



FALL 2018



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FOCUS ON The Varied Voices of People Living With or Affected by HIV



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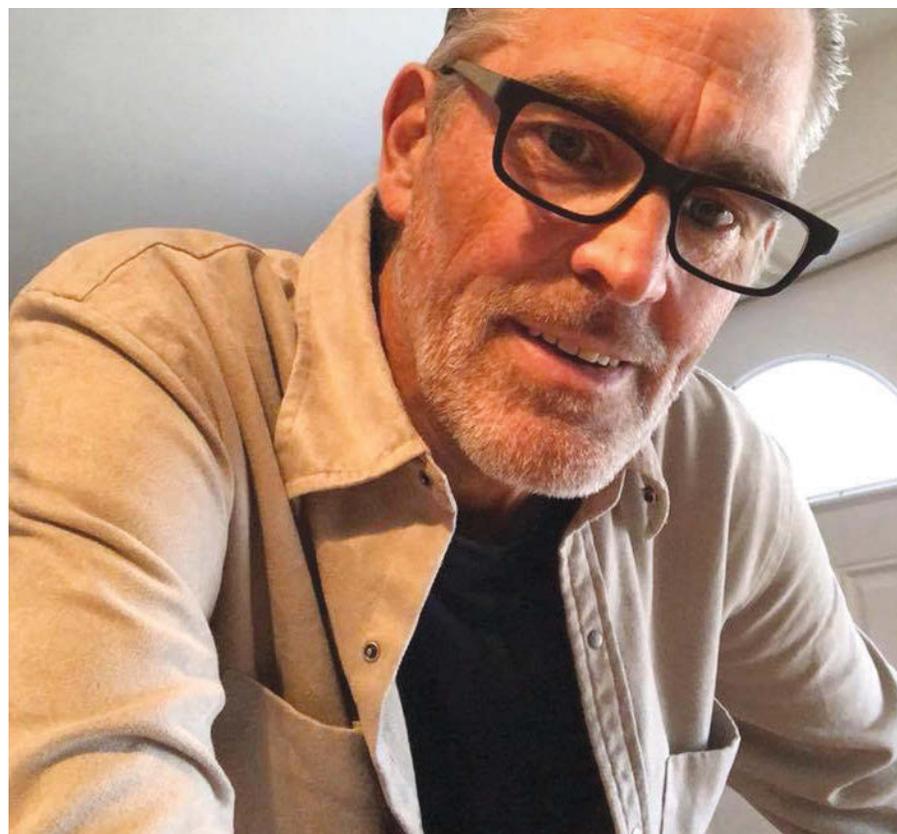
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Zee Strong, Social Media Advocate and Artist

Creator of AIDS HIV Survivor Living Memorial: *A Digital Living Quilt*



On World AIDS Day of last year, Zee Strong launched the AIDS HIV Survivor Living Memorial on Facebook. The project is a celebration of life and an affirmation of presence by people living with AIDS and HIV, united on a social media platform. This “Digital Living Quilt,” as Zee labels it, began as a simple tribute with a few impromptu Facebook posts and has evolved into a global network. People from all over the world send Zee their selfies to which he adds a custom AIDS and/or HIV positive-status frame that he himself designs. He then sends it back for them to post. The result is both a personal statement and a contributing voice in the unified rally for recognition and an end to stigma. Clearly the art is not only in Zee’s graphics. The Digital Living Quilt is an expression of the global AIDS/

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Broward County & HIV Join the Conversation

Leonard N. Jones

Leonard N. Jones,
Ryan White Part A
Recipient



HIV affects us all. Globally, the epidemic accounts for an estimated 36.9 million people around the world living with HIV, and we don't have to look far to grasp its impact. South Florida has become an epicenter of the epidemic. In Broward alone, with a total population of 1.9 million, 20,661 people are living with HIV. In fact, Broward County is second in the nation for new HIV diagnoses. What can we do about it? Plenty. Can you help? Absolutely.

At Broward Ryan White Part A, we provide services for a highly diverse community of people living with HIV. The MSM (men having sex with men) population and Black/African American population, both men and women, have the largest HIV+ population in the County. The White and Hispanic populations are comparably affected, each comprising 26% of Broward residents living with HIV as of 2017. Emerging groups that are increasingly affected by HIV include seniors, 50 years and older, and young adults, ages 20-34 years old. Also, HIV+ transgender women, while a small percentage of the Broward HIV population, are a significant percentage within our

transgender community. In 2017, Broward Ryan White provided HIV medical and support services for 8,499 Broward residents from all populations; however, 3,149 of those diagnosed with HIV did not seek care.

Learn the facts. Stigma is one of the primary reasons people living with HIV don't seek out or stay in care. They fear being ostracized if they reveal their status, so many remain untreated. Education is critical in combatting stigma. HIV is now a manageable condition. Proper treatment of HIV can mean a long and healthy life by rendering the HIV virus undetectable. According to National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease (NIAID) Director Dr. Anthony Fauci, undetectable means the virus is scientifically untransmittable, even to those who are HIV negative. Thus, in addition to benefiting the health of individuals, treatment can prevent the spread of HIV and help end the HIV epidemic.

What can you do? Join the conversation! Educate yourself about HIV. Everyone who is sexually active is at risk, regardless of gender, ethnicity or age, so have your doctor include an HIV test in your routine bloodwork. Consider prevention methods, such as the once daily pill Truvada for PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) to help protect against the HIV virus. Tell everyone who is HIV+ to get care and stay in care. If you are HIV+ and not in care, reach out to someone you trust or contact a healthcare agency (Ryan White Part A Program, Florida Department of Health in Broward County) and talk about what's stopping you. Whatever your status, join the conversation. That's the only way to eradicate stigma and address the HIV epidemic in Broward County. Let's help each other. Let's start talking.



THE RYAN WHITE PART A PROGRAM OF BROWARD COUNTY QUARTERLY JOURNAL

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FOCUS ON
Long Term HIV
Survivors

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3,000 copies of this public document were promulgated at a gross cost of \$3,490, or \$1.163 per copy, to inform the public about services provided by Broward County.



HIV Health Services Planning Council

Your Voice in the HIV Community

The HIV Health Services Planning Council (HIVPC) of Broward County is a planning body comprised of persons living with HIV, community members, stakeholders and representatives of private and public agencies providing Ryan White HIV/AIDS services. The Ryan White Care Act legislation makes the planning council unique in its composition and its role. The HIVPC has a tremendous responsibility as the consumer and the community voice in decision-making about the medical and support services and the amount of funding for these services.

Council and committee members are representative of the service users and providers in the community. The HIVPC committees meet goals outlined by the Planning Council to improve service delivery to Part A clients. Joining the council and/or one of our five standing committees not only means engaging our target population, advocating and making decisions that positively impact PLWHA in Broward County. It also means your voice and experience affect change for the better in our community.

Two of our committees work to engage community members. One is the Community Empowerment Committee (CEC) which hosts events that empower the community. This committee also collects participant feedback to assess the needs of PLWHA in Broward County. In the upcoming months, community members will plan and participate in community events and collaborate with other

community planning bodies to provide a forum for consumers and community members to provide feedback on the services they receive. The Membership Council Development Committee (MCDC) also facilitates engagement by recruiting and training members of the community to serve on the Planning Council with the goal of ensuring diverse committee representation. Current targeted recruitment activities include engaging more PLWHA, specifically Black HIV positive women and getting more youth ages 18-28 involved in the HIVPC.

Two HIVPC committees facilitate advocacy. The Quality Management (QM) Committee ensures access to and provision of high quality services in the continuum of care. This committee's goal is to address disparities for populations not achieving optimal health outcomes and make recommendations for interventions. The System of Care (SOC) Committee conducts activities to evaluate and improve HIV service delivery systems in Broward County. Over the next year, this committee will be responsible for following up with the results of the Black Women's Study and analyzing the implementation of a new Minority AIDS Initiative program that seeks to improve outcomes for Black males and females ages 18-38 years old.

Last but not least, the Priority Setting and Resource Allocation Committee

(PSRA) determines the budgets for all services provided through Ryan White Part A by ranking service categories based on data trends, service utilization and feedback from consumers. This information is presented to the HIVPC to make final allocation decisions. The committee is tasked with ongoing evaluation of services to ensure decisions made are in response to the needs of the community. This includes reallocating funding for Part A services based on spending trends across service categories. If you or someone you know is interested in serving on the HIVPC, please contact us for additional information.



GET INVOLVED! Join the HIV Planning Council or an HIVPC Committee.

We are currently seeking community members to serve on the Planning Council and its committees. As we continue to make decisions and prioritize needs of the populations we serve, it is important that we have PLWHA and HIV advocate representation across the board. If you or someone you know is interested in joining the Planning Council or any of its five committees, please get in touch! **954-561-9681 X1343.**

For more information on the Planning Council, please visit:

brhpc.org/programs/hiv-planning-council/

MAI Specialty Program Targets Minorities

Broward Ryan White Tailors 3-in-1 Treatment for Blacks/African Americans

Throughout Broward County, the Black/African American population accounts for a significantly higher proportion of those diagnosed and living with HIV/AIDS, compared to other races or ethnicities. In response to this disparity, the Minority AIDS Initiative (MAI) Specialty Program

was developed to assist in bridging the gap within this community, specifically targeting Black/African American men and women between the ages of 18 to 38 years old. The Broward County HIV Health Services Planning Council (HIVPC) received recommendations from

its System of Care subcommittee based on data regarding factors impeding achievement of viral suppression experienced by Black MSM (men having sex with men), Black heterosexual males and Black heterosexual females. They

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MAI Specialty Program Targets Minorities
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identified Black males and females often experience several barriers which hinder adherence to medical treatment, preventing the maintenance of viral suppression and discouraging retention in care. To address the unique barriers encountered by Broward HIV+ MAI populations, the HIVPC committed to allocate funding for the implementation of a comprehensive MAI program. Targeted activities implemented through the MAI Specialty Program will help to improve HIV-related health outcomes and reduce existing racial and ethnic health disparities by responding to the unique needs of the targeted MAI populations.

Offered through Broward House, the “3-in-1” pilot program enables Broward Ryan White clients to access three essential services under one HIV substance abuse program: substance

abuse treatment, mental health care and case management. A notable feature of this pilot program is “concierge” care, meaning clients are personally escorted through treatment. The program will include specialized programming, increased access to services, personalized engagement, efficient linkage to needed services, consistent monitoring and frequent follow-up. The need for this individualized support became apparent through the research of both the CDC and the Florida Department of Health. Broward Ryan White took note of the results revealing that while Black/African American men and women, ages 18-38, are the population most in need of HIV medical and support care, they are not inclined to actively seek out these services. In addition, a women’s study administered by Broward Ryan White concluded that Black/African American women are often so busy caring for others, especially children, that they tend to neglect themselves. Subsequently, the

HIV epidemic among Black females has been growing exponentially. It is these deficiencies in HIV care that the MAI Specialty 3-in-1 Program is focused on addressing.

