

Building Our Futures

Writing for AIDS United, Black transgender advocate Mallery Jenna Robinson shared her thoughts in a blog post titled “Voices of Community: Carrying Our HIV Stories, Building Our Futures.” Below is an edited excerpt.

January 5, 2026 By Mallery Jenna Robinson

I often say that my life’s work has been shaped at the intersection of identity, survival and community. As a Black transgender woman with Afro-Caribbean roots, I know firsthand what it means to navigate a world where HIV stigma, transphobia and systemic racism collide. These experiences have not only influenced my journey, but they have also become the very reason I step into spaces of advocacy, leadership and storytelling.

My entry into HIV and AIDS work came through community. Growing up, I heard stories of friends, elders and chosen family who had been lost to the epidemic and others who were surviving against the odds. Their resilience left an imprint on me. By the time I began serving on advisory boards and engaging in outreach programs, I understood that this work was about more than medical care; it was about dignity, justice and the possibility of joy.

Over the past 13 years, I’ve had the privilege of serving on multiple boards, including the West Hollywood Transgender Advisory Board, the Long Beach Transwellness board and the Being Alive HIV board, among others. Each role has taught me something different, but together they have reinforced a central truth: Our communities carry deep wisdom, and that wisdom must guide the future of HIV care and advocacy. Too often, policies and programs are built without the voices of those most impacted. We cannot afford that silence any longer.

My Afro-Caribbean heritage has also shaped how I view this work. From my Haitian ancestors, I inherited not only resilience but also a tradition of resistance and community care. These values guide how I show up in the HIV sector. When I advocate for leadership opportunities for Black, Latinx and trans communities, I am carrying forward that ancestral call to liberation. For me, equity is not just a policy demand—it is a spiritual obligation.

The future of HIV care must extend beyond the clinic. Yes, access to treatment and prevention is critical. But care also means addressing housing insecurity, mental health needs and systemic

discrimination. It means creating spaces where people living with HIV can thrive, not just survive. I envision a future where care is holistic, where providers, advocates and policymakers listen to community voices and respond with compassion and resources, not judgment or red tape.

Storytelling has been one of the most powerful tools in my work. Through projects like the A Hateful Homicidepodcast and my transgender empathy trainings, I've seen how sharing lived experiences can open hearts and shift perspectives.

In recent conversations within the community, I've noticed a recurring theme: the need to reclaim joy. For too long, HIV has been framed solely in terms of tragedy, loss or crisis. While it is true that we have endured immense grief, it is equally true that we have cultivated resilience, love and creativity that defy the odds. Joy is not a luxury; it is a form of resistance. By celebrating survival, by dancing, by loving openly, we affirm our humanity.

Looking forward, my hope is that the sector continues to evolve with equity, sustainability and community leadership at its core. This means shifting from short-term projects to long-term investments in grassroots organizations.

As a community leader, I carry both memory and vision. I carry the memory of those lost to the epidemic, the mentors who taught me how to fight. And I carry the vision of a future where people living with HIV are not just surviving but thriving; where equity is a lived reality, not just a buzzword; and where joy is recognized as central to our collective liberation.