



August 18, 2020

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Riverside County recognizes 30-year anniversary Ryan White funding for HIV/AIDS program

Ryan White, the courageous teenager who fought discrimination after contracting AIDS, never saw the impact his short life would have on hundreds of thousands of individuals living with HIV and AIDS.

Ryan, who contracted the disease from a blood transfusion in 1984, died in April 1990, only months before the establishment of the Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency (CARE) Act. The Indiana teen was 18 when he died.

“Ryan White’s courage in the face of sometimes cruel discrimination remains an inspiration for so many even to this day. The fund that was created in his name has saved countless lives and eased the burden on countless others,” said Kim Saruwatari, director of Riverside University Health System (RUHS) - Public Health, which operates several programs paid for by Ryan White funding.

Today (Aug. 18) is the 30th anniversary of the Ryan White funding and Riverside County health officials estimate the program has helped tens of thousands of people living with HIV/AIDS. Since 2004, Riverside County has allocated about \$14 million in Ryan White funding for programs dealing with mental health services, outpatient care, case management, oral healthcare, nutritional assistance.

James, a 50-something resident of southwest Riverside County, was stunned when he received his HIV-diagnosis in 2012. After learning more about the illness and meeting the public health medical team that would become a big part of his life, James said his life turned around.

“I could not have asked for a better group of people to care for me. They are amazing,” said James, who learned of his illness after a routine checkup. “They are part of my family.”

In addition to case management, James was helped with mental health and outpatient services.

“My life would be so different if it were not for the programs that helped me,” he said.

The care of those living with HIV/AIDS is particularly vital during the COVID-19 pandemic because those individuals are considered at-risk because of the underlying health condition. James said he has taken part in various virtual appointments and appreciates the safety measure taken by Public Health’s HIV clinic to safeguard its patients from coronavirus.

“As we make our way through the current COVID 19 pandemic, it is days like today that remind us of heroes like Ryan White who gave us inspiration and hope during other challenging times facing disease and discrimination,” said Board Chair V. Manuel Perez, Fourth District Supervisor. “These critical funding streams named in his honor are a vital source for treatment and care of some of Riverside County’s most vulnerable residents.”

To learn more about the programs offered through RUHS-Public Health, click www.rivcohiv aids.org.

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