Watch Princess Diana's AIDS Advocacy Continue to Inspire

Twenty-five years after her death on August 31, 1997, Princess Diana's legacy still teaches compassion for people with HIV.

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A quarter century has passed since Princess Diana died in a car crash on August 31, 1997, at age 36. Her popularity and mystique have ceased to wane over the years—if anything, they've grown stronger thanks to the media's unending interest in her now-grown children and the recent release of movies, plays, musicals and TV series revisiting her life.

Part of Princess Diana's enduring legacy is her AIDS advocacy. On many occasions, in the 1980s and 1990s, she publicly exhibited compassion toward people living with HIV and AIDS and helped fight stigma.

In 1987, she officially opened Britain's first AIDS ward, at London Middlesex Hospital. See the Facebook post and video below:

The '80s were a time of profound stigma, fear and confusion concerning the disease, and Princess Diana used the event as an educational opportunity. Beforehand, the media had wondered whether she would wear protective gloves, since some folks believed the virus was spread through causal contact. As the BBC reports, not only did Diana not wear gloves—but she even shook hands with a man who had AIDS.

"HIV does not make people dangerous to know," she said at the time. "You can shake their hands and give them a hug. Heaven knows they need it. What's more, you can share their homes, their workplaces, and their playgrounds and toys."

Two years later, while on a trip to New York City, she toured a pediatric AIDS Ward in Harlem, where she hugged a 7-year-old boy as the world watched.

That pivotal moment in her life was included in the 2020 season of the hit Neflix series The Crown, which chronicles the history of the royal family through several generations. You can watch that recreation from episode 10 of season 4 below (Pincess Diana is played by Golden Globe winner Emma Corrin):

Her visit to the Harlem hospital proved she was more than a fashion plate, Insider.com notes. The trip helped solidify her standing as a compassionate, modern woman—she was 27 at the time, and this marked her first royal solo trip abroad. Of course, shining the media spotlight on pediatric AIDS also helped raise awareness of that issue. In fact, publicity from her visit to the ward led to a surge in adoption of HIV-positive children.

In 1991, she visited Casey House, an AIDS hospice in Toronto, where she again did her part to fight stigma and educate the public about the reality of the epidemic.

In recent years, her son Prince Harry has continued to use the spotlight to raise awareness about HIV. He has been tested for HIV publicly, and in 2019, he sat down with rugby star Gareth Thomas, who is HIV positive, for a video conversation about life with the virus. That chat was filmed and promoted on National HIV Testing Week by the Terrence Higgins Trust, a U.K. HIV charity. Watch a clip below:

“Prince Harry has been a huge support to Terrence Higgins Trust by turning the spotlight that follows him onto the work we do and all the progress made in the fight against HIV since the 1980s,” wrote Ian Green, chief executive of Terrence Higgins Trust, on the group’s website. “He has consistently supported National HIV Testing Week and work to encourage everyone to test regularly. He’s been tested live on Facebook alongside Rihanna in Barbados, as well as joining with our patron Gareth Thomas to increase testing rates in 2019.”

Green expressed that gratitutude as part of an article posted July 1, 2021, to mark what would have been Princess Diana’s 60th birthday. “I believe it’s important to look back at the momentous impact she had on public perceptions of HIV and celebrate her legacy,” Green continued. “Because, with every gloveless handshake and every hug, she helped to challenge the hysteria and fear which was rife at the time. I truly believe we wouldn’t be where we are today without her.”

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