How Lil Nas X Boosts Morale and Raises HIV Funds

"He's our Beyoncé!"

November 16, 2021 By Trent Straube

Lil Nas X shows a whole lot of love for folks with HIV. First, his hit debut album, Montero, which dropped in September, is raising funds for 15 groups fighting the epidemic in the South—over $100,000 so far—then, during a visit to his hometown, Atlanta, the pop star paid a visit to AIDS service organizations, including the Ponce de Leon Center at Grady Health; He Is Valuable, Inc.; and the headquarters of THRIVE SS, which stands for Transforming HIV Resentments Into Victories Everlasting Support Services, a group for same-gender-loving men of color living with HIV.

"It was so cool," recalls THRIVE SS executive director Larry Walker. "It reminded me that yes, money does a lot, but visibility and representation are just as important, as is seeing yourself as real and valid and essential to culture."

A bona fide Black gay pop icon—"He's our Beyoncé!" Walker adds—Lil Nas X, né Montero Lamar Hill, ruled the past year with a stream of hit singles, controversial videos and click-worthy clapbacks to haters (earning him a spot on the 2021 POZ 100, which celebrates Black HIV advocates). Having someone of that caliber stop by your space and tell you and your staff that you're going a great job, Walker says, gives you the energy to persevere and boosts morale.

So what happened during the visit? Folks—from long-term HIV survivors to young men new to the community—formed a big circle and introduced themselves. They shared with Lil Nas X how much it meant to them that a pop star like him exists today, and Lil Nas asked them about the work they do and how HIV impacts the community. "He was truly engaged in what we're doing," Walker recalls. "He wanted to learn and know why HIV plagues our community so much."

For Montero, Lil Nas X created an online baby registry linking each track to a nonprofit fans can donate to. The HIV groups on the registry are grantees of Gilead Sciences' COMPASS Initiative (the name stands for "COMmitment to Partnership in Addressing HIV/AIDS in Southern States"). The registry includes the Arianna Center, Bros in Convo, Central Alabama Alliance Resource & Advocacy Center, Ch-Pier, Compassionate Atlanta, The Counter Narrative, Happy Hippy, The Normal Anomaly, OLTT, Relationship Unleashed, Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, THRIVE SS, Transinclusive Group, and What's in the Mirror?

To read more details abut his stop in Atlanta, see “Lil Nas X Visits Black HIV Groups, Raises $100K for Southern HIV Efforts.”

And in related news, THRIVE SS just launched an app for same-gender-loving men of color across the nation, regarless of HIV status. To lean more, read “Connect and Inspire Black Gay Men? There’s an App for That: THRIVE 365.”

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