

YOUTH AWAKE

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1) International Conference on HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections in Africa (ICASA): Nigeria Dec. 4-9 2005



ICASA youth leaders and GYCA members at the protest representing the silence of the youth at the conference

GYCA Activities:

The XIV ICASA took place in Abuja, Nigeria from December 4-9, 2005. The conference was preceded by a three day youth forum, December 1-3, attended by over 300 young people mainly from Nigeria and all over Africa. The youth forum was held in French and English, and young people living with HIV/AIDS and/or physical disabilities took leadership roles. GYCA, supported by UNFPA, contributed to the planning of the youth forum including newsletters, (available on www.youthaidscoalition.org), a youth visibility campaign, advocacy training, skills building and networking sessions. The youth forum commenced on World AIDS Day, and local youth and forum participants enjoyed a concert with popular Nigerian musicians. To protest the lack of commitment to youth participation, as evidenced at the cancellation of youth speakers during the opening ceremony on the first day of the conference, approximately 70 GYCA members staged a peaceful, silent protest wearing GYCA t-shirts and taping their mouths to represent the silencing of youth on the main conference lobby floor. The protest gained the attention of many attendees and international press. GYCA hopes to provide a mechanism for ICASA participants to follow-up to what they have learned at the conference. For more information please email GYCA Regional Focal Point for West Africa, Azubike Nwokoye: azubike@youthaidscoalition.org.

2) Toronto IAC Update:

Registration is now open for the XVI Toronto International AIDS Conference for August, 2006! Find out how to register, volunteer, apply for a scholarship or submit an abstract at www.aids2006.org. Abstract submission can be completed online until February 22, 2006. Take part in GYCA's free e-course on preparing for Toronto to learn how to write an effective abstract, or check www.aids2006.org for a Conference Abstract Toolkit that can help community people design effective abstracts. Since the abstract submission process remains in English only, the IAS has organized a mentorship program to help people submit. GYCA is currently supporting the development of a platform for GIYA: the Greater Involvement of Youth Living with HIV/AIDS.

3) Toronto Prep Course:

Attention GYCA members! You have probably noticed announcements about the 3-week Toronto Prep Course. Currently, 15 members are enrolled in the first course. The objectives of the course include:

- To educate about the different ways to meaningfully participate in the IAC and how to submit an effective proposal in order to present your work

- To help you understand the importance of showcasing your work, particularly in political advocacy
- To teach about diverse ways to obtain funding to attend the IAC
- To provide information on what to expect at the IAC and how to enhance your experience there

Dates for the next three courses are as follows:

Course 2: Jan. 2 (Mon) – Jan. 23 (Mon)

Course 3: Jan. 16 (Mon.) – Feb. 6 (Mon.)

Course 4: Jan 30 (Mon) – Feb 20 (Mon)

If you are interested, please be alert on the forum and check www.youthaidscoalition.org for the next application announcement!

4) Spotlight

Recent university graduate from Victoria, Canada, GYCA member and Project Management E-course graduate Logan Cochrane created a three-country HIV/

AIDS education program for eight refugee camps in 2006. The project, under the name *Working to Empower*, focuses on marginalized people and areas that lack HIV/AIDS

education. Logan has a degree in



Logan Cochrane

Anthropology and felt his studies of HIV/AIDS could help bring a change, namely on the issue of refugee camps in Africa. He is strong believer in the potential of each of us to use his/her abilities to change the world. Logan will be training for the program by spending three months in Addis Ababa, working with children and experiencing the cultural aspects concerning HIV/AIDS. In April, he will start work along with where Dieudonne (Founder and Director of ArtHum) within five refugee camps in the Eastern regions of DR Congo. He will then continue to travel to Kigoma (Tanzania) and Cotonou (Benin). For more information on Logan's work, check out: www.workingtoempower.org or contact him at logan_cochrane@hotmail.com

Staying Alive Awards 2005:

