



Tucson Interfaith HIV/AIDS Network

Helping People with HIV to Live Well

NEWSLETTER

Tucson, Arizona

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“If They Can Make It Through, Then I Can, Too”

Welo talked to me at Poz Café yesterday. “I just want to say thank you again. Everything TIHAN does for me is really appreciated,” he shared. “It really helps a lot to get the lunches and the CarePackages when your disability check doesn’t go too far.”

In talking more with Welo, he shared a bit of his story about how he got to TIHAN and how your support impacts him.

Now 57 years old, Welo (a nickname given to him as a child) got the shock of his life about 20 years ago when he went to the emergency room for severe back pain. It turns out he had osteomyelitis, a rare infection in his spine. But they found more. He also had no T-cells, a marker of immune strength, causing them to do a test for HIV. A positive test result came back.

When the doctor told Welo he was positive, Welo responded “I know I always have a positive outlook,” he joked. “No,” the doctor responded. “You have HIV.” Welo described what he was experiencing as the news sank in. “I felt like I was separated from my body. My mind was in a cloud. I didn’t know what was going on. I was floating. My world just started flying.” He was overwhelmed, thinking: How did this happen? What will I do now? How will I tell my mom?”

Knowing nothing about HIV, the words of a cruel doctor hit him hard. “You know you’re going to die. It’s very expensive to be HIV-positive, and most people just die.” Welo didn’t have enough knowledge about HIV to know that medications were available that could help stop the HIV in his body from replicating, and hopefully re-build his immune system. Unfortunately, neither did the physician who gave Welo the news.

After surgery to scrape the infection from his spinal cord, Welo was given strong antibiotics in his bones to kill the infection. He then set about learning about HIV and went to SAAF for case management help. He got connected to an HIV medical clinic, El Rio’s Special Immunology Associates, where they started him on anti-retroviral therapy for his HIV. Because he was not able to walk or work, Welo quit the three jobs he had been working. He went to the Social Security office and applied for disability due to the severe back pain, which still continues to this day.

“I had to gather my thoughts and figure out my strategy for what I was going to do next. I remember thinking that HIV was going to destroy my life, even if I lived. ‘No one will like me.’ ‘No one will talk to me.’ ‘No one will date me.’ But eventually I was able to get back on my feet again, and I moved out of my sister’s place and got my own apartment.”

Welo’s mom was “old school,” he says. “We never talked about sex or HIV or being gay or anything. We had never talked about any of that when I was younger, or even as an adult.” After he told his mom about his HIV, she started acting a bit different. Like placing the silverware that he used in a different place, separate from the silverware that others used. “I asked her to come with me to my doctor’s appointment at El Rio. They told her how HIV can and cannot be transmitted. She understood after that appointment. God bless her heart.”

Welo said his mom was his best friend. “She was always there for me. She was the one I could talk to. She would always give me good advice...” His voice trailed off after he shared that.

Continued inside

*A Note from
Executive Director
Scott Blades*



Highlighting A Volunteer: Janice!



TIHAN has many amazing volunteers who give generously of their time and love, and Janice Molina is one of those!

Janice started volunteering in 2017 through her faith community, Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church. In addition to being a co-liaison between TIHAN and her congregation, Janice also volunteers at our Poz Cafe lunch and social event, where she is affectionately known as “The Bingo Queen.”

“I truly love Poz Cafe as the perfect time to be with my treasured friends for fun and food and bingo,” she shares. “It’s my favorite day of the month!”

Thank you, Janice, for all your contributions!



Tucson Interfaith HIV/AIDS Network
1200 North Campbell Avenue
Tucson, Arizona 85719
(520) 299-6647
www.tihan.org



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Celebrating Impact and Community

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!

It's Official! TIHAN's Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony and Open House Draws a Crowd

What a fantastic community gathering for the official ribbon-cutting ceremony and the open house for TIHAN's new offices! We had 140 folks come join us for the festivities on the last day of April!

