



Centering Lived Experience

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At only 27 years old, Princess Jauan Durbin already has a decade of advocacy experience under their belt. The HIV activist is vice president of community health and partnerships at the Southern Legal Center for Youth, where they head its leadership programs.

“The Southern Kiki Leaders Collective is my HIV prevention grassroots program for the kiki scene,” Durbin tells POZ. “It includes HIV awareness and prevention initiatives and programming, including linkage-to-care services directly to the ballroom community.”

Kiki is a youth-centered offshoot of ballroom culture, the mostly Black and Latino LGBTQ underground community best known today for voguing and its portrayal in the 1990 documentary *Paris Is Burning* as well as the fictional TV series *Pose* (2018–2021). AIDS figured in both the movie and the TV show. According to Durbin, HIV-related healthcare disparities continue to disproportionately harm Black and Latino communities.

“I bring resources, community empowerment and sexual health navigation services into the ballroom space in a way that is accessible and digestible,” Durbin explains. “This outreach brings those resources directly into community and gives young people, specifically between ages 18 and 30, direct access to resources and opportunities to protect their sexual health.”

Thanks to those efforts, Durbin’s influence extends well beyond their home base in suburban Washington, DC.

“Although I live in Prince George’s County, Maryland, my programs are in Atlanta; Charlotte, North Carolina; and Orlando, Miami and Tampa in Florida.”

A 2020 graduate of Morehouse College, Durbin recently completed their master’s degree, a

milestone they hope will propel the next phase of their career.

“I knew that I wanted a master’s degree, and I came across the master of science in health equity program at Meharry School of Global Health,” Durbin says. “That was honestly the best program to equip me with healthcare policy education, specifically epidemiology. Graduate school just exposed me to the kind of technical research and theory side of this work that I could use as I actually do community-based research and programming.”

Durbin’s recent partnerships include a collaboration with pharmaceutical company ViiV Healthcare, for which they serve as a youth ambassador. Durbin also chairs the Health Action Alliance’s HIV Leadership Advisory Council for U.S. Business Action to End HIV.

“I’m proud of the work that I’m doing with ViiV because I have my own digital series called #Princess in Community that’s created, produced and written by me,” Durbin explains. “The series allows me to go beyond prevention and allows me to center joy and lived experience, conversations that go deeper than ‘get on PrEP [pre-exposure prophylaxis for HIV prevention].’”

A common thread throughout Durbin’s advocacy is their insistence that stakeholders put their money where their mouth is when it comes to young people.

“I’m tired of hearing ‘young people are doing such great HIV work’ but without funding our work,” Durbin says. “I’ve been uplifted beautifully in this space, but I have not been resourced enough to have the impact that I know I can have in eradicating this disease.”