Research shows this model produces the best outcomes and is the most effective approach to caring for Black males and females with complex healthcare needs. This approach is intended to reduce barriers faced by Black males and females, improve retention in care and achieve health outcomes. Ultimately, the goal of a multifaceted, concierge-style approach is to facilitate adherence to medical care through education and guidance that is individualized and solution based and addresses needs from a race equity perspective.

For information regarding the MAI Specialty 3-in-1 Program, contact Broward House at 954-522-4749.



New for AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP) Clients!

Wismy Cius, Florida Department of Health in Broward County

Online Recertification

ADAP clients are now able to recertify for ADAP services online. ADAP policy requires each client to reenroll every six months to remain active in the program. This new resource is a convenient and secure method of program recertification. Clients are able to set up an online account by visiting or calling their local county ADAP staff at 954-467-4700 Ext: 5629 or 5630. Clients may also call ADAP Central Office at (844) 381-ADAP (2327) to set up their online accounts.

Emergency Prescription Fills for Uninsured ADAP Clients using the PBM Network of Participating Pharmacies

An emergency prescription fill initiative for uninsured ADAP clients is now implemented. Eligible clients are now able

to receive up to two, 30-day emergency fills for their prescription(s) through any of the PBM network of participating pharmacies, anytime within a 12-month cycle. This will allow clients who would normally pick up their medications from a county health department, to pick up at a local retail pharmacy during an emergency need and receive ADAP medications immediately. This may be due to a client not able to access medications immediately through the state pharmacy system or local CHD pharmacy during afterhours or weekends. CVS Caremark has sent out cards to all uninsured ADAP clients.

Reasons to use the Emergency Fill

- Medications arriving late to the CHD and client has run out of meds.

- Ability to pick up after hours and weekends.
- Client has been released from jail and will run out of meds before CHD will receive the medication shipment.

Client Requirements

- Will need a valid prescription to present to the retail pharmacy or the provider may send the prescription electronically.
- Present a copy of the CVS emergency fill card to the retail pharmacy (available from CHD ADAP staff). Card will have the coding to indicate ADAP is a primary payer and not a secondary payer.

Please contact the Broward CHD-ADAP at 954-467-4700 Ext: 5629 or 5630 for more information.

Two Special Events for **National Latinx AIDS Awareness Day**



In honor of National Latinx AIDS Awareness Day (NLAAD), observed on October 15, two separate but equally noteworthy events will be happening around Broward County. On October 10, *Latinos En Acción* will present their annual Hispanic HIV Leadership Awards at the NLAAD Awards Night in Wilton Manors. On October 27, the Binational Health Week, featuring health promotions and health education geared toward the Latino population, will culminate in the XVIII Annual Health Fair in Miramar. Both events commemorate National Latinx AIDS Awareness Day, a community mobilization initiative that emphasizes the importance of reducing and preventing HIV infection in Latino communities across the United States. It promotes awareness among Latinos and encourages individuals to get tested for HIV.

Hispanic HIV Leadership Awards

recognize outstanding individuals or groups who have excelled at raising HIV/AIDS awareness in the Latino community. “You don’t have to be Hispanic to receive one of the awards,” says *Latinos En Acción* Group Co-chair Jorge Gardela. “It’s for anyone involved in the Latino community.” In fact, a new award, the Bishop S. F. Makalani-MaHee Unity Award, was added this year to recognize “an outstanding advocate regardless of race, gender or faith who believes in the purpose of *Latinos En Acción*.” The other

awards to be presented are the Louis Curbelo Leadership Award for raising HIV/AIDS awareness in the Broward Latino community, the Fulgenico Aponte Community Service Award and the Juliette Love Humanitarian Award.

Latinos En Acción is a coalition of community members, service providers and Florida Department of Health staff whose mission is to empower and educate the Broward community about HIV/AIDS issues and to educate service providers, organizations and the community at large as to Hispanic/Latino community needs. The group has been active since 2002 and Jorge has been helping lead it for more than a decade. “Ten years ago, resources were more limited. The prevention work was completely separate from HIV medical care and treatment. Now things have changed. Prevention, treatment and care are working collaboratively,” he notes with pride. “I believe that if we can get more people linked to medical treatment and high-risk individuals on PrEP, we can eliminate this epidemic.” *Latinos En Acción* is committed to fighting the HIV epidemic in the Latino community and the Hispanic Leadership Awards is a show of recognition and appreciation for outstanding individuals whose effort support this mission.

The 2018 awards ceremony will take place at the Welcome Reception of the Hispanic

HIV Leadership Awards Night on October 10 at 6:30pm at Hunters Night Club, 2232 Wilton Dr. in Wilton Manors. For more information, call Jorge Gardela at 954-295-9721.

The XVIII Annual Health Fair is hosted by Health Awareness for Life and the accredited Latin America Consul from South Florida. The fair is part of Binational Health Week, one of the largest mobilization efforts to improve the health and well being of the underserved Latino population in the United States, Mexico and Canada with health promotions and education. It offers workshops, insurance referrals, medical screenings, free health exams and more for disadvantaged people and those without medical coverage. There is information and access to infectious disease care, chronic disease care, mental health, adolescent health and even vision. Volunteers and agencies organize activities, directed by the collaboration of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Uruguay, Bolivia, Nicaragua and Peru.

The XVIII Annual Health Fair on October 27, 9:00am-2:00pm, will be held at 3130 Commerce Parkway in Miramar. To volunteer or provide a health service, contact Health Awareness for Life at hafoundationforlife@gmail.com.

The 15th Annual SMART Ride, November 16-17

165 Miles, 2 Days & a Chance to Reflect on Your Own Humanity



On November 16th, some 500 bike riders will set out from University of Miami in Coral Gables for the start of the 15th Annual Southern Most AIDS/HIV Ride, better known as the SMART Ride. For two days they’ll ride – not race – their bikes to Key West for the purpose of raising awareness and funds to benefit those living with, affected by and at risk for HIV and AIDS. In 2003, the maiden SMART Ride brought in \$169,000 and

since then, the event has raised over \$9.3 million, making it the second largest HIV/AIDS bike ride in the country and the only one of its size to give 100% of its pledges back to the community. This year, to commemorate its 15th year, SMART Ride plans to raise \$1.5 million which will be distributed to six designated HIV/AIDS organizations throughout Florida. Says SMART Ride founder Glen Weinzimer, *Continued on Page 6*

The 15th Annual SMART Ride, November 16-17
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“The ride is fully supported, everything you need we have.” From massage therapists to catered meals, scheduled pit stops, support vehicles, even cheerleaders to root for you.

The first day the riders bike 100 miles from Coral Gables to Hawks Cay Resort on Duck Key. Most people who set out early in the morning arrive by 4:00pm. The pace is anywhere from 12-21 miles per hours, with most people falling somewhere in between. The next morning, they bike the remaining 60 miles to Key West. The first stop on the island is Key West High School where they eat lunch including ice cream donated by Kilwins, as they wait for the remaining riders. At 2:00pm with everyone assembled, there is a final four-mile ride around the island, finishing at the AIDS Memorial for the Closing Ceremony overlooking the water on the White Street Pier. In addition to the riders, the ceremony draws 100+ supporters, mostly friends and family who come to celebrate the

momentous achievement of the individual riders and the group as a whole.

The Closing Ceremony is also where they announce the final tally of the money raised. When Glen took over managing the ride in 2003, it had gone through various incarnations, none of which he felt channeled enough of the funds back into the community. He agreed to take it on, he said, “if we give back 100% of the money raised.” In addition, he gave the riders some control over the money they bring in. Fifty percent of what the riders raise goes to all the six designated charities, the other fifty percent goes to one of the six designated charities, their choice.

“Personally, I feel extremely grateful, extremely proud of what’s been accomplished,” says Glen. But he’s concerned. After fifteen years, he feels the SMART Ride and the urgency of the HIV epidemic are treated with a degree of complacency. “Even those who lived through the worst of it don’t remember the worst of it. We protect ourselves, we don’t want to remember. You safeguard

yourself,” he says. “I have friends who like doing it but they’re tired, they’ve done their part. Who is going to replace them? How do you get through to millennials? But Glen, ever passionate about the SMART Ride and its contribution to the HIV community, continues to do what he can to engage everyone he can, with a promise of personal gain in addition to the philanthropic factor. “You ride single file, maybe for the first time by yourself,” he says. “You think about the people you lost. You get to reflect on your own humanity. And you know that you’re doing something for other people.” It’s a singular experience for a stellar cause. Vows Glen, “The sense of accomplishment and the ride itself is life-changing.”

SMART ride participants can ride as individuals or as a team. There are also opportunities to join the SMART Ride crew or to volunteer. For information on all aspects of the event, including requirements, training, route, registration and more, visit www.thesmartride.org or call **866-696-7701**.

Every Ribbon Tells a Story

Dillard High at Ribbons for the Children Youth Art Contest

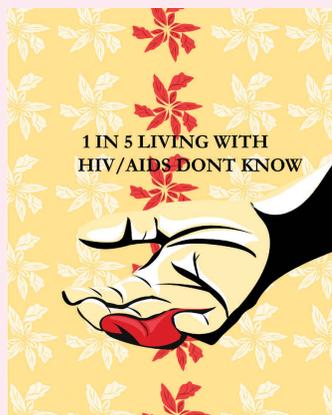
Every December, when the Children’s Diagnostic & Treatment Center (CDTC) holds its annual Ribbons for the Children Art Auction, they feature an adjunct Youth Art Contest. And every fall semester, AP art teacher Celestin Joseph encourages his students in the Visual Arts Magnet at Dillard High to submit their work. “It opens their eyes to the disease and people who are affected by it,” he observes.

The Ribbons for the Children Youth Art Contest, open to all Broward County youth ages 8-21 years old, is a pet project for Celestin’s art magnet students who work diligently yearlong to prepare their portfolios in preparation for a career in art. The contest gives these budding artists an opportunity to use their expression to impact the world around them. Says their teacher and Ribbons mentor, “It’s really

about, how can we put out a positive message?” And while the pictures painted are more gritty than pretty, every piece of art submitted by these youth has a message of impassioned support for the HIV/AIDS community.

Ribbons for the Children Youth Art Contest invites all Broward County Youth between the ages of 8-21 to submit original artwork in honor of World AIDS Day. For submission guidelines, email Jean Starkey at jstarkey@browardhealth.org.

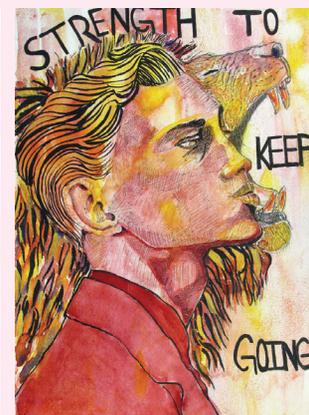
Dillard High School Youth Entries from 2017



J. Saint Louis



S. Brown



K. Jinks



A. Reynolds

HIV Vaccine Development: Where Are We?

