Add to the long list of names of mothers who lost a child to AIDS, the name of Denise Smith. This year’s 25th Annual AIDS Walk/Run will be the first for her, having lost her son, Ronny, last December.

In spring of 2013, her children started asking Denise Smith, “What’s wrong with Ronny?” Ronny, the oldest of Denise’s six children, worked full time as a nurse’s aide at an Oswego nursing home. His younger siblings told her they had noticed that Ronny was having trouble walking, communicating, and he just seemed ‘off’ mentally. “Something’s just not right with Ronny,” they’d say and asked their mother to intervene.

When Denise asked her son if he was doing okay, Ronny admitted, “I just don’t feel right.” She became concerned as well and took him to a doctor in Oswego who did some testing but offered no real treatment. The doctor advised “just letting this run its course,” and scheduled a follow-up appointment for three weeks. Denise, who was paying a lot closer attention now, was not inclined to just let things run their course. Ronny had some new symptoms; his legs were now raw and bleeding; he had trouble forming thoughts; sometime his words made no sense. She was very anxious and wanted answers now – not later.

The Oswego doctor’s office referred them to Upstate in Syracuse where Ronny was soon admitted and subjected to a barrage of tests. When it came to being tested for HIV, Ronny balked, but Denise persuaded him to “get every test you can. We have to get this figured out!”

“I think he was afraid,” Denise said later. “I think he suspected that it might be HIV, but he couldn’t bring himself to get tested and face a future he was afraid to imagine.” The test confirmed Ron’s worst fear. He was positive for HIV and the disease had progressed to AIDS.

“When his tests came back with AIDS, I was totally ignorant about the disease.” Denise educated herself and vowed to her son that, “we are going to fight this.” But AIDS had a firm grip on Ronny and wasn’t letting go.

Ronny spent September through December in the hospital and moved directly into the family home upon his release. They spent countless hours working to regain his ability to walk and to talk. He took his medications as prescribed, but “in the end he lost his ability to communicate, but not before he made it clear that he understood he had sacrificed his life out of fear.”

In a close family like the Smith’s, Ronny’s AIDS affected everyone. Most responded with love and encouragement, but sister Cara was very angry with her brother for not having taken care of himself. “I knew my brother, my best friend, my rock had...
Our Mission:
To create healthy communities by opening doors to services that enhance the wellbeing of all.

Our Vision:
A community in which every person has the opportunity to achieve optimal health and equality.

Our Values:
Commitment to Excellence
Respect for People & Community
Wellbeing
Integrity
Empowerment
Teamwork

ACR Health Hotline
1.888.475.2437

ACR Health in Syracuse
Main Office
627 W. Genesee Street
Syracuse, New York 13204
315.475.2430 • 800.475.2430
Fax 315.472.6515
990 James Street – 2nd floor
Syracuse, NY 13203
315.475.2430

Q Center
617 West Genesee Street
Syracuse, New York 13204
315.701.2431

Syringe Exchange
637 West Genesee Street
Syracuse New York, 13204
315.475.2430 • 800.475.2430

ACR Health in Utica
287 Genesee Street - 2nd Floor
Utica, New York 13501
315.795.0661 • Fax 315.735.9551

ACR Health in Watertown
120 Washington Street - Suite 302
Watertown, New York 13601
315.785.8222 • Fax 315.836.0033

ACR Health in Canton
101 Main Street - 3rd floor
Canton, New York 13617
315.386.4493 • Fax 315.386.2530

ACR Health in Auburn
54 Wright Avenue, Suite 5
Auburn, New York 13021
315.282.0005 • Fax 315.282.0002

ACR Health in Oswego
10 George Street
Oswego, New York 13126
315.475.2430 • Fax 315.342.9813

Newsletter Editor
Jean Kessner

It’s the most consequential time of the year here at ACR Health. Our AIDS fundraising and awareness season is underway, getting us out the door and into our comfort zone, sharing straightforward information about how to stay safe from HIV; going full steam to End AIDS by 2020; and asking for your assistance to keep our life-saving programs adequately funded.

