



# RED RIBBON TIMES

2020 Volume 6



11

Self-care is essential

## To the beloved and dearly missed Ms. Sheila French:

We of the Central Florida HIV Planning Council would like to remember Ms. Sheila French who was a dedicated member of the Planning Council for over three years. She will be remembered as a dedicated and kind person who had a lot to say in defense of her community. In her last days I, Ira Westbrook was blessed enough to be able to visit her in her nursing home. She often spoke about being tired of living there and how much she wanted to go home. The Lord had different plans for Ms. Sheila and lovingly guided her to a better place. Go on and

take your rest Ms. French. Your kindness, love, and dedication will continue to be an inspiration to us all. God loves you Ms. French and so do we.

**THANK YOU FOR GRACING US WITH YOUR LIGHT.**

Sincerely,  
**Ira Darnell Westbrook & The Central Florida HIV Planning Council**

### In this issue...

**1** Missed Ms. Sheila French

**3** Dear HIV

**4** Speaking up for Survivors

**TÚ IMPORTAS**  
**6-7**

You Matter/Tu Importas

**5** ¡Conversaciones Latinx!

**8-9** My Testimony

**10** Ask Ryan  
Miracle of Love  
Hope & Help

# CENTRAL FLORIDA HIV PLANNING COUNCIL

## STANDING COMMITTEES

### Membership Committee

- This meeting is the first Tuesday of the month at 2:00 PM

### Service Systems and Quality Committee

- This meeting is the first Thursday of the month at 10:00 AM

### PR & Marketing Committee

- This meeting is the second Tuesday of the month at 10:30 AM

### Needs Assessment and Planning Committee

- This meeting is on the second Thursday of the month at 2:00 PM

### Executive Committee

- This meeting is the Thursday of the week before the Planning Council meeting at 2:00 PM

### Planning Council

- This meeting is the last Wednesday of the month
- Meet-N-Greet (5:30 PM) & Meeting (6:00 PM)

Contact Planning Council Support for meeting locations or visit website

## PLANNING COUNCIL SUPPORT CONTACT INFORMATION

**Melanie Cross**  
Support Manager

407-429-2216  
Melanie.Cross@hfuw.org

**Andres Acosta**  
Support Coordinator

407-429-2119  
Andres.Acosta@hfuw.org

**David Bent**  
Administrative Assistant

407-835-0906  
David.Bent@hfuw.org

## RYAN WHITE PART A SERVICE PROVIDERS

**AIDS Healthcare Foundation**  
407-204-7000  
www.aidshealth.org

**ASPIRE Health Partners**  
407-245-0014  
www.aspirehealthpartners.com

**Center for Multicultural Wellness and Prevention**  
407-648-9440 • www.cmwp.org

**Dept. of Health in Lake County**  
352-771-5500  
http://lake.floridahealth.gov/

**Dept. of Health in Orange County**  
407-858-1437  
http://orange.floridahealth.gov/

**Dept. of Health in Osceola County**  
407-343-2030  
http://osceola.floridahealth.gov/

**Dept. of Health in Seminole County**  
407-665-3200  
http://seminole.floridahealth.gov/

**Heart of Florida United Way**  
407-429-2197 • www.hfuw.org

**Hope and Help Center**  
407-645-2577  
www.hopeandhelp.org

**Miracle of Love**  
407-843-1760  
www.miracleofloveinc.org

**Orange County Medical Clinic Pharmacy**  
407-836-7160

**Orange Blossom Family Health**  
407-428-5751 • www.hcch.org

**Turning Point**  
407-740-5655  
www.turningpointcfl.org

**Part A Recipient's Office**  
2002-A E. Michigan Street  
Orlando, FL 32805  
407-836-7631



**“Drop Us a Line...”**



*Planning council support (PCS) invites each of you to submit your feedback, opinions, questions or articles etc. Hearing from you directs and assists PCS as we plan future volumes of the Red Ribbon Times.*

*We'd love to hear from you!!*

**CFHPC@hfuw.org**

**Planning Council Support  
HFUW  
1940 Cannery Way  
Orlando, FL 32804  
407-429-2119**



Connect with us on Facebook @  
CentralFloridaHIVPlanningCouncil

<https://ryanwhitecfap.org/member-resources/integrated-hiv-prevention-care-plan/>

[www.ocfl.net/ryanwhite](http://www.ocfl.net/ryanwhite)

# DEAR HIV

By Gabriel Martinez

**It has been five and a half years since we have officially met, and I cannot believe that this is the first time you are actually going to sit there and listen to what I have to say.** I have thought of this day for a very long time and I must admit that, amid all this confusion, I am little nervous. I have thought about what I would say to you, how I would say it, and what message I wanted to convey. I think it is natural for me to believe that I would have immediately attacked you for intruding my life. You broke into my home without any warning and caused chaos. I often questioned what I did to you for you to have ran havoc within me, but it took so long for me to finally realize that you never broke into my home, rather I freely and willingly opened my own front door. You were just an unappreciative and unmannered guest who decided it was okay to open my fridge and make yourself comfortable in my bed.

