Employment Needs

Mark Misrok addresses employment and HIV.

July 1, 2019 By Alicia Green

When he tested positive in 1989, Mark Misrok didn't expect to live a full life or have a career.

"I spent many years just taking jobs that helped me survive and that I coped with," explains Misrok, an HIV advocate who now lives in New York City. One of those jobs was driving a cab in San Francisco.

After several years, though, Misrok wanted to transition to another occupation but felt trapped by a lack of skills and valuable experience.

So in 1992, he visited San Francisco's Positive Resource Center (PRC), which had an employment services program for people living with HIV.

Misrok started out at PRC as a client but soon became a volunteer. Three years later, he was hired as director of that employment program, a position he held until 2007.

With the introduction of protease inhibitors in the late 1990s, people with HIV began to feel healthy enough to return to work. As a result, the program expanded to address a broader range of employment needs.

"Across all those years, it was a very powerful experience for me to work one-on-one with almost 2,000 people seeking a range of employment assistance," Misrok says.

In 2003, Misrok connected with a group of advocates focused on strengthening responses to the employment needs of people with HIV across the United States. Together, they formed the National Working Positive Coalition (NWPC).

He served as president of NWPC's board of directors for 14 years before becoming executive director last year. "I have helped lead their advocacy, research and capacity-building activities across most of the history of the organization," he says.

The coalition's current projects include working with two HIV groups on a three-year grant that focuses on the employment needs and strategies of people with HIV over 50 and collaborating with the Southern University at Baton Rouge in Louisiana to improve responses to the employment

needs of African Americans with HIV in the area.

On September 18, the coalition is partnering with the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and community members to present Career Power Source 2019. (To register, click here.)

The event is the “largest-ever daylong employment conference for people living with or at greater risk for HIV,” according to Misrok. It will feature workshops, résumé development, headshot photography, career coaching and more.

Misrok’s goal is to help people with HIV make well-informed and self-determined decisions about employment and understand the range of opportunities they can pursue.

“Too many of us have been or felt trapped in poverty because of living with HIV,” Misrok explains. “Access to the information, services and resources that can broaden our options must be made available to us.”

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