



Assure HIV-positive youth their futures will also get better

Even before I lined up to purchase my hard-copy edition of the It Gets Better anthology, I gathered with my thoughts and flip camera to consider what messages of hope I could impart on LGBT youth facing a world of opportunities I never knew and haunting challenges that remain all too close to the surface. I decided I wanted my video message to speak to the tens of thousands of young people who will learn they are HIV-positive this year.

April 13, 2011 By [David Ernesto Munar](#)

Even before I lined up to purchase my hard-copy edition of the It Gets Better anthology, I gathered with my thoughts and flip camera to consider what messages of hope I could impart on LGBT youth facing a world of opportunities I never knew and haunting challenges that remain all too close to the surface.

Like all autobiographical work, I wanted my short video to be authentic and compelling. I also have the pressure of facing Dan Savage who will keynote the AIDS Foundation of Chicago's Spring Luncheon Monday, May 2. As the mastermind behind the brilliant It Gets Better project, Dan's

opinion matters. I certainly hope my meager contribution to this much-needed advocacy movement meets his and his audience's expectations, but you can be the judge of that. An essay format of my submission follows and the video is posted at itgetsbetter.org.

I want to speak to the tens of thousands of gay teens who will learn this year that they are HIV-positive.

Like many of you, my teen years were riddled with secrets I couldn't bear to reveal. My life did get better once I went off to college and graduated.

But my newfound independence and confidence came crashing down when, at age 24, I tested positive for HIV. It felt like the world would end. The diagnosis sent me back into a new closet full of shame and blame.

Everywhere I turned, I heard people blaming HIV on those of us infected--as if we brought it on ourselves--that we deserved to die.

I became depressed and didn't know what steps I needed to take to help my chances for survival; I was scared to ask for help. In my darkest hour, I didn't think I would live past age 35.

In time--and with the help of loving friends--I learned to overcome my fears. I met courageous people with HIV--including longtime survivors--who showed me how to cope. I learned to live with HIV, accept and love myself and manage my HIV just like any other chronic disease.

Thankfully, medical treatments have greatly improved since my diagnosis and so has my outlook.

I see my doctor regularly, make sure to take my medications, and rely on great family, friends and colleagues for support.

I'm healthier mentally and physically now than I have been for a long time.

While HIV continues to be a topic of tremendous discrimination, coming out as a person with HIV has allowed me to reject the negative stereotypes: they do not define me. In fact, they propelled me to fight back against injustice and for better services for those of us directly affected by the disease.

You see, HIV stigma hurts just like bullying: It stops people from taking steps to protect themselves against a preventable disease. Sadly, it also results in some people shunning those of us with HIV because of fear, ignorance and misunderstanding.

You can change the story about HIV by getting educated about HIV/AIDS, knowing your HIV status, and fighting bullying and stigma in all its forms.

As a person living with HIV, I can attest that it does get better. I never thought I would say that ... but it's true. If you are struggling to come to terms with HIV--you're not alone. Never give up--your life is not over. Despite whatever challenges you may face today, a great future awaits."

Learn more about the AIDS Foundation of Chicago and Dan Savage's next Chicago appearance at www.aidschicago.org.

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<http://beta.docker.poz.com/blog/assure-hiv-positive>