National AIDS Memorial Announces $50,000 in Scholarships to Help Educate the Next Generation of Leaders to Fight HIV/AIDS

San Francisco (November 10, 2016) – The National AIDS Memorial, through its Pedro Zamora Young Leaders Scholarship Program, has awarded ten outstanding undergraduate students $50,000 in financial scholarships to further pursue their educational goals and commitment to active roles of public service and leadership in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Named in honor of AIDS educator, activist and reality television pioneer Pedro Zamora, who passed away on November 11, 1994 from an AIDS-related illness, the scholarship program has helped support the education of young people who today are engaged in a wide variety of HIV-related work both in school as well as within the chosen academic field.

“Pedro knew that the key to changing social misconceptions about HIV/AIDS lay in the hands of the youth of America,” said Pedro’s Real World roommates Pam Ling, M.D. and Judd Winick, author/illustrator of the award-winning graphic memoir Pedro and Me. “With the support of the Pedro Zamora Young Leaders Scholarship, these ten young students will continue making a positive difference in their communities. We’re very proud of these recipients and the work National AIDS Memorial is doing continuing his legacy.”

The scholarships recipients announced today will each receive a $5,000 scholarship and include:

Tsion Afman was born in Ethiopia; after her parents died she was placed in an orphanage and later adopted by a family in Washington. Today, she is a freshman at the University of Washington and aims to work to translate and disseminate information about sexually transmitted diseases, specifically HIV/AIDS, to other countries. During her time at Newport High School (Bellevue) she became involved with AIDS Student Peer Educators at Newport (ASPEN) becoming a peer advocate and conducted workshops on topics ranging from diversity to STD, HIV/STD prevention, and contraception.

Albert Appouh is a junior at Rutgers University in New Jersey. Albert’s goal is to graduate with honors and begin working as a health and sex education teacher in an urban high school. Growing up gay and surrounded with misinformation, Albert is driven to end the HIV-related stigma. He has worked organizing various HIV/AIDS awareness events at Rutgers University, and with the Rutgers Children’s AIDS Network, the New Jersey HIV/AIDS Planning Group and AIDS Walk.

Caitlyn Anderson is a sophomore at University of Nevada Las Vegas and plans to graduate with a Bachelor’s Degree in Communications with a minor in Gender and Sexuality Studies. Caitlyn’s focus is on prevention techniques; the effects education has on risk behaviors; and providing resources, specifically health and housing for LGBTQ youth. She has worked lobbying local and (?) state elected officials to
approve a medically accurate and LBGTQ-inclusive sexual health education curriculum for public schools. On-campus and at local high schools she works providing sexual health workshops dedicated to breaking the stigma of those living with HIV/AIDS.

Benjamin Di’Costa is a freshman at Truman College in Chicago and plans work in Policy and Political Advocacy to make sure that his voice and those that follow are heard. Benjamin has traveled extensively sharing his story and working with organizations on how to better serve the youth and young adult community. He is currently working as a HIV Prevention Coordinator, PrEP Specialist for a local organization called Chicago House and Social Service Agency.

Ruben Molina is a junior at the University of Florida and a long-time volunteer at Gatorwell, the health and wellness organization at the University of Florida, dedicated to talking to students about safe sex and resources available from on and off-campus physicians. During the summer months, Ruben worked at Valley AIDS Council in South Texas helping to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS, focusing on young Latino men. Ruben plans to attend medical school and he hopes to work closely treating the LBGTQ community.

Abdon Orrostieta is a second year scholarship recipient and senior at the University of Central Florida in Orlando. He volunteers with Latino Salud, a nonprofit community- and minority-based HIV agency that provides HIV rapid testing and linkage services making Ryan White support and other medical services accessible to HIV-positive individuals. He is also a member of the Health Awareness and Prevention Society (HAPS), which promotes increased awareness and healthy living through education and prevention, and plans to incorporate what he has learned through his involvement with HAPS and Latino Salud into his future professional endeavors.

