ACR Health and the Rescue Mission Alliance have formed a partnership to establish an emergency 10-bed shelter for runaway and homeless lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth ages 12-17 in Syracuse and Onondaga County.

The need for additional emergency housing has become apparent in recent years. Area facilities capable of housing youth are frequently near or at capacity. The Rescue Mission is forced to turn youth away from its emergency shelter in Syracuse, which only serves adults 18 and older.

“These LGBTQ children are on the streets most often because they have been rejected by their families,” said ACR Health Executive Director Wil Murtaugh. “LGBTQ youth who go to homeless youth shelters nationwide report that they are discriminated against and victimized. This new Syracuse shelter will provide a safe, affirming space for LGBTQ youth.”

ACR Health’s Q Center has extensive services for young people, but has only limited ability to provide housing. Our Rapid Re-Housing caseload, for LGBTQ individuals 18-24 is maxed out, and the need for housing remains significant for that age group. There are no specialized housing services in Onondaga County for LGBTQ youth 12-17.

When ACR Health and the Rescue Mission Alliance announced their collaboration at a press conference, Rescue Mission Chief Executive Officer Dan Sieburg said, “Being a self-professed Christian, leading a faith based organization that has cared for the needs of the homeless for 130 years, I cannot in good conscience ignore the dire needs of homeless LGBTQ young people who are struggling to survive on the street while largely going unnoticed and underserved.”

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Shelter, project- ed to open in early 2019, will allow the Rescue Mission and ACR Health to bring what they each do best to the project. The Rescue Mission has extensive experience establishing and operating emergency shelters and permanent residences. ACR Health has a proven record providing counseling and programming to youth, specifically LGBTQ youth.

Fundraising for the youth shelter is underway with a goal of $500,000. The Plymouth Congregational Church in Syracuse has gifted $50,000 toward the project.

Homelessness affects many segments of the youth population, but LGBTQ youth are at greater risk. Approximately seven percent of the youth population identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning, but they account for 40 percent of homeless youth.

The challenges these youth face are tremendous. They attempt suicide at a high rate; they report being sexually assaulted on the streets and inside shelters; and they are homeless in many cases because their families reject or abuse them.
Life Changing

It’s spring and our fundraising season is in full swing! We had a fun and successful Hike for Life in the Mohawk Valley. **THANK YOU VERY MUCH!** Now it is on to ACR Health’s oldest and biggest fundraiser, the AIDS Walk/Run on June 3 at Beaver Lake Nature Center.

When the AIDS Walk/Run started 26 years ago, HIV/AIDS was ACR Health’s only cause. Now, through the expanded priorities we undertake on behalf of our state and national funders, our fundraising dollars go to support our four cornerstone causes: **HIV/AIDS, Addiction, LGBTQ Equality, and Poverty.**

We campaign to keep HIV/AIDS front and center because it was such a killer – of people, of families, of hope. Now as executive director of ACR Health I am keenly aware of all the lifesaving and life-affirming work that needs to be done outside the scope of AIDS.

Many conditions cripple the human spirit; some from illness, others from stigma and discrimination. ACR Health, through its groundbreaking work in AIDS supportive services, is adept at improving and transforming lives.

New York is spending millions to End AIDS by 2020; ACR Health is fully invested in that cause. While we have been working to get that epidemic under control, a new, horrible, epidemic has taken root in our nine-county service area. **ADDITION:** Those with substance use disorders are blamed for their dependence on drugs instead of being treated for a physical illness; reminiscent of the early days when AIDS was incorrectly inked to being gay. **LGBTQ Equality:** Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth suffer discrimination and physical and sexual assaults at high rates as they engage in sex work just to survive on our streets. **POVERTY:** ACR Health cannot erase poverty, but we can and do improve overall quality of life through services like health insurance enrollment, a Drug User Health Hub, and experienced Care Managers who connect individuals and families to services that nurture and protect.

I have come to understand how the fight to eradicate inequality, poverty, and addiction are analogous to the continuing fight against AIDS. Faced with the overwhelming threat to humanity that AIDS presented, our society blamed the victims and pushed them away.