HIV Vaccine Trials Network's Steven Wakefield Fills Us In

In an exclusive exchange with Positively Speaking, HIV prevention advocate Steven Wakefield speaks about his role and his experience in the journey to find an effective HIV vaccine. Currently he serves as the External Relations Director of the HIV Vaccine Trials Network, headquartered at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle.

How is the HIV Vaccine Trials Network (HVTN) leading the global effort in HIV vaccine research?

We are committed to making sure that an effective HIV vaccine reaches the members of our global communities who need it most. Our science takes the most promising ideas into clinical trials that will test whether they can prevent HIV infection. We have also been working with the NIH-funded HIV Prevention Trials Network (HPTN) on the scientific journey to lead the precedent-setting antibody mediated prevention (AMP) studies that will determine if a broadly neutralizing antibody (bnAb) will prevent the acquisition of HIV, as well as additional early stage antibody studies. Currently we have four efficacy studies in the field globally and over 15 early stage trials to evaluate what might work best in people.

What is your role in this quest for an HIV vaccine? How long have you been involved in this research and how did you find your way to it?

It is my job to build bridges between a variety of stakeholders and the scientists conducting clinical trials. I want to ensure that we continue to do research with and for communities, and not on them. It is important for me that our key stakeholders such as community advocacy groups, our funders, in-country partners such as governments, ethics committees and regulatory authorities have the peace of mind that we place the health and safety of our study participants at the heart of all we do. Collaboration is important to and for the HVTN.

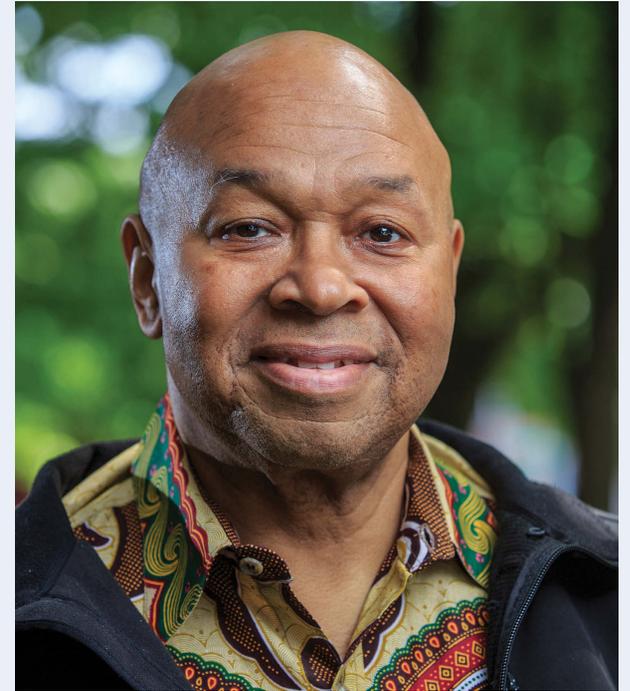
I was involved in HIV related work at the time when the epidemic started to show its devastating impact on our communities in the United States. I was a volunteer at an underground clinic for gay men where they received treatment for sexually transmitted infections. Over the years I have been humbled by the experiences of serving communities in the US and globally, either directly in affected communities, through the service of public health, or through HIV prevention research that builds hope to bring an end to the epidemic through adding the tool of an effective HIV vaccine.

In layman's terms, what does an HIV vaccine have to do to be effective?

An HIV vaccine has to teach the body to recognize and begin fighting back against the HIV virus within the first 72 hours of exposure. The body must mount an effective response to keep HIV from taking over at a cellular level, the same way antiretroviral therapy keeps the virus out of cells.

What is the "mosaic vaccine" and is that the future of HIV vaccine success? What other approaches are being researched?

A mosaic vaccine is a way of designing a vaccine to protect against the large number of strains of HIV that exist globally. It would help us to protect people who are exposed to different types of HIV viruses, regardless of where they live. The reason we do clinical research and test many different vaccines at the same time is that we do not know what approach will prove to be the best. Historically, vaccine



Steven Wakefield
HVTN External Relations Director

approaches that worked in animals were safe but did not have the same effect in the human body. Each vaccine tested is a hopeful strategy, and mosaic vaccines are one of the newest strategies being tested.

In addition to giving people a vaccine that will teach the body how to fight and protect the body against a future exposure to HIV, we are also testing the idea of giving people antibodies to see if they can offer protection from future infection. Where a vaccine teaches the body how to make antibodies, these studies skip that step and give people manufactured antibodies directly. The bottom line is that we need to find a way for the human body to mount an immune response either by finding an effective HIV vaccine or by using an antibody.

Who will benefit from an HIV vaccine? Is it intended for at-risk groups or the general population?

Our vaccine research has to protect uninfected people from ever becoming infected. When we find a vaccine that works it will likely be delivered first to those young adults and adults who are sexually active and vulnerable for

Continued on Page 8

HIV Vaccine Development: Where Are We?

HIV Vaccine Trials Network's Steven Wakefield Fills Us In

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exposure to HIV. It is hoped that in the future it will be given to children as part of their suite of shots before they become adults and/or have to worry about sexual exposure to the HIV virus. There are also some vaccines that are being tested in people who are living with HIV to help them reduce the number of HIV medications they have to take. These are referred to as therapeutic vaccines, and the idea would be to help keep the viral load in people undetectable, without having to be taken on a daily basis. These are also still in the clinical trial stage, and we don't have an effective therapeutic vaccine yet.

How close are we to a safe and effective HIV vaccine? Are we hopeful?

If we were not hopeful there would not be millions of dollars invested into research and we would not ask thousands of volunteers to participate in clinical trials in this research. We remind each volunteer that we do not know what will work, and we do these studies to learn more about what works and what does not. We are excited by the advances in HIV prevention in the past few years, but we also know that throughout history, it has taken a vaccine to end an infectious disease. We believe that having a vaccine against HIV is the best long-term strategy for ending the epidemic.

What does it mean to you, to be involved in the world's largest HIV vaccine clinical trials network?

It is an invaluable experience to be part of a network that brings together people from such diverse professional and personal backgrounds across the globe to reach a common goal. Laboratory, clinical trial experts, nursing and social science experts, community advocates, all dedicated to making sure that every step taken reduces the likelihood that over 1 million people each year become infected. We all get to play a part. We also know that people living with HIV, and people who are sexually active, must take advantage of the tools we have today to protect themselves and others from acquiring HIV. No "magic bullet" can curb

the trajectory of the epidemic. Global communities need an HIV prevention tool that is not dependent on human behavior. As the mortality, incidence and prevalence statistics of the epidemic vary from country to country, the resounding message remains: an effective HIV vaccine, when discovered, must be accessible and taken to scale.

To learn more about or participate in HVTN Clinical Trials, email [Aziel Gangerdine](mailto:Aziel.Gangerdine@fredhutch.org), HVTN Director of Communications, at agangerd@fredhutch.org or visit hvtn.org/en/science/HVTN-studies.html.



The HIV Vaccine Trials Network

(HVTN) is the world's largest publicly funded collaboration on a quest to find an effective HIV vaccine. There are an estimated 5,000 new HIV infections daily around the world. Globally it is also estimated that only 60% of people with HIV know their status and that the remaining 14 million (40%) still need to access HIV testing services. This 40% includes many people who are vulnerable to acquiring HIV, including men who have sex with men, people in prisons and other closed settings, sex workers and their clients, transgender people, and people who inject drugs. Led by Larry Corey M.D., a world-renowned expert in virology, viral immunology and vaccine development, and a team of global experts, the HVTN works with study participants, global communities and other key stakeholders on four continents in the hope of halting the HIV epidemic. For more information about the HIV Vaccine Trials Network and our participating research clinics, visit www.hvtn.org.

FOCUS ON THE VARIED VOICES



Love in the time of HIV

One Poz Woman Speaks from the Heart

"I think that black women and black women with HIV differ because when you think of a prestigious black woman, they feel like they're exempt from it. They feel like they're too important to catch a disease. On the other hand, women with HIV feel like, maybe if they led a different life they wouldn't have caught it. Neither one pays attention to the fact that it only takes one time to catch HIV." And it only takes one partner.

"I've known him since 1996," says she saw him off and on, and could never remember his name. If you ask her who she's talking about, Jane quips, "My boyfriend. Or as I like to call him, my donor." When they finally got together a couple of years ago, he didn't tell her he was HIV positive. It wasn't cool to ask his status, you didn't expect that, she says. But after a few months she told him, let's get tested. She did, he didn't. He already knew his status. And still he wouldn't tell her.

To this day, Jane says, he's in denial. He's been positive since 2002 and doesn't tell anyone. She found out by mistake standing next to him in a Walmart pharmacy when he was picking up a prescription for his HIV meds. His denial manifests itself in inappropriate behavior such as flirting with other women behind her back. She knows he does it, she also knows he isn't cheating on her. But unable to come to grips with his HIV status, he acts out to mask his true feelings, and acts as if HIV isn't a factor in his life.

When she was diagnosed the beginning of this year, Jane considered bringing a law suit against him. She's still angry. "I would never date someone without letting them know," she blurts, "especially if you love



Not everyone living with HIV feels free enough to speak openly about their status but many like “Jane,” still want their story to be told. And while Jane is not her real name, the new trajectory of her life, as she sees it, a black woman recently diagnosed with HIV, is very real indeed.

them.” And he does love her. He tells her so and it’s hard not to believe him. He’s great to her kids, he makes sure they have money to eat. “He’s been there more than their dad,” she says. “I love him dearly, he’s the only man I fell in love with.” And he’s the only man who’s been there for her.

When Jane was down and out living on the street temporarily, he was the one who sought her out to make sure she was okay. Now she’s living with him, along with two of her four children, in one room that they rent from his sister. She wants to move out but can’t afford it. “I have seven qualifying conditions for disability under Social Security,” for which she’s still trying to collect. “If I work, I’m not eligible,” she says. “It’s such an unjust system.”

Unjust doesn’t even begin to cover some of the hardships Jane has endured. Most painful was being raped at 11 years old and again at 15 by the same two guys. It wasn’t until she was in her late twenties that Jane went for counseling to deal with the trauma. And while counseling helped, she says, “That kept me from being successful.” Even though she’s obviously done a stellar job, under adverse circumstances at times, of raising four accomplished kids, ages 13-22 – one is a rap artist, the other an athlete, another an aspiring dancer – Jane never felt her life allowed her to reach her potential. And now this.

Living with HIV is still relatively new for Jane. “Looking in the mirror you don’t see the same person,” she says. “No matter how much makeup I put on, I still see the virus.” When you tell her she looks good, she says, that’s a lot of prayer. “I pray a



In 2017, 22% of newly reported HIV cases in Broward County were female, with an HIV rate 9 times higher for Black* women than White* women.

*Non-Hispanic

lot,” she says, “and that’s a major key to my children. They work hard.”