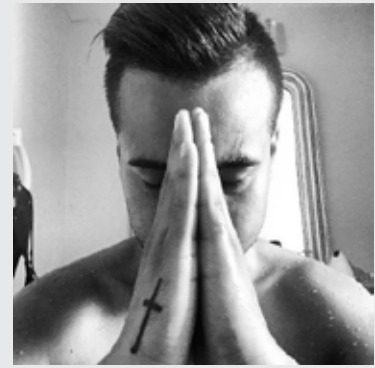
I remember ignoring you for about a year after we met. It wasn't because I was in denial that you were an uninvited guest. I mean, I saw you every time I walked into my home, brushed my teeth, made dinner, looked in the mirror or even driving to work. I was reminded of you, but I ignored you, fiercely. Ironically enough, on the other hand, all I did was learn more and more about you while simultaneously paying you no mind. I asked anyone and everyone about you. I read books, articles, and sought out individuals in my community who already knew you or of you to help me better understand you. You see, I could not face you. You reminded me every day of the mistakes that I made that led me to you. You became the regrettable tattoo that I must live with for the remainder of my life and I could not look you straight in the eyes. It took a very long time to finally turn around one day and face you and we kept that our little secret for so many years. No one really knew what happened between us that night, but we profusely stared at one another and something magical happened.

That faithful evening as I glared into your hollow, dark eyes, I was reminded of the spatial, dark holes they teach about in grade school. Dark holes are to be feared in space. They hold probably one of the biggest universal mysteries since everything in its path is devoured by its dark orifice. That's how your eyes looked and funny enough

that's how my eyes looked as well. I thought of hurting you. I wanted you to feel the pain I felt. I even thought of killing you and taking your life. I thought of it, but that realization also meant that I could not go on either and how do you balance those thoughts? How do I protect myself, my own life, and eliminate you altogether? We continued to stare into each other's eyes knowing that there needed to be no exchange of words, just the dark thoughts that caressed and tickled the satanic place in our minds. As divine interventions are, the phone rang and continued to ring out for about 2 full minutes. Whoever was calling needed to speak to me, but I also was battling with my own internal demons and I did not know what to do, and before the ringing became too unbearable, I picked up the phone.

That phone call changed the entire direction of my life both with myself and with you. You see, someone reached out to me because they found that you had gone into their home, their personal space, and invaded their privacy as well. You uninvitedly welcomed yourself to a serving of his food and a warm bath in his tub. He had no one to turn to and within seconds of speaking, he thanked me for picking up the phone, for taking the time out to hear him, guide him, and most importantly love him for being exactly who he is. You no longer were Judas's deceitful kiss or the demon he became after, but you became my blessing, you became my REASON TO LIVE.

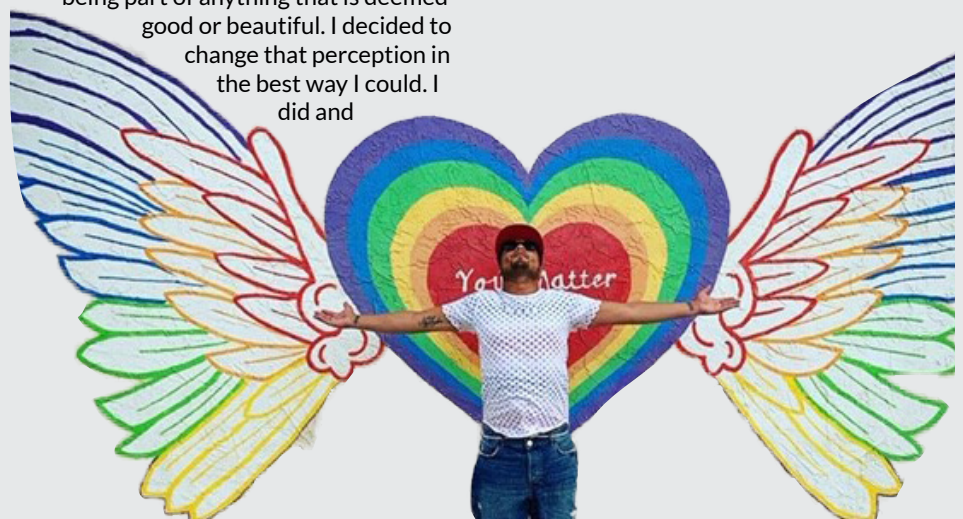
I often get questioned why I call you my blessing since it is so difficult for others to understand and frankly for me to explain. They cannot fathom the possibility of you being part of anything that is deemed good or beautiful. I decided to change that perception in the best way I could. I did and



