Despite COVID-19, These SMART Riders Raised $700,000 for HIV Groups

Florida's SMART Ride cycling fundraiser got a COVID-19 makeover to help six local HIV nonprofits.

January 27, 2021 By Trent Straube

Not even the COVID-19 pandemic could prevent SMART Ride cyclists from raising HIV funds. In fact, they exceeded their 2020 goal of $500,000 and by December 31 had raised $700,000 to be distributed to six HIV/AIDS nonprofits in Florida. But don't worry: They did it by keeping safety and social distancing concerns in mind—and by totally reimagining the annual fundraiser.

Traditionally, the SMART Ride (the Southern Most AIDS/HIV Ride) takes place over two days in November, with over 500 bicyclists trekking 165 miles from Miami to Key West and hundreds more individuals supporting their efforts. In 2019, the event brought in $1.4 million. Since its inception, the event has raised over $12 million.

Last November, amid the pandemic, SMART Ride 17 had to be reinvented. Participants picked an activity to perform for a metric of 165 over three days. Some cyclists pedaled their usual 165 miles—on their own or on a stationary bike. Others cleaned a beach for 165 minutes. One person even rode a paddleboard for 16.5 miles, according to SMART Ride founder Glen Weinzimer.

Another awesome Crew member doing awesome things to our community! Thank you Jane Kordish, new manager of our Massage Team for your love and support for the Ride and for your dedication to help others with Team Rubicon!

Posted by SMART Ride on Saturday, November 21, 2020

The new format allowed folks who aren't cyclists to participate directly. SMART Ride crew member Jane Kornish, of Team Rubicon, posted on Facebook that she did volunteer work for 165 hours in Lake Charles, Louisiana, helping the community recover from Hurricane Laura.

"The need to provide the agencies we benefit and, ultimately, the individuals needing services remained great," said Weinzimer, adding, "Not doing an event was out of the question." The ride's title sponsor, CAN Community Health, helped cover costs Weinzimer said, and ensured funds went to the HIV nonprofits.

A virtual check-presentation ceremony was held January 17, with 14 people in attendance, instead of the usual hundreds. According to SMART Ride, the beneficiaries are:

- Miracle of Love, Inc., the oldest and largest nonprofit minority AIDS service organization in Central Florida.

- Metro Wellness & Community Centers, a multifaceted agency in Hillsborough, Pasco and Pinellas counties serving the local HIV community via medical case management and services relating to mental health issues, substance abuse and prevention, testing and outreach.

- Compass Community Center, Palm Beach County's LGBTQ center, aims to challenge long-standing stereotypes and promote awareness of the caring nature of the diverse LGBTQ community.

- Broward House improves quality of life for individuals impacted by chronic health challenges, including HIV, by providing pathways to wellness.

- Pridelines provides safe space, social support, skills building, leadership development, HIV testing and support services and more for LGBTQ youth and their straight allies and the community. In service for more than 30 years, Pridelines is Miami-Dade County's LGBTQ Community Center.

- AIDS Help, Florida's oldest continuously operating AIDS service organization, is the only agency

in Monroe County that serves individuals with HIV and AIDS.

SMART Ride 18 is scheduled for November 19 and 20, 2021. For more information, visit TheSMARTRide.org. In 2018, POZ profiled SMART rider Uli Schackmann, who went way more than the extra mile by biking across the country to raise AIDS awareness. Read about her in "Uli's Amazing Journey." To read a collection of POZ articles about people and organizations that raise money and awareness for HIV/AIDS, click #Fundraiser.

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