Fighting Stigma by Telling Stories

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When Parker Trewin asked his friend Jason Lankow for a donation to his AIDS/LifeCycle bike ride fund, Lankow declined to write a check. Instead, as the CEO of infographics design firm Column Five, Lankow donated his company's time to create "My Status Is NOT a Secret," a website and campaign that promotes much more than Trewin's fundraising ride in California. "The goal of the site is to reduce stigma by humanizing the HIV experience," Trewin says. To that end, the site includes videos of nine people who share their perspectives about HIV. "Stories personalize the experience in a way that billboards and PSAs cannot," Trewin says. "They provide a touchstone for people who might be physically or emotionally unable to connect with others like them." Trewin, 54, understands the fear of disclosure; he waited 10 years to tell people his status. Today, he sees the benefit of sharing and advocating: "I just got a note from a decorated, former Navy squadron leader who is 84 years of age and a 30-year HIV survivor. He said that I inspired him. He inspires me."

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