

CELEBRATING THE 2020 LEADING WOMEN SOCIETY HONOREES



Dottie Rains Dowdell

Dottie Dowdell has over 20 years of experience in the field of human services. She is the President of Creative Training and Development Incorporated, a company committed to building stronger organizations and communities by providing tailored training and development programs. Dottie also serves as a coach for New Jersey's Behavioral Health Integration Project. There she assists in the development of integrated behavioral and HIV primary health care services to improve patient outcomes.

Additionally, Dottie's many accomplishments include helping to draft NJ's first Statewide Coordinated Statement of Need (2006), conducting a needs assessment on the increased rate of HIV infection among women of color in Trenton, in collaboration with the Health Incentive Program for Women, and the development of two national training programs, Building Leaders of Color (BLOC) and Growing Leadership Opportunities for Women (GLOW), for the National Minority AIDS Council and the Health Resource Services Administration.



Ruby Garner

Ruby Garner was born in Memphis Tennessee. She was raised by her Grandmother Frankie, who is responsible for the person she is today. Mrs. Frankie taught Ruby how to be humble, how to love God as well as others. Ruby eventually moved to Harlem N.Y.C, in her teens, growing up under the watchful eyes of auntie's and uncles.

However, nothing Ruby learned prepared her for her HIV+ diagnosis. She never thought she needed to be tested until she discovered her husband had sex with both men and women. At first, Ruby considered suicide but chose to live instead. In time, she found a community of people just like her. They offered support, showed her how to live "positive-ly" and how to share her story to encourage testing and treatment. Today, Ruby is a certified peer health education coordinator who supports others the way she was supported as they get tested, get PrEP, stay in care, and take their meds as prescribed.



Gena Grant

Gena has advocated for youth in Miami Florida since 2001. Today she is a peer educator/patient Advocate for the Ryan White Part D program. Gena is also the staff liaison for NIH- sponsored University of Miami Department of Pediatrics Research Community Advisory Board within the, ambassador for NMAC, and a facilitator and trainer with Growing Leadership Opportunities for Women. Her most recent accomplishments include completing NMAC's Building Leaders of Color program which seeks to engage PLWH in leadership opportunities, and joining the Positive Women's Network INC. as Director of Youth Services.

Gena started "Real Talk with Gena Grant" in August 2019 which focuses on sexual health conversations and education around key health issues impacting low income and underserved communities, including women, youth, and transwomen and men. Gena is also an active board member of Positive People Network INC. a social organization that provides social support services for People infected or affected by HIV/AIDS our motto is "There is life after the diagnosis."



Sheila Jackson

Sheila was born in St. Louis, Missouri in 1961. In 1995, at the age of 34, she was diagnosed HIV positive. It wasn't easy to for her, but she prevailed in her struggle. Today, Sheila is affiliated with Williams Associations. She helps out with testing, educating the community and sharing her story to encourage others that there is life after an HIV diagnosis. In her spare time Sheila enjoys spending time with her adopted niece and nephew. She also enjoys writing children stories.



LeSherri James

LeSherri James was born February 23, 1982, in Chicago, Illinois. In 2000, her life changed drastically when, at 18 years old and in college, she found she was living with HIV. Two years later LeSherri became pregnant with her first child. From that moment on I wanted to be healthy for my child and myself. So, she attended any HIV training she was invited to so that she could learn and pass on the knowledge women like her needed to help prevent the spread of HIV. LeSherri was really encouraged by her experiences and when she got the chance began working with community organizations. Her advocacy career began at Cook County Hospital of Chicago. From there, LeSherri went on to work with Rush University Hospital of Chicago and Howard Brown Health Center. She says,

"I am happy to serve my community. In Chicago, thousands of women are diagnosed a year I cannot stand by and watch this go on without doing my part to help."



Deirdre Johnson-Speaks

Since 2000, Deirdre has lived, learned and experienced HIV on her own terms. She utilizes her sense of humor and lively personality to openly share her medicine and medical adherence journey with the world using #MedsWillMakeMeDance. Deirdre is transparent about how she is not allowing HIV to have control of her, but fearlessly taking control of HIV. Deirdre is native of Virginia, and has worked as an educator, case manager, and speaker, however, she is most passionate about eradicating stigma, ending criminalization of people living with HIV, combating racial injustice, health disparities, and being an active Partner in Change.



