Making It Work

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Clothes may not make the man—but they can make a difference. Just ask Malvin Vien, whom fashion fanatics will recognize from the current season of *Project Runway*, airing on Lifetime.

This 24-year-old Brooklynite is spreading HIV/AIDS awareness through the "TEST ME/for hiv" campaign, which aims to empower members of the Asian and Pacific Islander (A&PI) community to talk to their doctors about getting tested.

"In the Asian and Pacific Islander community, sex is taboo," Vien says. "You don't talk about it, not even to a doctor."

According to the National Institutes of Health, only 30 percent of all A&PI adults have been tested for HIV—a lower percentage than any other minority group in the United States. And it estimates that 30 percent of positive A&PI Americans are unaware of their status.

"TEST ME/for hiv," launched by the Asian & Pacific Islander Coalition on HIV/AIDS (APICHA), encourages patients to go into a doctor's office wearing a T-shirt that reads "TEST ME/for hiv." The hope is that once a physician sees the shirt, he or she will be the one to start a discussion about getting an HIV test.

"[When] a doctor initiates a conversation about sex, it's completely nonsexual. It's about the facts and why you're at risk," explains Vien, who is HIV negative. "This is social change using fashion, which is one of the most understated media tools out there."

The intersection of fashion and HIV/AIDS empowerment has been a natural and long-held interest for Vien. Before beginning his fashion career at New York's Parsons The New School for Design, he studied biochemistry at the University of Redlands in California where he did HIV drug research.

"That's where my interest in HIV sparked," he says. "But I realized that I have to be involved in more than just drug development. I've got to be involved in advocacy, policy change and all of the different facets that go into the fight against HIV."

When he's not coming up with design ideas, Vien does prevention outreach with APICHA in New York. While he's certainly dedicated to fashion, he aspires to one day go to medical school and join Doctors Without Borders.

“I’m going to be like 50 years old at that point,” he jokes. Fortunately, compassion never goes out of style.

For more info on the campaign, visit apicha.org.

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