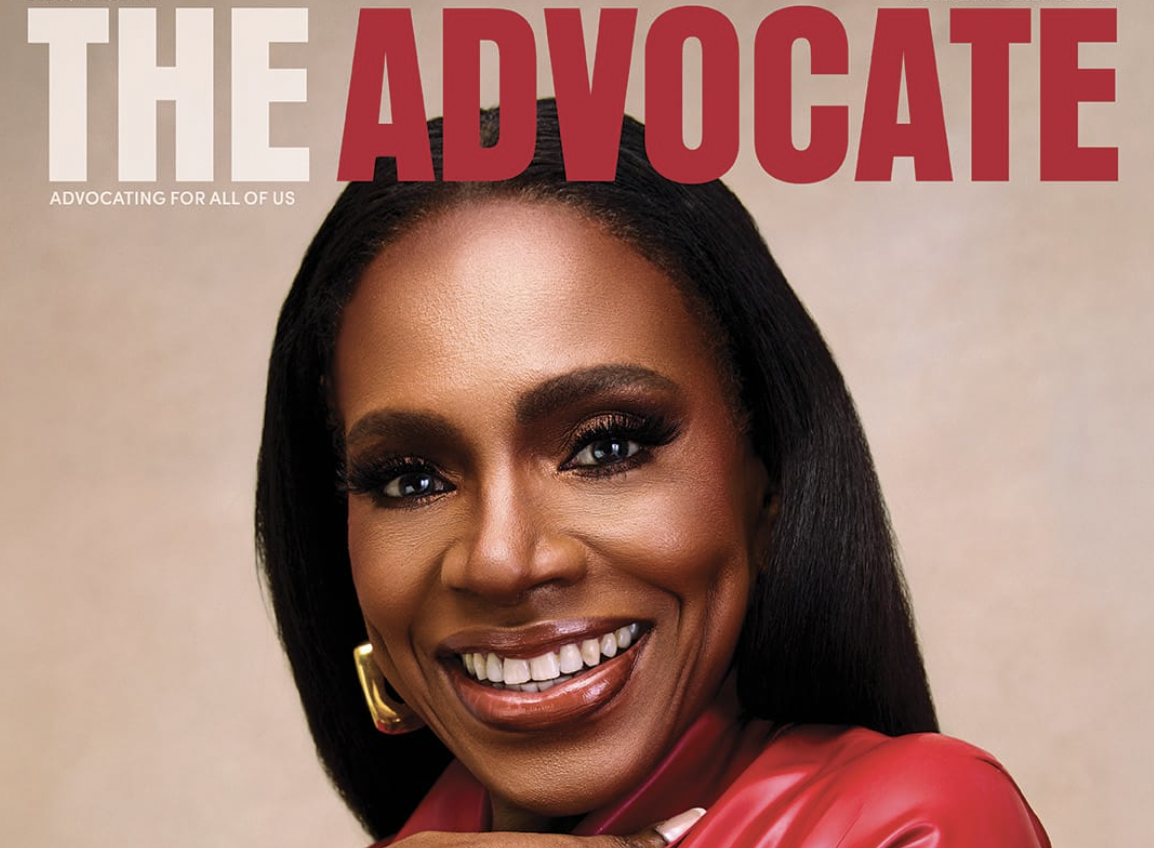
# Sheryl Lee Ralph is Advocate of the Year



Sheryl Lee Ralph, renowned for her role as Barbara Howard on the series Abbott Elementary, has long established herself as a pivotal figure in the entertainment industry, particularly since her trailblazing performance as Deena Jones in the original Broadway production of Dreamgirls in 1981. As her career blossomed in the early 1980s, the onset of the AIDS crisis profoundly affected her, leading to the loss of numerous friends and colleagues. This personal tragedy spurred Ralph to action, resulting in the establishment of the DIVA Foundation in 1990.

The DIVA Foundation, a nonprofit organisation, focusses on raising funds for HIV-related causes, particularly those that impact women, children, and marginalized individuals within the Black community. The foundation’s website outlines its mission: “The DIVA Foundation is committed to achieving better health outcomes for all people through innovative programming using the transformative power of the arts.” Its initiatives are structured around five key pillars: Health Awareness, Women and Girls, LGBTQ+, Social Justice & Racial Equity, and Food & Housing Insecurity. Over the past thirty years, the organisation has successfully raised in excess of $3.5 million for various affiliates, including the Minority AIDS Project, AIDS Healthcare Foundation, and the Black AIDS Institute.