Staying Alive Foundation awards are given to young people as well as youth organizations engaged in grassroots HIV and AIDS awareness, education and prevention campaigns. From over 200 nominations that were received, 25 young people were selected, and 7 of these were GYCA members/partner organization! Congratulations to: Onyinye Ndubuisi from Nigeria, Kingsley Essomeonu from Nigeria, Mohammed El-Sheikh & Ahmed Malah from Egypt, Masembe Paddy from Uganda, Ajay Jain from India, Fred Ouko from Kenya, and African Regional Youth Initiative (ARYI) from Tanzania. In addition to the financial support, recipients will be given the Staying Alive Award, an exclusive Staying Alive shirt and a one-time use digital camera to send pictures back of their activities. More info, including profiles of recipients can be found on: http://eu.staying-alive.org/stayingalive/shells/whats_new.jhtml?article=35132601

5) Living Positively –

Interviewing Ogochuwku Ibekwe

“My ambitions on earth are many and must be fulfilled,” says 25 year old Ogochuwku Ibekwe of Nigeria, after being diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. After facing the truth and magnitude of his condition, Ogoo remains positive in his daily living, and does not let adversity darken his path. In this interview he describes his lifestyle before and after HIV, and the difficult yet momentous road he continues to walk in the effort to reach his goals.

How I got infected – I came into contact with HIV/AIDS and got infected by having multiple sexual partners. Living in Zakibiam, northern Nigeria, sexual intercourse was the order of the day where the personality of a man was gauged by the num-



Ogoo in his village in Nigeria

ber of girlfriends one had. I believe I was infected in 1995 when I became ill and all the medications I used were proving ineffective. After visiting a few hospitals, I underwent a few tests and the only thing a doctor said



after the results were back, was that my sickness has no cure except God's intervention. With this information, and not knowing the cause of my ill health, I started praying and gained my health back. The manifested signs and symptoms cleared and I went back to my normal life. However, since 2000, my health condition has been deteriorating. I started developing mumps in the neck, constantly losing weight and going down gradually with no medicines. The only advice I got was that I should go down east in order to save my people the cost of carrying my coffin, and that's what I did. I went to Sefton hospital where I was diagnosed with HIV/AIDS without pre or post test counseling. The doctor there informed me of my status and handed me my results and a referral letter to Nnamdi Azikiwe University Teaching Hospital (NAUTH).

How I Felt About My Diagnosis? – I was shocked and felt dejected and went home instead of going to the hospital. On my way home, the only thing on my mind was, “very soon, I will die”. However, once I was home, I thought about my situation and suddenly thought of a verse from the bible which says “because He lives, I shall not die” and this comforted me. With this verse in mind, I did a midnight prayer and consoled myself that I will not die. I then tore the result and threw it away.

Personal Reaction and Reaction from Family and Friends – My family was accepting, yet very shocked once they heard of my status, since they thought that anyone with HIV/AIDS cannot survive and death is around the corner. However, they never relented in helping me. Their encouragement and assistance revived me once more, especially my older brother who is a teacher and was my last hope. He doubled the usual money he used to give me and sought for necessary medicines and remedies for HIV/AIDS cure. Finally, he took me to Borromeo Hospital, Onitsha – a hospital where HIV/AIDS cases are managed. I was counseled and given the necessary information about HIV/AIDS and directed to join a support group of people living with HIV/AIDS. I willingly did this with the help of my family and they are the reason I am still living today.

Living Positively – I changed my lifestyle once I started living positively. I stopped drinking alcohol, quit smoking, restricted myself from sex, and started using condoms when I didn't. This was to avoid infecting others and also re-infecting myself. Consequently, I

completely disengaged myself from all risky behavior and also changed my diet by taking nutritious foods to build my immune system. Being positive has not in any way affected what I'm doing today. Although I stopped my trading job when I got infected, I have found myself in a better and more fulfilling position now. My HIV status has enabled me to come in contact with a lot of commissioners, ministers, governors, et al, and has become an opportunity for me to interact with people and tell them my story. ARV's have also been very helpful as all the mumps disappeared and I gained my body weight and became healthier.

Life and Aspirations – There is nothing I was doing before I tested positive that I cannot do now. My ambitions on earth are many and must be fulfilled. I believe that I will live as my many years as my God wants me to, marry, bear children, and see my grand children. My greatest ambition is to be a prominent man on earth; either a governor or president. Being HIV positive cannot stop me from realizing my dreams or achieving what my heart desires. My role model is Kanu Nwankwo who is a famous Nigerian footballer who later established a heart foundation.