Antoinette Jones

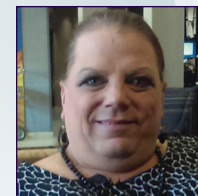
Antoinette joined SisterLove, Inc. in April of 2018 as a Peer Navigator facilitating access to preventative care and treatment for people living with and at risk for HIV. Working at SisterLove and many other non-profit organizations, Antoinette developed her advocacy skills in Racial, Reproductive, and Social Justice. She strives to educate folks on the intersections of HIV and Reproductive Justice, the injustices black women encounter, as well as empower people to take charge of their Sexual Health. Her advocacy work focuses on challenging cultural stigmas around HIV and using creative expression to share her story and inspire others to do the same



L'Orangelis Thomas Negrón

L'Orangelis was born HIV positive, and have worked to heal and become an HIV and sexual and reproductive rights activist. She was born and still lives in San Juan, Puerto Rico and is Afro-Caribbean and half Dominican. L'Orangelis is a queer trans-feminist blogger, wannabe Bruja, artisan and community educator, and part of many of the people living with HIV networks. She is the co-founder of Pangea PR, a safe space for young people living with HIV. Every month she facilitates a New Moon Menstrual Cycle for people who menstruate. She says, "I keep changing, transforming and exploring new stages in my life, also protecting my sovereignty over my positive body

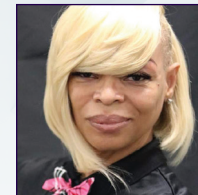
and sexual pleasure, empowering those around me to live together a free live." L'Orangelis is part of El Hangar en Santurce a queer safe space where we do political work through education, culture and art.



Francesca R. Schumann

Francesca is from Titusville, Florida. She currently resides in Columbus, Ohio. She is a post-op transwoman living with HIV at the undetectable level. Francesca serves on the Ryan White Part A Greater Columbus area team. She is the first woman/ transwoman to hold a co-chair position dedicated to consumer care and was also the first transwoman to hold a chair position dedicated exclusion to consumer concerns. Francesca hopes to continue her educational pursuits in 2021, returning to college to obtain 2 master's degrees in social work and political science.

Her goals are to develop safe spaces and housing for trans women and men living with HIV. That housing can be transitional or stable depending upon one's choice. Francesca says, "My focus is always to reduce stigma, racism, and bigotry, offering opportunities to overcome societal and self-imposed barriers limiting our success as women and individuals living with HIV."



Alecia Tramel-McIntyre

Alecia is founder of Positive People Network, Inc., a social organization for people living with HIV/AIDS. The organization's slogan is "There Is Life After Diagnosis, Live it ". Alecia has been positive for 20 years and an advocate for as long. She is also a board member of ICWNA, a national women's leadership organization. Alecia is the Florida State Lead for Positive Women's Network, a board member for The Women's March Miami, and a host of other opportunities that allow her to advocate for women and all people living with HIV/AIDS. Alecia fights discrimination and stigma in order to ensure a greater quality of life for women living with HIV. She is honored to join a group of outstanding women who show up and be included for our causes and needs.



Miriam Whitehead

In 2000, Miriam found out that she was HIV positive. Currently, her husband and three children are HIV negative. She says, "To me, HIV means His Internal Vision and AIDS stands for And I Don't Surrender to stigma and judgments." Miriam is an author, former HIV/AIDS spokesmodel for Maryland, motivational speaker, poet, and playwright. During these 20 years, she has developed new knowledge of her self-worth. It's balanced in faith. Most of all she says she is comfortable in her skin which consist of layers of freedom, liberty, and blessings. Miriam tells others, "I operate under God and "The S.Y.S.T.E.M. (Share Your Story Too Empower Many). I'm grateful in victory!"