continue to do my best to hide you behind a facade that's wrapped in purple paper with a big, over-sized pink bow on it. And with this letter I write to you, I'll try and explain why. You gave me purpose. You paved a path for me with a guided direction. Intrinsicly, I am an individual of second chances, growth opportunities, and a man of academia. I knew, in the depths and core of who I am, that I had to change the narrative of you for others to listen. We had to work together so that others gave us the time. You know what? We did it though. We have stood together in front of audiences small and large. We describe our relationship, how we came to be, and the plans that we have for our future. We let everyone know that it is a very imperfect relationship, but we have learned to fight against all the bad. Without you, there would be no me at this moment. The me that has inspired and built a life from trying to still figure out how to eliminate you. Ironic, don't you think?

You are no longer an uninvited guest, but rather a temporary resident. I say temporary because even if we do not find a cure in my lifetime, you my friend, die with me the day it's my turn. You would no longer have any control, power, or say in my body. We live it together, we die together, and we forever ride together.

Until death do us part,  
Gabe





# Speaking up for Survivors

By Andres Acosta

**Joel Junior Morales greets me at the entrance to the LGBT Center of Orlando.** His proud smile lights up his face as he welcomes me to what he considers “his home away from home.” Joel has been an involved member of the LGBT community for many years in Orlando and just recently, he was promoted to the role of Director of Operations at The Center. Joel wears many hats and today we are going to talk about one that has a lot of sentimental value to him. Joel is the chapter coordinator for Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice. At the time we spoke, he had just returned from the second annual Survivors Speak in Tallahassee. Crime survivors from across the state of Florida gather at the capitol to demand a seat at the table where public policy is made. “8 in 10 survivors report experiencing at least one type of trauma after their victimization” The smile has left his face and the determined look of a man fighting to make a difference has taken its place, “two out of three crime victims report receiving no help after the incident.”

Joel proudly represents the Orlando LGBT community in every way he can. As one of the founding members of Qlatinx his passion for social justice and representation have made him a prominent figure in the activist circles of Orlando. His work with

Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice was outstanding enough to warrant an invitation to march alongside pulse survivor Jeff Xavier in the Survivors Speak California.

Crime survivors for safety and Justice is a nationwide network of over 25,000 crime survivors from across the country. “The experiences and voices of survivors are critical to ensuring that our public policies make communities safe and healthier.” Joel makes a powerful argument, one that is at the core of the mission for Crime Survivors. “We believe that there should be more resources for helping victims heal and stopping the cycle of crime and violence.” The ultimate goal of the group is to close the gaps in accessing services that help survivors recover from crime. The group also aims to ensure that people coming out of the justice system

do not come out worse than before they went in.

Last year was the first time that Crime Survivors marched in Tallahassee and this year upon their return, they presented to policy makers their Safety Agenda. “The agenda focuses on creating a long lasting impact in the justice system that will protect the rights of victims, remove barriers to aid for victims and their families” According to Joel Florida has a victim compensation program meant to help survivors of crime. Unfortunately, this system is marred by red tape obstacles that oftentimes leave victims and their families unable to get the much-needed help they need.

Joel is not the only familiar face from Orlando that is personally invested in bettering the lives of crime survivors. Gabriela Rodriguez the Chair for the HIV Planning Council’ PR and Marketing Committee attended the event. “I love this picture,” Says Gabriela, “we were all united in a moment of strengths and solidarity.” The important work that Crime Survivors is doing has not gone unnoticed; this time around, they were able to meet with several legislators in Tallahassee. “We continue to fight on, and even though it’s a long road we will continue to push forward” Gabriella proudly states “when you are dedicated to creating change you learn to be patient and push on past the face of adversity.”

