

Queen of Ireland, Panti Bliss reflection on World AIDS Day

My eyes popped out of my head and I couldn't hold back an excited grin sitting at my desk. HIV Scotland were asking if the Staff Pride Network would be interested in hosting a World AIDS Day Q&A with Panti Bliss! Panti Bliss! She who successfully campaigned for Equal Marriage in the Republic of Ireland, delivered an emotional TED talk on LGBT+ equality "All the little things", whose speech in the national theatre of Ireland has been viewed on YouTube almost 1 MILLION times, and owns Pantibar in Dublin's gay scene! I've been there many years ago and I cherished the memory as the closest I've been to this Irish activist icon.

On Saturday 30th November we welcomed staff, students and the local community to join Rory O'Neill aka Panti at Old College's Usha Kacera Lecture Theatre. He has been openly HIV positive for many years and HIV Scotland's CEO Nathan Sparling discussed with Rory about his upbringing, the creation of Panti Bliss and about using his visibility to combat HIV stigma. He shared memories of a rural childhood, the birth of Panti Bliss in Japan and how his HIV medication has changed from 38 tablets per day when diagnosed, to just 1 today, and no longer any side-effects. Rory talked about how HIV is not the killer it once was: taking the tablet makes the virus so diminished in the bloodstream that it is undetectable and multiple research studies have shown that makes it untransmittable. U = U (undetectable = untransmittable). He highlighted the simple facts that people aren't dying any more so there aren't ads on TV and support services are less funded.

Questions were asked, Rory/Panti was sincere, genuine, funny, relatable, personal, everything I expected and more. We are delighted that the event raised £253 for HIV Scotland, who

recently launched their #ZEROHIV strategic plan for Scotland to reach zero new HIV transmissions, zero HIV-related deaths and zero HIV-related stigma by 2030.

As a mark of solidarity for World AIDS Day, we collaborated with the University Estates team and obtained funding from the University Secretary's Group to light up McEwan Hall, Appleton Tower and New College in red. Check out our Tweet if you missed seeing them for yourself.

Jonathan MacBride

HIV Scotland – learn about the work they do and how you can get involved