World AIDS Day 2016

December 1, 2016 By Paul Kawata

On this World AIDS Day, I want to remind you of our history. We are a movement of people who changed the world. Together we built a unique healthcare infrastructure because nobody would take care of our friends. We held the hands, comforted the families, and buried our friends and lovers with dignity, even when many funeral homes refused to transport them. When local social service agencies turned us away, we built a network of nonprofits across the country to fight a disease that nobody cares about. AIDS activism changed the way drugs were approved and laws were enacted. Activism captured our nation's attention about a disease that most people did not want to discuss. Working with our global friends, we fought to bring treatment to the world, even when everyone said it's not possible. All too often we heard the words impossible, you can't do it, yet we did.

We find ourselves at another great moment of change. It can seem scary or overwhelming. Our movement needs strong leaders who understood how to push the system. Leaders who value inside and outside strategies. Leadership cannot be limited to the few, it needs to be at all levels of our work, doing a variety of tasks and filling a diversity of positions.

The HIV movement depends on government funds to provide medication, healthcare, social services, housing and support to the 1.2 million Americans living with HIV and prevention services to reduce the number of new infections that are stubbornly stuck at around 40,000 annual new HIV-infected individuals. To provide these needed life-saving services, we must work with President-elect Trump and Congress.

Our movement survived the loss of friends and family. We learned to stand up when others turned their backs against us. We built systems of care and prevention services where none previously existed. During the darkest days of the epidemic, it was our hope and passion that got us through the difficult times. Because I know our past, I am not afraid for our future. There will be difficult moments, but we are a strong vital community that stands on the shoulders of heroes. NMAC thanks everyone who has dedicated their life to fighting this epidemic.

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