Orlando is thriving metropolis that is experiencing growing pains. We are struggling to find the balance between progress and gentrification and it is through the hard work of dedicated individuals like Gabriela Rodriguez and Joel Junior Morales that we as a city and as a state can ensure that those who need help are able to get it in a system that has often overlooked them in the past.





# ¡Conversaciones Latinx!

By Andres Acosta

**How do we mobilize a historically underserve community that speaks a different language, has unique barriers to care and has a culture of stigma? Well we talk and laugh as one united community that is how.** This is the approach that the Committee for the National Latinx AIDS Awareness Day took when tackling the hard work of engaging Central Florida's Latinx community.

On October 15th 2019, and every year for that matter we come together and hope to break barriers to talk about HIV and AIDS in the Latinx community. This year the event took the form of an online film festival that was the product of a collaboration between most of the local Community Based Organizations.

## Conversaciones Maternales


Focusing on the unique perspective of mothers navigating the world of HIV and motherhood. Four mothers gather to have a heartwarming conversation that would move the audience to tears. Gabriella Rodriguez shared her personal story and spoke about how she tackles raising two young boys. Maria Buckley let us know how her experienced changed from having one daughter come out as a lesbian to when her younger daughter follow suit. Angela Martinez shared how her unique friendships allowed her to keep an open mind with her gay son. Finally, Martha Lucia Ardila cried while she revealed how her sons HIV+ status created unique challenges for her and her family. These women show that the Latinx experience is centered

on family and the women that hold them together.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjergZaj-6g>

## HIV Testing Process

In order to let the people know that HIV testing is accessible and simple a video was created to guide Latinx individuals through the process and logistics of testing. There is no better way to fight fear than with knowledge and this video ensures that the viewer is aware of the benefits of testing in order to increase awareness to all.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VCDzbNkKd5g> 

## Esteban and Stigma

There is nothing more unifying than laughter and this video brings the joy into an otherwise heavy topic. Using comedy to shatter stigma and give the viewer a candid look into the true world of stigma in the Latinx community. Relatable, entertaining and well taught out this video will make the viewers laugh and take a closer look at the challenge of stigma for those living with HIV.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDsbBZXE-Lg>

## Lukas and Noel

The brainchild of the Central Florida HIV Planning Councils' PR & Marketing Chair Gabriella Rodriguez, Lukas and Noel takes the form of popular texting stories. It follows two young men as they make plans for an evening of fun out on the town. The story take a twist when stigma and

ignorance come to play but much like in real life; education and patience give the viewer a happy ending.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qa57sdRQsZo>

## NLAAD Live Stream from Pride

Taking advantage of the biggest event for the LGBT community in Orlando. NLAAD takes to the streets of downtown to celebrate pride and talk to members of the community. The candid video shows us how our community celebrates and just how much work still needs to be done to move the conversation around HIV and AIDS forward.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AYmBreXTK5s>

## A Calzon Quitao

The conclusion to the Online film festival came in the form of a conversation between friends centered around the myths that are often perpetuated in our communities. This video challenges the viewer to rethink their misconceptions and understand that what we think we know is often wrong.

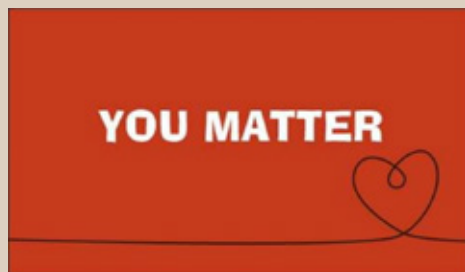
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMa7WDeiZxo&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR0qgXcaZsIHFy-UGL5fQ15-rJ4rFp3V2bv7T97lvIUixSri7fkzM3ZbRPE>

**The work of reaching out to communities is never done and we hope you will check out these videos and help move the conversation forward!**

# Saying “You Matter” Matters!

**Changing lives one card at a time...**

By Gabriella Rodriguez



**YOU MATTER! Today’s struggle may cause us to ask if “We Matter”, especially in a society where expectations are so high.** Although we have more ways than ever of connecting with others, many of us feel more isolated and disconnected than ever before. Leading us to question our worth and seek validation from unhealthy sources such as excess alcohol, substance abuse, bullying others and social media. How do we fix this? How do we connect after being so disconnected? I had an opportunity to meet an amazing soul fighting isolation, one card at a time. Vicki O’ Grady, a Central Florida based therapist in the Orlando area has been giving out these “You Matter” cards for years. You may have seen them around Orlando, red “You Matter” cards. You might’ve seen them lying around, or have been given one by a close friend of mine who hands them out to strangers he meets with the parting statement “In case no one has told you today “ You Matter””. Those two words can have such a positive effect on a person, giving someone visibility and validation and showing them that someone cares. The project did not start out like this, Vicki mentioned that before the “You Matter Cards”, she was holding up signs in traffic that said “Thank you” and “Sorry”. She then gave out Post-it notes

