



**On the Record: Against AIDS in Africa**

**Issue 9: Series Conclusion, March 19, 2002**

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The Advocacy Project would like to thank all of those who have helped in the production of this series on behalf of Youth Against AIDS.

**From the AP Editorial Desk: The Triumph of Networking**

This issue brings to a close this series of 'On the Record' about youth and AIDS in Africa. Over the last three months, the series has been going out to over 700 subscribers, mostly in Africa, and been read by many more. The response has been very encouraging. Clearly, this is an idea whose time has come.

The series has showcased the work of Youth Against AIDS (YAA), a group of volunteers who are mainly students. Their basic goal, as we reported in the first issue last December, is to push governments to involve young more people in the fight against AIDS. It is particularly vital in Africa, where young people have been singled out by the disease. Moses Imai, a dynamic young member of the YAA network from Nigeria, puts it as follows: 'He who wears the shoe knows where it pinches.'

YAA's members have been busy since December 1, when this series started going out and when their website was launched. Some of their recent activities are described in this issue. Their vision is starting to take hold.

The idea was to create a network of young AIDS activists in Africa, and then lobby on their behalf among young people in the north. With this in mind, YAA has encouraged its African partners to design small, low-cost community-based projects. YAA then tries to use their contacts among young people in the north to seek funding. Some of the projects can be found on the YAA website.

This approach has now produced its first tangible success. Recently, the Southern African Society at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) raised \$462 for Streetwise, a small educational project proposed by Moses Imai's group in Nigeria. It is an encouraging example of how YAA's international networking can bring young people from the North and South together around the common threat of AIDS and produce concrete benefits.

In this issue Rebecca Maina, a Co-Founder of Youth Against AIDS, and Mariana Newport from YAA-UK, describes some of the alliances that YAA is making in the United Kingdom. They also urge readers to contribute to a letter-writing campaign that will soon be launched to pressure the British government.

Another report in this issue comes from Andrea Powell, YAA's coordinator in the United States.

One stirring example of youth networking in the US occurred recently in Washington DC, when the US National Association of people with AIDS (NAPWA) hosted the seventh annual Ryan White conference. (This event is named after a young American hemophiliac who died from HIV/AIDS).

We reported briefly on this meeting in the last issue of On the Record. One of the keynote speakers was Moses Imai, who started the Youth Action Rangers in Nigeria and is one of YAA's 18 African members. Mr. Imai was followed by Ben Wickler from Harvard University. Mr. Wickler is also president of the Student Global AIDS Campaign (SGAC) which now has members in over a thousand universities in America and Europe.

Both young men said, with pride, that the activism of young people is beginning to make a difference in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Mr. Wickler cited the example of drug companies which have agreed not to block countries like South Africa from importing the less-costly 'generic' versions of the antiretroviral drugs used to treat the infection. He also called for more pressure on governments like the US to contribute to the new global AIDS fund and force American companies to provide drugs and treatment for their African employees who are HIV-positive.

Like YAA, the Student Global AIDS Campaign (SGAC) is another excellent example of youth networking. The Campaign has branches in hundreds of colleges and universities throughout the United States.

One of those colleges is Princeton, New Jersey. Public health specialists agree that dirty needles are a prime carrier of the HIV infection in low-income minority areas. But New Jersey is the only state in the northeast of the United States which does not officially support the provision of clean needles for drug addicts. American conservatives denounce needle exchange programs because they feel it will encourage drug addiction, in much the same way that religious conservatives in Africa feel that making condoms available for young people will encourage promiscuity.

Nida Parks, a third-year student at Princeton, was one of several students who decided that this was an issue that needed their attention. In this issue she describes how they have been working hard to influence lawmakers in the state.

This is youth building bridges, speaking out, networking - making a difference.

By launching a network in Africa YAA has raised expectations, but it would be a mistake to expect too much. YAA's members are few in number and have full-time lives as students. They are not the United Nations. They have no offices and no administrative support. This has made it hard for them to respond to the many letters that have received, let alone raise money for projects in Africa.

But YAA is not a group of young people trying to act like adults - it is an initiative by and for young people, doing their own thing in their own way. This is why YAA's impact should not be measured by the sort of 'outputs' so beloved by aid agencies, such as the size of a budget or the number of staff on a payroll.