What Can Be Done – Involvement and participation of PLWHA, especially YPLWHA in the prevention and impact mitigation of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, is an inevitable one if success is to be achieved to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS. The indispensable nature of their involvement is x-rayed in the roles they have to play. In my opinion, these include sharing their life testimonies and experiences with the virus and their decision to prevent the spread of it by not infecting others. They should have a public declaration of their serostatus to instill behavioral change on stubborn youths. There should be widespread education and advocacy to change stigmatization and discriminatory attitude of the society by encouraging sensitization and support. I also plead for stakeholders to provide care and support, access to treatment, involvement in meaningful projects, encouragement and assistance, so that PLWHA can live with opportunities and without being discriminated against.

Facing Stigma – One example of facing stigma was at my sister's home in Enugu. I had a persistent cough and although neither I nor anyone knew of my



HIV status, the signs and symptoms had manifested itself in my body. My sister had begun separating my eating utensils from others, stopped me from partaking in the cooking, fetching water and many other things, so as not to transfer my alleged sickness to family members.

Advice for Other Young People – If you want to live a positive lifestyle, do not hide your HIV status. I believe the healing process starts by disclosing ones status. It's never easy to do, but I strongly believe that a problem shared is a problem solved. I cannot imagine where I would be today had I not told my family members. Everyone on earth must be remembered for one positive or negative thing he or she did. I would like to be remembered for the good things I did on earth; my great ambitions and positive achievements.

6) World AIDS Day Activities in the Regions

North America

Canada: Canadian groups working on HIV/AIDS marked World AIDS day with a variety of exciting events throughout the country. University campuses were especially active. Members of the Students Against Global AIDS network held advocacy and awareness events on their university campuses. At the University of Saskatchewan highlights included a screening of the documentary film *A Closer Walk* and awareness tables throughout campus staffed by a diverse group of organizations such as AIDS Saskatoon, the African Students' Association and the Women's Centre. At McGill University, the McGill Global AIDS Coalition, in cooperation with other campus groups put on an entire week of events from film screenings to speaker presentations to a candle light vigil in the evening of December 1st. Both the McGill and University Saskatchewan groups, along with others, also circulated a petition asking that the Canadian government to step up its own efforts against the global AIDS Pandemic. The petition asked for such interventions as immediate, complete, and unconditional debt relief for all developing countries.

The organizers of the upcoming XVI International AIDS Conference in Toronto next summer took advantage of world AIDS day to start building momentum and energy for the conference. AIDS 2006 organizers held a press conference at the offices of the Local Host in Toronto. In addition to conference organizers, representatives from

the federal, provincial, and municipal governments were also in attendance. Youth were also represented. Danielle Layman-Pleet from Voices of Positive Women spoke about the importance of the Conference from the perspective of a young women living with HIV, and highlighted the importance of young people in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

The Youth Chapters of Dignitas International marked world AIDS day with their Race for Dignity. The initiative was inspired by Scott Simpson's story. Scott, a Toronto based tri-athlete, who was diagnosed with HIV over seven years ago, hoped to make his way across Africa in a "Tour d'Afrique" to raise funds for Dignitas. When health difficulties made it difficult for Scott to train, he realized that it wouldn't be possible for him to finish his race that year. Youth Chapters of Dignitas International peddled on with Scott's idea and raised funds with a stationary bike marathon. The event was held at Toronto area universities and Dundas square in downtown Toronto.

United States: As part of World AIDS Week, some of GYCA's north secretariat staff attended a screening of 'Transit' – a new movie produced by MTV's Staying Alive Foundation. The movie aims to help young people understand that there is a web of relationships between people that could lead to unexpected consequences in the lives of each individual part of the web. The two-hour film, shot on location in St. Petersburg, Mexico City, Nairobi and Los Angeles, follows 4 main characters on a journey across four continents that finds them exploring emotion and sexuality. The underlying message deals with the situations that put young people at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. The film is rights-free which means that anyone is free to use it and show it as they will. The Staying Alive Foundation will send a copy of the DVD to those who request it. The movie is also accompanied by a teaching manual. Visit http://eu.staying-alive.org/stayingalive/shells/whats_new.jhtml?article=30132792 for more information.