in the shape of hearts everywhere she went and began holding up a heart sign in traffic at intersections. After a conversation with a close friend, and the death of Robin Williams she decided to change the sign to “You Matter,” stating, “I think that so many people don’t know that they do matter and want to give up on life.” Over the years, she has been able to hear the impact that these two words can have on an individual’s especially since she herself had once been in a dark place. She now uses her lived experience within her practice and everyday life to share this message.

Words are powerful! Language is the primary tool for expression and communication. Recently Vicki has introduced the “Tu Importas” cards to be able to share these words with our Latinx folks. But, How do all these words work? They work by taking the shape of positive affirmations. Affirmations are positive statements that can help you to challenge and overcome self-sabotaging and negative thoughts. When you repeat them often, and believe in them, you can start to make positive changes. You might consider affirmations to be unrealistic “wishful thinking.” However, try looking at positive affirmations this way: many of us do repetitive exercises to improve our physical health, and affirmations are like exercises for our minds and consciousness. These positive mental repetitions can reprogram our thinking patterns so that, over time, we begin to think – and act – differently.

Vicki challenges us to not forget the power we each hold in our hands –

the power of connection, friendship, and being human. Tell someone “You Matter” today and every day. You will have just contributed to life itself!

To order cards and continue to spread the through the YOU MATTER Compassion Project go to: <https://youmattercompassionproject.com/>



# ¡Decir “Tu Importas” Importa!

## Cambiando vidas una tarjeta a la vez...

By Gabriella Rodriguez

¡TU IMPORTAS! La lucha de hoy puede hacernos preguntarnos si “Importamos”, especialmente en una sociedad donde las expectativas son tan altas. Aunque tenemos más formas que nunca de conectarnos, muchos de nosotros nos sentimos aislados y desconectados más que nunca. Tendemos a cuestionar nuestro valor y buscamos validación de fuentes externas e poco saludables como exceso de alcohol, abuso de sustancias, maltratando a otros y trolling en redes sociales. ¿Cómo solucionamos este problema? ¿Cómo nos conectamos después de estar tan desconectado? Tuve la oportunidad de conocer a una increíble alma combatiendo el aislamiento, una tarjeta a la vez. Vicki O’Grady, una terapeuta con sede en la Florida Central en el área de Orlando, ha estado entregando estas tarjetas “You Matter” durante años. Es posible que las haya visto estas tarjetas “You Matter” rojas alrededor de Orlando. También es posible que alguien como uno de mis amigos cercanos te la haya dado e dicho “En caso de que nadie te haya dicho hoy You Matter.” Esas dos palabras pueden tener un efecto extremadamente positivo en una persona, dándole visibilidad, valor, e demostrando que le importas a alguien. El proyecto no comenzó así, Vicki mencionó que antes de las tarjetas de “You Matter,” ella comenzó sosteniendo carteles en el tráfico que decían “Gracias” y “Lo siento.” Luego repartió notas adhesivas en forma de corazones por todas partes y comenzó a sostener un cartel de corazón en las intersecciones de



tráfico. Después de una conversación con un amigo cercano y la muerte de Robin Williams, ella decidió cambiar el mensaje a “You Matter,” diciendo “Creo que muchas personas no saben que sí importan y quieren rendirse en la vida.” A lo largo de los años, ha podido escuchar el impacto que estas dos palabras pueden tener en un individuo, especialmente porque ella misma ha estado en un lugar triste y oscuro. Ella usa su experiencia vivida dentro de su práctica y vida cotidiana para compartir este mensaje importante.

