Cross-Country Crusaders

Meet 10 people with HIV making C2EA their mission

September 1, 2005 By David Thorpe

Halima Grant, 44, Cleveland, Ohio
Diagnosed 1989; Volunteer

On C2EA: I'm talking to the big black churches about housing people when the Seattle activist caravan comes through, or giving whatever they can give, even if it's a bottle of water. Churches are involved in AIDS anyway—who doesn't want good publicity?
On speaking out: I spoke at the Youth ACTION Institute [to train C2EA activists]. When I do outreach, I try to make people cry, tell them how my skin changed,my hair fell out. I was diagnosed in 1989. I'm a veteran.
On staying strong: I spend time with my granddaughter and go to church. And I still watch*The Color Purple*. It's what brought me to be a strong black woman—even before HIV.

Robin Webb, 48, Jackson, Mississippi
Diagnosed 1991; Mississippi state coordinator

On coordinating: I have two C2EA caravans coming through—I just want people to have a place to eat and sleep! But they'll get great Southern hospitality. The state has a big heart.
On bouncing back: I got an AIDS diagnosis in 1993, but I've been extremely healthy since. I make a point to go hiking in Zion Canyon, Utah, every year for 40 days and nights. I hike and pray.
On activism: C2EA is the tip of the iceberg. I just founded an ASO called AIDS Action in Mississippi. The PWA community needed to get assertive.

Paige Swanberg, 24, Billings, Montana
Diagnosed 2001; Montana state coordinator

On C2EA: We're hoping the caravan from Seattle can march down the cliff around Billings and through Main Street. I want it to be something you can't ignore. And we're doing a Pet Walk. We don't even have an AIDS Walk, so this is something different. My pitbull, Mittens, is gonna love it.
On Mittens: It's a funny name for a pit—but she has two white socks!
On chilling out: I'm a little overwhelmed organizing, but I have a great team, and I work in my

yard when I can. Sometimes, I feel like the flower that grew through the concrete.

Larry Bryant, 38, Houston, Texas
Diagnosed 1986; Field organizer

On AIDS Inc.: AIDS looks like a hamster wheel, with ASOs bowing to the status quo. I like the idea of C2EA sticking a spoke in that wheel—I left my job to work on it.
On the future: When I found out I was positive, I was playing college football. I daydreamed about the house I'd live in, what job I would have. Now, I look forward to my *Waiting to Exhale* moment, when everything is cool: Things are getting better in AIDS and I'm married and have kids.
On the gridiron: I grew up a Cowboys fan. I'm sticking with 'em!

Hector Hernandez, 34, Chicago, Illinois
Diagnosed 2004; Volunteer

On C2EA: I'm hoping to get this hockey place to schedule a game to do a benefit—we gotta get media coverage. But I also want to join the caravan and go to DC. I've done some lobbying—it empowers you.
On the closet: I'm newly diagnosed, and activism helps me deal. I was in the closet about being gay—I've been married and divorced four times and have a kid. Then I went to an African-American AIDS conference that changed everything. I came out screaming, "I'm HIV positive!"

Valerie Jimenez, 40, New York, New York
Diagnosed 1989; Field organizer

On C2EA: I'm coordinating the "walking" caravan from New York to Washington, DC. I'd guesstimate we're going to have a core group of 100 marchers who go all the way. The main obstacle is two bridges, one in Jersey and one in Maryland, with no pedestrian access—it's been a pain in my rear!
On Eliza: I have a 2-year-old granddaughter named Eliza, who is the light of my life. Someday, I'd like her daughter to complain because she has to get another vaccine in school—and it's for AIDS.

Darren Wells, 36, Providence, Rhode Island
Diagnosed 1999; Volunteer

On anniversaries:I'm coming up on the sixth anniversary of being positive—I got my diagnosis in September—and it's good to do something with it. When you get the news, you need to wallow, but I'd hate it if that were the end of the story.
On caravans:I'll be joining the Nor'easter caravan in Providence. I'm not worried about traveling with strangers—but I do have a weird diet and allergies.

On prevention: People are still having sex and not talking about HIV. It's still the elephant in the room.

Johnny Guaylupo, 23, Bronx, New York
Diagnosed 1998; Volunteer

On marching: I'm planning to walk to DC with New York's Paving the Way caravan. I'm jogging and getting physically fit—I'm not that worried, though,because other people will help me keep going.
On disclosing: Being in POZ is a big first step for me. Most of my family members know I'm positive, but my best friend doesn't. I have to start somewhere.
On the stakes: I hope this activism doesn't die out: If we only do it till October, that's not enough.

Judith Dillard, 51, Fort Worth, Texas
Diagnosed 1990; Texas state coordinator
On commitment: I've turned down jobs because it would interfere with C2EA. I'm hoping a job will come out of this—I'm the greatest treatment educator in the U.S.!
On raising her voice: I've been clean for eight years, but I used to be a positive woman on the streets of LA, addicted to crack—and I did what it took to get money for drugs. I went to prison for 14 months. Those are the stories I tell senators when I go to their offices and tell them we need money for HIV prevention. That's where my power comes from.

Walt Senterfitt, 61, Los Angeles, California
Diagnosed 1988; Executive committee member

On activism: I've been an activist for 45 years—I was on the staff of Martin Luther King, briefly. His Poor People's March [the model for C2EA] was a failure, but connecting AIDS to a broader movement is important to me, reaching out to the South, African Americans, churches, unions, women's groups, gay-rights organizations.
On giving your all: I'm an epidemiologist with the LA County Health Department. I take time off and do C2EA work on nights and weekends—my health is generally good, so I can do both. I think I'll be an activist till I'm no longer physically capable.

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