Jane worries that her children are ashamed of her HIV status. She said when she told her son, he just hung his head. “He was hurt.” That’s the reason she wanted to be anonymous here. She knows that stigma is still prevalent when it comes to HIV. But Jane wants others to benefit from her story. From her experience. “You understand life every day just by realizing the things that make you happy and make sense,” she says. And every day Jane understands a little more.

If you ask her why she’s still living with him, the man who recharted her life with HIV, she’ll tell you it’s because of her circumstances. And then a moment later, she’ll retract it all with a no, that’s not the case. As much as Jane hates to admit it, when pressed she’ll reflect that there is more good than bad between her and her boyfriend. Her donor. Love with HIV may not be blind, but it’s still very much love.

Jane was diagnosed with HIV on January 11, 2018 and began receiving treatment on January 12 through Broward Ryan White Part A.

Jane’s Days a chronicle

1/11/2018 Found out.

1/12/2018 Went to treatment.

4/19/2018 This disease is a nightmare.

4/28/2018 Talked to friend.

5/09/2018 Talked to relative.
Deny deny deny.

5/27/2018 Talked to relative.
Scared to tell.
Started crying.

6/20/2018 Talked to family member.
He said so you guys are just giving it to each other. SMH. I laughed but thought, hmm, not in my plans.

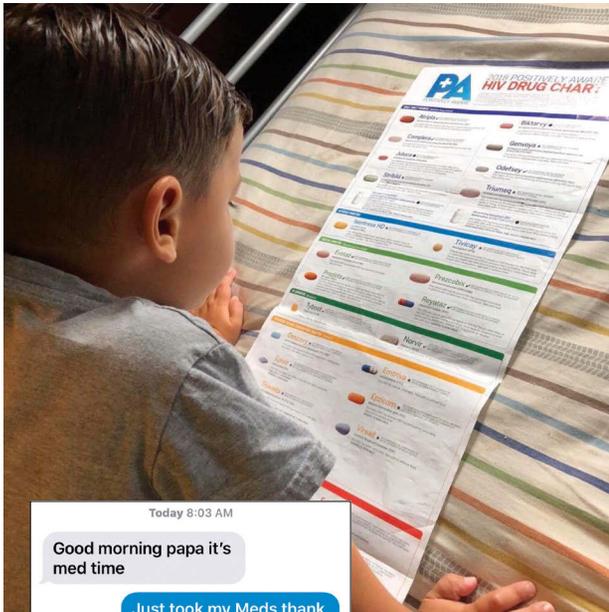
7/12/2018 I keep looking at my labs and I just want those words or letters to change. I hate this thing. I hate the person that did this to me. I hate him. I wanted to cry so bad because I want a cure. I want to be fixed. It’s heartbreaking. I’m so sick.

7/13/2018 I feel strong mentally at the beginning of the day. Then, a few hours later I feel like I’m about to pass out. I’m so tired, I start thinking. I have to hurry up in the store before I lay down on the floor in fetal position. I’m so tired of dealing with this. Where is he?

7/17/2018 I gotta boost my self-esteem. I know when he’s messaged other women I still choose to stay just to say he’s mine. And my children have taken to him. He treats them really good. He makes them laugh and they make me super happy. I’ve learned that my happiness from my children makes me happier than any relationship with a guy I’ve ever had. I owe them the world. I’ve brought so much hurt upon them. I’ve stolen their hope and they need it. I just wish I had a happy home and money to take care of them. They deserve better than the best. Children can’t always be as strong as you want them to be. Enough writing for the moment.

Zee Strong, Social Media Advocate and Artist

Creator of AIDS HIV Survivor Living Memorial: A Digital Living Quilt



Grandson Lucca, the Meds Reminder

Continued from Page 1

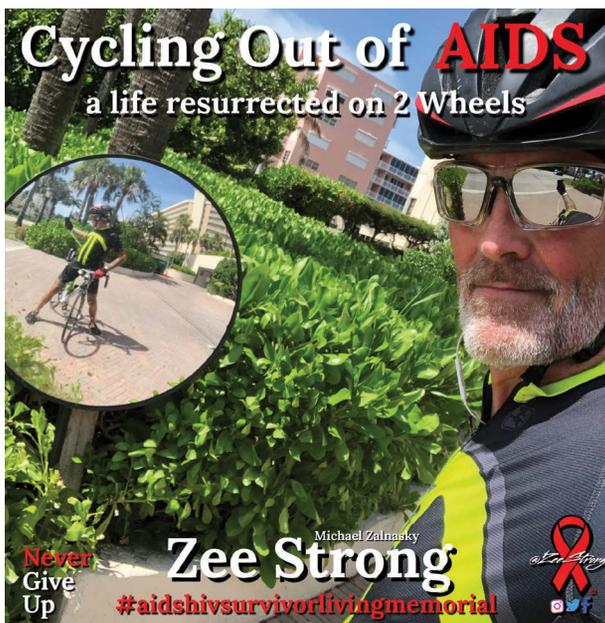
HIV community whose message grows with every frame that Zee, social media advocate and artist, creates.

Since its inception on December 1, 2017, Zee has crafted more than 20,000 Facebook photo frames for selfies originating in 28 countries and counting. It's a labor of love for Zee, who said the first week he barely slept, working twenty hours a day to accommodate all the requests. These days he gets up to thirty requests a day. For many people, this is how they out themselves and inform the world of their status. "I had three people from Russia go public last week," Zee cites. "Christine was positive 21 years and never told anybody until I made her a frame. She put it up as her Facebook profile picture and that's how she told everybody."

He's constantly boggled by his global reach. "I mean, when you have people from the Foreign Ministry of Uganda sending you a friend request, or you get a message, 'When are you going to Brussels, we want to meet you,' you know your reach is spreading," Zee muses. But his reach is not just geographical. Humanitarian Sir Edward Artis remarked to him, "You have changed the way people look at AIDS. You are changing the way people think about it." In fact, it was

a conscious decision by Zee to put AIDS first in the title, even though it deters some people from participating. He insists, "You can't be secretive and fight stigma." When he was first diagnosed with AIDS, he made a promise to himself he would never feel shame. "I hide from no one!" Zee declares and that's the resolve and the self-love that the Survivor Living Memorial perpetuates.

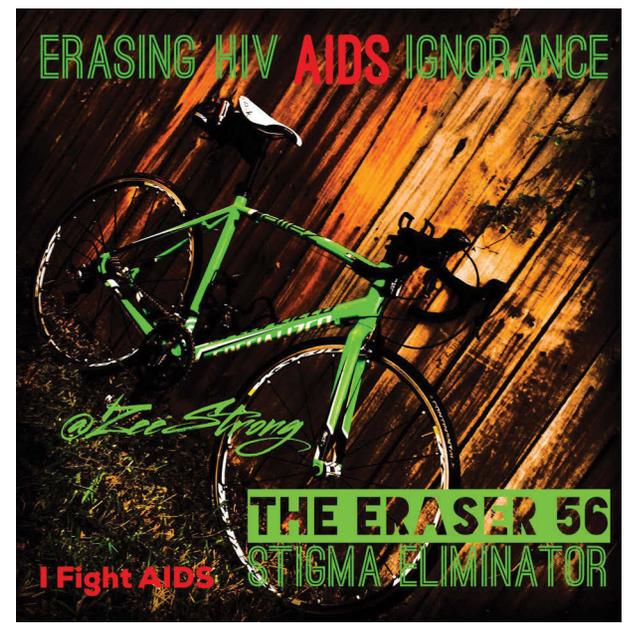
But it wasn't an easy road, literally, from AIDS patient to social media advocate. When he was first diagnosed positive for HIV in 2014, Zee left what he terms "the best job in the world" in Des Moines, Iowa, where he was living, and moved to Florida to stay with his daughter, son-in-law and two young grandsons in north



Broward. "I had AIDS, 19 T cells," Zee shakes his head. "I was really ill. I didn't think I'd make it to Christmas. My head was in a garbage can. I was sweating, I couldn't eat a thing. My six-year-old grandson Pierce stood with a towel on my head, telling me, 'Don't worry, Papa. I'll take care of you.' Nobody has taken care of me like that boy."

Then in August of 2015, Zee took up riding a bicycle. "I had PCP pneumonia and MAC (Mycobacterium avium complex) and the next thing I know, I'm out on A1A logging 20, 40, 60 miles a day. That highway was drenched in my tears." Zee went from 118 pounds to 190, traveling as far as Juno Beach in one day. He's logged

every mile, which today totals more than 11,500. "I always wanted to climb Mt. Everest," he beams. "This is my Everest. But it did far more than give me back my health," he maintains. "It gave me self-confidence, self-esteem. It gave me pride in myself and most important, it brought me out from deep isolation." Born Michael Zalnasky, it also gave him the name he's known by these days, Zee Strong. Zee, the first initial of his last name and Strong, a tribute to the success of his struggle. "I want to take someone and put them on a bicycle because I know what it did for me," he emotes. "I've had some setbacks, health issues, been hospitalized twice. I just keep pushing." The way Zee tells it, his journey back to health began babysitting his younger grandson, then



a toddler. "Luca would freak out unless I put him in his plastic Playskool car and pushed him down the sidewalk," Zee recalls. "We started going only half a block and before you knew it, we were walking two miles! Then I started walking with the dog six to eight miles every morning till my bike came." His trusty green bike, the "Stigma Eliminator" has become a symbol of his mobile advocacy, on which he pedaled HIV/AIDS awareness while reclaiming his life from the ravages of AIDS. "AIDS told me to crawl under a rock," Zee says. "Today I am the rock."

That doesn't mean, of course, that life with HIV is not without its challenges. "I struggle with immunity," Zee notes.

“I think being around my grandkids strengthens it.” In fact, every morning when he gets up, he has a little help with his HIV meds routine. Now four years old, “Luca the Meds Reminder,” as Zee christened him, helps his grandfather manage his daily pills. Says Zee, “If it wasn’t for my grandsons, I wouldn’t be here.” Luca slept with him every other night until this summer when Zee moved south to Wilton Manors. Luca misses having his Papa around all the time and still reminds him every morning to take his meds, now via text. It’s that kind of love and support that has sustained Zee and propelled him into a life focused on helping others living with HIV and AIDS find their strength and their place in the world around them.

And helping others in this capacity is paying it forward for Zee, who credits one person with keeping him going: Ryan White. “He’s always been my hero, because he is what a hero is,” claims Zee, who had an awareness ribbon tattooed on his leg in Ryan White’s memory. Back in

“

You can’t be secretive and fight stigma.