In 2022, Ralph further underscored her commitment to social causes by co-producing a documentary that highlights the experiences of young Black women living with HIV. Beyond her efforts to address health disparities, she has also become an advocate for LGBTQ+ rights. Earlier this year, Ralph posted a video aimed at educating her peers about the importance of respecting individuals' chosen names and pronouns. This active engagement in advocacy earned her the title of Advocate of the Year, an award from the well-regarded LGBTQ+ media organisation, The Advocate.

Ralph was honoured with this prestigious title during an Out100 event earlier this month, where she was celebrated by fellow cast members Chris Perfetti and Lisa Ann Walter. In her acceptance speech, Ralph expressed deep gratitude, stating, “To be named Advocate of the Year is an honour I carry on behalf of every individual who has fought for love, for identity, for visibility, and for freedom.” Coincidentally, Ralph incorporated her passion for singing into the ceremony by performing a verse from Diana Reeves' “Endangered Species”, reminiscent of her Emmy-winning moment.

In her remarks, Ralph acknowledged the collective nature of advocacy work, declaring, “Advocacy is not a solo journey — it is a collective movement. It is the bravery of those who came before us, the courage of those who stand with us, and the hope of those who will follow.” Supporting her sentiments, co-star Walter remarked on Ralph’s lifelong activism, noting, “She is a long-time activist for people in this particular community — before it was accepted, before it was cool.” Walter recounted how, as a young Broadway star, Ralph recognised the urgent need to support those affected by the AIDS crisis, launching a foundation to advocate for change, which Walter described as a “brave thing to do.”

In addition to her recognition by The Advocate, Ralph was also awarded the GLSEN Champion Award in October, commending her years of allyship in support of LGBTQ+ youth. GLSEN expressed that “Ralph’s leadership serves as a beacon of hope for LGBTQ+ youth facing harmful discrimination and legislation across the country now more than ever.”

Today, Ralph remains a steadfast advocate for the LGBTQ+ community, promoting unity in pursuit of a safer and more inclusive future. In her acceptance speech, she emphatically stated, “I am a believer in the power of unity. The world may try to divide us, but our strength has always been in our ability to stand together, to lift one another, and to remind each other that love — at its core — is unstoppable.” This ongoing commitment to advocacy reflects Ralph's dedication to uplifting marginalized communities and addressing critical issues within society.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://ew.com/sheryl-lee-ralph-abbott-elementary-barbara-petty-physical-comedy-8692858> - Corroborates Sheryl Lee Ralph's role as Barbara Howard on 'Abbott Elementary' and her career in the entertainment industry.
* <https://diva.foundation> - Provides details about the DIVA Foundation, its mission, and its focus on HIV-related causes, as well as its five key pillars.
* <https://diva.foundation> - Supports the information about the DIVA Foundation raising over $3.5 million for various affiliates and its commitment to better health outcomes.
* <https://abc7ny.com/divas-simply-singing-diva-foundation-sheryl-lee-ralph-hiv-aids-benefit/14086192/> - Details the annual benefit concert 'DIVAS Simply Singing!' and the DIVA Foundation's efforts in raising awareness and funds for HIV/AIDS prevention.
* <https://diva.foundation> - Explains the personal tragedy that led Sheryl Lee Ralph to establish the DIVA Foundation in 1990, including the loss of friends and colleagues to AIDS.
* <https://abc7ny.com/divas-simply-singing-diva-foundation-sheryl-lee-ralph-hiv-aids-benefit/14086192/> - Highlights the DIVA Foundation's long history and its impact on health awareness, particularly in the context of the 'DIVAS Simply Singing!' benefit concert.
* <https://ew.com/sheryl-lee-ralph-abbott-elementary-barbara-petty-physical-comedy-8692858> - Mentions Sheryl Lee Ralph's advocacy and her role in 'Abbott Elementary,' which aligns with her broader advocacy work.
* <https://diva.foundation> - Outlines the foundation's initiatives structured around the five key pillars: Health Awareness, Women and Girls, LGBTQ+, Social Justice & Racial Equity, and Food & Housing Insecurity.