Hannah Piecuch is a freshman at Agnes Scott College in Atlanta. She is passionate about reproductive rights and sex education. While in high school she worked to mitigate stigma, increase access to care, and promote education surrounding HIV/AIDS. With the help of her peers, she created Knowledge Empowering Youth, where teens undergo training to help facilitate comprehensive sex education classes, where they discussed basic anatomy, consent, healthy relationships, and safe sex. She plans to become a sex education expert with a double major in education and gender studies to battle the stigma against people with AIDS and improve knowledge of prevention.

Nestor Rogel is a junior at Cal State University Dominguez Hills in Carson City. He was born HIV positive and after losing his mother to AIDS-related pneumonia became an advocate for the rights and wellbeing of youth living with HIV. Nestor first volunteered with Children’s Hospital Los Angeles and then with Student Global AIDS Campaign. His efforts led him to lobby members of Congress for increased funding for the Presidential Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. His work helping to end discrimination and break stereotypes earned him the Hero Award from the South Bay AIDS Network. He is working toward a career in political organizing and advocacy.

Patrick Sabillon is a freshman at Florida State University living with HIV and works closely with Compass’ Outreach visiting at-risk communities like rehab centers, educating people on how to prevent HIV and the resources available for those living with HIV/AIDS. Patrick knows that anybody can be infected with AIDS, and is concerned with the rising number of HIV cases in black and Latino communities. His goal is to reach out to young HIV positive people who are struggling with the mental health effects of living with HIV-depression, anxiety, and stigma – and navigating the healthcare system by themselves.

Manuel Venegas is a second-year scholarship recipient and a senior at the University of Washington. Receiving this award will help him finish his undergraduate studies in Latin American & Caribbean Studies with an emphasis on Global Health. His background in public policy, community organizing and mobilization are just some key factors that come into play when he advocates for HIV & AIDS at the community, state and national levels.
“I made a promise to myself and to my mom after she died that I would work to empower and support youth living with HIV/AIDS,” said Rogel. “This scholarship from the National AIDS Memorial will help me continue my education and serve as a positive role model helping break the stereotypes about HIV/AIDS.”

The National AIDS Memorial started the scholarship program in 2009 and has since expanded its reach to high school seniors and college students from across the country through the support of corporate and individual donors, including major support this year from Gilead and Wells Fargo.

“The grants provided by Wells Fargo and Gilead Sciences are supporting the education of these truly amazing students who are making a difference in their communities and on campus,” said John Cunningham, executive director of the National AIDS Memorial. “Without the leadership and commitment from Wells Fargo and Gilead Sciences, this program wouldn’t have the tremendous impact it is having, not just on these students’ lives, but in helping develop the next generation of leaders to help end HIV/AIDS.”

The Pedro Zamora Young Leaders Scholarship is open to all current high school seniors, and college freshman, sophomores and juniors (ages 27 and younger) who demonstrate an active commitment to fighting HIV/AIDS and taking on roles of public service and leadership. To learn more about the scholarship program and the National AIDS Memorial, visit www.aidsmemorial.org or call (415) 765-0497.

About the National AIDS Memorial: The National AIDS Memorial, known as “the Grove”, is a dedicated space in the national landscape which honors lives touched by AIDS, and articulates the epidemic’s enormous societal impact and the community’s magnificent response. The Grove was created twenty-five years ago at the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic as a place where those impacted by AIDS could both grieve and begin the process of healing. In 1996, the Grove was elevated as a National Memorial through legislation sponsored by Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi and signed into law by President Bill Clinton. Today, nearly 25,000 individuals from around the world have contributed over 150,000 volunteer hours to support the National AIDS Memorial Grove and its mission to provide, in perpetuity, a place of remembrance so that the lives of people who died from AIDS are not forgotten and the story is known by future generations. For more information visit www.aidsmemorial.org, follow on Facebook, @AIDS_Memorial on Twitter or call 415-765-0497.

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