

Thriving: Shining a light on the lived experiences of women living with HIV in Australia

In 2022, after being impressed at a performance by Fleassy Malay, a queer spoken word artist, speaker and coach, ViiV Healthcare Australia approached Positive Women Victoria (PWV) with the idea to produce a poetry collaboration focused on the experiences of women living with HIV.

This idea saw Fleassy develop an original piece of performance poetry. She worked with seven women living with HIV in a writing workshop, where they shared their stories and experiences. The words in the poem - co-written and spoken by Fleassy and filmed by Ryan Adams - are of those women.

The Thriving performance poem, a beautifully filmed video of the participants, is an uplifting and inspiring piece of work that raises awareness of the reality of living with HIV as a woman today. It also highlights the importance of visibility and inclusion for a group within our community that are often diagnosed late.¹

The aim of Thriving is to raise awareness of the contemporary experiences of women living with HIV, address the HIV-related stigma they face and increase understanding of the global U=U message (Undetectable equals Untransmittable) that highlights people who achieve and maintain an undetectable viral load, cannot transmit HIV to their HIV-negative sexual partners.²

To commemorate World AIDS Day 2023, Thriving will be shared publicly at Federation Square in Melbourne, an initiative of Positive Women Victoria, and will be livestreamed via social media for international audiences.

“We have blossomed in the harshest of terrain. Warded off plague and blame, and found a place to place our roots. We are fragrant, vibrant, and brimming with life.”

Thriving was written by Fleassy Malay, filmed by Ryan Adams and produced by Positive Women Victoria in collaboration with seven women living with HIV. The project was supported by ViiV Healthcare Australia through a grant.

ViiV Healthcare Australia wishes to thank all the women who participated in the making of this video.

References:

1. Kirby Institute, HIV. Accessed October 2023, Accessible: <https://data.kirby.unsw.edu.au/hiv>
2. The Australasian Society of HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health Medicine (2020). U=U ASHM Guidance for Healthcare Professionals (3rd Edition) Allan. B (Ed.) October 2020. Accessed October 2023. Accessible: <https://www.ashm.org.au/resources/uu-ashm-guidance-for-healthcare-professionals/>