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## **Spotlight on Maria Mejia: Women Making a Difference**

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*The Well Project updates their interview with Maria Mejia, Global Ambassador, Community Advisory Board member and A Girl Like Me blogger, for our "Spotlight: Women Making a Difference" series.*

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**What is the goal of your advocacy work? Do you have a specific focus?**

My goal in my 20-year advocacy work has always been the same! To give hope to the hopeless, prevent new infections, and stomp on stigma any way I can! We now know that Undetectable=Untransmittable and that has set us free! So we have to continually educate everyone we can about this human condition.

## **Why is it important to you to reach out to women specifically?**

I believe women are underrepresented in many ways! That is why I am so honored to be a part of The Well Project! It focuses on women and HIV and everything that pertains to us as far as the virus! We belong in the table just like anyone else.

## **Do you think women living with HIV face unique challenges? What are they?**

We are not well represented! Even in research! We have different issues than men and this is why the work that The Well Project is doing for us women is so amazing. It makes us feel like we matter.

## **What is the thing you are most proud of, professionally or personally?**

Hmmmm...Being the founder of one of the largest online support groups in the world! I always wanted to create a space that was online and that I didn't have when I was diagnosed! I wanted it to be international and it has now more than 40,000 active members in both the English and Spanish versions! And I am proud of being The Well Project's ambassador and blogger! I know we are making a difference! Most of all helping or saving lives is my mission and passion.

## **If you could visit one place in the world, where would it be?**

I would like to visit Egypt and Jerusalem! I think they have so much history and that is something that I am passionate about.

## **What advice or information would you offer a woman newly diagnosed with HIV?**

To be proactive with their health! I am a 30-year survivor! To LIVE ~!! HIV is not the end! Take control of your health! Exercise, take your medications daily so you can become undetectable and that way you cannot transmit the HIV virus sexually. To never feel less than! This is just a human condition that can happen to anyone! Love yourself and respect yourself and never let anyone make you feel less than.

## **Can you share a story that illustrates how you've been successful in working with women living with HIV?**

I have mentored hundreds of women all these years! Many came to me hiding and suicidal! Now they are amazing activists in their countries! You see it's like a chain...I help someone and then they feel empowered and help others and mentor others! This and so many thousands of stories will forever be in my heart! Women who are suicidal and/or pregnant get hope through me and many others that are passionate about education and informing about this human condition.

## **How do you use The Well Project personally? In your work?**

The Well Project has helped me reach masses I can only dream of! They have helped me by being able to be independent with work! They have a fountain of endless information regarding us women living with or affected by HIV! They take us to conferences so we can be well informed, and we can go back and educate others in what we learned! They always have our back and they represent a true organization that is for US!

## **What difference has The Well Project made in your life and work?**

They are my support system when I feel isolated and want to give up! They have always and will always be there for me! I love them deeply. Through them, I have been more visible with my work so I am able to reach more women in the United States and worldwide! I am just proud to be a part of them



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