

Telling real stories

One of the best ways to communicate the often complex and varied realities of living with HIV in the UK today is through real life stories. Whilst people living with HIV see improved public understanding of HIV as important and want to help this process, for many of them making the decision to be open in the media about their status is a significant step. The stigma that surrounds HIV means that many people will need to consider carefully the impacts on their family, job or relationships before agreeing to tell their story to the media.

There are a number of steps journalists can take to help people with HIV tell their story to the media.

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- ▶ People living with HIV should not be pressured into revealing their identities, however good a story. If someone living with HIV asks to be anonymous this should be respected. Remember that disclosing someone's job and the general area where they live may be enough to identify them. During a radio or television interview, voices and appearances should be disguised during recording, rather than in post-production, and original material should be clearly – and permanently – marked so that an interviewee's identity is protected, whenever and however, it may be transmitted.
- ▶ If an interviewee agrees to be named make sure you have discussed the consequences of disclosure. Being open about HIV status can have implications for partners, families, friends and children if they are not considered fully.
- ▶ Ensure beforehand you have discussed with the individual any areas that they would not be comfortable answering questions about in the interview, and respect these during the interview.
- ▶ If possible, offering to read the final copy to the interviewee is a good way of reassuring them that they will be presented fairly. Remember to also make sure that when the copy is passed on to an editor or sub-editor that headlines and pull-out quotes remain sensitive and accurate.
- ▶ Contact details for people with HIV should not be passed on unless they have given permission, ideally in writing.

Further information

People's experiences of living with HIV

NamLife – www.namlife.org

NAT – www.nat.org.uk/living-with-HIV.aspx