The POZ 100: V-Z

November 11, 2013

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Jane Valencia

Jane Valencia
Volunteer
Indigenous Peoples Task Force
Bemidji, Minnesota
Positive since 1994

Jane Valencia is a member of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe in Northern Minnesota. She is currently a volunteer with Indigenous Peoples Task Force (IPTF) and has spent the last two years working with their Community Promise Program. She assists with monthly community testing on the Red Lake Tribal Nation and the Leech Lake Tribal Nation. Jane also volunteers to give HIV/AIDS presentations to the Tribal Nation Substance Abuse Treatment Programs as well to other programs within the IPTF. Jane is now a “Traditional Ladies” style dancer at Native American powwows. She is honored to be able to be an example for others in order to help those who are at high risk for HIV or are living with the virus. Her ultimate goal is to work with youth in HIV prevention and awareness.

Nestor Vanegas-Charry

Nestor Vanegas-Charry
Financial Specialist
Southwest CARE Center
Santa Fe, New Mexico
Positive since 2010

Nestor Vanegas-Charry is one of the hardest working individuals at the Southwest CARE Center. In addition to his daily duties as a financial specialist, he volunteers countless times a year to assist the outreach team with HIV and hepatitis C testing, to help plan and implement fundraising events or conduct outreach to LGBT youth. Nestor also takes on other work-related projects and offers his expertise to the entire Southwest CARE Center staff. Nestor is a “go to” person in the organization.



Jason Villalobos

Jason Villalobos
Advocate
Greater Than AIDS Campaign
Lompoc, California
Positive since 2005

Jason Villalobos is a national spokesperson for the “Greater Than AIDS” campaign and works to educate the public on the stigma, fear and misinformation that people living with HIV deal with every day. He has participated in the AIDS/LifeCycle—a 545-mile bike ride each June from San Francisco to Los Angeles—four times and has helped raise more than $25,000 for HIV/AIDS charities. A prolific public speaker, Jason has addressed numerous college and high school students in workshops designed to eliminate stigma and to encourage young people to engage in smarter safer sex. He recently began working with the local Planned Parenthood Positive Peers program, and talks to junior high and high school students about health education, bullying, gay rights and the prevention of HIV and other STIs.



Reed Vreeland

Reed Vreeland
Communications Coordinator
The Sero Project
New York, New York
Positive since 1986

Reed Vreeland is the communications coordinator for the Sero Project, a network of HIV-positive people and their allies fighting for freedom from stigma and injustice. Formerly an assistant editor at POZ, Reed is a member of ACT UP New York and works with DAWG, the Digital Activism Working Group. He is also a member of the Global Network of People Living with HIV/North America’s Young Leaders’ Caucus and on the steering committee of the United States People Living with HIV Stigma Index. Whether he’s planning a demonstration at the New York Public Library or pitching stories to the media about HIV criminalization efforts, Reed is a strong voice and advocate for people living with HIV.



Danielle Wasko

Danielle Wasko
Volunteer
AIDS Network

Madison, Wisconsin
Positive since 2006

Danielle Wasko has been a volunteer at the AIDS Network in Southern Wisconsin for four years. Known for her good spirit, she is often out in the community doing outreach education on the importance of knowing your status and practicing safe sex. Danielle has become a role model and an advocate in the LGBT community throughout the state, especially in the transgender community. She is always willing to share her story, her struggles and her experiences living with HIV/AIDS to help others.

Jeff Webb

Jeff Webb
Peer Leader
Boston Living Center
Boston, Massachusetts
Positive since 2004

Jeff Webb is a source of care, kindness and steadfast support for members of his community. As a peer leader at the Boston Living Center, he shines at assisting people through challenges. Jeff is also a facilitator of the LIFE (Learning Immune Function Enhancement) program—a scientifically based health course designed to engage the mind, body and spirit. The course emphasizes self-care, social support, risk-reduction and adherence to health routines. Jeff is aware that keeping people healthy and engaged in care requires an emphasis on self-worth.

Robin Webb

Robin Webb
Executive Director
A Brave New Day
Cleveland, Mississippi
Positive since 1988

Robin Webb founded the group A Brave New Day to organize and empower his Southern HIV-positive peers to proactively advocate against harsh punitive practices targeted at people living with HIV. Robin has created and produced numerous events for thousands of HIV-positive people and their allies in Mississippi and neighboring states, including the Office of National AIDS Policy's Town Hall Advocacy Workshop and the Mississippi State HIV/AIDS Conference and Legislative Day. He was the recipient of the 2012 Martin Delaney Power of One Award and has spoken and presented at conferences across the country. Robin serves on the Southern AIDS Strategy Initiative and Southern AIDS Coalition. He also serves the Mississippi Episcopal AIDS Committee.

