The POZ 100: Celebrating 10 Years of Advocacy

POZ honors the past ten years of the POZ 100

November 16, 2020 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr., Joe Mejía , Jennifer Morton and Trent Straube

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Magazines put out lists. It's what we do. Each year, Forbes informs us who the richest people in America are; Time rounds up the most influential; Vanity Fair announces the best dressed.

In 2010, POZ decided to create our own list, and the POZ 100 was born. The idea behind it was simple: to spotlight and celebrate HIV advocacy work being done in our communities. For the first few years, the POZ staff selected the honorees for each of our annual lists. But by the fourth year, we decided that the honorees should be nominated by the HIV community itself—and it has remained that way ever since.

Each year's list has a slightly different focus, such as women or long-term survivors or youth. Sometimes the list consists of only HIV-positive people; other years, HIV-negative allies are included. Despite these differences, the aim is always the same—to thank those in the HIV/AIDS struggle for their work.

HIV advocacy is about doing the work for the long haul. We have made remarkable progress against the virus over the years, but we still have a long way to go. And change often happens slowly. As the late Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg said, "Generally, change in our society is incremental.... Real change, enduring change, happens one step at a time."

Yet we must keep pushing for change. We must keep moving forward. We must keep demanding that the systems and policies in place in our democracy work for all people—not just some of them. We have to ensure that our most marginalized communities are not left behind. We have the tools to end the epidemic, but we need to fight for the funding to implement them.

We're going to get discouraged, we're going to lose battles and we're going to lose loved ones along the way. Sadly, over the years, we've lost many fierce advocates who've been included on the POZ 100. In 2020 alone, we've lost Larry Kramer, Deloris Dockrey, Ron Simmons and, most recently, Timothy Ray Brown.

2020 has been an especially tough year for many other reasons. The COVID-19 pandemic rages on. Belief in science has been challenged, and our medical experts are being ignored. Whatever

the outcome of the presidential election, we must keep fighting to ensure that all people are treated with the respect and dignity they deserve. Until there is a cure for HIV and it's available to everyone, it doesn't matter who is in the White House, HIV advocates will continue to fight.

Because that's what HIV advocates do. We can't stop fighting for ourselves or for one another.

Resiliency is our superpower. You may knock us down and you may stand in our way, but we will keep on fighting. As activist Matt Sharp says in this issue, "I can't imagine not supporting others and fighting HIV for the rest of my life. It's simply what I wake up to do every day."

To honor that resiliency, instead of producing our usual list this year, we decided to reflect on all the amazing advocates from the past 10 years of the POZ 100. We want to remind HIV advocates that we see you and we appreciate the work that you do.

We caught up with some of our past POZ 100 honorees and asked them to answer a few questions about their advocacy work. We hope that their words inspire and encourage you to engage with your own communities and advocate for yourself and others.

Next year, the POZ 100 will return to celebrate Black HIV advocates—both positive and negative—who are working to end the epidemic. Nominations will open next summer, so start thinking about whom you'd like to see on the list! Until then, here's to advocates everywhere who are doing what they do to make our world a better place.

Click below to read about each year's list:

Introduction | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | On the Cover | HIV Advocates on HIV Advocacy

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