassion, a kind heart, honesty, and caring."

Hearing how Jeremy phrased that was difficult to absorb: some people may be "believers," but somehow they still love and support people who have been marginalized? We asked him about that. Isn't that what people of faith should do—love unconditionally and treat others as they themselves want to be treated? Yes, he replies, but too often that's not been his experience.

Due to HIV stigma, he asked that we not use his real name or his photo. But his story is powerful.



continued on next page

Help Us Make Up the Shortfall Due to the Cancellation of Our Greatest Fundraising Event

Because of COVID-19 and its impact, our biggest fundraising event of the year, Treasures for TIHAN, was cancelled. Our Swinging@AIDS Concert and another benefit concert in the Spring were also cancelled.

We are grateful for the people and businesses that have stepped up and made a gift of what they might otherwise have spent at Treasures for TIHAN and Swinging@AIDS this year. **Still we have a deficit of over \$41,000 in lost income to make up.**

If you'd like to make a donation now of what you might have contributed for our benefits, we'd greatly appreciate it! You can

mail us a gift with a notation for Treasures for TIHAN, or contribute online at tihan.ejoinme.org/treasures2020



Thank you for supporting people living with HIV through your gifts!

Our TIHAN Wish List has a link to Amazon, allowing you to click on any needed item(s) you'd like to purchase and have them shipped to our office

no touch! no muss! no fuss!

Visit www.tihan.org click on the DONATE tab, and use the drop-down menu to Wish List

The Rest of Jeremy's Story

(continued from page 2)

Jeremy relates a story about a recent interaction with TIHAN. "Linda [a volunteer] called me about picking up my CarePackage. She asked me how I was doing on food, and I replied I was OK but didn't have a lot of food at the moment. She was so kind, and she gently encouraged me to let them know that at TIHAN. I could tell she asked me out of concern, but I wasn't asking for anything. Then when I stopped by the TIHAN office for my CarePackage, Rachel brought it out to me, and she also included a gift card for food. You know, that was the nicest thing in the world to me right then."

The people of TIHAN, Jeremy shares, are "lifesavers to me and to lots of people in the HIV community who I know. We can't gather and connect at Poz Café or have our Living Well classes right now because of COVID, but you folks are still giving out the toiletries and masks, and hand sanitizer and food support. And the emotional and mental aspects, too – I know that if I need someone to talk to, someone at TIHAN will be there and take the time to talk with me. The TIHAN team of staff and volunteers is unparalleled and unmatched in all they provide us CarePartners."

During this time of COVID, Jeremy admits he's nervous about risk, and he's taking precautions. He doesn't go out and about unless absolutely necessary. When he does, he wears a mask and takes hand sanitizer with him. "I do what I need to do to protect myself," he tells us. "I take the precautions needed to stay safer. Yes, I'd love to go to a football game, or take a trip, but those aren't options right now. I get sad hearing of people passing away from COVID and people not having the resources to protect themselves, or not wearing masks to protect others."

Jeremy shares his key message for today: "It's 2020 and we've had major advances in HIV prevention, testing, and treatment. If you do test positive, there's no reason you can't live a full and complete life just like anyone else. Have a positive attitude. If life does throw something at you like this, there are agencies and people who really do care. Not just from a professional standpoint, but from a personal standpoint, too. The people who make up TIHAN exhibit kindness and love not just because we have HIV, but because we are people."

Jeremy is not his diagnosis. He's not his disease. He's greater than that, he says, and TIHAN helps him see that and live that, filled with gratitude and a positive attitude.

Acknowledging Gifts Made to TIHAN in Honor of and in Memory of Loved Ones

(Gifts received April 16—July 31, 2020)

Gifts Received in Honor Of

Curt Beall *
Mason and Ted Beloin
Scott Blades *
Rachel Briggs *
Tim Brown and Josemaria Menendez
Luis Castaneda
Deirdre Demers *
Jeannie Esser
Shelly Gallichio
Soncheri Gregson
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Barbara Kaller-Cohen *
Jonana Liberty *
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TIHAN Staff & Volunteers *
Iva Warren-Todd *
Steve Wagner

Gifts Received in Memory Of

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Dr. Colette Sims
Justin Smith
Steve Trujillo *
Jim Valiton
Michael Vining *
Sister Patricia Marie Walsh, OP
Don Wilson

Thank you for these gifts made in honor and in memory of beloved people.

* denotes those for whom multiple gifts have been received during this period of time