

CELEBRATING OUR SCHOLARS 2020



Caterina Dong, a freshman at Brown University in Rhode Island, is studying medical anthropology and public health. Dong has volunteered on a global health initiative in the Dominican Republic, seeing first-hand the stigma associated with HIV and its impact on Black and Brown communities. Dong was also a participant in the Howard Hughes Medical Scholar program. *"Learning about and working with HIV has taught me that there is always more beyond the surface...I am a person who has suffered, who feels immense empathy and a strong connection to helping others, who knows that medicine must be enriched by anthropology to truly understand the human experience, who sees pain and inequality and wants to learn and heal."*



Moses Aina, a freshman at NYU Tisch in New York, is an aspiring actor. Aina's long-term plans are to both write and direct works of art that reflect the experience of HIV/AIDS within the black community. Aina founded "Diversity Alliance", a high school organization focused on the issues of LGBTQIA+ people in the school and surrounding community. *"I have a passion to not only rebuild society by fighting for LGBTQIA+ rights through the use of my art, but I am going to help bring awareness to the impact HIV/AIDS has on African American gay men, and how we as a society can address these issues in the most effective manner. And I know that I will be triumphant in my pursuit because I have the prerequisites for success: determination, resilience, openness, authenticity, and love."*



Brandon Staple, a Junior at Colorado University, Denver is a pre-med student and aims to be an infectious disease physician. Staple is a working board member of the Colorado HIV Alliance for Prevention, Care and Treatment where his work includes COVID-19 response and providing assistance to people in the HIV community. Staple volunteers with the National Minority AIDS Council and AIDS United and the Foundation for AIDS Research. *"Raised in the heart of the HIV/AIDS community where my father was a leader in ACT UP Los Angeles and a board member of the NAACP, from an early age I learned the value of leadership, activism, and public service for enhancing the dignity of mankind. So, when I was diagnosed with HIV, I was well-versed in the stigma, health inequity, and discrimination that people with my condition endured."*



Matthew Zheng, a junior at Stanford University, is a double major in Political Science and Feminist, Gender and Sexuality Studies with a minor in Sociology. Zheng's focus is on the intersections of injustice, inequality and illness. Zheng is a Queer Wellness Manager at Stanford Queer Student Resources, working with the student communities to create health and wellness events. He is also the Patient Health Navigator Chair at Pacific Free Clinic. *"What healed me from [my pain] was discovering a future in community. As I grew, I found elders who taught me the joy of being queer. I learned about my community's spirit of survival and penchant for fun... It was learning from those who survived before me (whether they be LGBTQ+, survivors of assault, HIV+, or any combination thereof) that gave me the fortitude to dream beyond my circumstances. It was the bravery of those like Pedro Zamora which gave me the hope to transform my trauma into a tactic of resistance."*



Adeleye Mesogboriwon, a freshman at Edward Waters College, in Florida, plans to study biology and become a genetic engineer. At the age of 12, Mesogboriwon began volunteering with HIV organizations in his community. With Know HIV and OneVoice Initiative for Women and Children Emancipation, Mesogboriwon was involved in sexual and reproductive health outreach program aimed at increasing the sexual health awareness among women and girls. *"At the age of 12, I started the "Know HIV" initiative in my community. I talked to some of my close friends in school, educated them, and they decided to join and help me. We collected different books from the library on HIV and forced [ourselves] to comprehend it... This initiative focuses on educating the public on ways to prevent HIV, debunk some HIV mythology ... and educate [on stigma]."*



Bo Hwang, a Post Baccalaureate Student at UCLA, in California, is pursuing a career in medicine and public health research. Hwang's goal is to work to improve the structural and medical care for vulnerable populations and help reduce health inequities that disproportionately impact LGBTQ communities of color and people living with HIV/AIDS. Hwang's experiences include working with several health services organizations, including the Asian Health Services, and the UCLA HIV Counseling & Testing Coalition. *"Being a scholarship recipient has allowed me to focus on the most important things. Mainly, it showed me that I no longer need to ask for permission to be authentically myself. I don't want to apologize or overly explain myself for the comfort of others. I want to create my own table and that table would be inclusive and reflective of our diverse communities."*



August Clayton, a senior at Towson University, in Maryland, is focused on English and writing. Clayton's passion involves working on projects which help raise the retention rate of students of color, first generation, low income, students living with HIV and LGBTQ+ students. Clayton is involved with the HIV & Health Equity Program that supports Black, LGBTQ+ students and alumni living with HIV. *"[Campus organizing helped me develop] a set of experience-derived personal values and principles that have become essential in my efforts to raise awareness, educate the masses and ultimately build community when navigating the institutional barriers that students living with HIV face."*



Philip Jones, a senior at San Francisco State University in California, is attending the School of Social Work. Jones is pursuing a career that will allow him to be of service to individuals like himself, who have experienced homelessness, had to navigate the criminal justice system, and struggled with substance abuse. Jones is a member of the Mentorship and Peer Support Team with the San Francisco Department of Public Health, where he is developing skills to be a social worker. *"A day at work consists of going to different treatment centers to check in with clients and helping them to create and abide by their treatment plans. I support their transition to a better quality of life in any way I can. Today, I work in the same courtrooms I was in years before as a participant. It is a powerful feeling to walk into a courtroom and be acknowledged for the positive work I have done rather than how I disobeyed the law."*