A Girl Like Me: Building Community and Advocacy Through Blogging

Iris House Women of the Face of AIDS Summit
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Speakers

**Gina Brown**, Community Advisory Board, WRI member, and *A Girl Like Me* blogger, The Well Project; Community Organizer, Southern AIDS Coalition

**Ciarra Covin**, *A Girl Like Me* blogger, The Well Project

**Krista Martel**, Executive Director, The Well Project
Agenda

• About The Well Project and *A Girl Like Me/Una Chica Como Yo*
• Diversity and *A Girl Like Me/Una Chica Como Yo*
• Building community and advocacy through blogging
• Sharing your story/becoming a blogger
• Personal experiences: Gina Brown, MSW and Ciarra Covin
About The Well Project

• Non-profit organization with a mission to change the course of the HIV/AIDS pandemic through a unique and comprehensive focus on women and girls
• Leverages technology to improve health outcomes and increase quality of life for women and girls living with HIV
• Focus is to provide accessible and comprehensive information, community support, and advocacy building
• Access our resources and join our community at www.thewellproject.org
About A Girl Like Me / Una Chica Como Yo

- *A Girl Like Me* (2009) and *Una Chica Como Yo* (2015) are online blogs where women living with HIV can share their everyday life experiences and stories.
- Women around the globe who are living with HIV often feel they are alone in their disease and isolated in the experiences they go through each day.
- AGLM/UCCY create a safe space for women living with HIV to share experiences, find commonalities, and build community.
- Decreases stigma and isolation by providing an always-available, anonymous platform to read the stories of women living with HIV who are thriving.

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What is diversity?

• The fact or quality of being diverse; difference
• A point or respect in which things differ
• The ways we are different; the condition of having unique characteristics

Why is it important to understand diversity?

• *Diversity is more than just tolerating differences.* It is:
  – Respecting, appreciating, and understanding what the varying characteristics of individuals bring to groups
• Everyone is unique and no single person is a representative of a certain group
Diversity and A Girl Like Me/Una Chica Como Yo

Of the 100+ A Girl Like Me and Una Chica Como Yo bloggers:

- Countries represented: 12 (Argentina, Australia, Belize, India, Namibia, Nepal, Nigeria, South Africa, Spain, Uganda, United Kingdom, United States)
- U.S. states represented: 25 plus Puerto Rico
- Youth (<30): ~11%
- Trans women: ~12%
- Black women: ~48%
- Latinx or Spanish Speaking: ~10%
- Caucasian: ~34%
- Asian/Southeast Asian: ~4%

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Middle Finger to the Stigma
Apr 1, 2019 - PDEES
A few months ago, I lost a really close friend, or at least a person who I thought was my friend. All behind a conversation this person was having in front of me with one of their other friends in regards to HIV and STIs.

Turning the Tide in Nigeria - AIDS in Nigeria: Book Launch
Apr 1, 2019 - boseolotu
I recently came across this news for an upcoming book launch: It has been over 30 years since the onset of the global AIDS epidemic and advances in biomedical research have led to the discovery of...

Intro - Derinthia
Mar 29, 2019 - Godchild27
Growing up in the hood in South West Atlanta was one of the hard things for me, especially being HIV-positive.

I Am Not JUST HIV
Mar 28, 2019 - Angel S.
I have been undetectable of the illness since 2006; except for the stigma and unkind people that leave evident scars on my mental health.

The Truth About the Truth
Mar 27, 2019 - Red40something
What do you know about the truth? Seriously, I'm asking. What's true for you? How do you define truth?
Creating Community Through Blogging

- Address diversity through personal narratives
- Leverage technology to unite women from around the world to:
  - Create an online network and support community with a global reach and impact
  - Make connections across lines of identity and focus on common experiences
  - Provide newly diagnosed women with numerous stories and faces to show them they are not alone and build hope

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Building Advocacy Through Blogging

• Advocacy needs women’s voices!
  – Only way to ensure the needs of women living with HIV are addressed
  – Need to identify and advance new activists

• A Girl Like Me/Una Chica Como Yo have been a launching pad for several women living with HIV who are now well-known national and international advocates. It also cultivates leadership among newer advocates looking to reach a larger platform

• The Well Project identifies leadership opportunities for bloggers, including presenting at conferences/on webinars, attending conferences, representing The Well Project at events
The question was: Why do I make myself attractive if I have HIV?

I am Maria Hiv Mejia-Laing. I am here as a living example that HIV/AIDS is not the end! I am here to let you know that we can live with this condition and still be beautiful inside and out! We are not dirty! We are not unclean! We are just human beings living with this condition! WE ARE MILLIONS AND MILLIONS around the world. If you are newly diagnosed I want to tell you that there is hope! That if you take your medications, live a healthy lifestyle, eat well, drink lots of fluids and exercise !!! you will live a long life with this condition.

Please do not feel ashamed and feel like you will never find anyone that will love you! YOU are deserving of everything and a person on this subject will understand that if the proper precautions are taken, HIV will not be spread. I am excited to offer this advice, especially to the LGBT community! I am excited to offer this advice due to the continual ignorance that society has on my backing!

I made it through. I am Clean! I have been HIV negative for weeks just what my part in sex and relationships means. I Stigmatized myself. I found that the ignorance of others. I self-right my advocacy, now I see how wrong I was.

I accept my status and I love and make decisions. I took a more colorful path with inner peace upon finding out my status.
Sharing Your Story

Why share your story?

– While disclosing can be difficult, finding a safe place to share your story can be empowering.
– Take baby steps – share your story with friends, family, or in small settings that are safe.
– Utilize your story to raise awareness and educate communities.
– Sharing can also help others feel they are not alone, decrease stigma, empower others.

*Sharing stories takes the burden of shame away.*
Sharing Your Story Through Blogging

- Blogging can be used to share everyday experiences living with HIV and allows one to “unpack baggage”
- You can blog anonymously – can be very empowering, helpful
- A powerful tool for HIV advocacy
  - Call to action
  - Raise awareness on topics that affect women living with HIV
- Blogging impacts both the writer and the reader
  - Writer: healing, decrease isolation, increase connection to community
  - Readers: healing, feeling less alone, decrease stigma and isolation

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Blogging with *A Girl Like Me/Una Chica Como Yo*

- Send email to Juliana Hawawini Johnson: [jhawawini@thewellproject.org](mailto:jhawawini@thewellproject.org)
- To apply, we ask for:
  - Brief bio
  - Introductory blog
  - Statement on why you want to blog with *A Girl Like Me/Una Chica Como Yo*
- Review and sign blog agreement
- Account is set up and blogs are posted by The Well Project team
- Blogs are shared on social media (we tag bloggers only if given permission)
Benefits of Blogging with A Girl Like Me/Una Chica Como Yo

• Established community of bloggers and women living with HIV
• Wide-reaching platform (2.5 million+ annually!)
• Diverse, supportive community of women living with HIV
• Potential opportunities with for scholarships to conferences, speaking engagements, media opportunities, mentorship
• Connection to The Well Project’s larger community:
  – Offers 110+ fact sheets, slide sets, and webinars to build advocacy and leadership among women living with HIV
  – Includes more than 25 partner organizations and their programs/events

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Panel Discussion
Questions & Answers
• To learn more about this topic, please check out these fact sheets:
  – Women and HIV
  – Talking to the Media and Using Social Media
  – Why Race Matters: Women and HIV

• For more fact sheets and to connect to our community of women living with HIV, visit:
  – www.thewellproject.org
  – www.facebook.com/thewellproject
  – www.twitter.com/thewellproject
  – www.Instagram.com/thewellprojecthiv
Thank you!!