Instead, YAA should be seen as part of a growing tide of activism by young people around the world who know that they could die from AIDS. They are responding as they know best - by meeting, talking, lobbying and networking. And they are doing it in their own way and on their own terms.

As one might expect of people who have grown up with the Internet, they have made good use of email and the website. The YAA website received over 4,000 visitors in the last three months of 2001. So far, this series of 'On the Record' has generated more letters than any other series produced by The Advocacy Project.

The benefits from this e-networking are now starting to be felt. Moses Imai, from Nigeria, says that his group in Lagos, the Youth Action Rangers, have acquired twenty new members and received scores of inquiries from inside Nigeria as a result of his work being profiled on the YAA website.

We at The Advocacy Project are confident that YAA's African network will survive and flourish. Young leaders like Moses Imai from Nigeria and Lydiah Bosire from Kenya (co-founder and president of YAA) are charismatic, determined and hard-working.

But it must also be remembered that the YAA network is not so much a formal organization as a loose association of AIDS activists who are all well known in their countries for their work on

AIDS. They also work through many networks: YAA, Advocates for Youth, the Student Global AIDS Campaign, Student Partnerships Worldwide, and many more.

This international network of youth against AIDS is fluid, flexible and driven by a sense of urgency rather than money. It embraces campaigns which ebb and flow in their intensity. Today it may be antiretroviral drugs, but tomorrow it could be needle-exchange programs. Next week it might be another UN conference. Next month it might be the new global AIDS fund. Each new campaign attracts new activists, new energy, new skills.

This network of young people is growing, and making an impact, because it is focussed on specific goals and campaigns, not on fundraising and administration. This is what cushions it against the cynicism, venality, and bureaucracy that are the death of so many other well-meaning international projects.

This is why it should succeed. The Advocacy Project is pleased to have helped.

### **Letters**

- From Aulora

Many thanks for sharing this important information with me. I have read it and think it's a wonderful way to target youth.

- From Nankali Maksud

My name is Nankali Maksud and I work in the youth and HIV/AIDS section at the UNICEF Regional Office for East and Southern Africa. I have been received your YAA newsletter and I think congratulations are in order. It is definitely an essential tool for my work.

I am particularly interested in Inviolata Mmbavi whom you wrote about in the most recent newsletter. Our office is in Nairobi, Kenya and I am surprised not to have heard of her. However, I would love to hear her story and get her opinion on how we can work with young people living with HIV/AIDS in ESAR. With her permission, I would like to kindly ask you for her contact.

I am also looking for the contact for Adam Frankel, who wrote the story on Kesego Basha of the Botswana Center for Youth Hope. I am very interested in the booklet that they are working on because it is by young people for young people.

I thank you for your time and look forward to a positive reply.

### **In the News: AIDS Orphans Expelled from Kenyan School**

In a case which casts doubts on the commitment of the Kenyan government to support victims of the AIDS epidemic, and also promote the rights of children, 13 AIDS orphans from a slum area have been locked out of a prominent primary school in Kenya for failing to pay 'maintenance' fees.

The school is the Limuru Mission Primary in Central Kenya's Kiambu district school. Their plight is reported by Rights Features, the Nairobi-based media service that has contributed articles about Youth and AIDS to this series of 'On the Record'.

John Kamau, Managing Director of Rights Features, writes that the expulsion of the 13 AIDS orphans comes a week after a new law on children's rights came into force in Kenya and just three months after President Daniel Arap Moi announced that pupils in public primary schools would not be charged any fees.

'The case not only puts into spotlight the confused government policy on 'free education' but also puts question marks on the new Children's Act as it relates to free education,' writes Kamau.

The 13 children are part of a 30-strong group of Aids orphans from a shanty slums in a poor tea farming town on the outskirts of Nairobi who are under the care of a little-known community based organisation - Belshiba Rehabilitation Centre - that has been scraping around for money to maintain the orphans. The Centre has decided to send the children back to nursery school because it cannot afford the primary school fees.

