

NATIONAL

Islanders show their support for millions with AIDS

BANNER-WIELDING Islanders took to the streets of Providenciales this week to show their support for the millions of people worldwide affected by AIDS.

The troupe stepped out in line with numerous marches across the globe to mark World AIDS Day which is celebrated annually on December 1.

Musical bands walked alongside community groups and members of the public from the First Caribbean Bank to Butterfield Square.

There they were met by local junkanoo group The Predators who delighted the crowds with their colourful ensemble of costumes and African drums.

Dr Rufus Ewing, director of health services, said World AIDS Day was a time for personal reflection.

"We should all take a few minutes to reflect on our individual lives and question ourselves as to what we have contributed to the fight to end the suffering, end the discrimination and stop the spread of the HIV Virus," he said.

"This is a time when we should celebrate life, a life of being free from HIV, and with a commitment to stay free.

"This day marks the end and the beginning of a year of care and support for persons affected by HIV/AIDS.

"Today we should recommit ourselves as individuals, as corporate citizens, as NGOs to the fight against HIV and the stigma and discrimination that it brings and lend a hand to those in need of moral, financial and medical support, good advice and guidance.

"An ounce of prevention is still worth a pound of cure."

This year's march was staged under the theme 'Don't point a finger, lend a hand'.

Dr Ewing said community organisations, businesses, churches and NGOs needed to come together to win the war on the disease.

"It will take community action and support to disseminate the information that is required

for persons to make informed choices and decisions that will change behaviour, hence halting the spread of HIV and eradicating stigma and discrimination," he said.

"It is imperative that corporations and government take this HIV threat to mankind seriously.

"Our very existence, way of life, quality of life and economic viability depends on our fruitful efforts in taking a stance against all aspects of this disease."



Community groups march to the beat of drums as a mark of solidarity for people living with AIDS.

AIDS Foundation breaks ground for centre



The first shovels hit soil as work on the new youth centre begins.

By Jean Sagesse
On World AIDS Day the Turks and Caicos AIDS foundation stepped up to the plate by breaking ground for a youth centre.

The centre, located in Leeward Highway, is being built as a way to make it easier to teach youths about the disease and at the same time provide space for them to have good clean fun.

Chairman Micky Shoulak said that in 2003 the Foundation was set up to create awareness in the island about the disease.

"The next step is member-

ship," she said.

"We need people in order to afford to help the youths and I hope that members will come forward and help in the cause and make a difference."

Home Affairs Minister Galmo Williams strengthened the chairman's point by saying that the reason that they have got this far is thanks to the members.

And it is his hope that, at the end of the day, the Foundation's message will get across.

In closing he thanked everyone who helped make this dream into a reality and urged

the public to give in their suggestions on how to make the centre even better.

Governor Richard Tauwhare said that it was a wonderful thing to see so much being done by so few people.

"In this day and age, our youths are under tremendous pressure from their peers and what they see around them," he said.

"And it's up to us to be there for them and teach them how to steer clear of those things."

Chief medical officer Dr Rufus Ewing asked the crowds

to look at themselves and see what they have done to prevent stigmatism and AIDS discrimination.

He said that the youth centre is a true example of the AIDS day theme this year - when businesses and the community come together and make something for the youths.

"At this time having this disease is a choice," he said. "Some don't know it and some choose to ignore it.

"We must teach our children about it and live what we preach."

He pointed out that money is not the only way a person can contribute saying that community action and support are alternative ways of contributing to the project.

National AIDS coordinator Cheryl Ann Jones said that in order to properly teach about and prevent the disease every single person in the community must take part in teaching it.

She added that the main purpose of the centre is to provide a safe place for people to learn, get tested and get educated.

The ground breaking was performed by Governor Tauwhare along with members of the Foundation following a blessing prayer by Father Scott Brennan of St. Monica's Anglican Church.

A moment of silence was also held to honour AIDS victims worldwide marked by a release of balloons.