

## Black, gay and proud

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Black, gay and proud – this is Wilo Muwadda today. And it will be him tomorrow. But it was not always the case.

When I was coming into my teenage years I saw images of people with the same skin as mine being inspired by leaders like Martin Luther King Junior and Malcolm X. African Americans were learning to celebrate their heritage and to respect who they were by knowing they had personal worth in this world.

Black pride was admired in Australia. It inspired a movement here and I was proud to be one of the frontline warriors. I joined other young, black Australians at meetings and at protest marches. We assisted researchers and produced community newsletters, like Message Stick, to bring about change for our people.

I was a small part of the gay pride movement, too, in the eighties when I went to study in Sydney. As part of this group, I believed our sexual orientation and gender identity were inherent to who we are as people – an ageless gift from our ancestors and creator beings.

'We did a lot of fighting together (blacks and gays) because we both understood the need to hear other minority voices.' There was one more important change happening, almost lurking, in the shadows of 1985. It was HIV. But there was no pride for me when I became infected – just many years of fear and stigma.

Being black was unavoidable. Coming out with my sexuality was essential to my life at the time. But everything connected to HIV was wrong. To me it represented bad living. All my newfound freedom had made me greedy and for that greed I had to pay. In my mind it was connected to our Aboriginal payback system – how our morals are holistically and spiritually connected to everything in and around us, including the things we do as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Funny, I forgot about our ability to love and forgive.

I tried many times to justify it all by looking back in history at other diseases that came to Australia. But always I blamed myself. Where was my black pride and where was my gay pride? I couldn't call on either to pull me out because it meant connecting to people and I didn't feel worthy. I just wanted to go further into the darkness of an incognito existence on the streets of Sydney. My close friends, unable to cope with the HIV, died around me pushing me deeper into despair.

I stayed low, accepting my ultimate fate with death. Sometimes I would pull myself up and visit back home to rebuild my strength and take nourishment from the love of my family and community.

One day, after months in hospital, I finally took back control. Strong words of my mother kept ringing in my ears: 'Who cares, Jack . . . really, mate, who cares?' she said to me. 'It's your life . . . they can all go to hell.' Too true, ay, mum. Bless her. She's gone now. I was almost dead at the time. I needed to stop predicting the worst. I needed to get up and do something with value and substance – which is what I did.

It's good that there are campaigns that show people like me. And that others think we have the right to feel proud of ourselves. They also remind me that help does come when I open up to family and friends and, to some extent, my communities.

Once again I am black, gay and proud. I am also HIV positive which is just another part of my life that can support me or hinder me depending on my sense of worth. There will be other labels of sickness and age to come. But I will deal with them the same way I have lived my adult life: as a black, gay, proud, HIV positive man who believes in himself as a worthy human being.

Wilo Muwadda is Convenor of the Positive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Network ([PATSIN](#) [1]Positive Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Network. A NAPWA-aided national membership-based network of Indigenous people living with HIV/AIDS.) and manages 2 Spirits – a program promoting healthy Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities for the Queensland Association for Healthy Communities(QAHC).

[Gay and bisexual men](#)

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**Links:**

[1] <http://www.napwa.org.au/glossary/term/446>