The Catholic-run Limuru Mission Primary school charges an admission fee of 30,000 Kenyan shillings (\$400), and another \$193 in the form of a 'maintenance fee.' The school has agreed in principle to admit the children, but insists that the maintenance fee (which helps to pay for the running costs of the school) must be paid in advance.

This is beyond the means of the Belshiba Centre, which is finding it hard to cover the living costs of the orphans, let alone the books and uniforms they would need at the Limuru primary school. The maintenance fee would be over and above this.

Last year the government made it clear that no fees would be charged on parents whose children attend public primary schools, although it did say that parents and communities would have to raise the maintenance fees. At the same time, the minister for education, Henry Kosgey, later said that no child would be sent home.

The law on children's rights passed by parliament in December imposed a minimum sentence of two years and a shillings 50,000 fine on anybody denying a child the right to education.

- To read John Kamau's full report about the 13 AIDS orphans contact Rights Features: [rightsfeatures@alphanet.co.ke](mailto:rightsfeatures@alphanet.co.ke)

### **Opinion: The Dangers of Complacency**

by Dr. Alex Muganzi Muganga

Uganda

*In this comment for 'On the Record', Dr Alex Muganzi Muganga from Uganda warns that young people can be the first line of support against HIV/AIDS but that they must not become complacent.*

The first AIDS cases in Uganda were identified in 1982 in Rakai district. Twenty years down the road, HIV/AIDS has spread not only to all parts of the country but to the entire globe. Its impact on the youth has been monumental. Many youths and young adults are dying at the prime of their life, with numerous unfinished plans, leaving behind generations of orphans.

Our prime focus must be on targeting our strategies towards people with AIDS and youth. Persons living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) know best what it feels to live with AIDS and their experiences can be a great source of inspiration and motivation to us all.

Young people can help to prevent AIDS from becoming an even greater catastrophe than it is now. All youth have a collective responsibility in HIV/AIDS prevention. They need the information, skills and services to protect themselves.

All youth throughout the world have an individual and collective responsibility to prevent HIV transmission, provide care for infected people and affected by AIDS and mitigate all the negative consequences of the AIDS epidemic. Young people can make a difference by becoming the arrow heads of these efforts aimed at containing the AIDS situation if given the opportunity, encouragement and empowerment to do so.

Uganda has made great strides in HIV prevention programs which have been universally applauded. The rate of HIV infection is declining now in Uganda. Sero-prevalence in a number of urban sentinel surveillance sites declined from about 30 percent to about 8.3 percent today.

But we have to fight to avoid complacency. There is still need for continued concerted efforts to sustain and improve the existing prevention and control initiatives. We must continue to share ideas and learn from other people and countries. An idea shared is an idea disseminated.

All the young people/youth themselves need to rise up and face this challenge of the AIDS catastrophe wherever they are. They must advocate for the inclusiveness and equality of all the people, irrespective of their HIV status. They must always remember that we are all vulnerable to HIV and that none of us can fight HIV/AIDS as an individual. They must remember that AIDS is a disease which threatens all of us, irrespective of who we are, where we come from or what religion or race we belong to. We are all vulnerable.

The 'I don't care' attitude of some young people must change. I remember one youth I was counselling on the need to prevent HIV infection telling me he could as well die in a road traffic accident! Others believe there is a pre-determined time to die no matter what intervention. Still others believe they already know too much about HIV/AIDS. But when challenged, they cannot even correctly mention at least three modes of prevention of HIV! These are some of the barriers we face. But they cannot stop our struggle.

Every life is worth saving from this deadly disease and each life saved gives us the inspiration to carry on the fight. The struggle to defeat this epidemic is going to be long but it is a worthy and commendable one. Let us all rise and face this challenge.

(This comment was edited for length)

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## **Network UK**

By Rebecca Maina

These are heady times for YAA in the British Isles. YAA in the UK has been actively involved in several projects aimed at raising awareness about HIV/AIDS and the efforts of African youth to defeat a rampant disease that threatens them.

The movement against HIV/AIDS in the UK is not new. Indeed there are many groups and organizations involved in raising funds and awareness in the country. But there is little involvement by those who are most at risk - namely, young Africans from sub-Saharan Africa. As this series has made clear, young Africans account for nearly 50 percent of infection rates in their continent, which is also the worst affected region in the world. (The figure is even higher in some individual countries.)