”

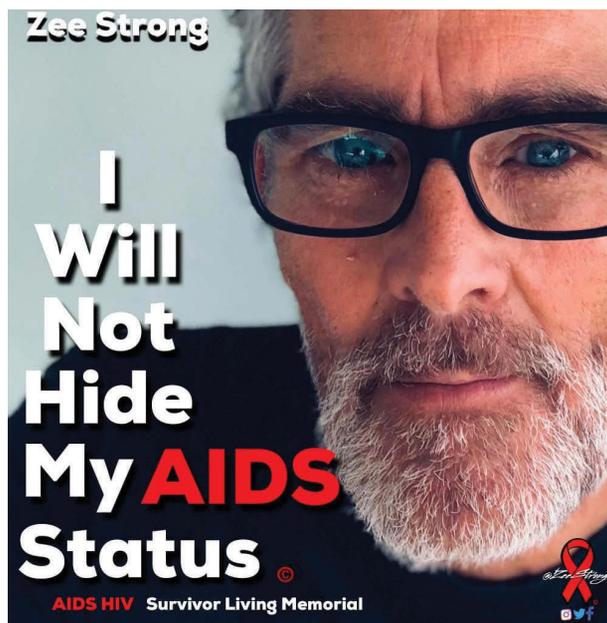
the early ‘80’s, when he was a “young kid” working as a hairdresser in Pittsburgh, Zee watched thirteen friends die from AIDS related illnesses. “Ryan White sparked an interest in me long before I was ever positive. He was a kid and he stood up to the world. Because of him, so many of us today are alive and well,” credits Zee. “I have a dream. Next summer I want to ride my bike through rural America and raise



In 2017, among newly diagnosed cases of HIV+ men in Broward County, 18% were due to heterosexual transmission.

HIV/AIDS awareness. I want to start here and end at [Ryan White’s] memorial or gravesite. I want to honor him at a level no one has ever before.”

Another passionate subject for Zee and one that impacts his personal life, is what he cites as the lack of visibility of heterosexuals in the HIV community. “Being diagnosed as a heterosexual man was the most intimidating thing. There’s no support geared toward the heterosexual community. From all the literature, we’re all gay.” In proactive response, Zee created Heterosexual POZ, a Facebook group “to share our experiences living HIV+ as identifying as Heterosexual POZ.” With almost 250 members, the group is another channel for Zee to express himself as an individual living with HIV and creating a better world for it. “I am who I am for those who can’t be,” he says. “I wouldn’t change a thing. I’m a much better person, a much better man with AIDS.”



For Zee, perhaps the highest compliment, and testament to his personal success, came from a total stranger. “About a year ago this woman said to me, ‘I always wondered what Ryan White would be like as an adult. I think I’m looking at him.’”

Michael “Zee” Zalnasky has been accessing HIV medical and support services through Broward Ryan White Part A since 2014.

Full public display of strength guts pride and courage

AIDS HIV Survivor

Living Memorial

A Digital Living Quilt

#aidshivsurvivorlivingmemorial

Mike Green

I Will Not Hide My HIV Status

I Know My Status

Get Tested Know Your Status Treatment Works

Know Your Status **Angel Cortello**

HIV+ Women

Strong Active Healthy

Grano Ditor Mendez

I WANT PEOPLE TO LOOK AT ME AND SAY ...

AND SAY ...

BECAUSE OF YOU I DON'T HIDE MY HIV STATUS

I want a Cure

It's time to end AIDS

Grano Ditor Mendez

I WANT PEOPLE TO LOOK AT ME AND SAY ...

AND SAY ...

BECAUSE OF YOU I DON'T HIDE MY HIV STATUS

Stigma Ends with Me.

AIDS HIV Stigma a battle beyond an illness

Scott A. Kramer

National Black HIV AIDS Awareness Day February, 7th

Ruby Amagwula

HIV+ Men

Alive and Healthy Living HIV+

Michael Ischner

HIV Stops With Me.

Sarah Thomas

The AIDS HIV Survivor Living Memorial is a Facebook forum that honors and celebrates people living with AIDS and HIV. More than 20,000 such survivors are united on this Digital Living Quilt. To help founder Zee Strong obtain a computer to perpetuate this unprecedented AIDS/HIV social media initiative, visit: gofundme.com/AIDS-HIV-Survivor-Living-Memorial.

Artist Yvette Michele Paints a Bed of Roses For Annual Ribbons for the Children Art Exhibit and Auction



Yvette Michele
Artist

Yvette Michele has been donating her original oil paintings to the annual Ribbons for Children Exhibition and Auction since she moved to Florida in 2015. The auction, under the auspices of Children’s Diagnostic & Treatment Center (CDTC), supports children and families living with or affected by HIV/AIDS. Thus the art Yvette has contributed has been a series of single red

This year Yvette’s donated piece will be a departure from the usual bouquet: an oversized portrait of an exotic red hibiscus against a bold yellow background entitled “Crimsons East.” She hopes the larger piece will bring a larger monetary donation for children and families living with or affected by HIV and AIDS. Says Yvette, “It is always a pleasure to support



Nina, Oil on Canvas



Kimberly, Oil on Canvas



Claudette, Oil on Canvas



If you have acceptance, it’s easier to deal with HIV. Creating art around a family was to say just that: this is all about love.



roses in reference to the HIV/AIDS red awareness ribbon. The rose paintings are part of her Le Fleur series. Each one is named for “real people that are roses in my life,” says Yvette. “Individual and unique as they are as human beings, their embodiment as roses is the same.”

Yvette’s involvement in the HIV/AIDS community began locally judging student competitions after she moved to Florida in 2015. The following year she contributed her art talents to the World AIDS Museum project “Saving Grace” which focused on HIV/AIDS in the black community. She and fellow artists created a family tree of related people who were either living with HIV/AIDS or affected by it. “If you have acceptance, it’s easier to deal with HIV,” says Yvette. “Creating art around a family was to say just that: this is all about love.”

the CDTC.” Last year at the Ribbons for Children auction, three people bid on “Donna”. While only one got to take the painting home, all three donated their bids to CDTC, Yvette recalls with obvious gratification. Clearly hers is art that keeps on giving.

Yvette Michele is an award winning artist whose work merges fine art, public art and photography to international acclaim. Her studio, located at 117 NW 5th Street in Fort Lauderdale, is open to the public during Art Walk on the last Saturday of every month or by appointment. To learn more about Yvette and her art, or to contact her, visit www.yvettemichele.com or [facebook.com/artistyvettemichele](https://www.facebook.com/artistyvettemichele).



Michele with CDTC Executive Director Ana E. Calderon Randazzo, Ph.D. at the 2016 Auction



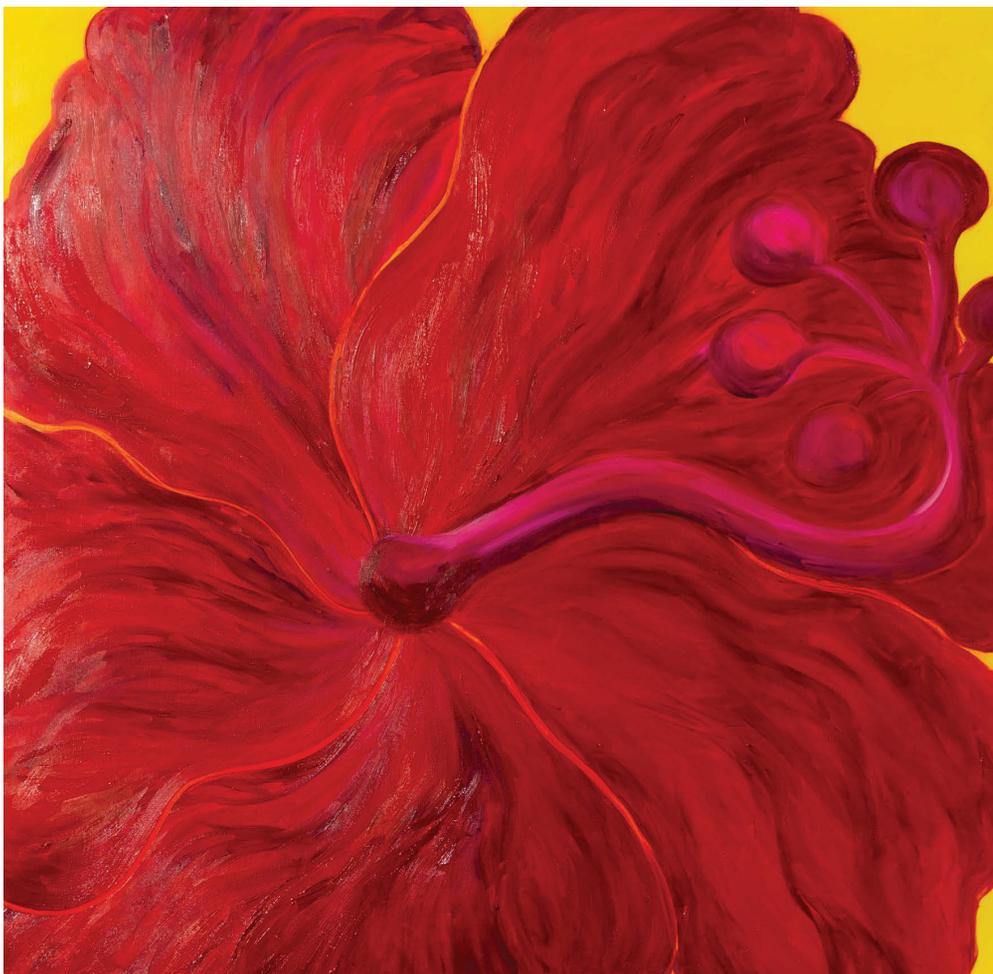
Jillian, Oil on Canvas



Lauren, Oil on Canvas



Donna, Oil on Canvas



Crimsons East
Oil on Canvas

Michele's entry for the upcoming 13th Annual Ribbons for the Children Art Auction



13th Annual Ribbons for the Children Art Exhibit and Auction will be held Friday, December 7, 2018, 6pm-9pm, at the RIVA Residences Luxury Owners' Lounge, Fort Lauderdale. Tickets go on sale in September. Deadline for Art Submissions is September 29. For information on attending or art submissions, visit childrensdiagnostic.com/ribbons-for-the-children.

Advocacy: Good for the Soul

Interview with Angela “Myammee” Pitts,
HIV Spokesperson



Angela Pitts,
HIV Spokenperson

Angela “Myammee” Pitts is usually the one asking the questions. In February 2016, Myammee launched her own YouTube channel, Project A & M Inc., with the express purpose of generating HIV/AIDS awareness. Whether it’s interviewing key figures in the HIV community or key figures in her own life (like her father), reporting on medical breakthroughs such as HIV organ transplants and news spanning from HIV+ chefs doing fundraiser cookoffs to athletes living with HIV, Myammee is the consummate spokesperson on any and every HIV topic. The reception to Angela and the need for such a forum is evidenced in the 84,000+ views on her launch video ‘My HIV & AIDS Story’ and the more than 2,000 subscribers to her channel.

Always eager to share a fresh HIV perspective, Angela allowed *Positively Speaking* to turn the journalistic tables on her and sat for an interview herself.

How was it for you, growing up in a family living with HIV?

“I was never really worried about it as much.” Angela is talking about growing up with her mother and younger twin brothers who were all diagnosed with HIV in 1989. Her mother had a new boyfriend after Angela was born, who didn’t know he had HIV and when he found out he waited to tell her after she birthed the twins. “They were born in 1987. The four of us got tested in 1989 and that’s when we found out that my mom and brothers had AIDS. And that’s when my mom knew it wasn’t my dad but my brothers’ dad she contracted HIV from.

