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Alex Danford

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Facsimile Cover Sheet

To: *Patsy Fleming*
Company:
Phone:
Fax:

From: Jerry Atchison
Company: National Leadership Coalition on
AIDS
Phone: 202-429-0930
Fax: 202-872-1977

home 301 587-7842

Date: 02/06/95
**Pages including this
cover page:**

Comments: *Please let me know
your decision as soon as
possible.*

May 29, 1995

Jerry Atchison
White House Student Intern Program
National AIDS Fund
1400 I Street NW, Suite 1220
Washington, DC 20008

Dear Mr. Atchison:

I wish to apply for the position of White House Student Intern. I am very interested in the prospect of working on Youth and HIV/AIDS: The American Agenda. As an HIV/AIDS educator I have seen many of the barriers that stand between my students and a lower risk lifestyle. Young people live in a world dominated by uncertainty and feelings of low self worth. As the instances of HIV transmission continue to rise in youthful populations, we must aggressively and honestly address the issues that contribute to a young person's risk. My educational efforts at the college level have been focused on fact based information combined with emotional foundation building and, when appropriate, practical experience utilizing educational devices.

Adolescents and young adults often do not have the coping skills required to successfully negotiate lower risk romantic or sexual encounters. Particularly if a youth has issues of sexual or gender identification, abuse, poverty or drug use, building self esteem usually takes a back seat to short term survival. Until very recently, America has not put forth a concerted national effort to address HIV/AIDS as an issue of importance to young people. This lack of leadership has dealt a fatal blow to many of our nations finest and youngest citizens.

Sexuality can be an embarrassing subject for a parent to broach, and few want to acknowledge that their children could become involved with drug or alcohol use. It is important that steps be taken now to increase the scope of educational programs geared toward youth. Peer education efforts in school systems are highly valuable in that students are exposed to information and skills from their own perspective. Pressure from peers to become sexually active can be a powerful influence on a young person, but that very suggestive power can be counteracted by, for instance, committed school age volunteers. HIV/AIDS peer education is gaining wider acceptance, but difficulty instituting programs of this nature is often still encountered in school board meetings. Many parents of at risk children still believe that taking their kids to church once a week will alone provide all the skills required to navigate risky situations.

If selected, I would bring to this project a valuable, youthful perspective. I grew up with the threat of HIV, and I came of age HIV positive. One of my most important long term goals is to give young people opportunities, which I did not have, for growth and self preservation. I view this internship as an occasion to accomplish that goal in a positive, unifying way.

Thank you for your consideration.

Alex Danford

Alex Danford

GROWING UP AND COMING OF AGE

Alex Danford

HIV entered my awareness in 1983 on a very personal level. I was thirteen when rumors began wafting up to my home town of Seattle. Gay men were dying of some horrible new disease in California, and no one knew any more than that. As I was already aware of bisexual feelings at that time, my panic level inched up over the years as more information came out and as the epidemic came closer to me and my community. I spent ten years of my life in absolute terror of testing positive for the virus, and I went through every form of denial that an at risk teen can devise. I lied to my friends and family for years, but not about being bisexual or gay. Whenever the question "Have you been tested?" came up, I always said "yes", and that I was fine.

When I was sixteen years old, I tested anonymously at the insistence of an older woman with whom I had been intimate, but couldn't bring myself to get the results. She tested negative and I told her that I had also. I was besieged with guilty apprehension because I knew that if a man wanted to have unsafe sex with me, I would rather convince myself that he was negative than lose the intimacy over an insistence that precautions be used. I had a general understanding of "safe" sex (as it was referred to then), and each time I allowed a situation to occur that put me at risk, I would obsess for several days about whether this had been "the one".

My self esteem had been low to begin with, so it didn't ever take much of a nose dive to hit rock bottom, which happened regularly through my adolescent years. Although I was very "out" about my sexual orientation with family and in high school, that still didn't afford opportunities to hold hands in public, or go to a prom with a boyfriend. I was always careful about which hallways I used in school, as I had been caught unaware before. I was certainly no fighter and I paid a heavy toll for publicly disclosing my sexual orientation. I had no way to be gay outside of a club setting, and an attraction in a gay club doesn't have a lot to do with second dates. Finding someone at the dance clubs to take me home was a high priority through the 1980s, and all the time I was too frozen with fear to ascertain my serostatus.