YAA has always stressed the need for youth involvement in decision-making at all levels, national and international. Given the fact that the UK acts as a base for many well-known organizations such as Oxfam and Action Aid who are involved in HIV/AIDS work in sub-Saharan Africa, it is of great importance to have greater youth involvement at the onset.

To that end, YAA has allied itself to the Stop AIDS Campaign, which comprises 15 development and HIV/AIDS groups committed to a common goal. The Campaign is harnessing the support of people in the UK in the struggle against HIV/AIDS and demanding backing and positive action from leaders in an effort to rid the world of the HIV/AIDS scourge. YAA brings a unique African youth perspective to this strong alliance.

YAA is also collaborating closely with Student Partnerships Worldwide (SPW), a UK-based group that works with and for young people in African and Asia on issues such as reproductive health, with a focus in HIV/AIDS. SPW's former volunteers have given SPW quite a presence in the UK and also become quite established in countries like Nepal and Tanzania.

YAA is working to put our own student volunteers in UK universities in touch with those of SPW. Together we can form a formidable network of young HIV/AIDS peer-educators in the UK. We are already planning visits to UK learning institutions to 'spread the message.'

## **Spreading the Message**

Although many people in the UK claim to be aware of HIV/AIDS, many are also still quite baffled by the epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa. I have been asked on one occasion whether HIV/AIDS was so rampant in the sub-Saharan Africa because Africans have sexual intercourse more than everyone else! Some are also quite surprised by the fact that in sub-Saharan Africa, the highest infection rates occur among young women. This does not fit with that other myth that, sadly, still exists in the UK, namely that AIDS is a 'gay disease.'

YAA has therefore made it a high priority to dispel the myths surrounding HIV/AIDS, and shed some light on why the youth in sub-Saharan Africa are so vulnerable to infection. At a recent talk at Cambridge University, I described my own experience of growing up in Kenya. I talked of the patchy, vague Pastoral Education that shed little light on sexual health matters, let alone HIV/AIDS. Of growing up within a religious environment that was unforthcoming when it came to matters that dealt with sexuality, apart for calling repeatedly for 'total abstinence or else..'

I talked of watching young girls expelled from my high school at the end of the term after they had fallen pregnant and wondering what else we had lost them to other than the pregnancy. I was able to give many listeners a first-hand account of some of the factors that conspire to make sub-Saharan Africa an HIV/AIDS hotspot, although the same factors are contributing to the skyrocketing HIV infections on other continents as well.

Yet YAA is keen to stress that Africans are not just sitting around and waiting for the HIV/AIDS scourge to ravage the continent. Many young campaigners, like those profiled in this series of On the Record, are successfully taking steps to stem the tide of infection, despite a severe lack of resources. In other words, the picture is not one of total doom and gloom.

And many young people in other continents here have showed incredible support for these achievements. Groups from universities such as the School for African and Oriental Studies (SOAS) of London and Cambridge University are expressing interest in raising funds for some of the projects listed under the YAA 'Adopt-A-Project' scheme.

## **Going National**

2002 holds even greater promise for YAA in the UK. In May, YAA plans to collaborate with SPW, the National Union of Students (NUS) and Action Aid to run a fund-raising campaign in several UK universities. The proceeds will go to Action Aid's HIV/AIDS projects in Africa.

This nationwide event will be followed by a Speakers Tour being organized by the Stop AIDS Campaign, which will see a diverse range of international speakers (including a young African person) travelling the length and breadth of the UK highlighting the urgency of the HIV/AIDS problem.

YAA is set to play an important role in this tour by providing a young speaker and also getting our African Youth links involved in a letter-writing campaign. This will describe their own situation and their efforts in combating HIV/AIDS. It will also call for an increase in funding by Western governments for prevention and treatment projects in the continent. Once again, this will serve as way of representing the millions of young people who will not be able to be present at this Tour and who are at the frontline of the battle against HIV/AIDS.