Today, those with HIV/AIDS, the poor, those with substance use disorders, and LGBTQ individuals are marginalized and blocked from a seat at the community table. ACR Health’s programs and services are available to help move them away from the margins and into the mainstream. Please support us in this work.

Come to an event or hit the donate button on ACRHealth.org.
ACR Health has added an essential service for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth thanks to a $29,436 grant from the Community Foundation of Herkimer and Oneida Counties that funded the part-time position of Q Center Educator/Case Manager for the Mohawk Valley Q Center in Utica.

“As our area’s only resource focused on LGBTQ youth and family support, the Q Center plays an instrumental role in creating an inclusive community,” said Alicia Dicks, president/CEO of The Community Foundation. “The Q Center works to ensure the health, safety and fair treatment of all seeking services, work that is enhanced by their welcoming and dedicated staff.”

The Care Manager helps youth access services including HIV/STD/Hepatitis C testing, mental health counseling, health insurance, healthcare, and hormone replacement therapy providers. The Care Manager works to reunify families, connects youth to agencies that can assist with basic living needs like social services or food pantries, and agencies that can assist with school, resume building, and job hunting.

“A CR Health’s Q Center provides a safe place where LGBTQ homeless youth can go to seek assistance,” said Assemblyman Magnarelli. “Q Center programming helps LGBTQ youth and parents who are seeking to reunify with their children. I am pleased to have provided funding for these practical items, a washer and dryer, which will help the young people who utilize the Q Center become comfortable and find their way in our community.”

The washer-dryer also provide an assist to the Homeless Shelter project announced last week by ACR Health and the Rescue Mission. “All of those youth will be able to come to the Q Center and do their laundry and use other resources like the computers and the kitchen,” said ACR Health Executive Director Wil Murtaugh. “For their self-confidence and to enhance their ability to successfully apply for jobs or get accepted in college, this is a big step.”
Soggy weather sent ACR Health’s Annual Hike for Life indoors for the first time in 20 years, changing the entire flavor of the fundraising event into a big happy block party. The indoor venue was the finishing touch on the re-imagined and relocated Hike for Life which has expanded its scope, now raising money to serve hundreds of additional residents of the Mohawk Valley.

When the Hike for Life began 20 years ago at Hamilton College in Clinton, ACR Health’s mission was to support people affected by HIV/AIDS and to work diligently to prevent the spread of HIV. That mission remained front and center as the Hike for Life moved to SUNY Polytechnic Institute and added fundraising for the crucial community challenges of Addiction, Poverty, and LGBTQ Equality to the long-standing fight against HIV/AIDS.

“AIDS was an epidemic at the time of the first Hike for Life, and remains a threat, despite recent progress. Today’s epidemics of addiction, poverty, LGBTQ Inequality, and HIV/AIDS must be addressed for our community to succeed and thrive,” said ACR Health Executive Director, Wil Murtaugh.

The Hike for Life is ACR Health’s largest outreach and fundraising event in the Mohawk Valley. 100% of the money raised stays in the Mohawk Valley to support ACR Health’s mission to create healthy communities by opening doors for those fighting AIDS, Addiction, LGBTQ Inequality, and Poverty.

ACR Health would like to thank our Presenting Sponsors: Empower Federal Credit Union, The Hartford Kinney Drugs, and MetLife; as well as sponsors PharmBlue, Northern Safety Co. Inc., AmeriCU, Adirondack Bank, Walgreens, Mohawk Valley Health System, and McDonald’s. Our in-kind sponsors are: A Moveable feast, Bagel Grove, Greater Utica Chamber of Commerce, Bug FM, Talk FM, and Kiss FM.
HIV/AIDS has left a lot of scars in its wake … and a lot of memories. Nearly everyone who comes to Beaver Lake Nature Center on the first Sunday in June each year can tell you a personal story about why they take part in the AIDS Walk/Run.

Cheri Giancola has attended every AIDS Walk/Run since the first one in 1993. She was a nurse at Chittenango High School for 17 years and was keen to educate students about HIV and how to keep from getting it. She established the first Teen AIDS Task Force chapter in ACR Health’s nine-county service area, and oversaw it for 17 years. Their AIDS Walk/Run team was top youth fundraiser for many years.

