



Voices of Community: Carrying Our HIV Stories, Building Our Futures

Writing for AIDS United's "Voices of Community" blog series, Black transgender advocate Mallery Jenna Robinson amplifies resilience, justice and joy.

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The "Voices of Community" blog is more than a platform, it is a promise. A promise that our stories, in all their complexity and truth, will shape the narrative of HIV advocacy. By telling our own stories, we ensure that the future of this movement is not written for us, but by us.

Carrying Our Stories, Building Our Futures

by Mallery Jenna Robinson

I often say that my life's work has been shaped at the intersection of identity, survival, and community. As a Black transgender woman with Afro-Caribbean roots, I know firsthand what it means to navigate a world where HIV stigma, transphobia, and systemic racism collide. These experiences have not only influenced my journey; they have become the very reason I step into spaces of advocacy, leadership, and storytelling.

My entry into HIV/AIDS work came through community. Growing up, I heard stories of friends, elders, and chosen family who were lost to the epidemic, and others who were surviving against the odds. Their resilience left an imprint on me. By the time I began serving on advisory boards and engaging in outreach programs, I understood that this work was about more than medical care, it was about dignity, justice, and the possibility of joy.

Over the past thirteen years, I've had the privilege of serving on multiple boards, including the West Hollywood Transgender Advisory Board, the Long Beach Transwellness Board, and Being Alive HIV Board, among others. Each role has taught me something different, but together they have reinforced a central truth: our communities carry deep wisdom, and that wisdom must guide the future of HIV care and advocacy. Too often, policies and programs are built without the voices of those most impacted. We cannot afford that silence any longer.

My Afro-Caribbean heritage has also shaped how I view this work. From my Haitian ancestors, I

inherited not only resilience but also a tradition of resistance and community care. These values guide how I show up in the HIV sector. When I advocate for leadership opportunities for Black, Latinx, and trans communities, I am carrying forward that ancestral call to liberation. For me, equity is not just a policy demand; it is a spiritual obligation.

The future of HIV care must extend beyond the clinic. Yes, access to treatment and prevention is critical. But care also means addressing housing insecurity, mental health needs, and systemic discrimination. It means creating spaces where people living with HIV can thrive, not just survive. I envision a future where care is holistic, where providers, advocates, and policymakers listen to community voices and respond with compassion and resources, not judgment or red tape.

Storytelling has been one of the most powerful tools in my work. Through projects like A Hateful Homicide and my transgender empathy trainings, I've seen how sharing lived experiences can open hearts and shift perspectives. Statistics may capture the scale of the epidemic, but stories capture its humanity. When we tell our truths about survival, about stigma, and about joy, we move people from awareness to action. This is why amplifying community voices, through platforms like this blog, is so vital.

In recent conversations within the community, I've noticed a recurring theme: the need to reclaim joy. For too long, HIV has been framed solely in terms of tragedy, loss, or crisis. While it is true that we have endured immense grief, it is equally true that we have created resilience, love, and creativity that defy the odds. Joy is not a luxury, it is a form of resistance. By celebrating survival, by dancing, by loving openly, we affirm our humanity in a world that has often tried to erase us.

Looking forward, my hope is that the sector continues to evolve with equity, sustainability, and community leadership at its core. This means shifting from short-term projects to long-term investments in grassroots organizations. It means creating leadership pipelines that uplift young people, especially queer and trans youth of color. And it means holding ourselves accountable, not only to funders or institutions, but to the communities whose lives are on the line.

As a community leader, I carry both memory and vision. I carry the memory of those we lost to the epidemic, the mentors who taught me how to fight, and the peers who remind me every day why this work matters. And I carry the vision of a future where people living with HIV are not just surviving, but thriving; where equity is a lived reality, not just a buzzword; and where joy is recognized as central to our collective liberation.

About the Author: Mallery Jenna Robinson is an AfroCaribbean Binary Transgender woman and HIV advocate for Los Angeles and the State of California.

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