SUCCESS FOR ANIMALS

BOWLING FOR PAWS: A HUGE SUCCESS

The Pets Are Wonderful Support program provides in-home and outside pick-up and delivery. Groceries and supplies provided through our Nutrition Health Education program and pet food and supplies provided by the Pets Are Wonderful Support (PAWS) program are available through “Grab & Go” and via delivery now. Services delivery has been adjusted to ensure social distancing. For example, SMART meals, usually provided onsite, are available “Grab & Go” and via delivery now. Groceries and supplies provided through our Nutrition Health Education program and pet food and supplies provided by the Pets Are Wonderful Support (PAWS) program are available through outside pick-up and delivery.

2019 BY THE NUMBERS

- 35 Members provided with permanent supportive housing
- 55 Members assisted by Employment Pathways program
- 11,145 visits to our drop-in living room
- 26 at Risk Young Persons & 99 HIV Prevention Services provided by MPower!
- 38,612 Meals provided by pantry bags, food vouchers and, the SMART Meals program

Technology is being leveraged to host team meetings and member gatherings, such as Nutrition Health Education classes, by video conference. We have also reached out to every Damien Center member by phone to ascertain their current needs, provide needed social support, and assist accordingly. We’ve installed a microphone and speaker system at our front desk so team members can talk with tenants from behind the glass to keep all safe.

RESPONDING TO COVID-19

Stronger Than Ever

When the Coronavirus first began to impact our region, the Albany Damien Center was deemed an “essential service” by NYS. We worked quickly to ensure our services would remain active by taking extra measures to keep our tenants and members, already immunocompromised, safe. We've successfully remained open and, to date, have had no known cases of the Coronavirus among staff, tenants, volunteers, or members.

Here’s how we’ve done it:

We instituted a comprehensive COVID-19 Response Plan on March 18, 2020 and have adjusted regularly based on NY State, Albany County, and City of Albany guidance. The plan’s goal is to keep our members, tenants, volunteers, and staff safe from COVID-19 while continuing to meet the needs that have increased due to the Coronavirus. This included additional cleaning and disinfection measures and adjusting who can be at the Damien Center each day. Only essential staff are onsite, while all others are working remotely. All staff and tenants are required to wear masks in common areas and to observe social distancing. The plan also includes steps to appropriately assist members and tenants should they contract the virus and contingency plans for covering workloads for any staff who might be unable to work due to illness.

Service delivery has been adjusted to ensure social distancing. For example, SMART meals, usually provided onsite, are available “Grab & Go” and via delivery now. Groceries and supplies provided through our Nutrition Health Education program and pet food and supplies provided by the Pets Are Wonderful Support (PAWS) program are available through outside pick-up and delivery.

The Damien Center’s MPower program is one of the few remaining places that is open to provide the compassion and caring desperately needed by our LGB & TGNB community. This program aims to improve the health, well-being, and quality of life for LGB & TGNB individuals and families. This includes providing TGNB employment navigation and support. The MPower! team is delivering needed items and support to each MPower! program member.

THE MPower! TEAM IS HERE FOR YOU!

2019 BY THE NUMBERS

- 35 MEMBERS provided with permanent supportive housing
- 11,145 VISITS to our drop-in living room
- 108 MEMBERS provided with Nutrition Health Education services
- 107 MEMBERS and 762 PETS served by the PAWS program
- 55 MEMBERS assisted by Employment Pathways program
- 26 AT RISK YOUNG PERSONS & 99 HIV PREVENTION SERVICES provided by MPower!
- 38,612 MEALS provided by pantry bags, food vouchers and, the SMART Meals program

Homeless for ten months, David, thankfully, had area homeless shelters where he could spend his nights. “You get a cot, a sheet, one quilt and a pillow,” said David, but he had to vacate the shelter by 7:45am and spend his days on the streets of Albany carrying a backpack that contained all his possessions. “It’s horrible to be homeless. I was freezing, my feet were swollen, and my legs hurt.”

After being referred by another organization, David secured his apartment at the Albany Damien Center as the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic began to impact the Capital Region. If he didn’t, David says he wouldn’t have continued to stay at the local homeless shelter for fear of contracting the virus from other guests who might not follow social distancing guidelines. For individuals already living with a compromised immune system, the threat of contracting COVID-19 is doubly scary. Now, David has his own space where he can comfortably practice social distancing and remain safe. He especially appreciates having a front desk staffed 24 hours per day in case he needs anything. He feels protected at the Albany Damien Center and knows we will take care of him if he needs something.

“The support we get here is outrageous. If I need emotional support, I have it. If I need food, I have it. If I need medical care, they help me get it.”

Now that David can worry less about his immediate needs and safety, he is able to focus on his long-term well-being and overcoming the obstacles that resulted in his homelessness. He’s even begun to pick up hobbies long forgotten, like sign making. His spirit won’t be broken and at 60+ years-old, he is hopeful again. “I have a second chance at building a life.”