While some schools shied away from educating about sexually transmitted diseases like HIV, Cheri knew that if she didn’t take the time to equip youth with the tools they needed to make smart relationship decisions she couldn’t be sure anyone else would. Her motto then and now: Knowledge Is Power.

For years, Barbara and Donald Coughlin have paid tribute to their younger child, Greg, who died of complications from AIDS in 2002. Greg’s aunt, Susan Benedict, remembers him as always hugging people - the unofficial greeter of family. “He always made people feel comfortable and welcome.”

About two dozen family members come each year, remembering Greg whose spontaneity and sweetness were bonds that held the family together, even all these years later. The family calls their team “Greg’s Rainbow.”

Come walk down memory lane with us June 3 at Beaver Lake Nature Center!

The 26th Annual AIDS Walk/Run, sponsored by Empower Federal Credit Union and Cathy J Berry MD & Associates, starts at 10:00 a.m. – rain or shine.

100% of the proceeds stay in Central New York to benefit ACR Health’s four cornerstone causes: HIV/AIDS, LGBTQ Equality, Addiction, and Poverty.
Safe, stable, affordable housing keeps people healthy. The lack of stable housing interrupts an HIV positive person’s ability to adhere to complicated medication, nutrition, and treatment regimens. Lack of stable housing has many negative consequences.

For people forced to live along the edges of the economy, ACR Health programs and services are a godsend. Take the case of 55-year-old Leon Caskinett who became permanently disabled when he fell from a third story roof in 2003. His back injury left him unable to work. He now lives in a trailer with his mother who is 83-years-old, disabled from a stroke, and has dementia.

Leon receives a monthly disability check for $733, which represents his entire income. Because Leon is HIV positive, though, he qualifies for programs exclusive to people with HIV/AIDS. He is eligible to use STAR Transportation for medical appointments; benefit from the help of a Care Manager; access Ryan White Health and Nutrition Health Education programs and, perhaps most importantly, receive rental assistance through HOPWA (Housing Opportunities for Persons With AIDS). HOPWA is a crucial program that stabilizes the lives of people with HIV, but the waitlist for housing assistance is long – right now it is two years.

Over the years, Leon managed to keep his head above water by being a thrifty shopper, especially when it came to food. “You can buy a box of individual snack packs with an expired sell-by date for about a dollar. That’s what I used to eat.”

In 2016 Leon made it to the top of the housing waiting list; HOPWA started picking up half of his rent, allowing him to breathe – and to eat – a little better. “The first purchase I made was to eat a salad. They cost a lot and don’t fill you up as much, but I really liked them, so that was the first thing I bought, and then a bag of fruit.”

If he is careful with his purchases, Leon can now afford to buy personal care items like deodorant and toilet paper. Many of our clients go without supplies like tooth paste, laundry detergent, and shampoo because food stamps don’t cover them and they are too costly otherwise.

### Urgent Need for Personal Care Items

ACR Health’s Volunteer Department is currently holding a personal care item drive to fill our empty pantry shelves. Will you help?

We need:
- Toothbrushes
- Toothpaste
- Bath Soap/Body Wash
- Tampons
- Baby wipes
- Dish Soap
- Razors
- Deodorant
- Laundry Soap

All donations are greatly appreciated and will be accepted at:
- 627 West Genesee Street, Syracuse;
- 287 Genesee Street, 2nd floor, Utica;
- 120 Washington Street, 3rd floor, Watertown
Monday-Friday from 8:30-4:30.

Thank you!
Expecting Future Greatness

Two young women have been selected by the Eddie Fund Committee to receive the Spring 2018 $500 Eddie “Future Greatness” awards to support and promote their higher education.

This is the second time ACR Health volunteer Alexys Herrick has been named an Eddie Fund winner. Alexis, unable to attend high school due to bullying, finished her high school education at Onondaga Community College, while earning college credits, and is now attending her first year of college, also at OCC.