Most young people live with an ill perceived sense of indestructibility. However, I have spoken to a number of gay men in my age range and a very common attitude among us is a sense of inevitability. So many of my older gay brothers were getting sick and dying around me and the gay community as yet was still alone in the attempt to mobilize early on in the crisis. I remember watching one of the first speeches in which President Reagan mentioned the word AIDS. It was 1987, and already thousands of people had died. I understood perfectly why it came across in such a disconnected way. I understood why he hadn't paid any public attention to it before then. This disease was killing all the right people, and addressing the issue on a national level was a politically dangerous move for anyone to make. As the number of funerals that I attended had already passed 15 by then, the only thing I saw in my future was embarrassment, pain and death. "Why should I go to college?" I reasoned. I always tried

not to consciously believe that I was infected, but the pervasive mind set that colored all of the life decisions I made was that I must be. . .or would be.

How I could have made it through the resulting drug and alcohol abuse, which marked the better part of my adolescence, is beyond me. I felt that the only times that I could escape the impending doom which surrounded me was when I could alter my consciousness, pick someone up and pretend, for awhile, that I was with a person who loved me. Love became synonymous with sex, and I couldn't face the risks involved in my actions, so I didn't. In December of 1992 I finally took another anonymous test. I had been practicing safer sex with increasing regularity over the previous two years, and I had myself convinced that there might actually be a chance I was HIV negative. I fell apart when my result was handed to me.

"HIV ANTIBODIES-----NEG".

"What do you mean, I'm HIV negative"!? The possibility for happiness was before me, but getting myself to that point while reducing my risk was going to be tremendously hard work. Elation was quickly followed by guilt. How could I have led such a frivolous, high risk life and not be infected? "Innocent victims" were being paraded through the press as an attempt to garner support on the issue from less tolerant segments of the population. All that these campaigns said to me was that, as a gay male, I was guilty for the suffering and death of others. I left the free clinic finally aware that I had emotional issues which I would have to address before I could move forward. I decided for the first time that I had value. I began to explore myself in much greater detail than I had allowed myself to before and my confidence grew with the knowledge that I wasn't bad or guilty at all. I was still involved in night life, but I was getting strong and making much wiser decisions.

By June, I had been working for several months toward leading a healthier lifestyle, but I still didn't have a sense of what direction I wanted my life to take. I was aware that I had many different talents, but committing to one course of action would mean movement of a sort that I was still unused to. Nonetheless, I had worked hard to improve my attitudes and behaviors and had begun to feel as though Seattle couldn't take me any further. Originally I had planned on Atlanta, but I didn't have any connections there. Close friends of mine lived in Dayton, however, which was a one day drive from Atlanta, as well as Chicago, New York and Washington, DC. There were also a number of excellent universities in Dayton, and college sounded like a viable option in a town with few big city distractions. The thought that I might not be happy living in a small town mattered little to me at the time. I was ready to leave behind old patterns in favor of getting on with my life. I made arrangements to lease a room in a friend's house, so I would need only to job hunt and fill out college applications.

Two days after my arrival, I received a phone call from my doctor in Seattle. Before I left, I had gotten a complete physical and updated my shots. I had also requested an HIV test, fully expecting a negative result. I had tested negative only nine months before, and had been diligently practicing safer sex for over a year. I felt as though I would never be able to stop crying.

Since I had tested negative less than a year before, I had expected that my HIV infection could not have progressed very far. My T-cell count had a different story to tell however, and I was already near the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines for an AIDS diagnosis. I spent the next nine months working at Goodwill Industries. It wasn't the only job I could find, but it offered excellent health insurance benefits.

Friends saved my life, floating me when I ran out of money, supporting me when I got insane with grief and panic. I don't know from where they drew the strength, but they protected me from disaster as I went quite crazy for three months. After I came up for air, I realized that I needed to speed the process I had begun in Seattle, with new urgency. I had taken those first steps toward heightening my self esteem a year before, and I couldn't allow this new tragedy the power to sink my boat. I needed to learn all that I could about HIV and what I might do to prolong my existence. I had gotten into a clinical trial early on, but the experimental drugs made me violently ill. If I was going to be proactive about my own health, I needed to connect with people and activities that would help me understand the dynamics of my illness.