Are you living with HIV and looking to become employed? Call us today to learn about our new Employment Pathways program 518-449-7119.
For the first time in my 21 years as Damien Center Executive Director, there is a new pandemic that threatens to upend our Ending the Epidemic efforts and poses immense new challenges for a population that has already suffered greatly from another pandemic called AIDS.

Here are five facts regarding the implications of Coronavirus (COVID-19) for those living with HIV and AIDS and for the work of the Albany Damien Center:

Fact #1: The people we serve are at a much higher risk of adverse complications should they contract COVID-19. Those with compromised immune systems (with a detectable HIV viral load or low CD4 cell measurements), multiple co-morbid conditions, and persons over the age of 60 comprise the overwhelming majority of those we serve. Poverty and racial disparities are also showing to increase both the risk of contracting COVID-19 as well as reducing optimal health outcomes.

Fact #2: The people we serve need us, so we intend to keep helping. Food, housing, access to medicine and healthcare, and the need for social connections top the list of needs that have grown with the COVID-19 pandemic that threaten each person’s ability to manage their HIV while keeping safe from the virus.

Fact #3: This is not the time to divert resources and take our eye off of HIV. History has shown with diseases such as tuberculosis, poverty and racial disparities are also showing to increase both the risk of contracting COVID-19 as well as reducing optimal health outcomes.

Fact #4: New service delivery methods and increased needs are increasing our costs dramatically at the Damien Center. The majority of these new costs are non-negotiable, as we have a duty to our tenants, members, staff, volunteers, and our broader community to keep people safe from COVID-19 as we provide our Damien Center services. Thus, there is not a dollar figure I can assess as “reasonable” to spend when we look to save lives.

Fact #5: If any one agency is resilient and ready to respond in times of crisis, it is the Albany Damien Center.

Your help makes it possible for the Damien Center to rise to this challenge and I am so thankful for our community of supporters like you who continue to help us. I am proud of our staff, board of directors, and volunteers, who are working tirelessly to respond to the rising needs. Finally, I am proud of the people we serve, who are indeed resilient and have shown they can work together to help each other.

When we stand together, we’ll win the fight against COVID-19 AND HIV and AIDS. Will you stand with us?

Be safe and well,

Perry Junulas
Executive Director
& Person with AIDS who is UNDETECTABLE

Thank you to the Seymour Fox Memorial Foundation for providing a grant to purchase hygiene kits for our members. Thank you to the In Our Own Voices Foundation for providing a grant to purchase hygiene kits for our members. Thank you to the Cooperstown Eagle Scout who secretly lived with HIV and AIDS until, at the age of 17, he decided to tell his story to benefit others and went on to become a national HIV and AIDS advocate before his death from a car accident at the age of 26. Today, through his popular Albany Times Union blog, active social media following and personal appearances, Ken uses his voice to speak intelligently to the issues impacting all of us and to advocate for social change. Ken is a 2009 Citizen Action Jim Perry Progressive Leadership Award recipient and the In Our Own Voices 2018 Community Advocate honoree. Ken is UNDETECTABLE & Person with AIDS who

We intend to hold this formal event on September 25, 2020 at The Century House in Latham, NY, and will continually assess the ability to do so as the impact of the pandemic continues to unfold. For ticket, honorary committee and sponsorship information please visit www.albanydamiencenter.org/heroawards.html.

DO YOU HAVE ENOUGH TIME AND PASSION TO HELP? THROWS A FUN-RAISER

Do you have energy, time and passion? Then throw a fundraiser for us! This is a great project for school, church, and employer groups to help raise needed funds and HIV/AIDS awareness! You can even throw one for your birthday or a special occasion online. Also, we have a new easy system and resources to support your fundraising!

MAKE A BEQUEST THROUGH PLANNED GIVING

A gift through your will or living trust will continue your support of the Damien Center and people living with HIV/AIDS as an important legacy in our community. For more information, contact Todd Cramer at 518/449-7119.

WE ARE OPEN!

If you or a person you know is living with HIV and AIDS, we want to help with:

- Behavioral health
- Housing
- Job placement
- Pet care
- Pantry bags delivered
- Prepared meals “to go”

VOLUNTEER WITH US!

Outstanding administrative and organizational skills?

Graphic design wizard?

Know your way around a kitchen?

If you are looking to lend your skills and abilities, we want what you have to offer!

Visit www.albanydamiencenter.org/volunteer.html to view our most immediate needs and join our volunteer team. You can also email us at volunteers@albanydamiencenter.org.

HOW YOU CAN HELP!

MAKE A MONETARY CONTRIBUTION

The need to support people living with HIV still exists, and we are working hard to continue our impact. As we continue to grow, we need your financial support to continue and expand our programs and services. Please consider a meaningful gift today.

MAKE A BEQUEST THROUGH PLANNED GIVING

A gift through your will or living trust will continue your support of the Damien Center and people living with HIV/AIDS as an important legacy in our community.

For more information, contact Todd Cramer at 518/449-7119, ext. 121.