

# Stigma And Discrimination....The OUCH! Communication Campaign

Social responses of fear, denial, stigma and discrimination have accompanied the epidemic of HIV/AIDS, ever since it has been diagnosed. Discrimination, which has spread rapidly, has fuelled anxiety and prejudice against the groups most affected, as well as those living with HIV or AIDS and their families.

Across the world, although the global epidemic of HIV/AIDS has shown itself capable of triggering responses of compassion, solidarity and support, bringing out the best in people, their families and communities; the disease is also associated with stigma, repression and discrimination, as individuals who are affected or in some cases, who are perceived to be affected by



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the HIV, have been rejected by their families, their loved ones and their communities. This rejection has been demonstrated in the developed countries as well as in developing coun-

tries.

Stigma is a powerful tool of social control and can be used to marginalize, exclude and exercise power over individuals who show certain characteristics like illicit drug use or abuse, men who have sex with men, commercial sex workers (prostitutes) and men and women who are promiscuous.

There are many factors, which contribute to HIV/AIDS – related Stigma these include:

- The fear of contracting HIV
- The association of the disease with socially unacceptable behaviors such as (sex between men and men, men and women who are promiscuous, men and women who engage in commercial sex (prostitutes) and men and women who are engage in illicit drug use and abuse (intravenous drugs)
- Religious or moral beliefs are that the disease is a punishment for engaging in immoral acts.

Here in the Turks and Caicos and in other Caribbean Countries efforts have been initiated, to address the problem of Stigma and Discrimination; to this end The OUCH! Communication Campaign entitled! "OUCH! Discrimination Does Not Protect Against HIV....It Hurts" was launched on January 23, 2007 at Kelly's House, Waterloo Rd, Grand Turk.

The Campaign, which seeks to:

- Increase compassion for persons living with HIV/AIDS
- Enable persons to be open about their HIV status rather than harbouring a fear of isolation and ostracism
- Encourage persons to seek the voluntary testing, care, treatment and prevention programs that are available, instead of being driven underground.
- Foster a change in attitudes among health care workers and the general public towards people living with HIV/AIDS.
- Increase the awareness of persons living with HIV/AIDS, to their rights and responsibilities as regards the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

The materials, which consist of products such as booklets, posters and print ads were displayed during the launch, as well as products such as Radio and Television spots, which were aired. These target Health Care Workers, People Living with HIV/AIDS and their families, the General Community, Business Sector; and will be placed and used in various settings like healthcare clinics, workplace and schools.

Materials will be used in sensitization sessions with groups as well.

Plans are also on the way to develop policies, which would address stigma and discrimination in the school and workplace.

Stigma and discrimination constitute one of the greatest barriers to dealing effectively with the epidemic.

They discourage governments from acknowledging or taking timely action against AIDS, deter individuals from finding out about their HIV status, inhibit those who know they are infected from sharing their diagnosis and taking action to protect others and from seeking treatment and care for themselves.

In tackling stigma and discrimination, we are aware that the availability of treatment helps to make the task easier, as it gives hope to persons who are living with AIDS and as a result persons in the community are more willing to be tested for the HIV and to seek care if necessary.

Against this backdrop, we must commend the Government of the Turks and the Caicos Is. for giving hope to persons living with AIDS. Services, which include support, care and treatment are made available and accessible, throughout the Islands, free of cost for those persons who are desirous of utilizing these services.

To this end the quality of life for persons living with AIDS and their families have been greatly improved.

Being aware that the fear and prejudice that lie at the core of the HIV/AIDS discrimination, need to be tackled at the community and national levels.

Efforts will be made to create and strengthen a more enabling environment, through the various sub-committees, which are functioning as a link between the National AIDS Program and the communities.

This attempt should increase the visibility of people with HIV/AIDS as a 'normal' part of any society.

Experience in most countries has shown, it is of equal importance that persons who are infected and affected with HIV/AIDS, join the fight against stigma and discrimination.

This can be done by making good use of the services, which have been provided and by engaging in a strong body of people, which would garner mutual support and a voice at the local, national, regional and international levels, as these could prove effective in tackling stigma and discrimination. In this regard, recognition should be given to the members of Turks and Caicos Persons for Positive Action (TCIPPA+) for their efforts in working together to improve the quality of life for all Turk Islanders living with HIV/AIDS irrespective of race, color, creed and class.

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National AIDS Program

## Vacancy

One (1) Labourer needed urgently  
Duties: General Labour work for Construction Work

Qualification: Hard working and highly productive worker, friendly and able to work long hours and under minimum supervision. Honest.

Closing date 9<sup>th</sup> March 2007  
Application should be sent to:

AG Construction  
Leeward Highway  
Providenciales  
Tele: (649) 241 7217

## Ashanti International Services

One (1) Domestic worker needed urgently  
Duties: General Domestic work

Qualification: Hard working and highly productive worker, friendly and able to work under minimum supervision. Honest.

Closing date 9<sup>th</sup> March 2007  
Application should be sent to:

Ashanti International Services  
Att: Manager  
P.O. Box 343  
Airport Road Providenciales  
Tele: (649) 241 0237  
Email: ais@tcway.tc