AWARENESS: Here is the direct and reliable way to not get AIDS:
• NEVER have unprotected sex with someone whose HIV status you do not know; use a condom or, if you have anonymous partners, take PrEP, the one-a-day pill that prevents HIV.
• NEVER share a needle regardless of what you are injecting. Use a clean syringe every time you inject; you can get them FREE from ACR Health’s Syringe Exchange.
• GET TESTED for HIV and other STDs. That service is FREE at ACR Health.

Please join us at one of our three AIDS Walk/Runs this year.

FUNDRAISING: Here is the direct and reliable way to support ACR Health: Participate in our events! We have three main AIDS Walk/Runs: the 19th Annual AIDS Hike for Life at Hamilton College which raised $35,508 on April 23rd. All of the youth programs and emergency client needs in the Mohawk Valley are sustained by the AIDS Hike for Life.

The 25th Annual AIDS Walk/Run (can you believe it? A quarter of a century!) takes place Sunday, June 4, 2017 at Beaver Lake Nature Center. Get involved, form a team, and join the drive to End AIDS by 2020. Thousands of people have participated over the years and thousands more kids have learned how to stay safe, healthy, and sexually smart through the programs the AIDS Walk/Run supports.

The North Country hosts the 18th Annual First Frost AIDS Walk/Run on Sunday, October 15. We’re lining up sponsors now and some teams are already holding fundraisers. They do this because they believe their community needs ACR Health. They believe that kids need straight answers to their questions, and a safe place to be who they are; ACR Health makes that possible for North Country youth.

ACR Health was born out of the HIV/AIDS crisis in 1983. Please support us any way you can at one of the big AIDS Walk/Runs. We have always promised that ACR Health will be here ... until it’s over. That promise stands.
just been given a death sentence, angry because he was an extremely smart individual, spoke three different languages, was loved by so many, he should have known better,” said Cara. “I will forever keep him not only in my heart but in my life.”

Ronny’s youngest brother, Noah, was in high school where the teachers knew that his brother was hospitalized. “I lied,” he told Denise. “I told them he had cancer.” She reassured her son that the lie was understandable, and maybe an easier way to explain.

“That doesn’t mean I’m ashamed of Ronny,” Noah said.

“I know that, honey.”

Ronny accessed services of ACR Health – especially helpful was the nutrition program, but in the end, AIDS had too much of a head start on him. His mother set up a Facebook page so Ronny, not wanting anyone else to make the same mistake he did, could share his lesson learned: don’t be afraid to get tested for HIV. He had 400 followers. In August 2016 he stopped taking his meds. It had all become too much and too painful. By December 5, he was gone.

Ronny’s death provoked a spark inside Denise to do everything possible to prevent this tragedy from happening to any other family. She knows now that HIV, when detected and treated early, can be contained and that HIV positive people can live long and well. She wishes that Ronny had not let his fear get in his way.

Denise has formed a team for the 25th Annual AIDS Walk/Run and she has agreed to take a leading role in ACR Health’s campaign to raise money and awareness about HIV/AIDS.

Investing in the Future

The spring application process for the Eddie “Future Greatness” award has ended with selection of two impressive young people each walking away with $500 to use toward higher education.

17-year-old Alexys Herrick is enrolled at OCC and will be using her award to help pay for her classes and further her education. She is embracing her college experience and while not completely sure of her career path, she feels drawn to pursuing an art major. Her response to the call that she had won the competition? “Shocked, ecstatic and inspired!”

18-year-old Emily Cox, a Q Center ally, will use her $500 award at SUNY Potsdam next year. Emily cares deeply about friendships and acceptance. In high school, she attends Gay-Straight Alliance meetings and cherishes her relationships. “We never know what others are thinking or feeling and our words can be so powerful,” said Emily. “Life is short and we have to put our best foot forward.”

Assistant Development Director, Maureen Harrington O’Neill notified Alexys and Emily of their wins. “I love telling them to take a moment to just be proud of themselves and of course to remind them the Q Center is always here as a resource for services and support. The founders of this award are changing lives and I am honored to be a small part of that when notifying the award winners.”

Four $500 awards are given each year: two in the Spring semester (deadline March 16th) and two in the Fall semester (deadline September 16th). All applicants must identify as LGBTQ or an ally, and be between the ages of 16-26 years of age. To apply: ACRHealth.org/youth/eddie

To apply: http://acrhealth.org/youth/eddie
Navigating Insurance Claims

From the North Country – a story about a sick child; a denied insurance claim that nearly wrecked a family’s reputation; and an intervention by ACR Health that saved the day.

