

# WE HAVE AIDS



CIDA PHOTO: DAVID BARBOUR

## DRAMA SHEDS LIGHT ON AIDS

Trinity Western University, a privately funded, Christian liberal arts school in Langley, British Columbia, turned the spotlight on HIV/AIDS with its fall drama production this past year called "Patient A." Based on the true story of a young woman who contracted AIDS while having a dental operation, the play was commissioned by the woman's family.

According to the director of the production, Angela Konrad, "Being involved in the show has been an incredible experience for our actors. They have gone through a whole range of emotions as they've prepared for this performance, knowing this story is about a real person."

Jean Rwomwijhu, one of the actors in the play, says that "the play touches on the social reaction of North American society to this illness, and how people react when they

*continued... PATIENT A*

## GETTING A Life

BY TRICIA WIND

**P**icture yourself growing up in Tanzania, Africa. As a 17-year old, you finished primary school a few years ago but you couldn't go on to secondary school. In fact, only four students from your graduating class did—it's expensive and spaces are limited. Now you are spending your days at home doing odd jobs for a bit of cash, or helping with the farm or housework. When people ask you what you're up to, you answer "I'm just here." You are frustrated, undereducated and underemployed, with little to look forward to.

Your friends deal with the frustration in different ways. Some continue to look for opportunities to go to school, find work, or throw their energy into a choir or youth group. Some guys hang out, talking about soccer. Others find the ten cents that it takes to buy a joint and enjoy a short-lived high. Some girls find an older man who will buy them clothes and give them a bit of cash in exchange for

company and sex. The lack of opportunity that poverty brings stifles the dreams you had as a kid. Worse yet, it can make you a prime candidate for contracting HIV/AIDS.

Rev. Robert Mutta is a pastor, trained counselor and a co-director of one of CRWRC's partner groups, Care and Counseling Organization of Tanzania, (CACOCETA). He organizes Life Skills Training for young people. One of the key emphases of this UNICEF program is helping youth develop goals for themselves. Mutta knows that when young people have goals, they are more confident and make better decisions. They avoid risking their health and lives to HIV/AIDS.

Mutta is especially concerned about girls. Traditionally, Tanzanian girls are taught to submit to men, so if a man asks them for sex they feel that they cannot refuse or even insist on protecting themselves. The results are predictable, yet horrible: for every boy between

*continued... SKILLS*



CIDA PHOTO: CHRIS OSLER

Youth in Africa participate in the March for Hope, raising awareness about AIDS and AIDS prevention.

### COMING THIS FALL!

Youth, youth leaders, teachers and small group leaders:

The Christian Reformed Church and CRWRC will be producing free HIV/AIDS related materials for youth. They will look at what the Bible asks of us in the face of HIV/AIDS and include ideas on how youth can take action in their own communities as well as join with youth from around the world. Look for this monthly newsletter with more information in the fall.

## PATIENT A

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don't understand." Rwomwijhu, who is from Uganda, where AIDS is referred to as the common disease, has seen the effects of the illness in her homeland. "This play has a powerful message," she says. "It talks about the larger disease—which is people's insensitivity towards those with AIDS at a time when those people, who are suffering, need compassion the most."

A special performance of "Patient A" was held on World AIDS Day (Dec. 1) and the proceeds were donated to Mennonite Central Committee as well as to local AIDS organizations.

# Skills to PROTECT AGAINST AIDS

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the ages of 15 and 19 who is HIV-positive, there are six girls. Two-thirds of all newly infected teenagers are female. If girls aren't equipped with the skills to assert and protect themselves, they will continue to die.

In Life Skills Training, Mutta and the participants discuss how to be assertive, and how to deal with stress. The youth practice negotiation skills, critical thinking, and effective communication. They also discuss AIDS openly. They talk about sex, and how to deal with their own desires. They also learn about how to care for those who are already sick. Some of the youth have already seen their parents die of AIDS but they still have a lot of misunderstandings on what it is

and how you get it.

The youth also learn techniques on how to guide discussions with their peers about sexuality and AIDS. When equipped with knowledge, skills, and self-awareness, youth make excellent ambassadors to teach other youth and children about HIV/AIDS.

The foundation of Mutta's approach is helping youth build self-respect and confidence so they will develop their own life goals. They take responsibility for not only their own health, but also of those around them. Life Skills Training helps youth develop a positive outlook for themselves. It fosters initiative and, most of all, hope.

*Tricia Wind works with CRWRC in Tanzania.*

**U** There are 11.8 million youth (aged 15-24) living with HIV/AIDS world-wide, 73% (8.6 million) live in Africa.

**N** UNICEF is the United Nations agency that deals specifically with children and youth. The HIV/AIDS challenge is a top UNICEF priority and will remain at the center of the organization's efforts to enforce youth and child rights around the world.

**www.unicef.org/aids**

UNICEF has developed a 10-step strategy for preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS among youth.

1. End the silence, stigma and shame.
2. Provide young people with knowledge and information.
3. Equip young people with life skills to put knowledge into practice.
4. Provide youth-friendly health services.
5. Promote voluntary and confidential HIV counselling and testing.
6. Work with young people and promote their participation.
7. Engage young people who are living with HIV/AIDS.
8. Create safe and supportive environments.
9. Reach out to young people most at risk.
10. Strengthen partnerships, monitor progress.

## Youth Against AIDS (<http://www.yaids.org/index.htm>)

The focus of YAA is on AIDS prevention in youth with the vision that no young person should get infected by HIV because of a lack of information and resources. In this vein, YAA has organized a worldwide network of youth fighting AIDS. Specific initiatives include profiling the work of young African AIDS activists and the "adopt a project" program.

## SGAC (<http://www.fightglobalaids.org>)

Founded in the spring of 2001 to mobilize U.S. students as advocates for global AIDS, the Student Global AIDS Campaign has already built a network of students at 215 high schools, colleges, and graduate schools nationwide. In partnership with AIDS activists internationally, the SGAC is building a movement. Join us!

These web sites present information related to HIV/AIDS and social justice and they challenge us to think deeply about and take action on many issues. The content, statements or links found within these sites do not necessarily reflect the official position of, or endorsement by, the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, the Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action or the Christian Reformed Church.