Volunteerism seemed like a good way to find the answers to many questions. My reasons for involvement definitely weren't altruistic, at first, but as I became more and more drawn in, I began to realize that feeling good about self and one's actions has a powerful curative effect. Sitting on several different non-profit boards and cleaning the local AIDS Foundation building was a lot to ask of someone working full-time for minimum wage. Frankly though, there were few other options in Dayton to occupy me. Even as I was making good friends in the HIV community, most of them were over thirty-five. I remained the youngest HIV positive person I had met in this city.

When the opportunity to join AmeriCorps National Service presented itself, I jumped at it. I was only taking a slight cut in pay, and I had a chance to work specifically with AIDS related issues. My placement at the American Red Cross was perfectly suited to my talents and goals. I was an HIV/AIDS educator predominantly at the college level, and I was more effective at it than I expected to be. I had not been exposed to a comprehensive risk reduction presentation until I was over twenty-one. It is my belief that I would have altered my behavior had I witnessed, at age eighteen, a presentation similar to the kind I facilitate now.

Young people need to have sexual issues de-mystified. They need to know that they are worthy of respect from self and all others. They must understand that the rest of their life depends on the choices they make. I have found a way to express truths to the very people who most need the message. I have found a degree of self esteem that I can share with my audience. Education is a key. It unlocks the door to self worth.

ALEX DANFORD
28 McDaniel Street
Dayton, Ohio 45405
(513)228-2585

WORK HISTORY:

Sept. 15, 1994 to Present: AmeriCorps National Service Volunteer,
American Red Cross, Dayton Area Chapter
Supervisor: Joan Klopf, Health Specialist (513)222-6711

Title and Duties: HIV/AIDS Peer Education Facilitator. Responsible for development and implementation of educational programs and events in conjunction with appropriate faculty, student groups and community organizations within eight area colleges and universities.

Dec. 15, 1993 to Sept. 15, 1994: Goodwill Industries of Dayton

Supervisor: Roy Parks, Store Manager (513)461-4800

Title and Duties: Salesperson. Duties included cashiering, sales assistance, stocking and merchandising.

PERSONAL ACTIVITIES-LOCAL:

Advisory Board Member for the Dayton Regional AIDS Partnership

Core Review Team Member for the Dayton HIV Community Prevention Planning Group

PERSONAL ACTIVITIES-NATIONAL:

Charter Member of the National Association of Positive Youth

ACHIEVEMENTS:

Participated in the official 1994 White House World AIDS Day Event. Six HIV positive youth met with President Clinton in the Oval Office to discuss how HIV/AIDS should be addressed on a national level.

Participated in the Metro TeenAIDS' 1995 National Youth Conference

Participated in the 1995 National HIV Positive Youth Leadership Conference

Moderated the HIV Testing and Youth - Policy Statement Working Session at the AIDS Policy Center for Children, Youth and Families 1995 Public Policy Conference

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June 1, 1995

Jerry Atchison
White House Student Intern Program
National AIDS Fund
1400 I Street, NW, Suite 1220
Washington, DC 20005

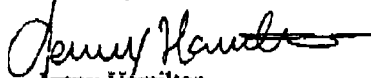
Dear Mr. Atchison:

I have known Alex Danford for eight months, although it seems much longer. During this period of time, Alex has been serving as an AmeriCorps Member in the National AIDS Fund Youth and HIV Service Partnership, volunteering a year of time as an HIV/AIDS youth educator at the American Red Cross in Dayton, Ohio. Since the beginning of his orientation and through the first eight months of his service, I have been highly impressed with the quality of Alex's work and his unyielding dedication to his assignment at the Red Cross. Watching Alex's enthusiasm for service work grow has given me great pleasure and consequently I follow his career path with interest. I am delighted to recommend Alex as an intern for the *Youth and HIV/AIDS: The American Agenda* program.

