

Aisha Diori

Diori's tenancy in the Underground Gay sub-culture known as the "Ballroom" scene is vast and long standing and her presence as a leader in the scene continues to shape its direction. In the summer of 1997, Diori attended the Mooshood Ball and was immediately enamored with the gender non-conforming, queer pageantry. Diori notes the ball wasn't simply a gay dance party, recalling, "it was full of safer sex messaging, freedom, pageantry sexiness, beautiful feminine women, strong handsome butch [women]..." Diori connected with fellow Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) classmate the Legendary Big Boy Runway Ricky Revlon. Revlon, who subsequently became Diori's gay father, along with Santana who later became Diori's mother, helped usher Diori into the House of Latex, forever changing her commitment to the LGBTQ community. Diori began participating, or "walking" balls. Under the guise of her gay parents, Diori was advised to walk in the Women's Face and Big Girls Runway categories for her first ball, The Black Pride Ball. Diori was praised as a smash sensation and won top prize in both categories. Diori would go on to win a number of balls and her interests in the ballroom scene began to shift from active participant to organizer and intervention specialist.

After graduating magna cum laude from FIT with a Bachelors of Arts in Advertising and Communications, she assisted Mother Santana conceptualize and facilitate the "Are You Served Latex" ball, and quickly discovered she enjoyed being on the planning side of ballroom interventions. Combining her love of the ballroom scene with her passion for serving the LGBT community, Diori began working as an outreach worker at the Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC), hosting balls that sought to effectively curtail the number of newly HIV infected youth. Diori would go on to create over 8 Latex Balls drawing in over 3000 people, culminating with her appropriately titled "Ladies Choice" ball.

In 2002, Diori would assume the title of House Mother for the House of Latex, a title she held for nearly 6 years. In 2003, Diori's pioneering spirit and prioritization of LGBTQ youth development led her to develop something that would forever change the ballroom community and prevention efforts. Acknowledging youth were not best served in the mainstream ballroom scene, she along with Mother Arbert Santana created the Kiki scene: a ballroom infused intervention focusing on LGBTQ youth ages 12 - 24. Since its inception, the Kiki scene has conducted over 200 safer-sex/harm reduction functions through various different providers including resources for some 20000+ at-risk LGBTQ youth. Diori's Kiki scene has been replicated by other youth providers in NYC as well as in other parts of the US.

Aisha Diori was the Assistant Director of After-School Programming at the Hetrick-Martin Institute (HMI) where she continues to engage LGBTQ youth. Diori organized Kiki Lounges: 2- hour long sessions ran by HMI interns where youth can come and learn how appropriately to vogue while also being informed on issues that affect their lives. Through Kiki lounge, a number of youth have been connected to care for HIV/STI treatment, accessed and successfully graduated from the HMI GED program, been accepted into a litany of different internships, and accessed other services in the HMI space. Additionally, Diori has also convened a committee of other providers, affectionately called the Kiki coalition, to create effective interventions across NYC as well as coordinating Vogue Femme Fridays, a monthly ball celebrating youth and promoting awareness and safer sex. Furthermore, Diori plays an integral role in the social marketing campaigns for HMI. Over the past several years, Diori has received accolades from colleagues, different

agencies and elected officials, including, The Advertising Women in America scholarships, The House of Blahnik Community Mobilization Award, Black Pride Award for Community Work, The Ross Infinite Award for Outstanding Community Mobilization, The HMI Damien Award, and Project HEAT Awards for Kiki Scene Prevention Work. Denoting her consistency, Diori was also awarded Mother and Women's Face of the Year titles consecutively in the early 2000's and was also named Woman of the Year numerous times.