Mike Weight

Mike Weight
Volunteer
Utah AIDS Foundation
Salt Lake City, Utah
Positive since 2004

Mike Weight started volunteering as a receptionist at the Utah AIDS Foundation (UAF) in 2012. Soon he began volunteering in UAF's food bank, assisting others in making healthy food choices and bringing a smile to their faces. Mike eventually took full ownership of the UAF's vegetable garden, installing new trellises and a new watering system and getting involved in the planning and planting of all the new plants. He has participated in numerous fundraising events and provides HIV education to the youth involved with Salt Lake Early Intervention program as they perform community service in the food bank. His contribution to his community has changed the lives of many, and the fruits (and vegetables!) of his hard work will grow for years to come.

Robert Westwood

Robert Westwood
Volunteer
House of Ruth Inc.
Louisville, Kentucky
Positive since 1998

Robert Westwood was a staunch advocate for those living with or affected by HIV even before his diagnosis in 1998. He is a retired student affairs administrator at San Francisco State University (SFSU) and was a founding member and chair of the AIDS Coordinating Committee at SFSU. He also co-chaired the committee that wrote the AIDS policy for the California State University system. Robert founded the first scholarship fund for students with HIV/AIDS at SFSU—upon his retirement, it was named the Westwood HIV Scholarship fund. In addition, he founded the Cindy Kolb AIDS Donation Fund, which has awarded more than $400,000 in scholarships to students, faculty and staff with HIV or other disabilities. Since his retirement, Robert has maintained residences in Rancho Mirage, California, and Louisville, Kentucky. He has donated both his time and money to the Desert AIDS Project of Palm Springs and House of Ruth in Louisville. He is currently launching a capital improvement effort to renovate House of Ruth's transitional/emergency shelter for homeless adults who are HIV positive.

Cassandra Whitty

Cassandra Whitty

CEO
Hope and Mercy Resource Center
Baton Rouge, Louisiana
Positive since 2000

Cassandra Whitty is a daughter, sister, mother, grandmother, aunt and a person living with HIV. She has served on the board for HIV/AIDS Alliance for Region Two for six years and served as the board chair for two terms. She also served on the Mayor's Advisory Council for HIV/AIDS. Cassandra is the founder and CEO of Hope and Mercy Resource Center in Louisiana where they minister and educate people living with and affected by HIV and hypertension through the program "Teaching One to Reach One." She advocates for those who cannot speak for themselves about living with HIV/AIDS by telling her story, and she urges others to know their status and get tested.

Erwin Willhite

Erwin Willhite
HIV Prevention Specialist
CARES of Southwest Michigan
Kalamazoo, Michigan
Positive since 2012

Passionate about reaching young black gay men, Erwin Willhite has worked as an HIV prevention specialist at CARES for over a year. He runs camps for HIV-positive men and offers HIV testing in non-traditional venues to reach those most at risk. Nicknamed 'Kid Friendly,' Erwin also works with the Mr Friendly program—an international, grassroots movement that aims to reduce HIV-related stigma, encourage HIV testing and improve the quality of life for those living with HIV.

Kekoa Yap

Kekoa Yap
Partner Services Coordinator
Maui AIDS Foundation
Maui, Hawaii
Positive since 1994

Kekoa Yap recently returned to the Maui AIDS Foundation (MAF) to work in the prevention and education department. He worked at the organization a decade ago and was the first coordinator for the CDC's Prevention with Positives Initiative. Kekoa was also a member of the Community Planning Group for the Hawaii Department of Health. In between his stints at MAF, Kekoa was a community health educator at the Desert AIDS Project in Palm Springs, California, conducting HIV 101 presentations to high schools and substance abuse and mental health centers in the

surrounding Coachella Valley. Kekoa returns to his native Hawaii with a wealth of experience and knowledge and a sincere compassion for the community.

Mark Zatyrka

Mark Zatyrka
Trustee
AIDS Foundation of Western Massachusetts
Springfield, Massachusetts
Positive since 1982

Mark Zatyrka contracted HIV as a child through tainted medication to treat hemophilia. He kept this a secret for most of his childhood, but after traveling the country with Camp Heartland, he decided to share his story. Mark gradually disclosed to family and friends, and in 2007, he connected with the AIDS Foundation of Western Massachusetts (AFWM). He joined the board and became chair of the local AIDS Walk. Mark co-founded the AIDS kNOw More Project—a group for area students to learn about HIV and in turn educate the community. He recently became a father and is excited to raise his HIV-negative twin girls to be as committed as he is to making the world a better place.

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