“All I remember is that my brothers were always in and out the hospital. They had medicines and this little breathing machine with smoke coming out of it. My brother David died first. Me and my other brother Douglas adjusted the best we could. I was 8 years old, he was five. I remember we used to play doctor and use real IV drips with our teddy bears. That was all we knew. We had doctors supplies all over the house, he use to bring it home from the nurses.”

Angela’s brothers passed away from AIDS related illnesses. Five-year-old David in 1992 and Douglas four years later right before his 10th birthday. Her mother, HIV/AIDS advocate, educator and activist Anna Wyman died on May 29, 2008.

What would your mother say about you doing this HIV/AIDS advocacy now?

“She’d say, ‘Don’t let those people drive you crazy.’ Because they were driving her crazy. She would just be proud that I wasn’t ashamed of her. When I was younger, it was so hard talking about HIV with anyone, even her. I knew that it was going to bring stigma to me if everyone knew. I just couldn’t say anything at all.

“Now that I’m able to talk about it freely, I know my mom and brothers’ deaths did not happen for me to keep my mouth closed. Even though it was their time to leave this Earth, I’m just going to do all and what I can, with what God gave me. Today she would be proud because I’m not ashamed of who I am nor of her and my brothers. Because she was chosen to be my mom for a reason and I’m going to put my story to use.”

And God gave Angela Pitts a lot: smarts and ambition, coupled with tremendous talent, remarkable poise and the courage of her heartfelt convictions. The Florida A&M University graduate began her reality TV career in her early twenties with two VH1 reality TV shows. as a participant on “Flavor of Love 3” and the winner of “I Love Money 2.” TV was also where she won the nickname “Myammee”.

How did your TV experience lead you to Project A & M and producing a video channel to promote HIV awareness?

“We’d filmed the first show in August/September 2007. I filmed six episodes which was half the season and towards the end of the show airing the next year, my mother went into the hospital. I’d missed Christmas 2007 because I’d had to work in Atlanta. It was the last Christmas I could’ve spent with her. I came home in January 2008, and told her, ‘Let’s do a foundation together around HIV/AIDS.’ I knew the show was going to air soon and I was about to gain a new platform, it could be a perfect time to do it. This was a few months before she died. She said, ‘Are you sure you want to do something like this?’ She meant be a



Angela on “Flavor of Love”



Angela and mother, Anna Wyman

part of the HIV world with her. Up to that point, no one but my family, not even my friends, knew about our HIV/AIDS story.”

How did it affect you, keeping the ‘HIV thing’ a secret, as you were growing up?

“I’d been keeping that secret as early as elementary school, knowing my mom and brothers had HIV since I was five. My mom told me early and continued to inform me so I knew everything. I had small reactions to it, but I’m happy she told me and didn’t hide it from me. I had to live with the reality of HIV with my mom and brothers at the same time, we were family, so I understand why she told me.

“I remember in high school, it pushed me away from my mom a bit, it pushed me to do other things. I was in a lot of sports, working a job, active in so many clubs, so that I was rarely at home. I was into basketball, badminton, bowling, track – anything that I could do and be a part of, I enjoyed. I was VP of senior class, on the yearbook staff. I chose to be “Best All-

around” senior year because I was voted top in a few categories and had to pick one! That’s still funny to me.

“Looking back, all that kind of trickles down into my life now. It’s in me, knowing that I’m different, that I have to stand out. I dealt with ‘the secret’ up until I was twenty-three when I opened up to my childhood friends. Then I revealed it to the world in 2013, and I’m still doing it today.”

What makes you different?

“Saying that I’m different comes from being different than my mom and my brothers, and knowing it from an early age. My brothers were always getting the attention and the love, being in and out the hospital. Looking back as an adult, I know now that no one knew when they were going to leave this Earth, so they loved them hard. If you had HIV/AIDS then, it was said you could die tomorrow. But as a child, I took the role ‘I’m different’ to another level. I made sure I stood out. I made sure I did things different. I wanted to be different from everyone at school.

“Now I really am different. Me, having grown up in Liberty City, I’m supposed to be pregnant by age 15, this and that like the stereotype. But I worked hard to be the total opposite of what they said I was supposed to be. It worked out that I really am different. I know if I’m in a room, I stand out. It’s rooted from that. I just took it and ran with it. ‘If I’m going to be different in this house with my mom and brothers,’ I decided, ‘I’m going to be different everywhere else.’”

What kind of strength does it take to be different?

“In my mom I saw a women who worked hard despite her circumstances, who also didn’t have to be around a man. Yes, I want to be married, I want kids. But to see her press through something so hard and stand up strong alone, it rubbed off on me. Because I’ve seen how to be strong. If she got through that, she could get through anything. And so can I. I’m Mrs. Brightside. I tell my friends there’s a brighter side to everything. I’ve seen what terrible looks like already. So giving up is too easy. I have people to confide

Continued on Page 16



Angela and brothers David and Douglas



Angela and her mother, Anna Wyman



Last picture together, 2008



If a woman takes HIV medicine daily as prescribed throughout pregnancy, labor, and delivery and gives HIV medicine to her baby for 4-6 weeks after delivery, the risk of transmitting HIV to the baby can be as low as 1% or less.

~ cdc.gov (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

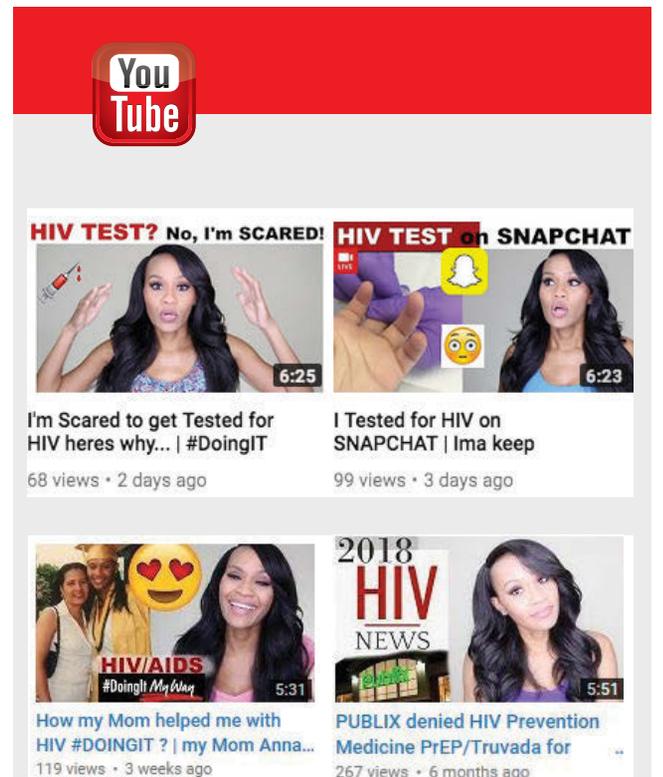
Advocacy: Good for the Soul
Continued from Page 15

in when I have to. But I let God handle it. I go to my higher power, my God, my Jesus and he gives me everything I need. There's a peace he gives me and I don't know how to describe it. I have to find the strength within like my mom. Sometimes you want to call and ask your mom, but I go to God. And sometimes that is her. She's made my strength even stronger remembering how she dealt with things."

What's next for Angela "Myammee" Pitts?

"I want to become a national co-hostess personality. I think big! Something like 'The Real' talk show is what I would love to do, to talk about new stuff every day. It could be national radio or a podcast as well, talking about things from my perspective. I always have an opinion. I want to be a part of conversations, have it filmed, get my point of views and my feelings out there. I don't care if it's five people who see it. If it helps people who are watching, that's advocacy! It's good for the soul, just helping people in all ways."

Angela "Myammee" Pitts is a South Florida Realtor and HIV/AIDS advocate, spokesperson and founder of the YouTube channel, "Project A & M Inc." for which she films, edits, writes, directs and produces all original content.



HIV Spokesperson Angela Pitts founded Project A & M Inc in 2016 to promote HIV/AIDS awareness and education through candid discussion, breaking news and interviews from within the HIV community. To view and subscribe to her video channel, visit the Project A&M Inc on YouTube.com.



Walking Through Fire

Tatiana Williams, HIV Activist and Trans Visionary

“I understand what it looks like to do what you’re doing, wondering if you’re going to make it out alive. If you’re going to contract the virus.” Tatiana Williams is talking about the precarious path taken by many trans women, including herself, who turn to sex work as a means to survive.

Tatiana considers herself fortunate.

“I kept the faith,” she says.

“I made it out.” Today, as Testing Expansion Coordinator at the Pride Center’s HIV Testing Center in Wilton Manors, she is actively involved in the prevention of the HIV virus. And as Community Co-chair of the Health Department’s Trans Advisory Group, co-founder of the tri-county support group TransInclusive, and trailblazing trans advocate for all causes transgender, she has dedicated herself to helping others in the trans community find their way.

“The times I’ve gotten defeated,” she confides, “I talk to myself, ‘If you walk out of the room, who’s going to be there to really fight?’

I’m one who can walk through the fire.”

Which she does on a daily basis, championing trans issues with the vision of both equality and inclusion for her trans sisters and brothers.



Remembrance Day
Tatiana accepts Wilton Manors proclamation on behalf of the Pride Center on Transgender Day of Remembrance last year

“All transgender individuals have different journeys,” Tatiana explains, “but the majority have had a difficult life.” It is far too common in the trans community to experience homelessness, to be both unemployed and deemed unemployable, to be disowned from one’s family which results in the homelessness, and overall to be pointedly and openly rejected by society. “Members of the trans community often get discriminated against in the workplace or when trying to access healthcare or housing,” she laments and when it comes to HIV, she emphasizes, “The transgender community wants to have access to all the resources that the general public has access to.” But for many, if not most trans men and women, it’s not a straight path, or a tangible one, to health and wellbeing. “Before people can think about HIV prevention or adherence, they have to think about navigating life. If I don’t have food to eat, or a place to sleep ...” Tatiana finishes the sentence with a weighted sigh. The essential basics of survival and critical health concerns are only part of the struggle.

There’s a picture of Tatiana on Transgender Day of Remembrance last year, smiling generously as she accepts a Wilton Manors proclamation on behalf of the the Pride Center, awarded for inclusiveness. Transgender Day of Remembrance,

celebrated internationally on November 20, memorializes those trans community members who were murdered as a result of transphobia; it also draws attention to the continued violence endured by the transgender community. When Tatiana references the raw fact that five trans women were killed in Jacksonville this year just for being trans, she says, “It brings up old emotions. It brings me back.” So many trans women and men are vulnerable to attack due to homelessness or the risky nature of sex work. Tatiana recalls the time when sex work was a means to enhance her physical self. “I got caught in a lifestyle. Wanting stuff wrapped me in that lifestyle. You get trapped in it, trying to get it all. I wasn’t thinking about a virus, I was thinking how I look and how I want to present as a woman.” She may be smiling in the picture, as she often is, but every day for Tatiana is a day of remembrance. “It keeps me in the fire,” she notes, “and keeps me moving.”