Las palabras son poderosas, el lenguaje es la herramienta principal para la expresión y la comunicación. Recientemente Vicki ha presentado las tarjetas “Tu Importas” para poder compartir estas palabras con nuestros amigos Latinx. Pero, ¿cómo funcionan todas estas palabras? Tomando la forma de afirmaciones positivas. Las afirmaciones son declaraciones positivas que pueden ayudar a desafiar y superar los pensamientos negativos y el sabotaje personal. Cuando las repites a menudo y crees en ellas, puedes

comenzar a hacer cambios positivos. Puede que consideres las afirmaciones como “ilusiones” poco realistas. Pero trata de ver afirmaciones positivas de esta manera: muchos de nosotros hacemos ejercicios repetitivos para mejorar nuestra salud física, y las afirmaciones son como ejercicios para nuestra mente y perspectiva. Estas repeticiones mentales positivas pueden reprogramar nuestros patrones de pensamiento para que, con el tiempo, comencemos a pensar y actuar de manera diferente.

Vicki nos reta a que no olvidemos el poder que cada uno tenemos en nuestras manos: el poder de la conexión, la amistad y la humanidad. Dile a alguien que es importante hoy y todos los días. ¡Estarás contribuyendo a la vida misma! Para ordenar tarjetas y seguir compartiendo el con el proyecto de compasión Tu Importas ve a: <https://youmattercompassionproject.com/>

# My Testimony

**BY: JANICE**

**Living with my HIV diagnosis has been a multitude of emotions and experiences.** From being diagnosed HIV positive 1996, fear and shame were my first reactions. We still live in a world where people are afraid to be around anyone with HIV/AIDS, because of what they don't know, which is rather sad.

Since then I've experienced anger and frustration. I saw first hand, those people that my husband (ex-husband now) had considered good friends, who after learning of our being positive, found it easier to end a long term friendship than taking time to educate themselves on the virus. While that hurt, and I don't like rejection, the loss of the type of people who would do that, was by all means better for us in the long run.

I didn't tell my family, because I had always felt their judgement, and they had never been very supportive of me

anyways. My parents have passed, and I have no regrets of not telling them. I often think of telling my sister, whom I am not close with. But I always come back to my thoughts of why, and what would it benefit? I chose to only tell my best friend. A very difficult conversation due to my fears, but a true friend will stick with you thru anything.

Starting out. I can remember taking a least 15 pills a day, and throwing up was a daily normal experience. This was what I though life with HIV was going to be, for the rest of what was likely to be a short life. This resulted in my time of despair. Fortunately, I prefer to be happy, and was able to get beyond that stage. These days, regiments are no longer so harsh, and usually only one or tow pills. So those of you newly diagnosed, and whining about how you hate taking your pills need to suck it up. The consequences of not following your regimen, are far worse than the struggle of swallowing a pill. I never thought I would be living to the age I am (almost 50), but I now see me living a long, wonderful life.

Thanks to all the good doctors that have kept me healthy, I'm not really bothered by being positive. Yes, I hate taking meds, yes I hate doing my labs, yes I hate going to the doctor. But I find it so worth it, for my health.

A few years ago, my husband of 24 years, divorced me. I had to figure out how to get thru the grieving stages of losing my husband, as well as the fear of thinking no one would want me, due to being HIV positive. I had been rejected by the man I loved, and had though I would grow old with, and already had low self esteem issues. Never did

I think that someone who is not HIV positive, would have any interest in me, but without even looking, that where I am now. I had no intentions of getting into a relationship, still bitter form the divorce, but he won me over, and broke thru the wall I was trying to build to protect myself. It was another heart wrenching conversation, telling him of my status. He never blinked an eye, or needed time to think about it. He saw me as someone worth loving, and would rather be by me thru whatever I deal with, than to be without me. There are so many people living with HIV/AIDS, who have a partner that is not positive, because that partner has taken the time to learn what we are living with, and understand that we are not a danger to them, as long as we take care of ourselves.

Up until the last few years, I had remained a very private person. I now work as a peer counselor for a FL health department, and feel that my talking of my experiences of dealing with HIV may help others, and that makes me feel wonderful. I see so many different types of personalities, and how they deal with being HIV positive, or being diagnosed with AIDS. Many share their fear of having to tell everybody. There is no reason to have to tell anyone, unless you are going to be intimate. I believe that it is easier to live with regret of not telling someone, than it is to live with regretting telling the wrong person. No one needs to have their business blabbed by the town gossip, so choose who you tell, wisely. Bear in mind, this is advice form a private person. I so admire those that openly speak of being positive, and are able to I'm here, if you have a problem with me, that's your problem. Perhaps one day, I will be able to be that confident.

We each have a choice as to how to live thru each day, whether being HIV/AIDS





diagnosed, or not. If you are the type to not bother looking for the blessings you are given each day, you will always be unhappy. That's your choice, don't blame anyone or anything else. I've had numerous challenges and struggles in my life, beyond being positive. I choose to see how the struggles have helped me become stronger, and a better person. I am grateful for where I am now, and know that I wouldn't be here, had it not been for those challenges, struggles, and low points in my life. I choose to see my being HIV positive, as a blessing.

