

Teresa Group In Touch

Envisioning the Future an International Success

In our last issue of the newsletter we outlined some of the preparations that were underway for our Envisioning the Future Symposium. As we moved closer to the symposium dates of August 11 and 12, it became clear that interest in this event was going to far exceed our original expectations.

On opening day over 400 delegates from 55 countries had registered. We were very lucky to have Mark Beckles from the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund (Canada) as our MC for the Symposium. We were also delighted that MPP Monique Smith the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and Long Term Care was on hand to officially open the symposium. As part of the opening ceremonies, delegates were entertained by the amazing Billy Newton Davis and Glen Marais, both of whom generously donated their talents for this. They were followed by Canada's own Stephen Lewis the United Nations Special Envoy on HIV/AIDS in Africa who received a much deserved standing ovation from the delegates.

In a rousing speech to the delegates Mr. Lewis applauded the symposium organizers for the breadth of speakers and topics being presented. He reminded delegates that despite the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which has been in effect for many years, children remain at the bottom of the ladder of government social and economic priorities. He noted the critical importance of children's advocates to meet and advance the children's agenda at every opportunity. >>>



Stephen Lewis and Karen Vance-Wallace

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“Excellent diversity of country experiences (Africa, China, India, Romania, Russia) that we don’t often hear about in presentations.”



“They presented a great policy overview followed by an eloquent description of how one project works on the ground. Very helpful.”

In terms of HIV treatments for children, Mr. Lewis said it was an “international scandal” that it has taken 10 years to begin treatment programs for children and even now only 5% of those who need treatment are actually receiving it.

Mr. Lewis then spoke about the devastating situation of children who have been orphaned by AIDS and that the sheer numbers and enormity of the problem has left governments and countries reeling. He noted that a whole generation of African children have been robbed of their childhood and are fighting for survival. The incredible role of African grandmothers in caring for orphaned children from their own and other families was highlighted. What Mr. Lewis referred to as ‘trauma meeting trauma’ where grandparents traumatized by the death of their own children are now in a situation of caring for grandchildren who have been traumatized by the death of their parents.

Finally Mr. Lewis challenged delegates to ‘envision the present’ when thinking about children affected by AIDS; that we must turn this disease around on the ground at the community level and that there is an urgent and immediate need for the international community to respond.

Over the two days of the symposium delegates also heard from such eminent speakers as the Hon. Sheila Tlou, Minister of Health for Botswana, Dr. Linda Richter, Director of Child, Youth and Development, South Africa, Peter McDermott, Chief of the HIV/AIDS Section, UNICEF and Dr. Jerry Coovadia from the Nelson Mandela School of Medicine in South Africa. Over 30 different workshops and panels gave delegates an opportunity to involve themselves in concentrated discussions about the global situation facing children affected by HIV and AIDS. Some of the world’s finest thinkers in this field were on hand to share their work and engage in discussions.

It was our intention that by bringing together a broad range of front line NGO’s, researchers and other professionals, we would enhance the ability of these individuals to do their work. Delegate evaluations indicated that this did happen. >>



“Serving Children and their families living with or affected by HIV/AIDS”

“**Fantastic** - need more such lectures especially different approaches from many countries.”

“**I was pleased to see such passionate people presenting – very inspiring**”

“Excellent session! Thought provoking and inspirational. It was great to hear audience experiences.”



“As if you chose these presentations with our project in mind. Dead sure we will not only learn but perhaps work with these projects somehow.”



“ The content was simple yet profound. We are talking about grass roots here...where the rubber hits the road. Excellent.”

“ I work with children and young adults. I didn’t know what to do but after this session, I know and have very clear direction.”

“ All of the presentations were good. I learned a lot about caring for children and supporting caregivers.”

Over 80% of respondents agreed that the workshops, “increased their knowledge and skills”, “that the information provided would be valuable in their work” and “would influence their future work with children affected by HIV and AIDS”.

It would be hard to imagine a more enthusiastic group of delegates than those attending the symposium. Between sessions people were busily engrossed in discussions, finding out more about what other groups were doing and making important connections for future work.

