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## **Spotlight on Aryah Lester: Women Making a Difference**

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Image



*The Well Project interviews Aryah Lester, 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? Why is it important to you to reach out to women specifically?**

In my life, I've lived a notch below in many instances due to my race or gender. Prejudice, discrimination, stigma, and shame are aspects in the lives of the downtrodden, especially so with transgender communities. As I found others within similar plights since my foray into adulthood and independence, I continuously fortified my desires to use my skills and energies towards equity and equality.

My focus has been on women, on black and brown communities, and on transgender and gender non-conforming communities, for I am an expert in my own intersectionalities. For so long we have lived in a male-dominated society, causing our views on gender and our societal categories of human lives to be skewed for centuries. I have an extreme faith in humanity and the natural world, of which the varying hues of identity, gender, and sex are displayed. I look towards a balance in all societies: for anyone no matter how they were born or what they were born into to bear.

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

Coupling gender discrimination and the oppression of black and brown bodies is a formidable foe for women. Adding an HIV diagnosis to the battle, women find themselves dealing with a stigma most aren't aware of. Healthy relationships become a wish and prayer, disclosure becomes dependent upon the education of the audience, and daily physical and mental issues batter upon our spirits. A daughter, girl, woman, wife, mother, grandmother, and femme all bear the burdens of holding up others while holding on to self while climbing the difficult ladder of health and career in a society run by those not like us.

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

I am extremely proud of my passion and opportunity, which has allowed me to cross paths with so many amazing advocates, visionaries, and lieutenants. Throughout every contract, event, advisory board, and panel I find others who remind me of my own passion for humanity. I could only imagine visiting every place on this planet where such people exist, sharing and trading pain and heart. I challenge every woman out there to go beyond their own pain and their own struggles. To reach out to those not unlike you: so we can all transform our wishes and prayers into a joyful reality.

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

The Well Project is an organization with a platform that makes it easy to connect to women around the globe with your passion, your drive, and your struggle. *A Girl Like Me* offered me an opportunity to put my pain and shame into words to share. My pain becomes a call to others, and my plight creates a sisterhood. There definitely is a well of promise in us all, reach in and allow others to see the light we have within.



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