THE PANDORA SINGLETON ALLY AWARD

Pandora Singleton came to this Earth to become many things to many people – daughter, wife, mother, leader, founder, visionary and ALLY. Pandora was the fiercest, most passionate supporter and warrior for women living with HIV and AIDS. She went beyond service to become a best friend, a great mentor, a mother-sister figure and a fearless fighter for human rights for women. She also fought for the rights of all People Living with HIV/AIDS, especially gay, bisexual, and transgender men of color. Pandora was the Founder/Director of Project Azuka in Savannah, GA. She was a founding member of SisterSong National Reproductive Justice Collective. She served as Co-chair of the GA Community Planning Group and was a Board member of the National Minority AIDS Council. Pandora literally gave her life fighting for so many others. We honor her story with this award as we show our gratitude for another ally who is a leading woman, who is not living with HIV and has been an invaluable ally for more than 20 years to Women Leaders Living with HIV/AIDS. Congratulations to the 2019 Pandora Ally Award winner, **Gloria J. Lockett**.



Valerie Rochester,
Vice President, AIDS United

Valerie L. Rochester has used her 25 years of experience as a leading wellness architect to provide programmatic, administrative, and technical support services in the public health field. A native of Indianapolis, she was exposed to public service at an early age. Her passion for other people's health and well-being has guided her both professionally and personally, instilling in her the drive to be a purposeful disruptor for bringing about change. She lives by her favorite quote from Muhammad Ali: "Service to others is the rent we pay for our room on this earth" and her motto in life is Make History Now!

Prior to joining AIDS United, Valerie was Director of Programs & Training with the Black Women's Health Imperative, where she led the organization's national programmatic responses to address racially and gender-based health inequities; managing an extensive portfolio of health initiatives addressing the priority health issues of breast and cervical cancers, HIV/STIs, obesity, and chronic disease prevention. As a health strategist, Valerie recognizes the importance of engaging and mobilizing communities to help bring about improved health outcomes and has applied these approaches to her work with local, Federal, national, and state agencies. She has also served on the board of directors of numerous national and community-based organizations, including her current tenure as a board member of the National Minority AIDS Council, where she holds the position of Treasurer. Because of her commitment to addressing health inequities in communities of color, Valerie was awarded the Congressional Black Caucus Healthcare Hero Award in 2002 at the annual Congressional Black Caucus Health Braintrust, presented to her by former Congresswoman Donna Christensen.

On another note, most people would never know that Valerie is a sports and classic horror fan, with a little pop culture thrown in. Her interests are a mix of boxing, Alfred Hitchcock movies, and fashion. When she isn't shopping for shoes or bags, she likes running, reading Stephen King novels, and spending time with friends learning hand-dancing. She is a self-described "coffee-fiend" who likes traveling to unusual places, discovering different R & B and hip-hop artists and learning all the words to their songs.

ABSOLUTE LOVE COMMUNITY AWARD

SisterLove has sustained her commitment to the mission of achieving full sexual and reproductive justice as a means to end HIV in our communities. We could not have done this for more than 31 years without the strength and support of dozens of partners, collaborators, and sponsors. This year, we are adding an award to the 2020 Leading Women Society Awards and Institute - Introducing the Absolute Love Community Partner Award. This special acknowledgment is our lovenote to a community partner who has shown and shared dedicated support for Women Living with HIV in our programs, as well as the 2020 LWS, for at least 20 years.

The Armorettes, *Atlanta*

The Armorettes are a Legendary Camp Drag Organization that have been around for over 41 years and counting. We have raised over 2.20 Million dollars in the 41-year period one dollar at a time. The Armorettes' namesake comes from where we started and our tale began, at the Armory Bar in Atlanta, GA. The original Armorettes were Thelma, Julie Garden, Justa Tish, Kitty Carlisle, Ginny Tonic and Liz Helen. These original six stepped up for the community during a very dark time in the late 70's and early 80's, when the AIDS epidemic was becoming more and more rampant and out of control. They decided enough was enough and if no one was going to help our community that they would step up and do so.

So, they decided to put on drag shows at the Armory in Atlanta, GA in order to raise money for their friends who were sick and dying from AIDS. Every dollar they took in they immediately turned around and put it to good use by distributing the money to those in need. We as Armorettes have always stepped up and done what was right and more importantly what was needed for our community and will continue to do so till a cure is found.

