



## Joey fights discrimination

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Joey DiPaolo learned early on the kind of discrimination young people face when infected with HIV. He was just 10 years old when hundreds of people protested and rioted to stop him from going to public school in Staten Island, a borough of New York City.

Born on 5 September 1979, Joey was infected with AIDS at four years. As a baby, he was diagnosed with ASD, a congenital heart defect, for which he underwent open-heart surgery in

1984. Four years later, after many medical complications, he was diagnosed with AIDS, which he had contracted from contaminated blood given to him during surgery. The doctor told Joey's family that he had one year to live, and that if they were smart they would not tell anyone about his sickness.

The DiPaolo family lived in strict silence until 1990, when Joey was 10 years old and became so critically ill that the doctors gave him only 48 hours to live. His love for life and powerful spirit helped him survive. It also convinced him that he didn't want to live with this secret anymore. "I wanted my friends to know the truth."

When Joey went public, his picture appeared on the cover of *New York Newsday* in a story about children with AIDS, causing an uproar at his school. Local parents were frightened and angry and did not want Joey to attend school with their children. Although the protest and threats failed and Joey soon returned to school, the discrimination he experienced then - and still faces today - had a profound impact.

Joey is now 21 years old and says his mission is to "help fight for the rights of kids and adults who are infected, so that they are not discriminated against like I was." He has become a spokesperson for people living with HIV/AIDS, and has met with students of all ages in the hope of educating them about the disease. His life was even portrayed in an HBO special, "Blood Brothers, the Joey DiPaolo Story," which won the 1993 Cable Ace Award.

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Joey and his mother, Carol, started [The Joey DiPaolo Foundation, Inc.](#) in 1996. It facilitates Teens Living a Challenge (TLC), a programme that sponsors an annual summer camp in upstate New York for children ages 13 to 19 who have HIV/AIDS. "I created this program because most teens who are infected live in secrecy. They are too scared of the discrimination they will face if their friends and their community know that they are infected," explains Joey. "At the camp kids are reassured to know that there are other kids going through the same things they are."

The Teens Living a Challenge Programme is funded primarily through donations and fundraisers. "Last year was our pilot programme, and it went really well. This year we are expecting 60 more kids to come to our camp, since it's all free," explains Joey. Most of his campers are inner-city kids from New York and New Jersey, but some come from as far away as Florida. Joey says the best thing about the camp is that "the kids finally have a week of living without fear."

Joey came to the [UN Special Session on HIV/AIDS](#) because he was happy and encouraged to see that the United Nations is trying to make a difference in the fight to combat this terrible illness. "The UN is providing global leadership. I have never seen a political person step up and take a stand like the UN's Secretary General, Kofi Annan, has. He is a very inspiring man." Joey says. "It is about time people started to realize that this illness has been around for the past 20 years and is not getting any better. If we all come together here at the UN, we can make a difference."

**FIND OUT MORE** about how the UN and its partners are fighting to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS. Click on the links next to Joey's photo.

*Photo credit: Robin Bowman/Matrix*

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