The POZ 100: Celebrating the South

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The POZ 100 list celebrates people working to end the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In the past, we've highlighted groups such as researchers, youth and long-term survivors, but this year we're focusing on a geographic region: the South.

Why? Kathie M. Hiers, CEO of AIDS Alabama and a POZ 100 honoree, summed it up best in the documentary deepsouth: "[In the United States, the South has] the most people living with HIV/AIDS, the most poverty, the most sexually transmitted infections, the most people without health insurance, the most vulnerable populations, the fastest-growing epidemic, the least access to health care, the highest mortality rates and the least resources to deal with this crisis."

On the flip side, the South is also home to a diverse and inspiring range of people dedicated to elevating lives and improving the health and well-being of those in their communities. We celebrate 100 of them here.

You'll meet professional AIDS advocates and part-time volunteers, members of the black church and an atheist from Black Lives Matter, scientists and stay-at-home moms, social workers and those who work social media, and people who are living with the virus and those who are not. And because HIV doesn't discriminate, you'll meet honorees spanning a range of socioeconomic backgrounds, sexual identities and ethnicities— from Latino immigrants to same-gender-loving African Americans—who hail from places as diverse as rural areas, small towns, suburbs and big cities.

Since there are varying ways to define what constitutes the South, we decided to go with the U.S. Census Bureau's definition, which is also used by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia.

These 16 states plus DC make up 37 percent of the U.S. population but account for 44 percent of Americans living with the virus. The HIV epidemic in the South is alarming, but, as you'll discover in the 2016 POZ 100, Southerners are rising to the challenge.

The 2016 POZ 100:

Row 1: Ellen Allen, Dazmine Allen, Monica Johnson, Michael Maus, Gregory Fordham, Derek Canas

Row 2: Roberto Olmo, Butch McKay, Phyllis Finch, Jean Hernandez, Debbie Warren, Christine Hackford, Adrian Castellanos, Mark Grantham, Gary Fowler

Row 3: Auntjuan Wiley, Twana Lawler, Brady Morris, Art Jackson, Chelsea Gulden, Renee Burgess, Jeremy Hobbs, Ken Rapkin, Ashton Woods, Carmen Julious, Alison Rice, Kevin Varner

Row 4: Shyronn Jones, Kathie Hiers, Jon Gabriel Ortiz, Arianna Lint, Jennifer Townsend, Alex Smith, Ronald Henderson, Morris Murray, Evelyn Scott, Cathy Robinson-Pickett, Robert Adams-Ghee, David Fawcett,

Row 5: Cheryl Lewis Edwards, Jonathan Lucas, Tiommi Luckett, Robin Webb, Carlton Smith, Sam Graper, Joyce Turner-Keller, Steve Daniels, Esther Ross, Shirley Selvage, Michael Emanuel Rajner

Row 6: Joaquin Garcia, Melvin Slack, Monique Howell-Moree, Chip Eakins, Ruby Amagwula, Darrin Johnson, Joe Fuentes, Stacy Jennings, Daniel Weaver, Angel Camacho, John Curry, Wesley Thompson

Row 7: Janet Kitchen, Alleen King Carter, Nicholas Carlisle, Dazon Dixon Diallo, Carolyn McAllaster, Daron Kirven, David Hearn, Leslie Hall, Stephen Fallon, TK Hampton, Tammy Kinney, Patrick

Gordon

Row 8: Steven Romeo, Deborah Kahal, Kecia Johnson, Michael Burks, Marxavian Jones, Bambi Gaddist, Byanca Parker, Danny Harris, Darnell Ferrell

Row 9: Ieshia Scott, Laurie Dill, C. Andrew Martin, Yvonne Early, Billy Duckett, Lee Storrow, Jaysen Foreman-McMaster, David Parker

Row 10: Savalas Squire, Jason Elliott, David Armstead, Charles Whitehead, Vicky Fortugno-Oliver, Stephen Bloodworth, Tiye Amos Mandela, Blake Rowley

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