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Sero Project Introduces Network Empowerment Project Strengthening Networks Led by and for People Living with HIV Commemorates June 5, 2017, HIV Long-Term Survivors Day

June 5, 2017: The SERO Project announced the launch of their NETWORK EMPOWERMENT PROJECT <http://www.seroproject.com/network-empowerment-project/> (NEP). Sero's NEP is an online resource for people living with HIV (PLHIV) and others interested in creating or strengthening networks of PLHIV, whether they focus on social support, recreation, education, awareness or advocacy.

"On June 5, when we join others around the world to commemorate [HIV Long-Term Survivors Awareness Day](#), it is appropriate that Sero introduces a tool to enable all of us survivors to connect with other PLHIV, especially the newer and younger advocates who did not experience the peak years of the epidemic in the U.S.," said Sean Strub, Sero's Executive Director.

The Network Empowerment Project's tool-kit and other resources are found online at <http://www.seroproject.com/network-empowerment-project/> including:

- Practical and logistical guidance for creating a new PLHIV network, including a step-by-step tool kit addressing leadership, fundraising and governance;
- Analyses of existing PLHIV networks, including research on what sustains them;
- Advocacy tools for contacting elected officials and influencing policy;
- Knowledge resources on key issues, including HIV criminalization, long-term survivors, trans issues,
- Articles, research and position papers relating to PLHIV networks, criminalization and other issues;
- Access to helpful databases; and
- A comprehensive directory of existing PLHIV networks in the U.S.

“With Sero’s support, we recently formed Texans Living with HIV, to create a collective voice for PLHIV in Texas, to influence policymakers and combat stigma and isolation. The leadership and tools offered by SERO will help build our network in Texas,” said Venita Ray, Public Policy Manager at Legacy Community Health in Houston.

Since the earliest days of the epidemic, PLHIV have formed networks to provide mutual support, reduce isolation, confront stigma, affect policy change, and improve health outcomes and quality of life. Even as the biomedical advances in treatment and prevention of HIV have profoundly changed the epidemic, HIV-related stigma stubbornly remains an enormous obstacle.

“I’ve seen first-hand the power of networks to uplift and inspire, combat stigma, and reduce the isolation and fear that too often accompanies an HIV diagnosis,” said Robert Suttle, Assistant Director of the SERO Project.

The Network Empowerment Project (NEP), led by Project Director Cindy Stine, emerges from several years of research and analysis. That started with qualitative and quantitative research on existing PLHIV networks, spanning 27 states and hundreds of respondents living with HIV. Dr. Carrie Elizabeth Foote, PhD, a woman living with HIV in Indiana, was the principal investigator. Her project team then identified a number of individual and community needs based on the survey's results.

That research, along with the assistance of dozens of PLHIV, and input from many existing networks of advocates and allies, led to creation of the NEP tool kit and resource bank to support the re-energizing of PLHIV networks throughout the U.S.

“The positive benefits from connecting, sharing, uplifting and empowering people and organizations through building networks and bringing people together are immeasurable. I am so proud to be a part of the amazing collective effort that has created a warehouse of information born from the community and about the community,” Ken Pinkela, Sero’s Military Project Director/Assistant NEP Project Director

Networks of PLHIV have traditionally been the incubators in which each new generation of PLHIV leadership has trained. Networks enable us to teach ourselves, and each other, how to maintain and expand the PLHIV self-empowerment movement. The NEP tool kit is designed to help PLHIV join, and build, that movement. *“PLHIV Advocacy is growing across the country; the NEP is going to make that growth happen faster and be even more effective,”* said Tami Haught, Sero’s Director of Training and State Organizing.

An acknowledgement section is part of the NEP collection on the website <http://www.seroproject.com/acknowledgement/>, expressing gratitude for the dozens of people who have contributed their time and compassion to the creation of this tool.

Special thanks goes to Anthony Wood and his colleagues at the Ittleson Foundation. They recognize how networks of people living with HIV (PLHIV) improve health outcomes, reduce internalized stigma arising from isolation, and are an important vehicle for advocacy. This tool kit would not exist without the support of the Ittleson Foundation.

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SERO is a network of people with HIV and allies fighting for freedom from stigma and injustice. SERO is particularly focused on ending inappropriate criminal prosecutions of people with HIV, including for non-disclosure of their HIV status, potential or perceived HIV exposure or HIV transmission. For more information see us online at <http://www.seroproject.com>

National HIV Long-Term Survivors Day is commemorated every year on June 5, in recognition of the day in 1981 when the first cases of what came to be known as HIV, were recognized by the government. Organized by a group of long-term survivors, the theme for 2017 is "HIV-Resilient." Everyone is encouraged to start telling the stories of survival and our epic journey.

We celebrate those who have defied the odds by living with HIV for decades. June 5 is about coming together and realizing that we are not alone. It is a national day of storytelling. We want to collect the stories of our lives, resilience, and our survival. For more information: <http://hltsad.org/>

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