From the beginning of his service with the National AIDS Fund AmeriCorps Program, Alex distinguished himself by his hard-working professionalism. As a trainee, he followed each training seminar with seriousness and curiosity, always asking for more information, always wanting to understand the bigger picture. Although he had no previous peer education experience, Alex has sought out information. Alex is someone who both knows how to learn, and what he needs to learn to accomplish the service which was assigned him. In a few short months he absorbed the skills necessary to do his job effectively. He has done a tremendous job of networking student peer education and support groups on different university campuses to each other, providing the information and technical assistance these groups need to become effective student organizations and enhancing the youth and HIV program within the Red Cross's Health and Safety Services Department. He brings to his service a passion for education others about HIV/AIDS and a profound commitment to improving the information and support given to our youth in regards to the epidemic.

In eight months of service with AmeriCorps, Alex has been able to demonstrate his superior organizational ability, conscientiousness, commitment to service, flexibility and desire to learn. I personally enjoy working with Alex and would gladly do so again. He would be an inquisitive and inspiring colleague, always able to challenge assumptions while continuing to support the process. He has my highest recommendation.

Sincerely,


Jenny Hamilton
Project Director, AmeriCorps



Dayton Area Chapter
370 West First Street
Dayton, Ohio 45402
(513) 222-6711

May 26, 1995

Jerry Atchison
National AIDS Fund
1400 I Street NW
Washington, DC 20008

Dear Mr. Atchison,

Please consider this letter of recommendation for Alex Danford. Alex is applying to be a White House Student Intern for the project, Youth and HIV/AIDS: The American Agenda.

Alex is an AmeriCorps volunteer. He has worked in that capacity as part of the Health and Safety Services team at the Dayton Area Chapter of the American Red Cross since September 1994. We have the highest regard for Alex and his abilities, especially his enthusiasm, high energy level and tenacity and ability to accomplish what he sets his mind to. He thrives on challenge. Alex is an effective communicator, both in structured, precise situations and in those where shared attitudes and values have more meaning. He is so effective because he is organized, has strong verbal and written skills, thinks clearly, and attends to detail. He has obvious leadership skills and is comfortable taking charge. He also values teamwork and cooperative process. Alex has a broad scope and extensive understanding in areas relating to HIV/AIDS and a strong commitment to community education.

We depend on Alex for his commitment and his capability. We appreciate him for his warmth and vitality. It has been a pleasure to watch him grow in skills and confidence. We are sure his inclusion in the project, Youth and HIV/AIDS: The American Agenda, will help produce a superior product.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Paula J. Good".

Paula J. Good, Director
Health and Safety Services

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joan K. Klopff".

Joan K. Klopff
Health Education Specialist

INSTITUTE FOR FAMILY-CENTERED CARE

7900 WISCONSIN AVENUE
SUITE 405
BETHESDA, MD 20814
PHONE 301-652-0281
FAX 301-452-0186



May 25, 1995

Jerry Atchison
White House Student Intern Program
National AIDS Fund
1400 I Street NW, Suite 1220
Washington, DC 20008

Dear Mr. Atchison:

I am absolutely delighted to write a letter of recommendation for Alex Danford. When I received the information from Brenda Kunkel about the opportunity for student internships to help complete *Youth and HIV/AIDS: The American Agenda*, I immediately thought of Alex. He is a talented, focused, and energetic young man whose commitment to improving care and services for young people affected by HIV is outstanding. Further, Alex is a really wonderful person - dynamic, compassionate, and very, very witty. He is tremendous fun to work with and would be a great member of the intern group.

Alex and I met when he applied to attend an invitational National Youth Leadership Conference our organization was sponsoring in collaboration with the National Alliance of Positive Youth (NAPY). He was very enthusiastic about participating, but I remember he also asked that if he was not selected to attend, if we would be willing to share his name with other young people from the Midwest. He described how isolated services were for youth in his state, and wanted to offer himself as a support and information resource to other young people from his region. Understanding the concerns of youth and reaching out to others are hallmarks of Alex's personality.

Happily Alex was selected to participate in the conference and played a major role in mobilizing the youth who came. Subsequent to that meeting when we have been asked to recommend youth to speak at national conferences or to participate in key policy discussions, Alex is always among the young people we recommended.

I know he is very excited about the prospect of this internship. He would be a superb addition to your staff and would give his all to the effort. I recommend him wholeheartedly. Please let me know if I can provide additional information or answer any questions you may have. I wish you the best of luck in this very important endeavor.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth S. Joppson, P.D.
Director, HIV Programs

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Dayton Area Chapter
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