Thanks to amazing efforts of the media team at NATIONAL Public Relations who donated their time to organizing the media briefing with Stephen Lewis at the symposium along with subsequent interviews, we were successful in getting the message about the global reality of children affected by AIDS out to over eight million Canadians.

We would like to thank our partners at the Hospital for Sick Children, our wonderful symposium sponsors, the CCABA International Steering Committee, the symposium organizing and planning committees, staff at Canada Forum, Teresa Group staff and symposium volunteers for making Envisioning the Future such a successful and memorable event. With early commitments from a number of funders, The Teresa Group is looking forward to planning the next symposium in Mexico City in 2008, just before the International AIDS Conference. Olay!



“Serving Children and their families living with or affected by HIV/AIDS”

Mutescreamz

Whatchu know about AIDS?

Music and lyrics have a way of touching people's hearts whether it is jazz, classical, rock 'n' roll or rap. Local rap artist Mutescreamz Mentaltainment partnered with seven youth from The Teresa Group to create poetry about how HIV/AIDS, isolation, secrecy, discrimination and stigma has affected their lives. The rappers 'Unknown Mizery' and 'Ali' spent half a day working with the youth and speaking to them about their lives. These talented young artists had the ability to turn powerful words into an amazing work of art that eloquently educates listeners about how HIV/AIDS has affected these youth. Since hearing the voices of children is part of our mission here at The Teresa Group, these artists performed the rap that our youth co-wrote at our Symposium in August. Here is a little taste, "no one chooses to have HIV, feels like I'm livin' with a monster, why would god give me birth and let me suffer with AIDS, I still have hope, I got love, I got faith..."

Symposium delegates attending the evening reception were clearly moved by the performance of the young rappers. People were moving and clapping along to the music. Some of the delegates became so emotional that they wanted to hug the performers following the song. Some of the feedback from the audience was; "They are the children's voices!" "I would love to hear it again." "People must hear their message."

The artists also expressed how moved they were by this experience. After their performance, they indicated that they felt a strong sense of commitment to our youth to educate others about HIV/AIDS. They also talked about feeling very connected with our youth from a cultural and social perspective. This was a very bonding experience for everyone. We look forward to working with these talented young adults in the near future.





If a Picture Paints a Thousand Words...

The Envisioning the Future Symposium was created to highlight the needs of children around the world who are affected by HIV and AIDS. The challenge for The Teresa Group was to find a way to include the voices of children so that their needs, ideas and thoughts could be heard by the international community. Quite a large challenge since as an affiliated event of the International AIDS Conference, children under the age of 16 were not allowed to attend. Enter Marla Buck, a local Toronto artist who had read about The Teresa Group and wanted to find a way to become involved. Marla presented us with the idea of having children in our Leading the Way program create large canvasses upon which they could express themselves artistically, tell their stories and educate others.

The children loved the idea. Leading the Way is a 9 week group therapy program for children affected by HIV. During each meeting, the kids in the program diligently worked on the canvasses. They were excited to work with Marla who they referred to as the 'artist'. She shared with them different techniques for applying paint and ways to share their thoughts on the canvasses. While the kids certainly had fun

**“Serving Children and their families living
with or affected by HIV/AIDS”**



The Teresa Group at the United Nations



working on this project, the program facilitators knew that the art was also providing an emotional outlet for the kids, where they gained insight into their feelings and expressed their thoughts about living with HIV. Art is a natural form of communication for children, many finding it easier to express visually rather than verbally. One young girl who had chosen not to disclose her HIV status to the group previously wrote, 'you can still have physical contact with me'. An 11 year old boy who had never spoken about trauma he had experienced wrote 'hug me'; another child etched out the words 'life is a struggle'. Along with these messages were those of hope, 'you are not alone', 'never give up', 'stay strong'.

Our heartfelt thanks go out to Marla Buck and the children who put their heart and souls into these pictures. The colours, images and words have taught us so much. Without a doubt, the voices of these children have now been heard, as one child stated when asked if she enjoyed the art project, "I did enjoy the art because I feel that it speaks to people about HIV and AIDS and it was made from the hearts of people who have HIV and AIDS in their self or families...I LOVE THAT!!!"