“Winning this scholarship means everything to me. I want others to be able to read my message about what they can do to pay it forward. Not only will it help me spread kindness, it will help me in my college career. I plan to use this scholarship to help pay my college classes.”

“Future Greatness” winner Brooke Hendricks, who spent last year as a Jesuit Volunteer with ACR Health, says she is humbled and honored to have been chosen for the Eddie Award.

“The year that I spent immersed in different aspects of ACR Health was influential in shaping the type of physician that I hope to become. I will strive to provide inclusive, compassionate care to the LGBTQ+ population, individuals experiencing homelessness and those struggling with addiction. I am very grateful to be starting medical school with this generous assistance from the Eddie Fund and I will carry on Eddie’s passion for helping others, both in school and in my future career as a physician.”

The Eddie Fund award is dedicated to helping youth who have the desire and ambition to succeed. It is available to all LGBTQ youth and their allies, 16-26, who are registered in an accredited post-secondary institution.

The next deadline to apply is September 16, 2018. Find the application at ACRHealth.org/youth/eddie.

New Service at Drug User Health Hub

ACR Health’s Drug User Health Hub has begun treating individuals diagnosed with Hepatitis C, providing yet another service enhancement in the past year. Originally, the Medical Clinic provided acute medical care for injection drug users, but that mission has grown. In addition to hepatitis C and acute medical care, services now include medication assisted treatment; overdose prevention, aftercare, and safety planning for individuals who experience opioid overdose; placement into substance treatment; on-site mental health counseling; and training for providers to ensure availability of medical, mental health, and substance use services for people who drugs.

Clinic patients are screened by Nurse Practitioners for Hepatitis C, tuberculosis, HIV, other sexually transmitted diseases, and receive preventative care.

The Drug User Health Hub has become a trusted source of help in the community and has a waiting list of more than 150.
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.

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**UPCOMING EVENTS**

**May 29, 2018 - Tuesday**

**Paint the Town RED**

Annual kick-off press conference to a week of AIDS, LGBTQ, Addiction and Poverty awareness that culminates at AIDS Walk/Run: 10:00 a.m. Clinton Square, downtown Syracuse.

**June 3, 2018 - Sunday**

**26th 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.

**October 14, 2018 - Sunday**

**19th Annual First Frost Walk/Run**

1:00 p.m. Thompson Park Zoo and Conservatory, Watertown. Sign up as an individual or a team.

**Motivate, empower, and deliver with our new fundraising website.**

- Use social media to ask friends and family to donate
- Track your progress
- View event photos
- Watch the power of your money impact the causes you care about

All proceeds support ACR Health’s mission to create healthy communities by opening doors for those fighting AIDS, Addiction, Poverty, and LGBTQ Inequality.

**INVEST IN YOUR COMMUNITY. GET INVOLVED TODAY!**

[ACRHealth.org/events](https://ACRHealth.org/events)  
315.475.2430

**Q CENTERS FOR LGBTQ YOUTH**

Resources throughout Central, Northern, and Mohawk Valley regions.  
For information call 800.475.2430 or email QC@ACRHealth.org  
Group times listed ACRHealth.org/youth

**TESTING SERVICES**

- HIV, gonorrhea, chlamydia, syphilis, and Hepatitis C. Testing@ACRHealth.org

**NARCAN TRAINING**

Monthly trainings at ACR Health offices. Appointments: Narcan@ACRHealth.org

**SYRINGE EXCHANGES**

- Syracuse: 637 West Genesee Street and Outreach Van at corner of Dudley & Fitch Street
- Utica: 287 Genesee Street
- Watertown: 135 Franklin Street  
SEP@ACRHealth.org

**DRUG USER HEALTH CLINIC – SYRACUSE**

Provides onsite access to acute medical care, medication assisted therapy, and linkage to additional medical resources.

**HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAMS**

Health insurance enrollment and advocacy. Navigator@ACRHealth.org

**GET INVOLVED. JOIN THE TEAM.**

For more information on all programs or if you wish to unsubscribe from the newsletter:

information@ACRHealth.org or 800.475.2430