It also keeps her in the forefront of trans issues. Advocacy for the trans community has long been her vocation. “That’s where my strength lies. People saw my passion, my drive and they wanted to give me more of platform,” Tatiana says. The Pride Center recruited her first as a

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Walking Through Fire

Continued from Page 17

volunteer and then took her on as staff. In this capacity she not only serves the greater community but uses the position to leverage more support for the trans community. When she co-founded the support group TransInclusive, the Pride Center gave her the space to conduct their weekly meetings. The group, led by trans men and trans women, focuses on building trust and relationships. It advocates for trans needs and works with community partners to reduce barriers in healthcare, provide much needed resources and support the struggle for equality.

The challenge, she says, was getting people to show up until she began using her pageant background to bring people in. Tatiana was a leading contestant for five years in the prestigious Miss Continental, a national pageant for female impersonators. “I wanted to get more women of color in the room. I got a black trans guy and he helped get the trans black guys and I got the trans black women in the door, and the Pride center helped with space.” The group meets every Thursday at 7pm and people come from Dade and Palm Beach in addition to Broward to hear speakers, share experiences, network and just connect. The last Thursday of every month it’s open to the public. Sometimes service providers come in and disseminate information; anyone who wants to speak just needs to let Tatiana know.

“I’ll tell you what’s beautiful about the group,” Tatiana beams. “The Health Department knew what an amazing group

it was, so they reached out to the Pride Center, they knew the group was here.” That resulted in the Health Department funding a program, All About the T, for trans individuals and their partners. The series of six sessions began in May and includes a town hall meeting and trans facilitated groups. There’s an advisory body of trans men and women who steer what the program should look like for the community. “In All About the T sessions, you’re talking about stigma, HIV,” says Tatiana, who professes, “It’s helping. But we need more people on the ground.”

“

My mother would always say, it doesn’t matter what you do or who you choose to become, you just become the best at it.

”

More people like Tatiana herself, who takes every opportunity to further trans causes. In her “spare time” Tatiana serves as Community Co-chair of the Trans Advisory Group of the Florida Department of Health in Broward County. She was first elected in 2016 and again in 2018. “I represent the community at large. My job is to take back what the trans community is saying to the government chair. We work with the Broward County Prevention Planning Council but it’s baby steps because the community has been navigating a certain way for a long time,” she cites. “If we put more people on the ground who identify with the trans population, it will empower them.”

Tatiana’s own sense of empowerment seems rooted in an upbringing that allowed her true self to flourish. “My mother, my family, everyone was supportive,” she says. Her father died when she was 8 years old and she was raised by her mom who, she believes, was not surprised when she came forward as a trans woman in her late teens. Tatiana feels her mother always knew. When she was growing up, Tatiana recalls, “My mother would always say, it doesn’t matter what you do or who you choose to become, you just become the best at it. That was instilled in me.”

The best that Tatiana Williams can be shines through in both her dignified presence, “I’m an unapologetic black woman,” she declares with pride, as well as her visionary efforts throughout the trans community. “My goal is to train men and women to do what I do. I let them know you have to stand for something.” She gives her office a cursory glance. It’s not a bad gig, helping the community with HIV services but, she says smiling, “I know where my true work is.”



Current estimates reported by the CDC show 22-28% of transgender women are living with HIV, and among Black/African American transgender women, more than half, an approximate 56%, are living with HIV.



TransInclusive First Annual LGBT Prom
Tatiana at the LGBT Prom in 2017, thanking participants for “being the change they want to see.”



TransInclusive Support Group
Tatiana with members of TransInclusive support group which she co-founded.



Do the Wright Thing

Melvin Wright, Unlikely HIV/AIDS Superhero

Somehow Melvin Wright, just a regular guy with a regular job, has transformed himself into a something of a modern day superhero in the local HIV community, and probably without his even knowing it. Melvin works on the maintenance staff at Deerfield Beach High School and has for the past 12 years. “I’m the Yard Man,” he says. But tending to the school grounds wasn’t all Melvin, a man with a mission, was cut out to do. The beginning of last school year, he petitioned the principal, Jon Marlow, to start an HIV/AIDS awareness club for the high school students. Mr. Marlow agreed and so began a journey of alternative education and community outreach by an unlikely bunch of advocates led by an even less likely champion.



Melvin Wright and friend Zee Strong

Melvin’s own awareness of HIV and AIDS is deeply personal; he lost four family members to AIDS related illnesses. Some 17 years ago, Melvin’s sister Pat began dating a man who then moved in with her and their mother. “He was big and healthy,” recounts Melvin. “Five months later, my sister wheeled this guy out of the room in a wheelchair. I jumped!” When the guy passed away, Melvin recalls, “They didn’t talk about why he died,” and not long after, he continues, “I said, ‘Mom, there’s something wrong with Pat.’ By the time she went to the doctor, she had full blown AIDS.” Pat passed away with Melvin and his mother by her side, he recalls solemnly, citing “Medicine wasn’t like it is now.”

Melvin’s father and stepmother also passed away from AIDS. He and a stepsister were raised by his father who Melvin calls his “role model.” His father died two years after his sister, his stepmother ten years after that, followed by an uncle. In memory of these loved ones, Melvin wears a ring he had custom made which bears four diamonds. The ring symbolizes the depth of motivation behind his HIV/AIDS activism. “Four diamonds for the four family members I lost,” says Melvin who vows, “I’m not going to lose another family member or another friend on my watch!”

To that end, Melvin has become a vibrant voice of HIV/AIDS awareness. The way he sees it, this awareness needs to reach everyone so he’s taken it upon himself to educate, inform and involve his own community through a host of innovative grassroots efforts. “The Fort Lauderdale City Commission has a jazz event,” he cites. “I called the commissioner in my district and told him, ‘You have something at the park every month, why not do something for the Black community for HIV awareness?’ Because of that, now every year for World AIDS Day, we have something with them.”

A mover and a shaker and an awareness-day event-maker. Not everybody has the vision or the tenacity to affect change in their community, but for Melvin it seems to be first and second nature. Last year he decided to organize a health fair with his church. “I asked the pastor if we can have it,” Melvin relates. “I reached out to the Health Department, the Black Treatment Advocates Network (BTAN), a lot of different people. It was all for HIV awareness,” he declares, adding for emphasis, “We even blocked off the road!” One of Melvin’s heartfelt initiatives yet to be realized is an HIV awareness Florida license plate. Incredulous, he

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According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, at the end of 2015, an estimated 60,300 youth, ages 13–24, were living with HIV in the United States. Of these, 51% (31,000) were living with undiagnosed HIV—the highest rate of undiagnosed HIV in any age group.

Do the Wright Thing

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relates, “I was riding down the road and I see we even have a tag for animals, but we don’t have a tag for HIV!” Melvin

I have activities for them. The first thing we did was for World AIDS Day in December,” he recounts. “Me and the kids released more than fifty red balloons into the sky in the football stadium.” A couple of months later, to commemorate National

states. “They are our tomorrow.” For today Melvin is doing everything he can to help them make the world a little – or a lot – better by teaching about HIV prevention and care, while conveying the value of compassion and support. These are the tools and the ideals Melvin, HIV superhero, imparts on the lives he touches, young and old.



Deerfield Beach High School HIV Speak Out Club, 2017-2018



Saving Grace Award, World AIDS Museum, 2016

took it upon himself to change that, and for five years has been petitioning any government official he can write or call to make an HIV awareness license plate a reality.

Perhaps one of Melvin’s most notable HIV/AIDS advocacy coups has been enlisting the support and the energy of local youth. His HIV Speak Out Club began in the fall of 2017, with 41 Deerfield Beach High School students. “It’s a club that educates the youth,” Melvin explains. “I bring in people to speak to the kids.

Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day on February 7, 2018, Melvin set a challenge: Go into the community and get as many people as you can to take a photo holding a Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day poster. Twenty-five of the students took the challenge and succeeded in capturing a total of 5,500 such photos. At the end of the school year, Melvin relays, “I thanked the principal for his support and Principal Marlow countered, ‘No, thank you.’”

Both Melvin and Mr. Marlow have high hopes for this school year’s Speak Out Club. In addition to guest speakers and awareness day activities, there are plans for a school-wide World AIDS Day event. Also, Melvin has established a scholarship incentive for one deserving Speak Out Club member. The K.W.J.L. Scholarship, which will award \$500 for outstanding HIV/AIDS advocacy, is an acronym memorializing the names of the family members Melvin lost to AIDS. He takes comfort in passing on the love by empowering the next generation.

He began working with the kids originally, he says, “Because what I see going on around the school.” He recognized the potential to channel all that young energy into a positive force in the fight against stigma. “They’re the future,” he

“I constantly think about HIV, what to do next,” Melvin muses. “I plan months ahead.” Melvin explains. Last year at World AIDS Day he gave away six bicycles, this year he wants to give away twelve. He can’t do enough, it seems, to make the world a better place for those living with HIV, and to educate those who are not and he knows he can’t do it alone. On a personal level, it seems he won’t have to; Melvin recently became engaged to, in his words, “a beautiful lady,” Bridget Duncan. There’s apparently no shortage of love in Melvin’s life and no shortage of big ideas, worthwhile initiatives and laudable success in bringing HIV/AIDS awareness to his own community.

In the video “Saving Grace: Confronting HIV/AIDS in the Black Community” which premiered at the World AIDS Museum in 2016, twenty community members were interviewed, Melvin among them. In that interview he says, “I always say, we are in this fight together. It’s not about me. It’s not about that person or this person. We got to try and stop the stigma. We got to work together.” And when it comes to stigma, Melvin knows he’s in for a fight. He urges everyone around to join the crusade because, he says, “If we’re not fighting together, what are we fighting for?” As ever, leading the charge, Melvin proclaims, “I’m going to fight to the end.” Spoken like a true superhero.

Melvin Wright is on the maintenance staff of Deerfield Beach High School and is an advocate for HIV/AIDS awareness throughout the community.