Activities conducted by Student Global AIDS Campaigns (SGAC): The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill led a showing of solidarity with other-on campus groups, including the Asian-American student group, pro-choice group and Gay-Lesbian-Bisexual-Transgender group. SGACers added cut-outs of people every hour to a clothesline to symbolize those who had



Woody at UMD Chapter

died from AIDS. Two hundred and forty people took free rapid HIV tests. UNC students also wrote postcards and signed letters urging the passage of a pro-harm reduction act in the state legislature. At Baylor University in Texas, about 2000 students, faculty, and staff wore bright orange shirts that said, "HIV+: Educate Yourself". The SGAC chapter hosted an on-campus candlelight vigil, and attended the Waco community World AIDS Day service. On Saturday, December 3, Baylor SGAC hosted the second annual Central Texas AIDS Walk to raise money for a local AIDS organization and New Life Homes in Kenya. About 100 people participated in the walk. While the University of

Maryland chapter organized an exciting week of action for World AIDS Day, their most hyped-up event involved the exposure of a giant phallus! That's right, the human-sized, overly energetic penis named Woody shocked several students as he jovially jumped around campus, handing out condoms, chanting his frustrations with current U.S. and Global AIDS statistics, passing out AIDS ribbons, and distributing sheets of HIV/AIDS facts to students. Woody was found in the main library "studying" with random students, making sandwiches at the campus co-op, and giving inspirational speeches during lectures. The penis costume grabbed a lot of positive attention and awareness to the AIDS pandemic, and although it seemed rather humorous to some, it motivated many students to listen and get involved.

TakingITGlobal:

<http://www.takingitglobal.org/express/gallery/contests/contest.html?contestID=365>

TakingITGlobal launched TIG Xpress-HIV/AIDS on December 1st 2005 at a



World AIDS Day breakfast which was a partnership with Business Professional Women of Canada and Voices of Positive Women. It also featured the official launch of the Canadian Blueprint for Action on Women and AIDS. TIG-Xpress uses photographic analysis to undertake HIV/AIDS education based on social justice, transnational communication and global solidarity between youth. The images were created by participants in TIG-Xpress initial Toronto-based workshop series as part of broader

strategy to produce a toolkit for use in Canadian Schools set to be released in June 2006.

TakingITGlobal is also a lead partner in a new initiative called *AIDS:*



AIDS: PICTURE CHANGE

Picture Change that was launched at Canterbury High School in Ottawa on December 1st 2005. *AIDS: Picture Change* is a multimedia exhibition that will travel to Canadian high schools and universities. The launch was organized at Canterbury High School, and featured poetry, music and drama.

Latin America and Caribbean –

Edward Charles, Regional Focal Point for English-speaking Latin America and Caribbean, was invited by the National AIDS Program, Ministry of Health, and Government of the British Virgin Islands to participate in their Annual National Summit for Youth on HIV/AIDS, Friday December 2nd, 2005, Tortolla. He participated as a Technical Advisor, Facilitator and Guest Speaker at Red Cross World AIDS Day activities. This Summit was a direct response to the growing HIV/AIDS crisis and an effort to prevent future infection by targeting youth, providing them with necessary information to encourage sexually healthy lifestyles and behaviors. The format of the Summit combined experiential learning and educational sessions focused on HIV/AIDS, healthy sexual lifestyles, sexually transmitted diseases, issues related to peer pressure, sexual abuse, teen pregnancy, gender, faith-based approaches and stigma and discrimination. His primary responsibility included presenting information/facts on HIV/AIDS/STI facts, on the impact of HIV/AIDS epidemic on youth, gender and cultural issues, stigma and discrimination. Two HIV infected children from Trinidad and Tobago participated and provided invaluable insights on being youth living with HIV. Of the two, one was not allowed to go to school until he was 14 years old. He is now 17 years and lives in a home for orphans in Trinidad.

