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Damien Center honors Ryan White's legacy, 25 years of federal HIV/AIDS funding
Hoosier teenager left lasting impact for those affected by HIV

Indianapolis, IN—Wednesday, April 8, marks 25 years since Indiana teenager Ryan White passed away from HIV/AIDS-related complications. White's legacy continues to support those affected by HIV/AIDS both in Indiana and across the United States through federal legislation as well as efforts to continue increasing public education and research about HIV/AIDS.

Though faced with severe discrimination, hatred, and even expulsion from his Kokomo-area school for being HIV+, White ultimately became a leader in the fight against HIV/AIDS stigma. White passed away just one month before his high school graduation, but through federal funding for HIV/AIDS care and support, his efforts continue to make a tangible difference for those affected by HIV/AIDS today.

"The impact that Ryan White made not only on Indiana, but also throughout the nation was proof that one person can make a difference," says Damien Center Executive Director Tom Bartenbach. "Ryan dedicated himself to educating a very frightened and fearful nation about AIDS."

Just four months after White's death in 1990, Congress established The Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency (CARE) Act, which continues to offer subsidized care to people who do not have sufficient health care coverage or financial resources to cope with HIV/AIDS. As the largest federally funded program for people living with HIV/AIDS in the United States, the act provides care and support for roughly 536,000 people each year and more than 2,500 organizations, including The Damien Center.

The Ryan White CARE Act has had a profound impact on the ability of community-based organizations like The Damien Center to improve the lives of individuals living with HIV/AIDS. Life-changing programs such as medical case management, mental health services, substance abuse services, housing case management, non-medical case management, early intervention services, HIV testing and counseling, and emergency housing and financial assistance are all provided to eligible HIV+ individuals free of charge as a direct result of funding from the Ryan White CARE Act legislation. Funding through the CARE Act allows organizations like The Damien Center to stay at the forefront of a national movement to prevent the spread of HIV by reaching those affected by it and providing the medical care and support they need.

"The recent outbreak of HIV in rural Scott County, Indiana, is a potent indicator that preventing the spread of HIV must still be a priority both locally and nationally," says Bartenbach. "With the support of Ryan White federal funding, organizations like The Damien Center can continue to reach those affected by HIV/AIDS and offer them the care they need to reduce their risk of transmitting the virus to others."

In Indiana alone, more than 10,000 individuals are living with HIV. Nationally, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 1.2 million people are affected by the virus, 14% (one in seven) of whom do not know they are infected. Early diagnosis and treatment saves lives and is known to reduce the spread of HIV. Those with HIV who are on treatment and in care can reduce the risk of spreading the virus to others by as much as 96 percent. AIDS Service Organizations (ASOs) like The Damien Center work to honor Ryan White's legacy and continue to build on the momentum he created in the fight against HIV/AIDS. The Damien Center offers free and confidential HIV and STI (sexually transmitted infection) testing Monday through Friday and two Saturdays each month at 26 N. Arsenal Ave. in Indianapolis. Details about testing can be found at damien.org or by calling 317-632-0123.

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The mission of The Damien Center is to lead the fight to prevent the spread of HIV and to empower persons in Central Indiana affected by HIV/AIDS to move forward each day with dignity.

The Damien Center offers vital supportive, preventive, and medical services to those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS so they may live abundant and productive lives. We also provide comprehensive HIV prevention services, including HIV testing, prevention counseling, education, and advocacy.