



You Are Valued

Tracy L. Johnson Jr. wants to let others know they are important.

January 9, 2023 By Tracy L. Johnson

My name is Tracy L. Johnson Jr. I was born in Orlando. I relocated to Columbus, Ohio, when I was 12 years old. At age 14, I ran away from home because I got tired of the physical, mental and verbal abuse. During this time, I was homeless. I was eating out of trash cans, and I started selling my body. On August 15, 2005, I found out that I was HIV positive. I didn't know what HIV was, but I tried to commit suicide several times because I thought I was worthless and didn't have anything to offer to the world.

But there were several people who invested the time to show me that I had a voice and that I have power and that my life was worth living. For more than 15 years, I have been a strong advocate and started support groups in my house. I'm on a fixed income, but I cook and buy all the food to give people a safe haven to be themselves.

I've traveled around the world to many national and international conferences. I made it my duty to cause a domino effect in people's lives and let others know that they are valued, that they are important and that their voice matters.

How would you describe yourself?

I am kindhearted. I love making people smile and laugh. And I put others before myself.

What is the best advice you ever received?

You only have one life to live. Live your best life, and don't worry about what others say or think.

What person in the HIV community do you most admire?

Bryan Jones (an HIV advocate based in Lakewood, Ohio).

If you could change one thing about living with HIV, what would it be?

Everyone's views on stigma and discrimination.

What drives you to do what you do?

My children. One day, they will be the age I was when I got diagnosed, so I want to educate everyone about HIV.

What is your motto?

“Test it before you sex it.”

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