

FROM ISOLATION TO CONNECTION: SOCIAL NETWORKING AS SELF-CARE FOR WOMEN LIVING WITH HIV DURING COVID IN THE U.S.

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OBJECTIVE

This project sought to decrease anxiety and depression in African American HIV positive women and to identify variables determining participation in support groups and social networks.

TEXAS

Texas has the third-highest rate of newly diagnosed HIV infections in the nation trailing California and Florida (Kaiser Foundation, 2019).

Nearly 20,000 people in the Dallas area alone are living with HIV.
Approximately 1 in 4 of these individuals are women, representing the fastest-growing population of those newly diagnosed.



Research consistently shows that issues of stigma, discrimination, violence, and post-traumatic stress negatively impact the emotional wellbeing of women living with HIV, and impair their quality of life and HIV medication adherence, which can ultimately affect clinical outcomes.



PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESSORS

- Impair quality of life
 - Impair HIV medication adherence
 - Affect clinical outcomes.
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- HIV-positive women often experience internalized stigma and attitudes leading to feelings of isolation, rejection, low self esteem, and depression.

STIGMATIZATION

One of the leading causes of anxiety in fear among positive women

- fear that others might find out that they are HIV-positive, especially their partners
- can occur at the individual, community, or structural level
- can range from subtle discriminatory practices to overt and labeling, stereotyping, exclusion, and loss of social status
- can result from secrecy about the diagnosis, enacted stigma results from actual incidences of discrimination, and perceived community stigma which is derived from a perception of community ethos



The Grace Project exists to break through the stigma preventing women from accessing healthcare and to address the unique needs of women living with HIV/AIDS.

The program seeks to encourage hope and hold families together through a supportive net of services specifically for women, including mental health counseling, substance abuse treatment, social support building, and education.



- Zoom groups
- Community collaborations
- Social media

- Workshops
- Webinars
- Conferences

Engagement

Education

Empowerment

Evaluation

- Peer Support
- Leadership Academy
- #IamRed campaign

- Demographic data collection
- Pre/post surveys
- Longitudinal data



To reduce stigma and isolation among women living with HIV, the Grace Project has launched the #IamRed anti-stigma campaign on social media and created the website- iamredproject.org.

- helps to de-stigmatize HIV by creating a social network of women who are open and public about their HIV diagnosis.
- provides a platform for women to disclose their status in a safe environment, and is a catalyst for other women to step out of isolation.

GRACE PROJECT NATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR WOMEN LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS

- This conference is one of the **LARGEST IN THE WORLD** specifically for women living with HIV
- Our **23rd** year
- First virtual conference held in 2020 due to COVID pandemic
- Women from all over the U.S., potentially the world!
- A one-of-a-kind weekend geared towards personal growth, empowerment, connection, and inspiration
- Includes discussion groups, workshops, & presentations


THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Telehealth, which had previously NOT been widely embraced by medical insurers and clients alike, became an essential way to deliver therapeutic services.

Within two weeks of the shut-down in March 2020, Legacy pivoted from in-person-only counseling into a telehealth program to continue serving our clientele with socially distanced treatment and with minimal interruption in care.

We were able to reach those in the community who might not otherwise seek counseling for fear of the stigmas associated with both mental health and HIV, or who had fallen out of care.

COVID AND THE GRACE PROJECT CONFERENCE

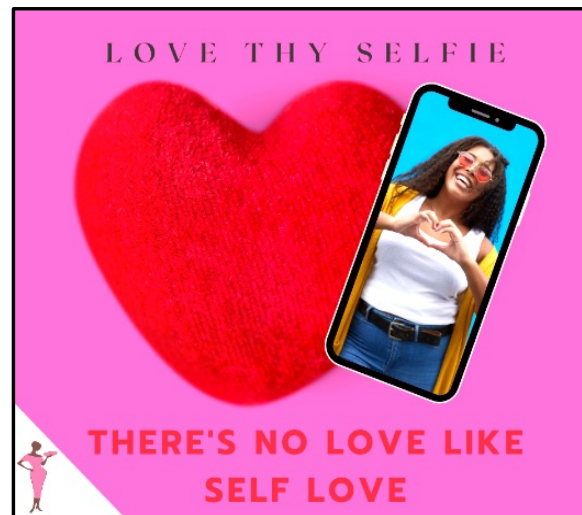
- In 2020: Limited in the number of scholarships  reaching nearly 20% more women across the U.S.
- In 2021: A hybrid experience- returned top three days of in-person workshops, group sessions, and connecting activities, live streaming all plenary sessions and general conference sessions.
- Expanded our support network by making the educational sessions, exhibitor information, and group processes available to a host of eligible women who would not otherwise have access.
- Required a great deal of technical assistance to successfully implement our very first virtual conference

