

Jay Connor, San Diego



My name is Jay Conner. I am a 43-year-old Black American living with AIDS. My journey began with my AIDS diagnosis in March 1996 and has been an up and down battle since. When I went to my first AIDS Service Organization, my mother and I were told that I would not live out the year. This was very shocking and devastating to us. We didn't know what to think or do.

My only solution to that information was to resort to drug and alcohol abuse. My thoughts were, "I'm dying anyway, so what's the problem." Well, that wasn't the case. The following year, 1997, the wonderful HAART medications hit the market; I was not going to die. Unfortunately, the drug addiction didn't stop for 11 more years.

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Today I am 4 ½ years clean and sober. I have worked in an alcohol/drug recovery program and now I have the opportunity to work in the field of HIV/AIDS, a job I have been training for since 1996. I am very blessed to be able to help women, by being a voice or just being an ear and shoulder, when needed. •

"There are many women out there that have to hide and be silent and feel alone when diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. I want to be someone who can tell my story and fight for the rights for all women, especially women of color. I believe that is my gift in spite of having a chronic illness."