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Bronx, New York

Positive since 1989

I am 62 years old, and I have been living with HIV for the past 30 years. For many of those years, HIV felt like something that was holding me back, rather than something that was building me up. Today, thanks to a job training program I was able to access through my health plan, Amida Care, I get to work at a job where I use my lived experience as someone who is HIV positive as a tool to help those who are just learning their own status. As a peer worker, my experience living with HIV is an asset not only to the clients I interact with but also to my employer, United Bronx Parents Acacia Network Health Home.

There is nothing more valuable than speaking with individuals on a person-to-person level and helping connect them to health care. I know how they're feeling because I've been there too. But I also want them to know that with treatment, people living with HIV can live long and healthy lives. Amida Care is a Medicaid special needs health plan in New York, and it helped me get treatment to help me become virally suppressed. I want others to know that you can get your HIV to an undetectable level and do all the things you ever wanted to do with the right supports in place.

I think peer workers are such an important part of a supportive health care system, especially for people with complex health conditions like HIV. I'm thankful that I was able to attend Amida Care's Innovator Employment Project, which is made possible with funding from the New York City Council. My being positive has helped many clients to regain their stability. Expanding access to training programs like the one I attended will help people find meaningful and fulfilling jobs all while helping others. It is an important part of the fight to end the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and it has truly changed my life. By sharing my story, I hope I can make an impact on others and help them feel supported to seek out job opportunities that might be possible for them. There's nothing you can't do because you're HIV positive.

What three adjectives best describe you?

Determined, healthy and virally suppressed.

What is your greatest achievement?

Being a peer worker and giving back.

What is your greatest regret?

Drugs in my life.

What keeps you up at night?

Basketball.

If you could change one thing about living with HIV, what would it be?

Stigma.

What is the best advice you ever received?
“You can do it.”

What person in the HIV/AIDS community do you most admire?

Shatarra Barnes, my boss. (She’s not HIV positive but works in the HIV community as program director of health homes at Acacia Network).

What drives you to do what you do?

The thought of being employed and being able to help others.

What is your motto?

I’m not living with HIV; HIV is living with me.

If you had to evacuate your house immediately, what is the one thing you would grab on the way out?

My medication, a coat and my pocketbook.

If you could be any animal, what would you be? And why?

A dog because they have a lot of compassion, and they know how to be a friend.

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