Folded within ACR Health’s Insurance Enrollment division is the “Community Health Advocates” service that assists individuals and families with a wide range of issues related to insurance coverage including claims disputes. Sheryl Evans, like many navigators, wears both “Navigator” and “ Advocate” hats.

This story began October 12, 2014 with a trip to the emergency room for 11-year-old Emily Downey. Her family had health insurance; having enrolled after the Affordable Care Act took effect, and the ER visit would be covered. But when they arrived at Claxton-Hepburn Medical Center in Ogdensburg with their sick child they were told Emily’s insurance had been cancelled. Emily’s mom Becca went ahead with the visit anyway because she knew that they had valid insurance; she was the one who paid the bills.

Prior to the Affordable Care Act, John and Becca’s employers didn’t offer affordable health insurance and they had Medicaid. The children had Child Health Plus. When the Affordable Care Act required them to get insurance the parents enrolled in the Essential Plan and their children still qualified for Child Health Plus. The policies were in good standing. Proving that to the hospital, however, took 2½ years, countless hours of phone calls, emails, faxes, and the intervention of Sheryl Evans.

“Before Sheryl’s help, I was not getting anywhere with either the insurance company or the NYS Health Exchange,” said Becca Downey. In the meantime, the hospital sent the bogus bill to a collection agency which had a huge effect on the family’s credit and caused immense emotional and financial stress.

Becca was relentless but stymied. “You would talk to so many different people and no one could give us any answers,” said Becca. “By so many people looking into our case, they kept making more and more mistakes which in turn made things worse.” By working with Sheryl, Becca was able to have just one person, Sheryl, to oversee and get all of the problems corrected.

The back medical bill has eventually removed from collections; taken off the Downey’s credit report and paid; like it was supposed to have been in 2014. “If it wasn’t for all of Sheryl’s experience as a Consumer Health Advocate and her hard work, I fear this never would have been fixed.”

“Becca was a meticulous record keeper, making note of calls, letters, names, and progress,” said Sheryl. “She made a hard job easier. We are both glad this is concluded.”

Community Health Advocates assist individuals and families with a wide range of issues related to insurance coverage:

- Best prices on your prescriptions
- Basic advice and information on all health coverage
- Accessing financial assistance, to help pay medical bills
- Selecting a primary care provider
- Obtaining referrals for specialists and out-of-network providers
- Understanding how health care reform impacts you
- Authorization/denials of coverage, medical services, recertification and exemptions
- Claim disputes, fair hearings, complaints, appeals
- Billing issues

If you need a Community Health Advocate, call 800.475.2430
ACR Health received a big boost on April 23rd with a $35,508 bounty from the 19th Annual AIDS Hike for Life.

HIV rates in Oneida County remain high. In 2015, Oneida County reported:
• 20 newly diagnosed HIV cases and
• 9 newly diagnosed AIDS cases. (HIV diagnoses and AIDS diagnoses cannot be added in a meaningful way.)
• 20 HIV cases is up substantially from an average of 12 new HIV cases in four previous years.
“Those HIV numbers represent the lives of 20 people whose infections could have been prevented,” said Assistant Prevention Director John Arcaro, who oversees testing. “Through effective treatment and education, HIV will stop with them.”

As a leader in New York’s “End AIDS by 2020” campaign, ACR Health has increased HIV testing (up 36%) in the Mohawk Valley and added two new programs to educate and test at-risk populations about HIV: programs that work with (1) young men who have sex with men, and (2) substance users; both populations have a higher than average risk of acquiring HIV. These programs are in addition to long standing programs targeting heterosexual communities of color, adult gay men, and injection drug users.

100% of money raised at the 19th Annual AIDS Hike for Life will stay in the Mohawk Valley to support youth programming and emergency client needs.

