



AIDS Link

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PO Box 242, San Ignacio, Cayo District 622-4009 AIDSLink@hotmail.com

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World AIDS Day
1 December...

STOP AIDS
Keep the Promise

So What's Going On Here?

'When the truth spreads, AIDS won't', reads a sign in Belize City. It sounds like a simple enough idea, one might think. And the rewards would be so great. Imagine stopping the spread of AIDS across the country. Imagine the hundreds of deaths that could be prevented in Belize alone, the thousands of Belizean children who could be saved from being orphaned!

'So what's going on here then?' countless people from all walks of life have asked. 'If only there was a way of hearing about what the other HIV/AIDS organizations are doing, we could work together more and be stronger', many organizations' staff have said. Other voices are from Community Nurses Aides (CNAs), asking: 'Can you teach us more about how to care for people living with HIV/AIDS and let other people know how to as well?' Schools want to have a way of giving their children news on the HIV/AIDS situation, and many people in communities all over the country have basic questions about understanding the disease, or strong viewpoints they'd like to share and discuss.

This newsletter has been born as a result of the voices heard across Belize, and it will be built upon those voices. Through working together everyone can stay informed on what's happening in the fight against AIDS, learn how to live better with

the disease and to help family or neighbors affected by it, and talk openly about the issues that matter.

Together communities will be a part of spreading the truth. With at least 600 Belizeans already dead from AIDS and 14,000 children affected by HIV/AIDS, everyone must continue to strengthen their work to make sure that the spread of AIDS does indeed stop.

A True Life Story

This is the story of a man from Cayo who was diagnosed HIV positive a year and a half ago:

I'd been feeling unwell and didn't know why, so someone recommended to me that I go to HECOPAB for an HIV test. When the nurse told me the result was positive I felt bad at first. I was unhappy that I couldn't go out and do the things I used to do, but I knew that I couldn't go out and give HIV to other people. Over time I accepted it. I'd

made a mistake. I'd fooled about with other people and I got it.

I told my mother and daughter that I had HIV, and they've given me a lot of support. They still love me

and accept me for who I am, and they're always there for me. If you've got someone to support you and be behind you, you'll feel

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**WHEN THE TRUTH SPREADS
AIDS WON'T**

A Look at the Cornerstone Foundation in Action

Since the Cornerstone Foundation is initially taking on the role of producing this newsletter, it seems right to introduce ourselves. Cornerstone is a non-profit organization in San Ignacio, founded in 1999, with the mission of 'inspiring respect'. Cornerstone is headed by Ms. Anna Silva, who oversees the running of its programs, covering women's and youth issues, relief and aid, disabilities support, and HIV/AIDS.

Cornerstone's HIV/AIDS work focuses on educating people, especially in Cayo communities, through presentations and prevention outreach programs. These began with an HIV/AIDS education initiative, sponsoring articles in a youth newsletter, hosting an internship program to teach HIV/AIDS awareness within the community, and helping initiate the Cayo AIDS Committee in 2001.

Cornerstone provides a series of HIV/AIDS presentations on request, which can be modified to fit different ages, cultures, and beliefs. Presentations conducted for the Belize Defense Force, police departments, teachers, students, beauty salons, youth groups, and more, have included basic information about the virus, HIV/AIDS bingo games, information about stigma and discrimination, and peer education.

Outreach projects are designed to make a big impact on a large audience and include mural paintings, essay contests, billboards, puppet shows, poster contests, television shows, candle light vigils, village

walks, displays, banners, parade floats, condom distribution, youth retreats and camps, home-care training, the production and distribution of brochures and booklets, and more. An AIDS Orphan March and an AIDS Run helped to involve the larger community by providing a means to participate in speaking out about HIV/AIDS.



Youth Pan di Move, a peer educator group, consists of around 15 youths, aged between 13 and 23 years old, and is led by Ms. Elita Vasquez as president. The youths do one-on-one peer education and student presentations. They reach a large number of youths by spreading their message informally through word of mouth. Ms. Vasquez is often approached

by youths asking for more information, and from knowing some of them over time, she has seen encouraging changes in behavior.

As of 2005, Cornerstone has been developing a national HIV/AIDS initiative for the Protection and Care Of Orphans, Vulnerable Children and Their Families.