We started in our courtyard, with the Vice Chair of the Pascua Yaqui Tribe, the Hon. Peter Yucupicio, sharing a beautiful blessing and the context for this land we now inhabit. Then, he was joined by the Chair of the Pima County Board of Supervisors Rex Scott, along with Tucson City Council Members Karin Uhlich and Kevin Dahl, Deputy Pima County Administrator Steve Holmes, along with Our Saviour's Lutheran Church Pastor Amalia Vagts and Council President Patty Sirls, TIHAN Board President Bobbie Parrish, current and former TIHAN Board members, and HIV physicians Dr. Kevin Carmichael and Dr. Danielle Avila. A group of seven people living with HIV processed into the courtyard carrying the red ribbon, which will now be framed and displayed in our office.



The ceremony finished with an interfaith blessing from a dozen clergy from many denominations, led by Pastor Amalia, Rabbi Helen Cohn of Congregation M'kor Hayim, and Rev. Michael Bush from Casas Adobes Congregational UCC.

Following the ceremony, we went inside for delicious refreshments catered by Si Charro (and gluten free desserts from Dedicated!), as TIHAN Executive Director Scott Blades gave a brief update about TIHAN, our mission, programs, and plans. Then our team of volunteers provided guided tours of our new offices as our staff shared more about our programs, operations, volunteer opportunities, and ways to get involved.



We had 51 different nonprofit partners, clinics, government agencies, business groups, and faith communities that we partner with who sent their CEOs, owners, managers, clinicians, and program staff.

It great to see such amazing community support as we work together to improve the health and well-being of our community, especially during these challenging times.

Welo Shares About Living with HIV and TIHAN

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After a moment, I asked if his mom was still with us. “She just passed away four months ago,” he said. “She got diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and died within a month. She was my best friend. Some days I just can’t cope with it...”

Welo talked about hearing her voice, every day now. Sometimes he sees her image, walking up to his apartment. We talked about TIHAN’s check-in calls, having a TIHAN volunteer call him once a week to talk with him and just see how he’s doing. It’s especially helpful when someone is going through a rough time, and the loss of a loved one is definitely one of those times. “Yes, that would be so helpful. I would love that,” he replied.

“TIHAN has always been so helpful to me,” Welo shared. He talked about being encouraged by people in a SAAF support group about 14 years ago to connect with TIHAN. “I kept hearing about TIHAN this and TIHAN that. And I finally just asked, ‘What is TIHAN?’ and they explained it to me. So I reached out to you guys and you opened your arms and let me in. I was wanting more support, and to talk about HIV and know more about what’s going on. So since then I’ve been going to Poz Café for years now. I have some anxiety and I’m not good with big groups, but Poz Café is different. It’s fun, I LOVE playing bingo, and the food is always delicious. That orange chicken meal was my favorite!”

“We are all going through the same things, and some people even worse than me. If they can make it through, then I can make it, too.”

Welo talked about two more components of Poz Café that are very helpful to him.

Welo’s disability checks total a bit over \$19,000/year—but it’s \$186 over the limit that would make him eligible for SNAP benefits, formerly known as food stamps. “I just barely get by. Between rent, and food, and my cell phone, internet, and insurance, I don’t have much left over to buy things. I live on a budget, and if I run out of things, I can’t just go out and buy it. Coffee is one of my favorite things, and I had run out of coffee. I couldn’t make coffee for three days and I was going bonkers. So when TIHAN gave me that \$25 gift card to Fry’s, I went straight to Fry’s and bought me some coffee. That was a lifesaver.”

“I meet a lot of really nice people at Poz Café,” he said. “The staff and volunteers are great, especially Janice who calls bingo. And the other clients remind me that I’m not the only one suffering from HIV and these issues related to getting older. I have chronic back and neck pain, but my HIV is better. We are all going through the same things, and some people even worse than me. If they can make it through, then I can make it, too.”

Asked what he would tell TIHAN’s donors about their impact on his life, Welo responded: “Please keep doing what you’re doing! You are saving our lives by loving us and helping us and feeding us and having a nice lunch and meeting others and giving us our CarePackages. You are giving us a reason to get out of the house, get dressed up, and go out and enjoy a good day every month. That means a lot to me. You guys are doing so much for us. Thank you.”

