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Spotlight on Ieshia Scott: Women Making a Difference

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Image



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

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

My goal as an advocate is to empower each individual I come in contact with, by giving them knowledge. I have NO specific focus, my advocacy is on the individual. My motto is, "let's keep the negative, negative and the positive healthy." Negative or positive, I want to empower you with the knowledge I have to help you live a healthy life.

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

Because women are often left behind in advocacy. It's important that the world see that we too are affected by this virus, and this is not just a gay man's problem. This is a human problem and women need to be featured and promoted just as much as MSM. Women need to know firsthand that there are resources, help and information for our demographic. I want to build a bridge over the gap and show the world we too have a voice and a hand in this fight.

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

I am proud to be the newest peer for a local non-profit organization, Miracle of Love. I am now a core

member in my community and will be working firsthand with my community, testing, counseling and linking individuals to care and resources. I begin this new journey in May 2016, exactly one year after moving to Orlando. I am excited for the new challenges I will be embarking on and I have my supporters to thank for this opportunity.

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

I would visit Africa. I get so many messages via Facebook from women in Africa that would like to hear me speak in their country. One day I know I will get the offer and I look forward to it.

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

Giving up is easy but knowing and growing is a reward. HIV changes your routine, not who you are. You'll have to remember to take your meds, you'll go to the doctors a little more than you like, and lab work will be a constant. You'll be a better you because of your diagnosis, once you come to terms. HIV makes you wiser and it allows you to grow, you realize exactly who you are and what you should accept. You'll become a lot stronger and you won't take anything from anyone, because you'll already have experienced what we all call "the worse point in your life." Once you bounce back from that and once you grow, you'll become a wildfire and your courage and strength will spread within you. So, cry now but you will be victorious in the end. HIV is meant to hurt us, but many of us change it around for our good. You'll do the same, in time. It's not about being public, or being an advocate, you don't have to do that to show strength and courage. You just choose to live, and that's how you win.

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

Being a big social media advocate, I am always messaged by women who are newly diagnosed and just want to talk. One in particular has had a lot of trouble with her status, being born positive like myself, it's been difficult for her to cope. In fact, after about 22 years of life, while at an event here in Orlando, she confessed her status to me. I comforted her, I held her hand and I encouraged her. Her sister began to cry, she stated "before you, my sister has never shared her status with anyone." We all cried, and at that moment, I knew what I was doing was my calling. I realized what I was put on this earth to do and that was on NWGHAAD, last month. A month later, I was offered a position within a great non-profit. I can't wait to help many more women, the way you all help to keep me going.

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

I love everyone's blogs from *A Girl Like Me* and I love all of the helpful information on The Well Project itself. I use the fact sheets to spread awareness and knowledge, I consistently remain a student, even while teaching.

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

Becoming a CAB member has professionally given me opportunities I may not have gotten alone. Personally, The Well Project has given me a platform to be true to myself, without doubt and judgment. The Well Project was the first place I shared my diagnosis on *A Girl Like Me* blog. I was afraid but in the end, I was happy.... That was about a year ago, and look at me now.



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