And while all this goes on, I and Mariana Newport of YAA's UK network, continue to work with our representatives in universities here, from Edinburgh to the L.S.E, from Cambridge to Cardiff, who are involved in various HIV/AIDS projects. We are all determined to ensure that YAA's mission of youth empowerment - and the acquisition, use and transmission of knowledge on HIV/AIDS - continues in the United Kingdom.

## **Lobby the UK Government with Letters!**

We need to work to get the British government to give more money to the AIDS fight in Africa.

Tony Blair, the UK Prime Minister, recently made a tour of Western Africa and spoke very encouragingly about the need for global co-operation in tackling the problems currently facing the African continent. HIV/AIDS, though certainly not exclusive to Africa, is one such problem and we are keen to see those words turn into action. To this end, we are working in partnership with the Stop AIDS Campaign in London to develop the letter-writing campaign.

This is how the letter-writing exercise is expected to run:

In a planned Speakers' Tour set to take place across the UK between May 3 and 13, Stop AIDS Campaign will organize speaker forums in which a number of renown AIDS activists will visit various locations and relay a message on the urgency of the HIV/AIDS problem plaguing sub-Saharan Africa. The aim is to demonstrate to UK citizens why they must demand their government to increase aid and other resources to fight the disease.

For our part, YAA will select a young African speaker who will represent this most affected age category. We will also be coordinating a campaign in conjunction with our African youth representatives who will oversee the writing of letters by young Africans. They may not be able to participate directly in the tour, but we feel that their opinions, ideas and hopes will certainly be represented by these letters and through the speaker.

YAA representatives in Africa will organize meetings with youth leaders from each country, and together they will draft their letter. The letters will broadly follow the same structure:

- First paragraph: talk about how bad AIDS is in their country, and highlight how the youth are specifically affected.
- Second paragraph: talk about the work they are doing against AIDS, the successful work of different youth NGOs or youth-inclusive NGOs, and their plans for future projects.

Finally every letter will end with the same message: 'We, the youth of Africa, stand united with the Stop AIDS Campaign in our common purpose: to fight AND beat the spread of HIV/AIDS and to reclaim our future and our continent. We urge the UK government, which has spoken encouragingly on the need for governments in the West to work with Africa, to join in this fight, increase its funding towards African HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention programs and stand shoulder to shoulder with us in our struggle against this terrible scourge.'

This will be a unified call by African youth. Of course if individuals or groups want to write their own letters, they will be free to do so. But we must encourage them to finish with this final common appeal.

These letters will be displayed along the tour venues. We also hope to link them with similar letters by young people in the UK. This might be done through [Student Partnerships Worldwide](#)

(SPW), a group that has strong links with young people in the UK. It would amount to a unique show of solidarity and shared responsibility in the fight against a common enemy.

Those who are interested in the YAA letter-writing campaign please contact Rebecca Maina at: [rmaina1@hotmail.com](mailto:rmaina1@hotmail.com)

We are at present searching for the funding to cover the cost of printing/posting the letters. We are aiming for 100 signed letters per country if possible. Please do get in touch because this campaign will be a very powerful way for youth to pressure the UK government and will amount to a major campaign. We have plans to even include it in a wider HIV/AIDS awareness campaign expected to be linked with the forth-coming World Cup Finals in the Summer.

- Rebecca Maina is a co-founder of YAA.

### **London University Raises \$462 for YAA's Nigerian Partner as 'Adopt a Project' Takes Off** By Mariana Newport

On Friday 22, 2002, the Southern African Society of SOAS (the School of Oriental and African studies) became the first group to 'Adopt a Project' that was proposed by the YAA network in Africa!

It was a mixture of fundraising and fun-raising at the Society, as international members and other curious souls grooved to the African sounds of Freddie Matcha and the Kitoto band.

The packed student bar raised a total of \$924 that is to be divided equally between Streetwise, a charity working with South African street children and the Nigeria Youth Action Rangers. The Rangers (led by Moses Imayi) have proposed an innovative project, which aims to prevent the spread of AIDS by training peer educators.

But before getting carried away by Nigerian achievements, back to London. The Southern African Society was formed with the aim of filling a gap that students felt on the school's analysis of Africa. According the society's president Rosa Eckle the study of Africa in SOAS focuses more on North and West Africa whilst neglecting the study of Southern Africa. The society hopes to remedy this by encouraging intellectual debates, visiting speakers etc.

