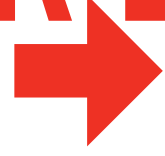


SIR ELTON JOHN



On Giving Back

Sir Elton John

Established by Sir Elton John in 1992, the Elton John AIDS Foundation (EJAF) is a leader in supporting innovative HIV/AIDS prevention education programs and direct care and support services to people living with HIV/AIDS. EJAF has raised more than \$150 million for programs in fifty-five countries around the world.

→ ejaf.org



In the 1980s there was so much misinformation surrounding HIV/AIDS. People were genuinely terrified, and there was a great deal of stigma surrounding the disease. During this time, I became involved with the fight against HIV/AIDS because I was inspired by Ryan White and his family. People shut him out of school, shot bullets at his home, and spread lies about him. But Ryan didn't hate them. He knew they were just uninformed and afraid. Ryan and his family were such positive and forgiving people, despite the horrific prejudice they encountered.

The United States government was disgracefully slow in doing anything toward the fight against HIV/AIDS. There were no antiretroviral drugs at that point; insurance companies showed prejudice toward gay men in their AIDS treatment policies. So many people would lose their jobs after being diagnosed with the disease, and then lose their homes because they had no financial support.

In 1992 I decided to bring focus to all of my AIDS-related work by establishing the Elton John AIDS Foundation. After years of reckless behavior and drug addiction, I felt a huge responsibility to make up for lost time and give back to anyone living with or affected by the disease. The goals of EJAF are education, awareness, and direct care and support. Our efforts are concentrated on the most highly marginalized and vulnerable populations living with the disease. Awareness has improved massively in the Western world, but there is still more work to be done. Lately we seem to be losing ground as a new younger generation of people becomes infected with the disease. And in the developing world there is even more work ahead of us.

I feel my greatest strength is in the area of fundraising. I am able to use my celebrity to bring people together and help them understand the desperate need to support the fight against HIV/AIDS. I am particularly motivated whenever I make visits around the world and see the difference our foundation is making in the fight against the disease. Despite the staggering worldwide numbers associated with the disease, even the smallest amount of money can make a huge difference. People shouldn't be intimidated by the statistics surrounding HIV/AIDS. Everyone can make a difference. Write a check! No amount is too small. We constantly hear stories from people across the United States that participate in AIDS Walks, run in races, and host lunches to raise money. They simply called up their local AIDS organizations and got involved. It's not just grand fund-raising dinners that are important, it's the people in every city and town speaking in their churches and schools to continue to raise awareness and dispel stigma and prejudice wherever it exists.

I have a very special, a very rich life, but when I see the gratitude people have for the little we've given them, I feel I've got to do more. Until the day I die I'll continue getting out there and raising money for people with AIDS.

RYAN WHITE

In 1984 13-year-old Ryan White was diagnosed with AIDS after contracting the virus through a blood transfusion. Given six months to live, he asked to continue to attend school. Ryan and his family were forced to battle discrimination from their community as well as the Kokomo, Indiana, school board after Ryan was barred from the classroom. His fight gained national attention and Ryan soon became a spokesperson for greater AIDS awareness. His story touched the hearts of the entire country, including celebrities such as Elton John, Phil Donahue, Greg Louganis, and Michael Jackson, all of whom offered their support to the teen. After a 5-year battle, Ryan White died of AIDS-related complications. At his bedside were his family and his friend Elton. Soon after his death, Congress passed the Ryan White CARE Act to provide federal funding for treatment and education for people affected by HIV.

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Sir Elton John and David Furnish hold a baby who was born HIV-negative at the Site B Hospital, Khayelitsha in South Africa.