Empowering LGBTQ Youth in Philadelphia

Ashlie Jacob Pollard helps the Attic Youth Center provide health and wellness information and a sense of community.

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Ashlie Jacob Pollard got his start in advocacy when he was a teenager interning at the Attic Youth Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He's since become the director of administration at the organization, bringing his journey full circle.

The Attic Youth Center provides services to Philadelphia's LGBTQ youth, with a goal of reducing "the isolation felt by LGBTQ youth by providing a sense of community and developing programs and services to counteract the prejudice and oppression that LGBTQ youth often face."

"I would hope that people could acknowledge the reality of HIV without stigmatizing it," Pollard said. "I believe that in today's world, people either don't take it seriously enough or it's stigmatized. The only thing that will change this is learning more about it as well as education around prevention."

Pollard is a part of AIDS United's first-ever class of the Fund for Resilience, Equity and Engagement and the Transgender Leadership Initiative Leadership Development Program. These leaders were chosen through AIDS United's grantee partner organizations as representatives of transgender and gender-nonconforming people and Black gay, bisexual, queer and same-gender-loving men (GBQ/SGL)—populations in our communities most disproportionately impacted by HIV.

We caught up with Pollard to learn more about his story and how he works to mobilize his community to stop HIV together.

How did you get into this work?

I actually started working in the field when I was 14 as a youth intern for the Attic Youth Center. I worked there for about six years before leaving to work at a management consulting firm and starting a small business. I returned to The Attic in 2007 because I missed working in a field that I generally am affected by and care about.

How do we start to reduce the barriers preventing Black GBQ/SGL men from accessing care?

Black GBQ/SGL men face a lack of knowledge of services, cultural shaming and fear of discrimination when attempting to access care. I work at an organization where I get to help support and shape the free services we provide to LGBT young people. I am “back of the house,” which allows me to support staff who provide free individual, relationship and/or family therapy, teach safer sex to young people and provide information on health and wellness and their options around protecting themselves.

What are some of the challenges preventing Black GBQ/SGL men from being in executive leadership roles? What are some of the solutions to addressing those challenges?

Black GBQ/SGL men are not being taken seriously when pursuing leadership roles. Along with a lack of cultivation and development, there is also a heavy cultural bias around appearance and professionalism. I think the first step is getting people to acknowledge their racial bias and having conversations around why they have them. This requires training to break down discrimination and discuss intersectionality.

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