Accessing Activism

Lorenzo Davis works to protect access to AIDS Drug Assistance Programs.

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As politicians in conservative states move to limit access to HIV treatment, Lorenzo Davis is leading the fight back. His goal: to protect access to AIDS Drug Assistance Programs (ADAPs) for people who rely on them to afford their HIV medications.

According to Davis, 18 states have already made it harder to access HIV meds. This includes Florida, where Davis was born and raised and which is home to roughly 18,000 HIV-positive residents who rely on ADAP.

As marketing director and outreach manager for Cintex Community Health Clinic in South Florida, Davis is working on the front line to protect pharmaceutical access "in Alabama, Georgia, all the way down and across Florida."

Davis turned to HIV advocacy to break the cycles of neglect and abuse he endured growing up. "I saw a lot of hurt and pain," he says. "From being molested, being kicked out of the house because I was gay and then beat up to get the gayness out of me."

Davis was 16 and still in high school when he contracted HIV. "I didn't know what to do at that time," says Davis, now 38. "I just knew: OK, if I'm going to die, I want to be able to tell the world what I went through and what I experienced. I wrote everything down."

That's when he took himself to the University of Miami's adolescent medicine clinic, where not only did he access healthcare but he also met an HIV advocate named Quintara Lane, who inspired him.

"She was in the community helping people to stay safe and educate people about safer sex," Davis explains. "At that time, she saw something in me, because even though I was in my sad and depressed sorrow, I was always willing to tell my story of how I got HIV."

Lane also helped Davis access ADAP, which he describes as “the first time during this whole HIV journey that I didn’t walk alone.”

His initial foray into HIV advocacy involved going on gay hookup apps to preach harm reduction and share his unlikely story of resilience as a teenager living with the virus. “I would tell my story, what happened to me and let them know it could happen to them,” Davis says.

As a newly diagnosed teen, Davis found himself counseling others living with HIV, especially people who were also newly diagnosed. “They were contemplating suicide,” he says. “They heard my story, and I told them what I went through to help guide them and save their lives.”

These days, Davis calls both Jacksonville, Florida, and Atlanta home. And he keeps busy as one of the most outspoken leaders on the issue of preserving ADAP in the most conservative parts of America while also working on a passion project titled ADAP ASAP, an initiative “to raise funds to help those individuals who can’t access their medications and amplify the voices of the individuals who depend on ADAP to survive.”

Through it all, Davis creates and performs music as LHAYES and writes to manage the stress that accompanies working as an HIV advocate in an increasingly inhospitable political climate.

“Just like I write everything down, it’s the same with music, singing and theater,” he says. “From high school until today, I just keep myself busy and focused on those things that give me joy.”

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