



Join This Webinar on Social Isolation Among Long-Term Survivors

A free Reunion Project webinar will address loneliness and social isolation among long-term HIV/AIDS survivors.

April 18, 2022 By [Mark S. King](#)

There is a moment in a [1982 NBC News television report](#) about the emerging plague that still stops me in my tracks. Keep in mind, the culprit for the mysterious illness and death of so many gay men – the primary cases in this country at that time – was unknown. Scientists suspected a virus but nothing had been identified. The illness had killed mere hundreds in the United States.

In the news segment, a patient spoke about his mysterious diagnosis, especially in light of it already becoming known as “gay cancer.” His remarks were telling.

“Death doesn’t scare me,” said the young man. “It’s living with this for a long time, that’s more frightening than death.”

The young man literally believed living with HIV was worse than dying from it, and for reasons many people living with HIV still understand all too well, especially long-term survivors who embody the physical and emotional trauma of that time. The fear and societal stigma that accompany an HIV diagnosis can lead to dangerous and debilitating loneliness and social isolation, even among the most empowered of us.

[The Reunion Project](#), a national network of long-term HIV/AIDS survivors, is producing a webinar, “Making the Connection: Long-Term Survivors Discuss Loneliness and Isolation,” set for 7pm ET on Thursday, April 28th. You can [register for free right here](#).

The one-hour webinar will feature two long-term survivors, Gina Brown and Arriana Lint, discussing their lived experience with social isolation, and therapist David Fawcett, Ph.D., offering clinical perspective and advice. I will be the moderator.

“Human connection is essential to ground ourselves emotionally,” panelist David Fawcett told me. “Without such grounding it is all too easy to get caught in emotional cross currents that can be very destructive.”

The physical and emotional costs can be high, cautioned Fawcett. “Rates of addiction, anxiety, depression, PTSD and even suicide all significantly increased during the pandemic,” he said. “And emotional concerns aren’t the only risk. Loneliness is a significant factor in heart failure, obesity, diabetes and even a significantly shorter life span.

“It is critical to emphasize that it’s not necessary to remain in isolation,” Fawcett added. “Most HIV care networks, including those in rural areas, are actively engaged in helping people maintain social connection. To me this period is reminiscent of the early days of the epidemic where there

wasn't an HIV infrastructure of care and support. We were on our own to create networks, check in on each other, and take responsibility for ourselves as a community. We need that spirit and sense of urgency now more than ever."

I hope to see you [at this webinar](#). In the meantime, my friends, please be well.

Mark

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