My Sanctuary

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I wanted to create The HIV League to empower the HIV community through scholarship, wellness and education. But what does that really mean?

Before moving to New York City, I lived in North Carolina my whole life, including college. Everything went as smooth as college life could go until my senior year, when my HIV status changed from negative to positive.

Dealing with this event was quite stressful, but I learned how to live a healthy life and be comfortable with my status. After testing HIV positive, I knew I wanted to take my professional career in the direction of HIV-related work. But where was there a need?

It took many lunch breaks, reflecting back to when I was a student living with HIV, until it finally hit me. I immediately searched “National scholarships for HIV-positive students” on my phone. Nothing came up. I found the need.

As I was developing The HIV League, I envisioned our organization facilitating these scholarships, but I also wanted us to demonstrate how people living with HIV are able to live well and lead a healthy lifestyle. Therefore, our events and fundraisers will focus on wellness.

We also found a need in the general public to hear personal stories from the HIV community, whether from someone who’s living with HIV and has a healthy lifestyle or someone who is HIV negative and acts as a support system for those living with the virus. The HIV League’s Stories are videos we produce that tell these individual narratives.

I look forward to Tuesday nights. Every Tuesday night, I escape work as fast as possible, head to my apartment, throw on my shorts, lace up my shoes and bike as quickly as I can to the Lower East Side. When I arrive, I meet up with the other members of New York’s urban running crew Orchard Street Runners.

There are all kinds of people here. Engineers and artists, extroverts and introverts, novices and founders. No matter who we are or what our background is, we gather every week for our shared love: running.

So after the chitchat, we all head outside at 8 p.m. and start that night’s route. The first mile is

always as a group, but once the first stretch comes up, we all find our own pace. Our own rhythm. Our own movement.

This is when I start my own challenge. My pace for the night. My personal Tuesday night ritual. For each time I run, I always go back to why I began running. It's my way of fighting and battling through my HIV. I was diagnosed in college, and this is when running became my sanctuary. Another mile is another year. Another lap is another day. Another step is another breath.

This mindset is with me every Tuesday night. When I'm chasing the leading pacer off the Red Hook Piers, I'm chasing my goals I have yet to achieve. When I'm dodging cars and people on 34th Street, I'm dodging the obstacles that have come my way.

But somehow, every Tuesday night, I make it to the finish line.

After each run, we celebrate our accomplishments with $4 margaritas at a local bar. We talk about races that are coming up and laugh at ridiculous stories, and one or two of us may dance around by the end of the night.

It's during this time, no matter what our run was like or what we're going through at that particular moment, that we support each other by eating, having a few drinks and laughing the night away.

It's times like these that I realize I can make it to my own finish line.

Go to poz.com/hivleague to read more from Daniel and other contributors.

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