

# Positive Reinforcement

By Branden Dudek

## Living with HIV.

San Francisco has a lot in common with Pittsburgh: We both have established gay communities, a variety of bars, community centers, and social resources. We are gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender. And within these communities is a common thread: HIV.

I feel as though being HIV+ (Poz) is like being gay: It can feel isolating, and we can feel apprehensive about telling anyone for fear they might react poorly. Being gay and getting to know other gays, experiencing our first kisses, and falling in love for the first time can help us to feel part of a community. The same rings true in the Poz community. Stigma and ignorance can push so many people into a state of denial or hiding to the point that we feel alone and misunderstood.

I moved to Pittsburgh from San Francisco and was very impressed with the resources available, but I noticed no one around me talked about being Poz. Being open about my status created a welcoming atmosphere for other Poz people in Pittsburgh. I enjoy going to bars, movies, and even Kennywood with my new friends. We don't need a support group, just a social network. In efforts to help, I helped to organize Staying Positive, a group of young adults who live with HIV either because we are Poz or because we care about someone who is. Our goal is to create an avenue for other Poz young adults and their friends, who are looking to connect with peers in a fun social setting. We intend to remain discreet while still making our group feel open and safe.

*For more information, visit [stayingpositive.org](http://stayingpositive.org).*