Talk about a proud moment! The Teresa Group was one of a handful of Canadian organizations accredited to participate in the UN General Assembly Review and High Level Meeting on progress towards the implementation of the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV and AIDS. Over 800 civil society organizations worldwide were invited to attend the meetings which took place this summer in New York. The Teresa Group was represented by Executive Director, Karen Vance-Wallace.

Civil Society organizations had high hopes going into the discussions. There was a sense that the 2001 UNGASS document would be strengthened with specific targeted goals and stronger language. But alas, despite the input from civil society organizations and progressive governments, the final political document proved to be a huge disappointment. Member states refused to commit to hard targets on care and treatment, prevention and funding. Worse still was the fact that children were barely mentioned in the meetings. The final political declaration contained only one clause specifically pertaining to children.

It is hard to believe that with 15 million children orphaned by AIDS, 2.2 million children already infected with HIV, 1,800 new infections in children every day that this issue only rates one clause at a global level. Clearly there is much work to be done to get governments seriously thinking about the impact of HIV/AIDS on the world's most vulnerable citizens.



TUTORING UPDATE

Teresa Group Staff Member Ukraine Bound

When the Canadian Society for International Health (CSIH) approached us to be involved in a pediatric HIV/AIDS project it is managing in Ukraine, we were honoured by invitation.

“The Canadian Society for International Health and its current partners on this project – including the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto – recognize the quality of services that the Teresa Group offers and the reputation it has developed over the last 15 years. We have been told countless times that your organization is the Canadian leader in pediatric HIV/AIDS support services and we would welcome the opportunity to work with you on this project in Ukraine.”

The Ukraine project seeks to address the critical need for professional capacity in the care, treatment and support of children living with HIV/AIDS in Ukraine. The project offers technical assistance by engaging Canadian expertise to assist in the development of in-depth training programs for Ukrainian participants.

Providing comprehensive psychosocial support and ensuring integrated care and treatment through evidence-based research, training and education for community outreach programs has been identified as one of the goals of the project. The expected end result will be that Ukrainian professionals have enhanced capacity to deliver child-friendly, gender sensitive care, treatment and support to HIV-positive children, their families and caregivers, and; children with HIV/AIDS, their families and caregivers have access to improved care, treatment and support.

Jennifer Kindy-McPherson, Coordinator of our Family Support Program will act as The Teresa Group's representative on this exciting international collaboration.

After breaking for the summer, the Tutoring Program is up and running again. While most children dread September's approach since it marks the start of school, we heard comments such as, “Mark has been asking for his tutor all summer, we can't wait to see her again!” An unusual comment from a young boy who has always struggled in school. New to Canada, Mark has learned English while also coping with being in a regular grade 4 classroom. Nothing was familiar to him, the language, books or the people. Mark also has a parent with HIV and two younger siblings that he helps to care for. Mark looks forward to his tutor coming, not only because she has helped him to navigate the grade 4 curriculum and work on his academic skills, but because this is time where an adult spends time only with him, where his needs are being met and he does not have to care for those around him. His mother noted, “words can't express how grateful we are, how much this has helped him.” Mark's tutor stated, “I have noticed a real confidence shift in Mark throughout the weeks of tutoring. He is a lot more self-confident in terms of his attitude towards his classes and school work in general.”

The tutors that have been hired are dedicated to helping the children they work with make gains academically which will also impact their self-esteem and sense of self-worth. The tutors have stated that while they are there to teach, they themselves learn so much. As one tutor noted, “today was an emotional day. Kara told me she loved me and that she got really excited before I came each week. I told her she taught me as much as I taught her...she smiled”.

Without a doubt the Teresa Group's Tutoring Program is offering children a chance to find support as they navigate school while coping with illness in their families. For many of these children, school has not been their priority. The mother of one child stated, “Kamal has only begun to be at all interested in school since having a tutor”. Perhaps the words of one child in particular tell us why it is so important to reach out and provide a service such as this, Mari, a 14 year old said to her tutor following a session, “now I understand what education is about”.

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