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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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