**BY: ROY HARRY**

**In 1983 as a 3rd year medical student I attended my first medical conference on HIV disease.** Although there was a lot of information presented about this new disease, there was essentially no effective treatment and no hope for a cure. I was most likely the only gay man in the room and I felt alone and afraid.

As the HIV disease continued to grow around me, so did my fear. In 1985-86 I was working as a physician in training in medicine and neurology. This is when I had my first contact with patients diagnosed with HIV. At that time, it was felt to be a "gay" disease. Since I was the only gay resident physician on the service all HIV cases were assigned to

me. Again I felt alone and afraid. No one wanted to get close to a patient with HIV including the nurses, doctors, dietary and custodial staff. So every day I would enter my patients room, push the trays of uneaten food and trash cans overflowing aside and do what I could to keep my patient alive. But as was the expected end back then one day I would arrive to work to discover my patient(s) expired.

As the HIV population continued to grow it began to touch me on a more personal level. Over the next ten years I watched friends, neighbors and former lovers succumb to the disease. I watched as they took their last breath. It was painful to watch the transformation and even more painful to say goodbye.

I reached the height of my fear in 2003. That is when I received my positive diagnosis. I was overwhelmed with feelings: anger, hurt, shame and fear. I didn't want to tell anyone of my diagnosis for fear of rejection. But I was determined to fight this disease and get treatment. Fortunately I was able to get the newer medication and my viral load has been undetectable to 15 years. By writing this I'm taking a step to once again come out of the closet and share what I've kept secret for so long. I can't live with the fear of rejection any longer.

**BY: PAUL**

**I was diagnosed with HIV in 1985.** But I had symptoms long before including skin rashes and bouts of diarrhea. The disease progressed and in 1993 I was diagnosed with PCP Pneumonia. I was hospitalized for four weeks and left the hospital weighting 70 Pounds. I thought for sure I was going to die. I felt alone, ashamed and very afraid.

I suffered through all the early medical treatments and their side effects. But fortunately today I am on medication that has kept my viral load undetectable.

I am tired of this disease and how it caused much suffering in my life and the lives of others. But I want to live and at age 60 I will fight this disease until there is no more HIV. I'm grateful for all the support I've received these many years. Do not let fear and shame keep you from asking for help.



# Ask Ryan



Dear Ryan,

I've been receiving services through the Ryan White program for some time now. However, I am not truly familiar with who Ryan White actually is and what role does he play in my healthcare under the Ryan White Program?

Sincerely  
Eager learner



Dear Eager Learner,

Learner the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program was born of a movement that began with the onset of the AIDS epidemic. At a time when AIDS was feared and misunderstood due to the lack of science, those living with HIV/AIDS had to fight for many, many things throughout the history of the epidemic. Most intimately, they have fought for their health—day by day, often hour by hour, with unflinching courage and resilience. A testament of this can be found in Ryan White. His voice rose above the stigma and fear of the early epidemic to bring much-needed attention to improving access to quality health care and social justice for people living with HIV/AIDS, a mission the Ryan White Program continues today. A young teenager at the time, Ryan White gained national attention, rallying for his right to attend school after contracting AIDS from a blood transfusion given to treat his hemophilia in 1984. Despite the hatred and abuse heaped upon him and his family by the frightened people of Kimono, Indiana. He still fought for and won a landmark court case that allowed him the right to go to public school. This made him a spokesperson for fair treatment for ALL those living with HIV/AIDS and served to educate the public about HIV/AIDS.

Even after winning a lengthy court case allowing him to return to his classes, Ryan continued to be ostracized, bullied, and shunned by other students, but he and his family persevered. By early 1990, his health plummeted. He developed difficulty swallowing and his respiratory condition worsened and he later died on April 8, just months before Congress passed the AIDS bill that bears his name – the Ryan White CARE (Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency) This act, provided the first and largest federal aid program for people living with HIV in the United States. Over

the last 30 years, the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program has played a critical role in the United States' public health response to HIV. The Program serves as an important source of ongoing access to HIV primary medical care, essential support services, medication that can enable people living with HIV to live close to average lifespans, among other critical services. More than half of all people living with this diagnosis in the United States receive services through the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program, meaning more than half a million people benefit from these life saving services each year.

