Help Us Make History. Again.

March 1, 2009

The first time a group of people with AIDS from around the country got together to strategize was in 1983 at a health conference in Denver.

They wrote a historic manifesto—The Denver Principles—that became the foundation of the self-empowerment movement for people with HIV/AIDS. It begins:

We condemn attempts to label us as “victims,” a term which implies defeat, and we are only occasionally “patients,” a term which implies passivity, helplessness, and dependence upon the care of others. We are “People With AIDS...”

Beyond casting off the victim label and asserting our humanity, The Denver Principles was the first time people who shared a disease organized and asserted the right to have their voices heard.

Shortly after that meeting, those same pioneers founded the National Association of People with AIDS (NAPWA) to give us an organized, collective presence—and voice—in our nation’s capital. Believing that those of us living with HIV could change our destiny, NAPWA advocated on our behalf on Capitol Hill. As a result, federal policies were changed, funding was increased and significant advances were made in the fight against HIV. Many of us are alive today because of the efforts of those early AIDS pioneers.

But though treatment options are more plentiful for some, AIDS still ravages our communities, people we love are still dying and people with HIV are still stigmatized—in many ways, worse than ever.

The last eight years have seen a dramatic reversal of much of what our movement accomplished in the early years:

Science-based HIV prevention programs have been gutted in favor of abstinence-only or abstinence-until-marriage programs. The result? Hundreds of thousands of new HIV infections, mostly among young people of color.

Hysteria-driven prosecution of people with HIV for failing to disclose their status has helped create an image of so-called “AIDS Monsters” in the media and further fueled the criminalization—and

stigmatization—of people with HIV. The result? We are increasingly marginalized and portrayed as vectors of disease who must be controlled and regulated rather than as what we are: human beings struggling with a life-threatening disease who deserve compassion, human rights and adequate, affordable health care.

While the United States has technically lifted the specific ban on HIV-positive people from entering the country, HIV remains on the list of contagious diseases that can be used to prohibit people with HIV from immigrating to or visiting America. The result? The nation that represents itself as a beacon of freedom is, instead, a leader in discrimination, setting a shameful example of intolerance and ignorance.

Now, it is time for all people who want to end the AIDS epidemic to recommit to the spirit of The Denver Principles—thus ensuring that the voices of people with HIV are heard.

Those of us living with HIV often struggle to pay our rent, feed ourselves and provide for our families while finding money for our medications and health care. Knowing that many people living with HIV have financial concerns, *POZ* Magazine, as it has done since the very first issue, provides—for free—the education and inspiration that HIV-positive people need to stay healthy and empowered.

The financial concerns of HIV-positive people have also prevented NAPWA from developing a large membership because many people with HIV cannot afford NAPWA membership fees.

In response, NAPWA is announcing a bold new initiative called The Denver Principles Project. The Denver Principles Project will recommit our community to The Denver Principles and dramatically increase NAPWA's membership. With a vastly increased membership, NAPWA will be better able to advocate for effective HIV prevention and care as well as to combat the stigma that powerfully damages us all. NAPWA can be no stronger than our collective action, which is why your support is so urgently needed.

NAPWA is asking people living with HIV, those affected by HIV and those committed to stopping the spread of AIDS to support The Denver Principles Project, to become members of NAPWA and/or to donate to The Denver Principles Project.

To help launch the project, *POZ* will donate 100 percent of all advertising sales in our 15th anniversary issue to The Denver Principles Project. *POZ*'s donation, as well as those from individuals, organizations and companies, will be used to sponsor memberships in NAPWA for anyone with HIV who cannot afford the $35 membership dues.

The May issue of *POZ* is our 15th anniversary issue. In it, we will publish the entire original Denver Principles along with the names of all individuals, organizations and companies who show their support for The Denver Principles Project by March 15.

This is a new era in America, one of great hope. It is vital that the voices and concerns of people

living with HIV are heard in Washington, DC, during these critical first few months of the new administration. The Denver Principles was a significant milestone for our movement; by joining us today, you will become part of a similarly powerful step that history will one day acknowledge as a new chapter in the ongoing story of the AIDS movement in America.

Don’t miss your chance to be part of history. Support The Denver Principles Project and join NAPWA today at napwa.org or poz.com.

Thank you,
The staffs and volunteers of NAPWA and POZ

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