As a regional initiative, GYCA's *Spanish-speaking Latin America and Caribbean* regional team prepared an e-poster for WAD which was circulated in more than 15 e-networks of LAC. The e-poster encourages young people to participate in their local activities, making each individual's voice count toward HIV/AIDS prevention. To see the e-poster visit: <http://www.farraurbana.com/root/popups/temp/email/20051129/email.htm>

In the **Dominican Republic**, GYCA members in Dominican Network of People living with HIV/AIDS participated in the creation of a "solidarity human chain" at the Independence Park against discrimination at work



Young people recording the radio program in Paraguay

because of HIV/AIDS. At the same time, governmental and NGOs made a national meeting to analyze their current situation related to HIV/AIDS. In **Colombia**, a GYCA member from the

Action Foundation, participated in an interview with a youth radio program on his country; and in **Bogotá**, there was a popular candlelight memorial for all people who have died of HIV/AIDS. In **Paraguay**, a special edition for the WAD Radio Program "With 'S' of Sex" was produced by the Arte&Parte Project by the NGO PROMESA and the Rock and Pop Radio Station.

South Asia –

On World AIDS Day in **India**, a public meeting of about eighty people was organized by People's Empowerment Organization in Collaboration with Kripa Society. The participants included



A public meeting in India to discuss prevention and treatment access

PLWHAS, young people, NGO workers, Government officials and media. The speakers highlighted that prevention must be the cornerstone in response to the epidemic, more options for receiving treatment for PLWHAS should be look into by the governments to ensure that stigma and discrimination is minimized. Speakers emphasized the need to provide young people with a full component of tools to promote safer sex which include Life skills based education, youth friendly services etc. The growing demand for ARV in our state is also a great challenge facing the community.

GYCA **Pakistan** celebrated World AIDS Day on December 1st to focus local and national attention on the devastating impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Mr. Pervaiz Tufail, Regional Focal Point GYCA South Asia was invited by one of the national television channels

AAJ to talk on the impact of AIDS on young people. He emphasized the role of young people, their vulnerabilities and challenges faced and encouraged an involvement of young people in all levels to raise awareness and build their capacity to highlight the issue. Public Service Announcements by National AIDS Control Program, UNICEF, AMAL and young people all over the country titled "Strings of Hope" was launched at national media channels. The documentary is a story about learning and closes with key campaign messages from Strings, a national popular band and UNICEF's National HIV/AIDS ambassador. They toured the country to listen to youth who work and don't attend school as well as those that do. This documentary was very appreciated by young people as they received guidance and input into the scripting, storyboarding and much of the filming.

The PSA were also shared with young people at gatherings at different locations and engaged in discussions. In **Quetta**, an awareness raising walk was arranged by



A public gathering of young people in Balochistan

marginalized and vulnerable youth groups followed by an awareness raising talk at the final destination. Balochistan AIDS control program, Ministry of social welfare, GYCA representatives, AMAL and out of school young people were especially invited to participate in a provincial gathering. The young people who spoke emphasized the importance to take action, open forums and media campaign to raise awareness on the issue. They also performed role plays, skits, dances and street theater on the occasion.

Middle East and North Africa –

On November 30th, GYCA members participated in a breakfast with Dr Nafis Sadik, UN Secretary General special envoy on HIV/AIDS, as a preparation for her meeting Mrs. Mubarak, the first lady of Egypt. GYCA members made a presentation to the first lady stressing the role of political support to fight HIV/AIDS and to reach vulnerable groups in the Egyptian community. GYCA members asked to include the political role for youth empowerment in fighting HIV/AIDS and stigma in the message. On December 1st, there was a workshop for World AIDS Day with the theme "Stop AIDS, Keep the



Promise, Care, Support and Treatment". The meeting was chaired by Dr. Nafis Sadik and his Excellency Dr Awad Tag Eldin, Minister of Health, with attendance of all Expanded Theme Group members. GYCA represented youth in Egypt and the meeting planned the next strategy for dealing with HIV/AIDS especially vulnerable groups' accessibility and collaboration with pharmaceutical companies for increased access to treatment.