A group of TIHAN volunteers traveled to Phoenix to attend the AGRA Celebration of Giving, where checks were presented to groups that provided volunteer support to Phoenix’s gay rodeo. AGRA distributed \$125,000 in rodeo proceeds to 24 community organizations, including \$10,000 to TIHAN!



Rev. Lynn Bartlow of St. Mark’s United Methodist Church served at our Poz Café lunch and social program for people living with HIV in April.

We celebrated the birthday of Lead Program Coordinator Gina Snyder (center), flanked by Executive Director Scott Blades and Manager of Operations and Programs Kristen Quinnan.



TIHAN founding Board member Jane Perri turned 90 years of age, and her children celebrated with a big party, with lots of TIHAN faces there to celebrate Jane!

An ensemble from Desert Voices chorus came to Poz Café to sing a few songs over lunch for our CarePartners living with HIV. It was a hit, and our folks were very appreciative!



Members of Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church gathered after Sunday services to tour the TIHAN offices, bless our new space, and hear a presentation about TIHAN from our Board and staff members.

A group of incoming volunteers at a recent Volunteer Orientation session. If you’re interested in volunteering, please reach out to Kristen at 520-299-6647.



You Start Dying Slowly

by Martha Medeiros

You start dying slowly
if you do not travel,
if you do not read,
if you do not listen to the sounds of life,
if you do not appreciate yourself.

You start dying slowly
when you kill your self-esteem;
when you do not let others help you.

You start dying slowly
if you become a slave of your habits,
walking everyday on the same paths...
if you do not change your routine,
if you do not wear different colors
or you do not speak to those you don't know.

You start dying slowly
if you avoid to feel passion
and their turbulent emotions;
those which make your eyes glisten
and your heart beat fast.

You start dying slowly
if you do not change your life when you are
not satisfied with your job,
or with your love,
if you do not risk what is safe for the uncertain,
if you do not go after a dream,
if you do not allow yourself,
at least once in your lifetime,
to run away from sensible advice.

Major Grants Received in 2025—Thank You!



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

(Gifts received January 1—April 30, 2025)

Gifts Received in Honor Of

Scott Blades *
Arlan Colton and Jeff Ramos *
John Consedine
Fred Hubbard and Tom Oliver
Matthew Kessler *
Jess Losoya and Scott Blades *
Jess Losoya *
Paula Medler
Patricia
Paul
Frank Ptak *
Shundell
TIHAN's Staff and Volunteers

Gifts Received in Memory Of

| | |
|---------------------|----------------------------|
| Deb Barnette | Myron Morris * |
| Jerome Beillard | Douglas Noffsinger |
| Phillip Bohlender | Joe Rogers and David McGee |
| Guenther Braun | Janet Smith |
| Charles Burton | Jerry Smithson |
| Jim Girard * | Steve Trujillo |
| Joseph Heller * | Mike Vining |
| Eleanor Johnson | Jason Vogler |
| Mitchell Lester | David and Anita Wade |
| Linda | Irene Walden |
| Bill McManus * | Dotty and David Woody |
| Rev Robert McKnight | |
| Richard McLean * | |
| Oswaldo Montes | |

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



A huge team of volunteers from Intuit, under the leadership of Thom Gilliam, joined to sponsor Poz Café, our lunch and social program. A great service/learning opportunity for Intuit staff, and a great benefit for CarePartners living with HIV.



Volunteer John Consedine was honored recently by the Tucson Cyber Lions Club for ensuring vision support for the people living with HIV that we serve.

\$25 Gives You a Chance to Win Three Amazing Prizes

Every ticket we sell will help fund our programs!



New 2025 Kia Carnival Hybrid
SX Prestige

Two First Class Airline
Tickets to Anywhere



"Millions for Tucson" Raffle

Buy your tickets online at tihan.ejoinme.org/win
or call us at 520-299-6647

100% of proceeds from our ticket sales benefit TIHAN's programs
and services for people living with HIV

\$25 each, or 5 tickets for \$100. Purchase your tickets and we will fill out
your ticket entry and then mail the ticket stub(s) to you.

Tickets are available only through December 5, 2025, and the drawing will be held on
December 11, 2025. You must be 21 years of age to purchase raffle tickets.
You do NOT have to be present to win. Maximum of 120,000 tickets to be distributed.