Be That Shining Star

Angel Vick, the first recipient of the NCAAN Carolyn McAllaster Scholarship, shares why she is excited to participate in AIDSWatch 2020.

March 28, 2020 By North Carolina AIDS Action Network

In recognition of the incredible advocates in North Carolina, four years ago the North Carolina AIDS Action Network (NCAAN) started a small stipend program to help offset some of the travel costs of attending AIDSWatch, the annual HIV/AIDS lobbying event in Washington, DC, and help folks who might not be able to attend otherwise.

This scholarship program has steadily grown over the past several years thanks to a partnership with Campaign for Southern Equality, and this year we were thrilled to announce a new component to the program, the Carolyn McAllaster Scholarship. The scholarship was named after longtime advocate, founding NCAAN board member, and HIV living legend Carolyn McAllaster in honor of her retirement.

This new annual scholarship will fully fund one North Carolina advocate to attend both AIDSWatch and Building Power Across the Spectrum, the NCAAN annual fall advocacy conference. The scholarship is funded as part of the NCAAN Endowment, which was established with the support of the Elton John AIDS Foundation last year.

The first recipient of the Carolyn McAllaster Scholarship is Angel Vick. Angel will still be participating and attending AIDSWatch virtually on March 30 with many advocates from across the country. NCAAN will be funding her participation in AIDSWatch next year as well, in addition to naming the second Carolyn McAllaster Scholarship winner!

Hear from Angel in her own words about why she’s an HIV advocate in North Carolina:

Tell us about yourself and your background.

My name is Angela or Angel Vick. I was born, grew up and went to school in Washington, DC. I am a mother of five and grandmother of 13. I later moved to North Carolina.

What do you do for a living?

Right now, I am a full-time HIV advocate and board member at Lincoln Community Health Center, but I am also a former teacher’s aide from when I used to live in Maryland.

What do you do for fun?

Writing, poetry, spending time with my grandson and kids in general, and doing hair. I'm pretty much a homebody.

What has your experience and journey with HIV been like?

In 2007, there was an HIV testing event happening at my church and my son and I decided to get tested. After we took the HIV test, I started praying harder than I have ever prayed in my life. I was actually more worried for my son than for myself. I prayed to God that if my son's test was negative, I would move to North Carolina and go to NC Central University in Durham, NC, and educate people about HIV. I would also spend time educating myself about HIV. My son's test was negative, but my test came back positive. I still decided to move to North Carolina a few years later because of that prayer I made to God back in 2007.

Before I learned more about HIV, I always connected HIV to death. Whenever I told people about my status, people would immediately start crying because they thought I was going to fall over and die. I eventually had to stop telling people because it got too hard to deal with the stigma and other people's feelings about HIV.

Talk to us about your journey into HIV advocacy and about your experience with HIV advocacy so far?

At first, I didn't tell hardly any people about my HIV status. I wasn't comfortable yet. I joined the Positive Women's Network (PWN) when I still lived in DC to connect with other people like me. Women who were like me.

A few years later, I was invited to a World AIDS Day event with a group called Sisters for Sisters and I ended up going. During the program, there was a time for people from the audience to speak. I wanted to speak but I was so nervous! I eventually worked up the courage to get up and speak and I shared my HIV status publicly for the first time. It was incredible. I felt so free.

Growing up, I was sexually abused and was involved in drugs. Later on, I was in an abusive relationship with my ex-husband. Because of that abusive relationship, I was given resources to be able to escape and move down to North Carolina. I then got in touch with my cousin who lives there and started working with Project Safe at NC Central University in Durham, NC, educating students about healthy relationships and safer sex.

I also joined the women's group at Healing with Care with Dr. Karen Bynum and later spoke at Women's Empowerment, which was one of the biggest speaking opportunities I have had since that World AIDS Day event when I first shared my HIV status.

I have done a bunch of trainings and workshops with the North Carolina AIDS Action Network and at Duke University. I had the chance to attend Duke's Medical Center HIV Care Continuum, which is a three-part training for HIV peer education. I really learned a lot about HIV from Carolyn

McAllaster when she was at Duke and was so happy to be the inaugural winner of the Carolyn McAllaster Endowment Award scholarship for AIDSWatch.

I wanted to learn more about HIV to educate my friends and family, but I have had a better response from strangers than my own friends and family. People in North Carolina supported me when my own family didn't. It has been complete strangers who were there for me and helped through my HIV journey, not friends and family. The people in North Carolina really embraced me and did not judge me. I really feel like I'm supposed to be in North Carolina. Lately, my friends and family have been a little bit better about my HIV status. My son even joined me and spoke at a World AIDS Day event last year!

Going through tough situations earlier in life made it easier in being able to deal with my diagnosis. I'm so surprised about my journey and where my life has taken me! I haven't really taken the time to think about it all until this interview.

Have you ever attended AIDSWatch?

Yes, in 2016.

Why did you decide that you wanted to attend AIDSWatch back in 2016?

I wanted to know what everything was about! I wanted to learn as much about HIV for myself. I also wanted to learn and teach things about HIV, particularly to the younger generations. Older people make it challenging. It is hard to teach a dog new tricks!

Why do you think it is important for people living with HIV to be actively involved in HIV advocacy?

Because the best way to know something, is to go through it firsthand. Not to learn about it. Not to read about it. People making policies should be able to learn about HIV from your personal experience.

I also want to fight against HIV stigma. I don't want other people living with HIV to experience the stigma from other people that I have and not have family support. If I help one person and God says well done, it is all worth it.

What is the most important thing that our legislators in DC need to hear about the needs of people living with HIV in this country? Are there local issues that you are passionate about or are of pressing concern for you, particularly for people living with HIV?

We need to end HIV stigma and fix housing. Just because you are living with HIV, you should still be able to have housing. And also medicine for lower income people to just stay alive. I'm tired of people judging instead of helping.

What message do you want to share with people living with HIV and HIV advocates during this time?

Look at your HIV status as being the “chosen ones.” Not everyone can do this and live this life. Going through difficult things in life helps make you stronger. Be that shining star and don’t worry what others think about you. People won’t break you.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/aidswatch-2020-ncaan