Awareness Days

September 27

National Gay Men's
HIV/AIDS Awareness Day



October

National AIDS Awareness Month

October 11

National Coming Out Day

October 15

National Latinx AIDS
Awareness Day



November 3

World Kindness Day

November 20

Transgender Day of Remembrance

December

National Human Rights Month

December 1

World AIDS Day



December 10

International Human Rights Day

HIV/AIDS Support Groups

Angels of Hope

African American, Tuesdays 6:30pm
MODCO
401 NW 9th Avenue
Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33311
954-767-9919

ARTAS – Linkage to Care

HIV-newly diagnosed or new to area,
periodically
Rafael Reyes 954-463-9005 X307

CHOICES

HIV+ Men, 5-week program
The Pride Center
2040 N. Dixie Hwy
Wilton Manors, FL 33305
Magno Morales 954-463-9011 X303

Couples Speak

Men, 4-week program
The Pride Center
2040 N. Dixie Hwy
Wilton Manors, FL 33305
Lorenzo Robertson 954-463-9011 X306

Hispanic HIV Support Group

Latino, third Wednesday of the month,
12:00pm
Care Resource
871 W. Oakland Park Blvd.
Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33311
Argenis Aguilera 954-567-7141 X112

HIV Gay Men Support Group

MSM, Thursdays at 2:00pm
Care Resource
871 W Oakland Park Blvd.
Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33311
954-567-7141 X142

HIV Lunch and Learn

For All, 4th Thursday of the month, 12:30pm
Broward Health Comprehensive Care
1101 NW 1st St.
Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33311
Trudy Love 954-356-5037

HIV+ Men's Weekly Group

MSM, Tuesdays at 7:00pm
SunServe
1480 SW 9th Avenue
Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33315
954-548-4602

L.I.F.E. Program

MSM, Tuesdays at 6:30pm*
*14-week program, January & June
The Pride Center at Equality Park
2040 N. Dixie Hwy
Wilton Manors, FL 33305
John Baumgardner 954-463-9011 X302

Positive Issues: HIV+ Gay Men and the Men that Love Them

MSM, Thursdays 7:00pm
Wellness Center of South Florida
2931 NE 6th Avenue
Wilton Manors, FL 33334
Jerry Hoinacki, 954-568-0152

Positive Leaders Uplifting Each Other

For All, Thursdays 7:00pm
Conference Call:
Dial in number: 1-857-232-0156
Conference code: 703251
Karen 754-245-5462

Positive Social

PLWH, affected by PLWH
or at risk for HIV, Tuesdays 7:00pm
Latinos Salud
2330 Wilton Dr.,
Wilton Manors, FL 33305
954-765-6239

Positive Attitudes

MSM, Wednesday, 7:00pm
World AIDS Museum
1201 NE 26th St. #111
Wilton Manors, FL 33305
Steve Stagon 954-390-0550

SOFFA: Significant Others, Family, Friends, and Allies

Transgender/Gender Variant
2nd & 4th Saturday of the month
SunServe
2312 Wilton Drive
Wilton Manors, FL 33305
Santi Aguirre, 954-764-5150 X112

The Kiki Project: Open Forum

Black MSM, Special Events
The Pride Center
2040 N. Dixie Hwy
Wilton Manors, FL 33305
Lorenzo Robertson 954-463-9011 X306

Women of Empowerment

HIV+ Women, meets monthly:
Sept. 26, Oct. 24, Nov. 14, Dec. 5
Care Resource
871 W Oakland Park Blvd.
Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33311
Jennifer Palmer 954-567-7141 X101

Online HIV/AIDS Support Forums

hiv.supportgroups.com

Facebook HIV/AIDS Support Groups AIDS HIV Survivor Living Memorial

For All
facebook.com/groups/1716936251671905/

Gay HIV+ Men MSM

facebook.com/groups/GAYHIVUSA

Heterosexual POZ Heterosexual

facebook.com/groups/126252234585822/

HIV/AIDS Network For All

facebook.com/groups/284585801584590/

My AIDS Campaign For All

facebook.com/groups/213320955360312/

Poz & Proud For All

facebook.com/groups/7773554937/

*If you would like to add a support group to
this listing, please email the information to
Lauren Kettler Gold at lgold@broward.org.*

BROWARD RYAN WHITE PART A SERVICE PROVIDERS DIRECTORY

The Broward Ryan White Part A Program provides medical and support services for uninsured or underinsured people living with HIV. In order to access Ryan White Part A services, individuals need to be deemed eligible by Centralized Intake (CIED) and Eligibility Determination provided by a Broward Regional Health Planning Council. CIED representatives are located at the following sites. Call **954-566-1417** for an appt.

- MEDICAL
- PHARMACY
- CASE MANAGEMENT
- MEDICAL CASE MANAGEMENT
- DENTAL
- SUBSTANCE ABUSE
- HEALTH INSURANCE CONTINUATION PROGRAM
- CENTRALIZED INTAKE (CIED) & ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATION
- MENTAL HEALTH
- LEGAL SERVICES
- FOOD SERVICES

● ●
Broward Regional Health Planning Council
Hollywood 954-566-1417

●
Broward Community and Family Health Center
Pompano 954-970-8805

●
Care Resource
Ft. Lauderdale 954-567-7141

●
The Poverello Center
Wilton Manors 954-561-3663

●
Broward House
Wilton Manors 954-568-7373

●
Memorial Primary Care Center
Hollywood 954-265-8410

●
Children's Diagnostic & Treatment Center
Ft. Lauderdale 954-728-1088

●
Broward Health - Specialty Care Center
Ft. Lauderdale 954-527-6064

●
Broward Health - Comprehensive Care Center
Ft. Lauderdale 954-467-0880

●
FL Dept. of Health in Broward County
Ft. Lauderdale 954-467-4700

●
FL Dept. of Health in Broward County - Paul Hughes Health Center
Pompano Beach 954-566-1417

●
AHF Healthcare Center - One River Plaza
Ft. Lauderdale 954-767-0887

●
AHF Healthcare Center - Oakland Park
Oakland Park 954-561-6900

●
AHF Healthcare Center - Northpoint
Ft. Lauderdale 954-772-2411

AIDS HEALTHCARE FOUNDATION (AHF)

●
Wilton Manors Pharmacy
Wilton Manors 954-494-8013

● ● ● ●
Northpoint Healthcare Center
Ft. Lauderdale 954-772-2411

●
Sunrise Pharmacy
Ft. Lauderdale 954-462-9223

●
AHF Healthcare Center
Ft. Lauderdale 954-761-2230

● ● ● ●
Oakland Park Healthcare Center
Ft. Lauderdale 954-561-6900

● ● ●
One River Plaza Healthcare Center
Ft. Lauderdale 954-767-0887

BROWARD COMMUNITY & FAMILY HEALTH CENTERS

● ● ●
Health Center
Pompano 954-970-8805

●
Central Broward Community Health
Lauderhill 954-583-4710

BROWARD HEALTH

● ● ●
Comprehensive Care
Ft. Lauderdale 954-467-0880

●
Children's Diagnostic & Treatment Center
Ft. Lauderdale 954-728-1088

●
Bernard P. Alicki Health Pharmacy
Ft. Lauderdale 954-527-6042

●
Broward Health Medical Center
Ft. Lauderdale 954-522-3355

● ●
Cora E. Braynon Family Health Center
Ft. Lauderdale 954-759-6600

● ●
Annie L. Weaver Health Center
Pompano Beach
Medical 954-786-5903
Case Management 954-786-5929

● ● ●
Specialty Care Center
Ft. Lauderdale
Medical 954-463-7313
Pharmacy 954-463-7313
Case Management 954 527-6064

● ● ●
Comprehensive Care Center, Broward House
Ft. Lauderdale 954-522-4749

FL DEPT. OF HEALTH IN BROWARD COUNTY

● ●
Paul Hughes Health Center
Pompano Beach 954-213-0638

● ●
Fort Lauderdale Health Center
Ft. Lauderdale 954-467-4700

●
South Regional Health Center
Hollywood 954-372-4818

BROWARD HOUSE



Broward House
Ft. Lauderdale 954-523-9454



Broward House
Wilton Manors 954-568-7373

CARE RESOURCE



Care Resource
Oakland Park 954-567-7141

LATINOS SALUD



Latinos Salud
Wilton Manors 954-765-6239

LEGAL AID SERVICES OF BROWARD COUNTY



Legal Aid Services of Broward County
Plantation 954 765-8950

MEMORIAL HEALTHCARE SYSTEM



South Broward Community Health
35th Ave., Hollywood 954-265-8400



South Broward Community Health
Pembroke Rd., Hollywood 954-265-8400



Memorial Center for Behavioral Health
Hollywood 954-276-3422

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY



Nova Southeastern University
Ft. Lauderdale 954-262-7530



Nova Southeastern University
Cypress Creek 954-262-7530

POVERELLO CENTER



Poverello Center
Wilton Manors 954-561-3663

SUNSERVE



SunServe
Wilton Manors 954-764-5150

PROVIDER SPOTLIGHT

Broward House

Providing Hope and Healing for 30 years



Broward House clients celebrate their Behavioral Health & Housing Programs achievements

Broward House is a not for profit social services organization with nearly 30 years of providing services for our community impacted by HIV and other chronic health challenges. We provide a unique treatment program which allows individuals to address all the life areas which impact their health, wellbeing and sobriety. What does a client of Broward House look like? An individual who desires and deserves to know they are worthy of respect and dignity. Someone who is impacted by HIV in every aspect of their being: emotional, spiritual, mental and physical, and who should have ease of access to the care essential for healing. We serve every age, every race, every gender, every sexual orientation, every education level – HIV/AIDS, chronic illness and housing needs are everywhere and so is Broward House.

Broward House has served Broward County since the beginning of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, providing a home to many who passed in peace at our Assisted Living Facility. The value of this grassroots organization continues to drive the core of Broward House's delivery of services, even as the agency has grown to meet the current needs of individuals impacted by HIV. And while the original mission of providing housing remains a core service component, individuals require a broader array of support services for true healing to occur. It is this philosophy that led to

the expansion of services over the years. These are all provided regardless of the individual's financial status.

Broward House services include assisted living, transitional housing, independent living in 74 agency-owned and operated apartments, scattered site housing voucher assistance, case management, mental health, substance abuse treatment and several HIV and Substance Abuse prevention programs. Also, Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) and HIV Testing, and PrEP services are available through an on-site partnership with CAN Community Health Medical Care. Our extensive experience with this structure allows us to immediately connect an individual with services to support comprehensive health care in a comfortable environment.

Broward House also has established relationships in the community to connect individuals with services not provided internally. The agency's goals is 100% of those living with HIV in care and to eliminate new infections working alongside all of our community partners and stake holders.

For questions or information about Broward House, call 954-568-7373 X2200.



Broward House operates on a budget of \$8.2 million, with 94 employees serving 4,000 clients annually. Its major funders are HOPWA, Ryan White, Homeless Initiative Partnership, Department of Health, DCF through BBHC. Broward House has four client service locations, two of which house their partner clinics. In addition, their residential program operates one Assisted Living Facility and ten apartment buildings.

GET CARE. BE THERE.

If you are an HIV+ individual receiving medical care and you adhere to your prescribed HIV treatment, you can become virally suppressed **within a period of six months.**

After another six months of being virally suppressed, you will attain “undetectable” status.

That means the HIV virus is undetectable in you. Which means there is no chance – none* – of you transmitting it to anyone else. It also means you can live a full and healthy life.

But you must be in care, and stay in care, to do so. **It’s that simple**, and that effective. And remember, you don’t only owe it to yourself.

*According to the NIAID
(National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases)

GET CARE
BROWARD
TREAT HIV | BEAT HIV

Broward Ryan White Part A
954-357-9797