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Spotlight on Destiny Smith: Women Making a Difference

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Image



The Well Project interviews Destiny Smith, Community Advisory Board member and A Girl Like Me blogger, for our "Spotlight: Women Making a Difference" series.

How did you get your start in HIV advocacy?

I got started in HIV advocacy about seven months after finding out my positive status, the day after Christmas 2017; I was 22 and pregnant with my second child. Advocacy was a way to help me get out of depression and feel normal and help me accept and love myself after finding out about my status.

Are you particularly passionate about a specific topic or demographic?

Yes – I work hard to serve African-American young adults and to help people get comfortable with being tested and knowing their status.

Do you think women living with HIV face unique challenges?

All women face a lot of unique challenges just being women but to be a woman with HIV is so hard to handle sometimes. Because of stigma, so many people have this assumption of you because of your status. As an African-American woman living with HIV, I feel like, because in our community we don't have the conversation enough, people shun you out and look at you a certain way when they hear about it.

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

In the spring of 2020, I released a book about having HIV as a pregnant, African-American young adult. I went into detail about how I overcame depression and how I dealt with the news when I found out my status. I know that my book has made a lot of young adults, especially in my community, more comfortable with having that conversation of knowing our status.

What advice would you offer a woman who recently learned that she has HIV?

Life is going to move forward with you in it. You have so much to give to the world. And you will always be loved.

What advice would you offer a woman who wants to get started in HIV advocacy?

DO IT. DON'T LET ANYTHING STOP YOU

Any specific guidance about getting ready to publicly share her HIV status for the first time?

Talk to your support system first. I'm very strong on faith, so whoever your higher power is, maybe just take time with them in silence. I promise you will feel like a brand new person once you tell your story.

Can you describe an experience in your advocacy or personal life of which you are particularly proud?

I published a book called Living My Truth, and I started my own business.

What impact has COVID-19 and physical distancing had on your life and work?

I'm more isolated and it has given me bad anxiety. I've been listening to music, watching movies and spending time with my boyfriend and kids to help me cope.

Do you have any advice for others?

Don't isolate yourself there are plenty of ways to reach out to family and friends while social distancing.

What impact has The Well Project had on you?

I found The Well Project when I was doing research on safe places for women with HIV and they have shown me I am not in this alone. They give me a platform where I can read other stories and learn from them. I can speak to other amazing women who know exactly what I'm going through.

How has it benefited your personal life or facilitated your advocacy/leadership work?

It benefited my personal life because I wouldn't be so confident and have so much love for myself while dealing with this virus if I didn't have The Well Project. It has helped my advocacy and leadership because it gives me a platform and information and opportunities to give my all.



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