However their educating zeal doesn't end there. They also hope to educate London on the cultural richness of Southern Africa. In the words of their governing document they hope to 'cover different areas of interest that go beyond what can be covered by merely academic institutions, such as cultural events which are for enjoyment rather than analytical contemplation'. The party last week was certainly one such event.

As a society of students who have a special link to, and understanding of, Africa it is no surprise that they are the first to sponsor a YAA initiative. HIV/AIDS is an issue relevant to everyone but especially to African youth. The Southern African Society knows this better than most. YAA hopes to keep them on board for the long struggle ahead. For now let us simply say, a big THANK YOU!

- Mariana Newport is a member of YAA UK. Contact her at: [mariana\\_mn@hotmail.com](mailto:mariana_mn@hotmail.com)

## **10 American Schools Seek Funding for YAA Projects**

By Andrea Powell

Youth Against AIDS brings youth across the United States together to combat AIDS by empowering the youths in Africa with desperately-needed funding to save themselves from the clutches of AIDS. Youth across the United States and in Africa are working already to stop the devastation of AIDS, but this is a unique approach bringing them together.

In the United States, there are approximately 10 committed schools willing to sponsor an African-based youth initiative combating AIDS through effective awareness and training. For example, one US group will sponsor a group in their efforts to inform local youths via radio broadcasting in Guinea.

Currently, these groups are focusing on running a series of benefits in local cafes that will raise at least \$1,000 per benefit. These benefits will offer local university students the opportunity to inform locals of the effects of AIDS in Africa while gained much needed seed funding. The film, 'Everyone's Child,' will be shown in many locations and in some schools, student art will be auctioned off for donations. After funds are secured, they will be sent to the 'adopted' project where measures of success and implementation are already in place.

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## **Princeton Chapter of the Global AIDS Campaign Advocates Needle Exchanges to Curb HIV Infection**

By Nida Parks

Founded in February of 2001, the Student Global AIDS Campaign (SGAC) has spread across the United States, gaining support and membership from 188 colleges, high schools and graduate schools in 43 states. 2001 was a year of determination and accomplishment for SGAC in confronting the global AIDS crisis.

SGAC allies with numerous other advocacy organizations in the United States and abroad, helping to build a powerful movement of student leaders in the fight against AIDS. The Princeton chapter of SGAC was established at the start of the fall semester in September of 2001 and quickly took its place in the highly organized infrastructure of the national student campaign already in place. We were able to immediately join with the efforts of students at other schools such as Harvard and Yale.

## **Regional Training**

One of our first major projects was to help organize and plan a regional training conference to be held in Philadelphia in February of 2002. (Editor's note: This conference took place recently and attracted participants from New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and

Virginia. It focused on the education and training of students interested in assuming leadership and initiative in international AIDS advocacy.)

The platform of SGAC includes a comprehensive strategy to fight AIDS internationally, especially in countries such as Africa where the rates of infection remain extremely high. The UN Global Health and HIV/AIDS Trust Fund helps to provide these countries with financial support and resources in their struggle to extend medical care and education to HIV/AIDS citizens in impoverished regions.

SGAC has also sponsored a major effort to win more US support for the new Global AIDS Fund. Coined the 'Billion Dollar Campaign,' our project takes the form of a letter, signed by US representatives and senators, that was sent to President Bush. The letter asked the President to provide \$1 billion to the Global Fund for AIDS as an emergency supplemental appropriation.

The Fund currently has just over \$1 billion in donations from many sources, but it needs \$10 billion a year to be fully operational. A number of Princeton SGAC members helped distribute flyers and information advocating student involvement in this movement.

In order to pressure politicians as aggressively and directly as possible, we urged students to call the offices of their representatives as well as to schedule district meetings. From stations in our Frist Campus Center, we provided students with information outlining effective letter-writing techniques and guidelines for calling and visiting offices. Our location in Princeton, NJ also allowed us to pressure several influential US politicians in the area.

