

NARRATOR:

The Disability & Philanthropy Forum presents Masen Davis, Executive Director of Funders Concerned About AIDS.

MASEN DAVIS:

I mean, I was reflecting that, especially around talking about COVID and the situation then, I remember my first job in 1993 was at Chicago's Gay and Lesbian Center, which really was just a gay and lesbian center at the time. We weren't so great at bi and trans inclusion yet, but I learned so clearly then if you have a cold, if you think you might be sick, don't go to work. You were working besides people who have serious health conditions. And your cold could see somebody else's death. And there's a sense of community and shared responsibility for keeping each other safe. Keeping each other safe on the street, keeping each other safe at work, making sure people are safe at home. And I was really, I think, kind of heartbroken in a lot of the conversations around COVID in how hard is it to wear a darn mask if you're sick, or in a space with somebody who might have a vulnerability you don't?

And it made me really actually grateful for those early lessons I learned from queer activists and HIV and AIDS activists in the 90s, that we have a responsibility to each other. And by all the means, stay home if you're sick. The world is not going to end for you. Usually. So I think that that feels very present for me in this conversation. I do think sometimes we have to remind people that HIV and AIDS are conditions that are covered under the ADA. And while a lot of folks living with HIV... we've had amazing progress in medication to treat people and to prevent HIV. The reality is we still have a lot of people living with HIV in the LGBT community. And for some people, it is a disabling condition, whether temporarily because of medication change or symptoms or permanently for some people.

And so it just is at that intersection of LGBT rights, disability, justice, and HIV. And I think we've gone too far in separating the LGBT movement and the HIV movement. They used to be one. And then at some point when it was... To be honest, as I've been talking to people, more folks of color getting HIV, the LGBT community kind of stepped away, "Oh, that's not us. We have a separate movement." And we really need to challenge that as we look at who's most impacted and how we can be stronger together. And I think we know that folks with disabilities are at higher risk of HIV in part because of stigma, suggesting that folks depending on disability, oh, they're not that sexual, or they don't need prevention, or no one needs to talk to them about PrEP, because we're not going to talk to them about as think of them as sexual beings.

So there are real risks there, I think as a result that we need to really challenge politically and in our own day-to-day lives.

NARRATOR:

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