The Ryan White program has led the Nation's response to AIDS care through innovation, discovery, and breakthrough. It has reminded America of its own greatness and taught us much about what can be achieved when we move past today's barriers and dream of a better tomorrow. It has been 29 years since we lost Ryan White, and as we continue to lose our first generation of fighters, we need to focus on nurturing and guiding the newly diagnosed (many of whom were born after Ryan passed away) as it is critical that the torch lit by Ryan White remains burning brightly.

Yours in the struggle,  
**Ask Ryan**

To read more about the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program near you, along with other HIV/AIDS services, go to:  
<https://hab.hrsa.gov/about-ryan-white-hiv-aids-program>

Submit your questions to [CFHPC@HFUW.ORG](mailto:CFHPC@HFUW.ORG) with the subject line as "ASK RYAN" and it could appear in the next installment of the Red Ribbon Times. Disclaimer: All questions will be answered by Planning Council Members and staff persons while using experience and data if necessary.



## Miracle of Love:

On November 26, 2019, Miracle of Love (MOL) conducted the 12th annual "Turkey Drop".

MOL "Turkey Drop" provides clients in Orange, Osceola, Lake and Seminole County with all the fixings to prepare a holiday feast for their households. Each Turkey Drop included: turkey/ham gift card, vegetable, macaroni and cheese, dressing, cranberry sauce and bread. This year MOL supplied 375 households with a Turkey Drop Box.

Additionally, MOL provided prepared meals for seven Facility-Based houses to serve 49 individuals that had no ability to prepare a hot meal at their residence.

Miracle of Love could not produce the project alone. The "Turkey Drop" was a collaborative effort between MOL the following community partners: The SMART Ride, Disney VoluntEARs, Starbucks Community Services and Wyndham.

## Hope & Help:

"For Thanksgiving, Hope & Help coordinated our annual turkey drive in partnership with Joy Metropolitan Community Church (Joy MCC). 150 clients received an 11lb frozen turkey, and a bag of Thanksgiving themed non-perishable food items for their enjoyment. Every year we work to ensure our clients can enjoy the holidays with loved ones"



A PSA FROM PEER SUPPORT SPACE

# SELF-CARE IS ESSENTIAL

## WHAT'S SELF-CARE, REALLY?

Any activity that we do deliberately in order to take care of our mental, emotional, & physical health.

**Self-care is going to look different for each individual.**

Do what works best for you and don't be afraid to experiment.

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

You're out here trying to make the world a littler brighter. It's hard out here!

**Invest in self-care so you can remain resilient.**

Self-care helps ensure that you can show up with intention as your best self.

**BE GENTLE: ASK YOURSELF IF YOU WOULD TALK TO A FRIEND OR CHILD THE WAY YOU TALK TO YOURSELF.**

## BUT I AM PRESSED FOR TIME & MY FUNDS ARE LOW...

*Self-care should be accessible to everyone! Peer Support Space surveyed community leaders, social justice advocates, and our group participants to see what ways they invest in themselves and here is what they had to say:*

- Spend time with friends/family
- Say "no"
- Practice mindfulness during routine daily tasks
- Leave work on time
- Practice self-compassion
- Set aside 30 min YOU time every day (no phone or laptop)
- Pray or connect with your spirituality in a way that is meaningful to you
- Spend time in nature
- Unfollow accounts that make me feel bad
- Take a shower
- Go for a run
- Get to the beach for sunrise or sunset
- Learn from a dance tutorial video on Youtube
- Find a blog or podcast you love (not related to your work!)
- Youtube a guided meditation

## IT'S OKAY TO NOT BE OKAY

Sometimes despite all our best efforts in taking care of ourselves, we still need a little support. Asking for help when you need it reveals so much strength and bravery.

VISIT [WWW.PEERSUPPORTSPACE.ORG/RESOURCES](http://WWW.PEERSUPPORTSPACE.ORG/RESOURCES)  
TO FIND SUPPORT

**YOU DESERVE TO FEEL WELL + FLOURISH. WHEN YOU START FEELING DOWN REMIND YOURSELF THAT IT IS OKAY TO TAKE A PAUSE AND PRIORITIZE YOURSELF.**



Peer Support Space, Inc.  
Where Chosen Family  
Heals Together.



[www.ocfl.net/ryanwhite](http://www.ocfl.net/ryanwhite)



Can't wait for the next Red Ribbon Times? Us either! Stay connected for all the latest info on Facebook @ CentralFloridaHIVPlanningCouncil