(Editor's note: Much to the disgust of the Student Global AIDS campaign, the US has so far given just \$200 million to the Global AIDS fund)

### **Needle Exchange**

Another initiative of the SGAC at Princeton is the 'Needle Exchange Today' (NEXT) Campaign. Since the beginning of the fall 2001 semester, we have been researching the unique history of Needle Exchange Programs (NEPs) in NJ. Alone among the states of Northeast New Jersey continues to make these life-saving programs illegal. This directly contributes to the high rates of infection among intravenous drug users as well as women and children in highly populated cities such as Trenton and New Brunswick.

Over the last four months of 2001, we actively worked for the legalization and installation of these desperately needed NEPs into the cities of New Jersey. Our goal is to have a bill passed in the state legislature that would force the governor to enact a demonstration NEP in New Jersey immediately.

Earlier in the fall, I attended the Governor's AIDS Advisory Panel meeting with another Princeton student and director of NEXT, Robin Williams. We met with many of the individuals involved in promoting NEPs in New Jersey. During the run-up to the November gubernatorial elections, we contacted both Democratic candidate McGreevey and Republican candidate Shundler in order to ascertain their official positions on NEPs. As McGreevey openly supported

NEPs, we urged Princeton students from New Jersey to vote for this candidate. Now, with McGreevey in the Governor's office, we hope he will act to finally legalize and institute NEPs throughout the state.

This, however, will require not only the support of the Governor, but also the acceptance and compliance of legislators at the local level. When both the Senate and Congress Health Committees introduce the bill for NEPs, the votes of these representatives will decide the fate of thousands of NJ residents.

In order to inform many of these politicians about NEPs and heighten the importance of this bill, we organized a weeklong telethon in which we contacted every district office in New Jersey. We compiled a four-page packet of information concerning NEPs and their success in other areas such as New York, Connecticut, and Baltimore, which we faxed to each office. Many of the offices responded with their positions regarding NEPs, and we plan on continuing in our advocacy until the bill is passed.

We are also currently working on editing an educational video on needle exchange programs to distribute with a longer, more extensive written report on the debate surrounding needle exchange in New Jersey.

### **Fighting Complacency**

The Princeton SGAC chapter has organized a number of events to raise AIDS awareness on our own campus. In October, Princeton SGAC members participated in the Philadelphia AIDS Walk, and many others helped to involve the Princeton campus on World AIDS Day on December 1. As part of this day, we arranged for the Tigertones, a popular all-male a cappella group, to sing in our 1879 archway as we distributed ribbons and flyers to students.

Later, a number of SGAC members and other interested students watched, 'And the Band Played On', a powerful film recreating the history of the outbreak of AIDS in the United States. We also attended a dinner-discussion following the movie. We are determined to strike the right balance between raising awareness and engaging in direct action and political advocacy.

One of our greatest obstacles has been the overwhelming complacency of much of the student body. Perhaps it is because so much new AIDS medicine and technology is available in the United States, but the awful nature of HIV/AIDS seems to be diminished for many.

Even as the attention of countries such as the United States now turns toward other issues, this deadly virus will not cease to devastate the lives of millions. We, at Princeton, accept the challenge of battling against this complacency and fighting for the protection of human life in this ongoing global AIDS crisis.

- Nida Parks is a third-year student at Princeton University in the United States. She is spending this semester in South Africa. To contact Nida email her at: [nparks@Princeton.EDU](mailto:nparks@Princeton.EDU)

## **Networking News**

Since the start of this series of 'On the Record' last December, YAA has joined the [Africa Alive Youth AIDS Initiative](#) (AAYA) with Global Justice, Population Services International (PSI) and Johns Hopkins University Center for Communication Programs (JHU/CCP).

The AAYA initiative is working closely with the Artists Against AIDS Worldwide (AAAW). AAAW was founded by AIDS activist Leigh Blake and sponsors the 'What's Going On' project. This project allows recording artists to focus attention on the global epidemic. The all-star collection R&B, pop, rock and rap artists includes Bono, Mary J, Britney Spears, and Destiny's Child. The messages supported by the What's Going On project are 'Donate the Dollars, Treat the People, Drop the Debt'.

YAA is also having discussions with the African Youth Parliament on how to prioritize the issue of HIV/AIDS in the upcoming Session in September 2001.

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