East Africa –

Over the past two years, HIV infection among Kenyans has fallen from 10% in 2003 to 6.1% in 2005. The decrease in infection rate has been attributed to behavior change, including abstention from casual sex and the use of condoms. Statistics show that more than 20% of those affected are now aware of their status, having visited voluntary counseling and testing centers countrywide. This is a very positive step; however Kenyans have been urged to continue being vigilant and not wavering in their steps toward behavioral change. On December 1st, World AIDS Day, celebrations were held at the Kenya International Conference Centre. The well-attended event included a myriad of diverse edutainment activities and was presided over by Health Permanent Secretary Zachary Ogongo, Director of the National Aids Control Council, Dr Patrick Orege, UNDP Resident Representative Mr. Andre De la Porte who spoke on behalf of UNAIDS, among others. On the same day, President Kibaki launched TOWA, Total War Against Aids. The initiative aims to bring down the current infection rate to 5.5% in 2006. There was also a drama festival in Kibera that was attended by some GYCA members.

In Uganda, this years WAD celebrations in Uganda were held in the northern district of Kitgum on Dec. 1, 2005. The National Coordinator of the Alliance of Mayors and Municipal Leaders on HIV/AIDS



The march in Kitgum, Uganda on World AIDS Day

in Africa (Amicaall). Dr. John Mugisa, was the chief guest. Amicaall is a network of local government authorities, mayors and municipal leaders committed to supporting sustainable solutions to the HIV/AIDS epidemic at the local level. Its main objective is to

enhance advocacy and institutional capacity. Campus Youth Alliance in collaboration with other HIV/AIDS organizations organized activities such as: free Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) in the IDP camps, radio campaigns and mobile film shows in the camps later in the evening. Also materials in the form of food, bedding and scholastic materials were distributed to PLWHA. Before the public gatherings, a march took place and later proceeded by public talks, testimonies from PLWHA and some traditional dances. The event was opened by the Kitgum Mayor Mr. Alex Tabu Odongtoo.

Southern Africa –

On Nov 30th, a video show on positive living was organized at the American Center with about 50 young people from the University of Zambia and youth organizations in attendance. The video depicted a couple living with HIV/AIDS for 10 years and how they overcame challenges like stigma and discrimination from friends, neighbors and relatives. This was followed by a discussion on keeping the promise in line with the video and other HIV and youth issues. There was a candle lighting walk from Kafue roundabout to the Cathedral of the Holy Cross and prayers for those who have died from the pandemic. On the World AIDS Day, GYCA members participated in the march from Chaisa to Matero Stadium in a high density area of Lusaka. The march was attended by all stakeholders and the Minister of Health. In the afternoon, members we went round to Youth Media, Planned Parenthood Association of Zambia, Youth Vision Zambia and Forum Syd offices with a group of youth leaders and young politicians to learn more on how they integrate HIV and SRH. The day ended with a party and video show at the Swedish School.

West Africa –

This year's World AIDS Day was a colorful one because many young people were in Abuja for ICASA 2005. GYCA members mobilized young people from different hotels where they were housed for an early morning jog (6.30 am) to the Eagle Square of Nigeria where the President, His Excellency, General Olusegun Obasanjo came with his ministers, senators, members of different government functionaries, country reps of UN bodies and Nigerian HIV/AIDS NGOs. The President and Charmain of the National Action Committee on AIDS - Professor Babatunde Oshotimehin, declared that they would keep the promise made to STOP AIDS.



Young people gathered for a discussion on AIDS in Africa during the ICASA conference in Nigeria

Everyone who spoke, reflected on UNAIDS latest report that confirms that Africa still has the highest number of people living with the HIV virus this year which is over 40 million people worldwide and everyone has to do more and intensify efforts in order to stop the pandemic. There were many GYCA members that were present, and the West African Regional Focal Point, Azubike Nwokoye and task force member Kingsley Essomeonu were interviewed by the Nigerian Television Authority where they spoke their minds and said that every individual whether positive or negative should join the fight and be committed, making the promise to STOP AIDS.



If you have any information or material that is HIV/AIDS and youth focused, or if you know of any excellent examples of people working in HIV/AIDS intervention in your country and think they should be highlighted in our newsletter, please submit their information to Kiran Khandwala at kiran@youthaidscoalition.org by Feb. 15, 06. Join GYCA by sending a blank email to gyca-subscribe@youthaidscoalition.org