THE GRACE PROJECT DURING COVID

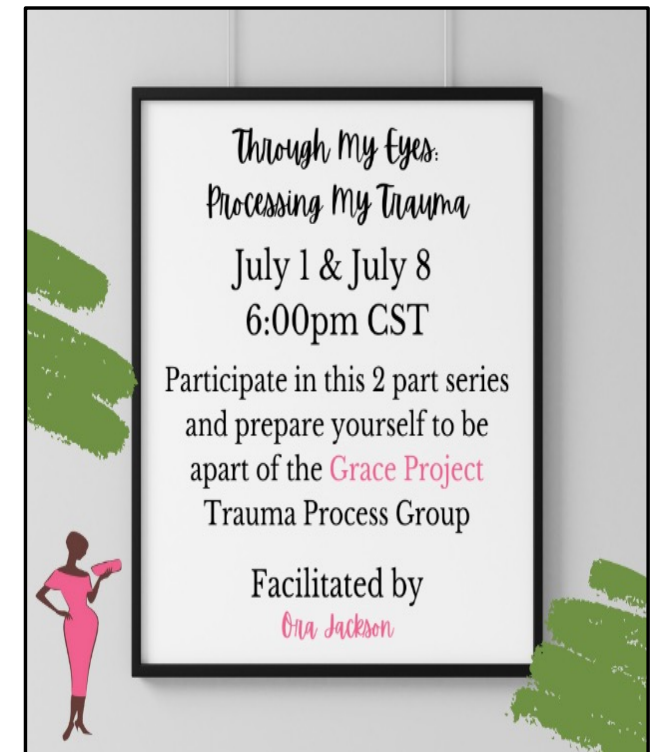
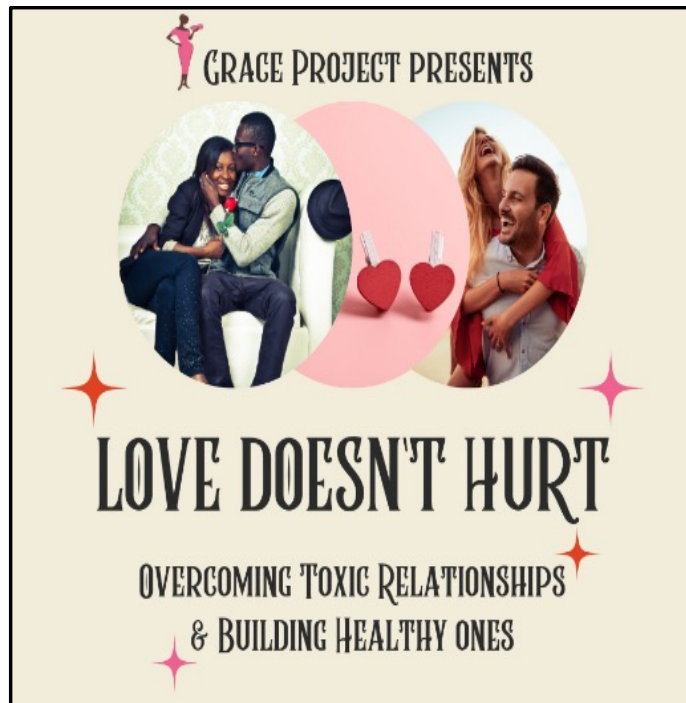
- Increased frequency to weekly Zoom meetings and support groups
- Thursday Process Groups
- Grace Project Woman Peer Presentations
- Leadership Academy Workshops
- Alternating process groups and psychoeducational sessions.
- Successive virtual workshop series focusing on Leadership, Women's Empowerment, and Advocacy.



GRACE PROJECT PROCESS GROUPS



GRACE PROJECT PROCESS GROUPS



LEADERSHIP ACADEMY WORKSHOPS



**What's Your
*leadership style?***

Explore the different leadership styles.
Discover your own leadership style and
learn how to use your style to become effective.

**Leading In Your
*Zone of Being***

There are 4 Zones of Being. A conscious leader spends 70% of their time living in their Zone of Genius. Discover your zone of being and learn what it takes to become a conscious leader and lead in your Zone of Genius.



Navigating Boundaries

Learn why boundaries are important and how to set healthy boundaries. Self advocate and get your needs met and identify areas in your life you may need to draw boundaries.



COMMUNICATION MATTERS

Improve your communication style.
Learn to use communication skills effectively.

Grace Project Woman Peer Presentations

“Soul Talk”

“The Will to Live”

“Self-Care: Managing Disclosure and Stigma”

“Empowerment: Beauty for Ashes”

“Why Are You Hiding?”

“Let’s Talk about Sex” Parts I & II

“Walking it Out”

“Advocacy: What, When, & Why”



CONCLUSION

Although a great deal of technical assistance was required to successfully implement our very first virtual conference and subsequent virtual programming, continuing with a hybrid in-person and online experience presents a model for best practices in maintaining supportive connection among women living with HIV.

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