The AIDS Hike for Life would not be possible without the support of our sponsors: Empower Federal Credit Union, Noble Health Services, BNY Mellon, Metlife Foundation, McDonalds, Mohawk Valley Health System, Rome Memorial Hospital, The Hartford, and Walmart; Media Sponsors: KISS FM 97.9 & 105.5, Bug Country 99.7 and 101.1, WUTQ Talk 100.7 FM, and CBS 2 Utica WKTV; In-Kind Sponsors: Bon Appétit Management, CNY Awards and Apparel, Utica Coffee Roasting Co., and Saranac; and special thanks to Hamilton Rainbow Alliance.
Are you or a loved one at risk for type 2 diabetes? According to the CDC, 9 out of 10 people with prediabetes do not know they have it. Pre-diabetes is when your blood glucose (sugar) is higher than normal, but not yet high enough to be considered diabetes. Type 2 diabetes can be delayed or prevented through effective lifestyle changes. ACR Health will link you to programs that can help you make those changes.

ACR Health now provides information and resources to learn more about Diabetes Prevention, Chronic Disease Self-Management, and hypertension. Individuals at risk can participate in CDC approved programs to cut the risk of developing diabetes and other chronic illnesses.

Participation for Diabetes Prevention Programs includes a risk assessment for individuals that are diagnosed with diabetes or at risk for it. Among the seven questions: are you a woman who has had a baby weighing more than nine pounds at birth? Do you have a parent or a sibling with diabetes? If you score high enough on the quiz, you may be at risk for pre-diabetes, and qualify for the programs.

“Having a chronic illness such as diabetes can significantly impact one’s quality of life,” said ACR Health’s Poonam Patel. “Diabetes Prevention and other evidence-based programs work with community members to help develop positive diet and lifestyle changes that promote healthy living.”

ACR Health helps clients gain information about programs in their area and can refer them to a resource to help develop skills and meet goals that will prevent them from developing diabetes and related complications.

If you want to learn more, call 800.475.2430 or email diabetescare@ACRHealth.org.

ACR Health Names Assistant Development Director

ACR Health is thrilled to announce the promotion of Maureen Harrington O’Neill to the position of Assistant Director of Development. She will build on her extensive experience and passion for our mission as she develops new funding sources in all of our nine counties. Ms. O’Neill began her career with ACR Health in 2011 with the task of designing a successful fundraising strategy for the Q Center in Syracuse - a safe place for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth, their families and allies. She significantly expanded the reach and the budget for LGBTQ Youth Services.

“Moe would think outside the box about how to engage the community with the Q Center. She created a sit down dinner, organized art classes, and developed fundraisers like BLOWOUT that showcased hair salons on a runway. Moe has done a dynamite job, we are lucky to have her on the ACR Health team,” said ACR Health Deputy Executive Director, Carrie Portzline-Large.

“I am lucky, I live in a progressive city with people who care and I have a dream job with amazing co workers who work very hard to ensure the health of my community,” said Ms. O’Neill. “I may have increased funding for the Q Center, but the truth is, the Q increased my passion for life. I am honored to continue the work and invite everyone to join me.”

As Assistant Development Director, Ms. O’Neill will continue to inspire actions to make a positive impact within our community. While working alongside the development team, she will provide support and will continue to bridge the funding gap needed to enhance ACR Health’s programs. As an innovator and leader, Maureen will build upon our efforts, especially in the Mohawk Valley.

“I may have increased funding for the Q Center, but the truth is, the Q increased my passion for life.”
Multiple frenzied meetings in Washington have so far failed to deliver the long-promised repeal of the Affordable Care Act. While we breathe a cautious sigh of relief for our clients and the thousands of families we had enrolled in health insurance, the Affordable Care Act debate is NOT over and we must stay on the alert, as the president has doubled down on his promise to repeal and replace Obamacare. We asked Navigator George Deveny to tell us exactly what is at stake in this debate.

As the country grapples with the changes that will occur in our health care system, all Americans should ask themselves some basic questions about what is the best course for our nation. Most importantly, do we want all Americans covered by health insurance, or do we want a system where up to 25 percent of our population will have none?

And what is the cost to our society when everybody is not covered? Gutting the Medicaid program will aggravate the problems of substance dependence, and put people with mental health issues out of programs they so desperately need.