This involves training interviewers to assess the needs of children affected by HIV/AIDS, training community members on the home-based care of AIDS patients, and helping each district to establish a Community Information Coordinator (CIC) and set up their own community response network to support and provide for the essentials of families in need (emergency nutrition, medical supplies, shelter, schooling, and clothing).





Nationwide HIV/AIDS News

HIV/AIDS Training

Peace Corps Belize held a week of Training for Trainers in HIV/AIDS awareness and education in Belize City from 25th to 29th September. Participants increased their awareness of the current status of HIV/AIDS globally and nationally, increased their understanding of the issues and effects of HIV/AIDS and the need to raise awareness in their communities, and gained training strategies, methodologies, and presentation skills that will enable them to assist with behavior change among target groups. Among other activities, the workshop came up with a six-page list of available resources.

Comforth, the Committee for a Faith-Based Response to HIV/AIDS, launched a pastoral HIV/AIDS manual in July for the empowerment and support of families. The manual describes the HIV/AIDS situation in Belize and the churches' involvement, and teaches key skills in pastoral counseling, including confidentiality, working with children, and dealing with bereavement. Comforth also held a training workshop for pastors in August that included myths about HIV/AIDS, HIV/AIDS 101, voluntary counseling and testing, cultural practices and their influence on HIV/AIDS, biblical issues in relation to HIV/AIDS, and pastoral counseling skills, as well as issues involved in counseling and its practical application.

The Cornerstone Foundation recently held workshops in Belize, Cayo and Stann Creek Districts to teach home-care to church members and to train trainers in the home-based care of AIDS patients. Participants learned about the immune system, transmission, prevention, patients' rights, confidentiality, listening skills, nutrition, medication, dying, children's needs, universal precautions, and personal care (changing diapers and sheets, bathing, getting out of bed, cleaning spills, etc). In September, Cornerstone, conducted a workshop for Maya Alcaldes in the Toledo District, providing HIV/AIDS education and health information. TOLCA assisted.

The Alliance Against AIDS (AAA) will soon hold a training course on human rights for affected families and a forum on women, looking closely at microbicides and vaccines so that women can protect themselves.

Support Group for PLWHA

The Positive Lives support group for persons living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) meets once a month in Belize City where members give updates, share their problems and how they have dealt with them, discuss their experiences, have empowerment sessions, and talk about health issues. AAA pays members' transportation and provides lunch. The group is encouraging people with HIV/AIDS from all over the country to join them. Members are glad to have this opportunity to share their experiences with people who are going through similar things, and one member said before she came to the group she felt she was a nobody, but through the group's support she has started to feel that she is worth something. Before bringing people into the group, AAA will discuss confidentiality so that the privacy of all members is respected. For more details, please call Ms. Edna Novelo, at AAA on Monday or Thursday at 223-6493.

Regional News

HIV/AIDS Spreads in Latin America

Over the last 20 years, around 600,000 people in Latin America and the Caribbean have died from AIDS. Today, two million people in this region live with HIV/AIDS and approximately 567 become infected by HIV every day. As in other developing regions, HIV/AIDS disproportionately affects these countries' most productive workers, infecting about one in 20 adults aged 15 to 49 years.

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World News

16th International AIDS Conference In Toronto, Canada, August 2006



The International AIDS Conference, held every two years, is the largest gathering of HIV researchers, physicians, advocates and HIV positive people in the world. With over 25,000 participants, it was an opportunity to exchange ideas, review strategies and evaluate progress so far on dealing with AIDS. Perhaps the best way to capture the essence of the conference is to summarize the closing session that ended the week.

The Global Figures	
40.3 million	People living with HIV
4.9 million	New HIV infections
3.1 million	Deaths due to AIDS
Source: UNAIDS/WHO 2005 Report	

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VCT Center and BFLA

The Voluntary Counseling and Testing Center has two nurses who conduct HIV testing, and counseling, and do outreach in the district. The Belize Family Life Association also does outreach and offers HIV testing, but refers clients with positive results to the VCT Center for counseling.

