Success Stories From AIDS United's Transgender Leadership Initiative

Grantees provided training, support services, direct employment and more. Check out these inspiring profiles on five groups.

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AIDS United launched the Transgender Leadership Initiative (TLI) in 2017 to support the ability of transgender leaders to respond to HIV-related stigma and improve provider competency. This funding initiative made a second round of grants last fall to eight organizations working to advance leadership within trans communities throughout the U.S. Over the past year, these organizations ran projects to solidify transgender power in our society and respond to the dire HIV epidemic facing transgender communities.

Collectively the eight TLI grantees:

- Provided intensive training and mentorship to 156 transgender and gender-nonconforming (TGNC) people;
- Delivered support services to 163 TGNC people;
- Assisted 19 TGNC individuals in gaining new leadership positions, including on Ryan White Councils and non-profit boards;
- Supported the direct employment of 30 TGNC people; and
- Reached a total of 257 TGNC people through leadership building activities.

AIDS United is deeply proud of the work accomplished by all the funded organizations. Take a look at the highlights from the second cohort of grantees below.

Hawai'i Health and Harm Reduction Center

The Transgender Leadership Initiative supported the Hawai'i Health and Harm Reduction Center's ongoing Ka 'Aha Mahu Leadership Building Project, an advisory group that motivates and builds leadership within transgender communities. They piloted a leadership workshop, Na Lama Kukui, to enlighten and empower the voices of trans communities in: 1) identifying bills and policies to champion/oppose; 2) identifying community strengths and needs; and 3) deciding how to advocate with legislators.

TGNC individuals living with and affected by HIV gained strong representation on the Hawai'i HIV Community Planning Group. The project's members also helped move the state to having PrEP campaigns specifically for transgender communities and ensured transgender inclusion in all state programs for HIV prevention and care. Additionally, members developed digital stories capturing Native Hawaiian and transgender cultures to be used as training tools for service providers to understand the needs of trans people.

New York Transgender Advocacy Group

The New York Transgender Advocacy Group's TGNC Pioneers of Tomorrow Leadership Program is a 6-month mentorship and training opportunity. This unique program prepares TGNC people to take on and successfully navigate leadership roles within their community. The program is comprised of four 90-minute virtual modules and a full-day, in-person training in New York City. Topics covered include strategic storytelling, conflict resolution and dealing with microaggressions, identifying leadership styles, and how passions fuels leadership. Under TLI, the program enrolled six core TGNC/non-binary community members, the majority of whom were people of color. Two members also self-identified as being HIV-empowered, a term that highlights how people living with HIV can be more than clients and who, in spite of dealing with a chronic illness, can be effective leaders and have agency over their lives.

Pridelines

Pridelines advanced leadership through TransRepresent, which trained three Black transgender women living with HIV as Justice Advocates. These advocates are working to affect policies within the Miami-Dade homeless services system. They are developing a training for frontline staff with companion tools for shelter administration on how to accommodate transgender people appropriately. Because Pridelines found that most trans women with HIV were not willing to participate in activities specifically for people with HIV, the Justice Advocates created a non-HIV-specific network of Black transgender women to address HIV stigma.

Pridelines began by engaging Black transgender women who are not living with HIV in understanding HIV stigma, thereby creating a safer environment for women who are living with HIV to be more open about their status. These women identified areas where discrimination and transphobia impact their wellbeing: access to housing, shelter, and medical care; lack of protection from and profiling by law enforcement; violence; and unemployment. The women also discussed internal and external stigma, as well as the impact of HIV on anti-trans prejudice and

the intersecting oppressions they face. For those who chose to share that they are living with HIV, they were welcomed and affirmed by the other women and, for the first time, found themselves connected to support and leadership training.

Transgender, Gender Variant, Intersex Justice Project (TGIJP)

With the support of TLI for a second year, the Transgender, Gender Variant, Intersex Justice Project continued to advance the leadership of currently and formerly incarcerated transgender women, especially Black women and women of color. (Because TGI Justice centers Black Trans Women in the core of their work and in their leadership, and as a way of countering anti-Blackness and colorism, the organization frequently talks about "Black women and women of color.") Statewide, their leaders pushed for passage of AB 132 to ensure incarcerated transgender people are housed with others of their identified gender. TGIJP testified in front of various state Senate committees and worked with incarcerated members to shape what should be included in the bill, which passed the state Senate and is headed to the Assembly.

TGIJP also hired nine individuals newly released from prison as re-entry staff. All participated in organizing and leadership opportunities, including advocating with elected city officials on trans-specific housing opportunities and speaking before the San Francisco City supervisors and the San Francisco Human Rights Commission on funding for formerly incarcerated transgender community members.

UTOPIA (United Territories of Pacific Islanders' Alliance)

The New Possibilities project built UTOPIA's organizing and advocacy capacity with queer and trans Pacific Islanders (QTPI). Through a leadership academy, trainers from the community provided know-your-rights, healing justice and social justice education, and organizing skills training. These leaders are a part of UTOPIA's work to address disparities in employment, healthcare, and laws that negatively impact trans women and people living with HIV. This leadership development increased the organizing skills of UTOPIA's members and taught them the power of their stories and how to make change in their communities specifically to impact the systems and policies that need to be changed for TGNC people facing violence, harassment, discrimination, severely limited work opportunities, and criminalization.

We are so proud of the work that all the amazing TLI grantees have done; it has been AIDS United's privilege to support them. We look forward to hearing about their success and impact in their local communities in the months and years to come.

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