

“My Journey”

An HIV-positive diagnosis can be the start of a very lonely and frightening journey. As women living with HIV, we face complex challenges to our health and wellbeing. The fear of disclosure and of discrimination often makes forming and maintaining relationships difficult. Because of the stigma associated with HIV, we frequently experience social isolation. Antiretroviral medication is now available to help people with HIV to live long, “normal” lives, and the physical impact of HIV has lessened, but the psycho-social impact remains.

The “**MY JOURNEY**” kit was conceived and written by and for women living with HIV. The kit weaves together, in our own words, the experiences of 32 women living with HIV in Australia. Despite our wide ranging backgrounds and beliefs, it highlights much common ground in our experiences. The Kit is meant as a resource of information, support and comfort for all women living with HIV. It also provides health sector and other allied service workers with an insight into the realities and needs of women living with HIV. Contact details for all major service providers are in the “Resources” booklet.

“**MY JOURNEY**” is divided into five themes, each focussed around a positive woman’s story, and highlighted by comments and quotes from other women about their experiences of living with HIV. The “**MY JOURNEY**” kit explores: Diagnosis, Disclosure and Discrimination, New Relationships, Taking care of ourselves, and The Future. It also contains a personal journal, a candle and 30 cards with messages we have written to inspire you each day of the month.

Once diagnosed, the beginning of our journey is fraught with fear. HIV can send us to the depths of despair and seems to close off the life that we had hoped to have. It sends us in another direction, along a new path. As we continue our journey, for most of us, the fear is gradually replaced by hope. As we increase our knowledge and understanding of HIV and we listen to the stories of other women who have gone before us, we learn compassion for ourselves. We learn who we can trust to stand next to us, we find a voice to say how we want to be treated and we realise that we are not alone.

The women involved in the creation of “**MY JOURNEY**” invite you to realise you are part of the treasures contained within it. Positive Women Victoria hopes that by sharing our stories and experiences through the “**MY JOURNEY**” kit we can lighten the pathway along your unique journey and help you to navigate the challenges and complexities of living with HIV, reduce the experience of stigma and minimize the personal and social impact of HIV.

