



# Women's Empowerment Group



Women Living With HIV Take Photos And Talk About Their Lives

## What women living with HIV want you to know!

First, an HIV diagnosis is not a death sentence.

I want to let people know that HIV is not just a gay man's disease. HIV includes us all. How it got from one point to another is irrelevant. It is what it is. There are more faces to HIV than just men.

Don't nobody take no bag full of medicines anymore. We have simplified the pills...

My HIV medication is a part of my everyday life to take to stay healthy and take care of myself.

My number 1 goal is to tell people how good God is and how beautiful you can be, still, with HIV. Don't let nobody put nothing on you. Know that you are beautiful.



I am like the ribbon standing tall despite what I have, being courageous enough to talk about this disease that plagues so many of us in this world!

I am just really happy in my life right now. The sun is shining. It's like no matter what happens, you can get back up and smile again. Because at some point, you've got to believe that it's going to work out no matter what it is. And so, it's like, the sun is shining, I'm happy. All is well. No complaints.

If you know that someone is HIV positive; Don't talk about them behind their back!

You cannot catch HIV through sharing food and dishes. You can eat behind me. You can sit behind me. My virus is undetectable.

The Women's Empowerment Group is a 7-week group intervention group to empower women living with HIV through sharing their story and experience in photos and discussions.

Twenty-three women living with HIV in Memphis were given digital cameras and over the weeks asked to take photos in response to questions such as "what challenges have you overcome in your life," "what are you proudest of," and "what are your hopes and dreams for the future?" The resulting photos were brought back to the group and discussed. Each woman chose several photos to display in a poster collage that represented her life journey (or part of her journey) and wrote narrative descriptions of the photos.

Women in this project described a progression from feeling no hope to self-acceptance. Many women expressed the desire to help others. Seeing these photos gives others the opportunity to see the world from her perspective, improve HIV awareness and hopefully reduce the stigma of HIV.

Through community exhibits of these posters women have a "voice" in educating the public and facilitating critical dialogue about HIV in our community.

## They are proud of...



Women living with HIV are daughters who love their mothers. They are mothers who are proud of their children. They are wives and sisters. They are grateful to be here.

This is my puppy. Her name is Lady. She is as independent as I am!

I'm going to the Excel school to get my high school diploma. I'm going to get that diploma and walk the stage and we have cap and gown, we have a ring, we have everything.



My greatest accomplishment is that I'm here today clean and sober.

The new me! I'm loving the new me! I'm coming into a new person. A lot of new stuff is happening. The difference between the old Dominique and the new Dominique is that the old Dominique was shy, she let things get to her, she was depressed, and she was at the point where she was ready to give up. She cared about helping others, but she put herself on the back burner. Today's Dominique still cares about helping other people, but she puts herself more in the front.

## Hopes and Dreams

There's just so many things that, at one point in time, I thought I couldn't achieve. Dreams that I thought I couldn't meet. Now, everything is just opening up. In spite of all that's going on in my life, I keep feeling like them cherry blossoms. Like those flowers, just blossoming all over the place.

I want to have my own home. I just want to live life on life's terms. This time that God gave me, because, see, we don't never know the day nor the hour. But, I just want to be happy. Peace. I just want to have peace.



My dream is to be a nurse: an RN. Not just a regular nurse, but I would like to be an HIV nurse. I am now taking classes at the nursing building and I'm so thankful because I never thought I would see myself at this place. Never thought I would see myself at the nursing building taking classes. I'm one step closer to my goal!

I eventually want to open an organization called Girl Positive. What that basically means to me is not about a girl being HIV positive, but a woman trying to unite everyone and take away the negativity that surrounds HIV through people being united.



My future is in my hands!