The first year the ACA was implemented, we Navigators saw people with pre-existing conditions, some of whom previously were excluded from insurance by companies who were allowed to do so. Or people nearing the $1.5 million cap all policies had before the ACA. We must ask ourselves what will become of these people re health insurance and health care in the future? Will we allow our society to turn its back on these people?

Navigators help people enroll in the NY State of Health Marketplace every day. As changes to our health care system are proposed, we wonder what will the future bring to the people we have helped over the past three years? Will Medicaid be rolled back to pre-ACA levels, and what will happen to people just above the eligibility cut-off level? New York State currently offers two Essential Plans for people just above the Medicaid eligibility – will these people be also priced out of the market?

Whatever changes are adopted if we ask ourselves some tough questions now, we may all be better off in the future. I believe these questions should include: does our new healthcare system include consumer protections included in the ACA, like prohibiting lifetime caps on policies; prohibiting insurers from denying coverage based on pre-existing conditions? Or prohibiting discriminatory premium rates based on health status or gender?

Does it include Maximum Out of Pocket protection (MOOP), excusing enrollees from copay and deductibles if they hit the level of the MOOP? Does it include annual preventative exams included at no cost, including mammograms?

The informed questions we ask, and the decisions made by our political representatives, will affect all Americans in the near future. I urge everyone to learn about our health insurance system, and contact your representatives in Congress to add your voice to the debate!

George Deveny is one of 14 ACR Health Insurance Navigators that together have assisted 30,000 individuals with their health insurance.

You can reach a Navigator at 800.475.2430.
ACR Health offers its services to anyone without discrimination based on age, race, creed, color, gender, sexual orientation, economic status, political affiliation, marital status, handicapped status, or mode of transmission.

ACR Health is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Follow us on:

Supported by:

UPCOMING EVENTS

May 20, 2017 – Saturday
6th Annual Volley for the Dough
Team Stumblers fundraising event for the 25th Annual AIDS Walk/Run: 10:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m. at Cheap Seats Sports Bar and Grille, Oswego.

May 30, 2017 – Tuesday
Paint the Town RED
Annual kick-off press conference to a week of AIDS awareness that culminates at AIDS Walk/Run: 10:00 a.m. Clinton Square, downtown Syracuse.

June 1, 2017 – Thursday
Packet Pick-up Happy Hour
Turn in your fundraised dollars, receive your incentives, and get ready for the 25th Annual AIDS Walk/Run. 4:30-7:30 p.m. at WXYZ Bar at Aloft Hotel in the Inner Harbor. Entertainment by DJ Kobe from HOT 107.9

June 3, 2017 – Saturday
Second Chance Packet Pick-up
In preparation for the 25th Annual AIDS Walk/Run. Can’t make it to the Happy Hour? Join us at Fleet Feet on Bridge Street in DeWitt. 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

June 4, 2017 – Sunday
25th Annual AIDS Walk/Run-5K walk/run and 10K timed run
Central New York’s oldest and most successful AIDS fundraiser begins at 10:00 a.m. at Beaver Lake Nature Center, Baldwinsville. Helps us reach our $250,000 goal and together we can end AIDS!

June 31, 2017 – Wednesday
Pink Sneaker Award
The Pink Sneaker Award for outstanding commitment to equality and inclusion presented to Assemblyman Al Stirpe, United Way’s Frank Lazarski, BNY Mellon, and Andrew Brazill of Fox 68. Presentation at the CNY Philanthropy Center Ballroom, 5:00-7:00 p.m.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION FORUMS

Forums provide HIV education to community members and those interested in becoming volunteers. Events are held monthly in Syracuse and Utica. Call 800.475.2430 to sign up.

LGBTQ YOUTH SUPPORT GROUPS

ACR Health has numerous programs for LGBTQ youth, including support group meetings in Syracuse, Utica, Watertown, and the Mohawk Valley.

Participants are grouped by ages from 8-26.

The Q Center for a full listing

Q Center Central New York
617 West Genesee Street
315.701.2431 or QCENTERCNY@ACRHealth.org

Q Center Mohawk Valley
315.793.0661 x 133 or QCENTERMV@ACRHealth.org

Q Center Northern New York
315.785.8222 x 164 or QCENTERNNY@ACRHealth.org

If you wish to unsubscribe from this newsletter: information@ACRHealth.org or 800.475.2430.