Hand in Hand Ministries

The Hand in Hand Ministries Outreach Center enhances the quality of life of children from birth to 6 years old who are affected by HIV/AIDS. They provide holistic services caring for the physical, spiritual and emotional needs of these children and their families. By linking with other NGOs, they also work to empower PLWHA, to promote quality care, to spread awareness in the community, and to fight discrimination. They currently have 39 outreach families and 13 day care children.

The Red Cross

The Red Cross runs the 'Together We Can' peer education program. They have just launched 'The Faces' billboard and t-shirt campaign with the slogan 'Nobody has the truth written on their face. Protect yourself use a condom'.

**Alliance Against AIDS (AAA)**

The AAA is a psychological support agency that focuses on empowering PLWHA and those affected by HIV/AIDS to improve their lives. They train volunteers in telephone skills, counseling, outreach and care and have a 'Positive Lives' support group. They are developing a referral directory so that agencies can refer those who need help to the AAA and vice-versa. The Global Fund provided AAA with a vehicle, making them mobile now.

PASMO

PASMO helps reduce the spread of HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), using Behavior Change Communications (BCC). Roughly 70% of their activities are individualized interventions. They focus on men who have sex with men (MSM), and commercial sex workers (CSW) and their potential clients, such as uniformed populations and migrant mobile populations. In the city alone they have around 100 current MSM clients. PASMO offers peer education training, which consists of a two-day course on the technical side of HIV/AIDS and how to teach behavioral change, with two months of practical follow-up activities and assessments. Among other World AIDS Week activities, they are collaborating with the Red Cross on a music festival.

Resources in Stann Creek District

VCT Center and HECOPAB

The Health Educator organizes teams to carry out HIV/AIDS health education at schools and at training sessions for teachers, students, other health educators, soldiers, and others in the community. The VCT nurses give free HIV counseling, testing and treatment.

The Red Cross

The Red Cross conducts HIV/AIDS first aid training, and has the 'Together We Can' (TWC) peer education youth group. The group, which consists of youths aged around 10 to 18 years old, meets on Saturdays.

HIV/AIDS Society

The Society aims to create a supportive environment for people seeking information, medical attention, support, and care. They are striving to open a VCT site in The Sacred Heart Parish building.

Belize Family Life Association

BFLA does not do testing or counseling at this time. However they do provide educational workshops and school HIV/AIDS presentations.

POWA Fu Women

POWA, housed in the Women's Department, brings young women together to empower them to improve their lives. Sessions include HIV/AIDS and condom use. They are making three billboards to reduce stigma and discrimination and to increase hope and tolerance. They plan to start a gift shop that will also be a venue for distributing HIV/AIDS information.

Christ the King Anglican Church

The Anglican Church recently hosted a workshop on bedside care, and has compiled a referral contact list to help PLWHA. They plan to set up a counseling center in the office at the back of their church for PLWHA or people who are worried that they might be positive.

First Things First: The HIV Test

Am I at risk?

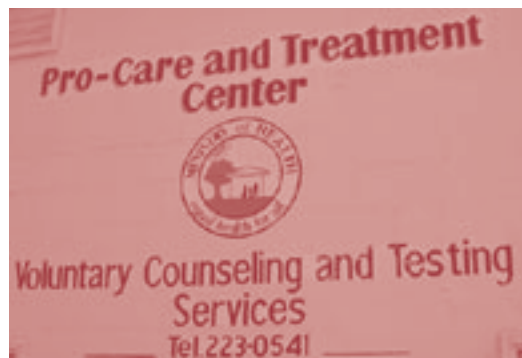
A person can only catch HIV if they come into contact with a sufficient quantity of infected blood, semen or pre-seminal fluid, vaginal fluid, or breast milk. Certain activities put people more at risk of being infected with HIV, so you need to ask yourself:

- Have you had unprotected vaginal, anal or oral sex:
 - ♦ without knowing for sure that your partner did not have HIV?
 - ♦ with a person who has had multiple sex partners?
 - ♦ with someone you know has HIV/AIDS?
 - ♦ with someone who uses injectable drugs or shares needles?
 - ♦ with a man who has had sex with another man?
- Have you had a sexually transmitted infection (STI), eg genital herpes or syphilis? (Having an STI makes it easier to get HIV).
- Have you paid a person to have sex with you?

If you answered 'yes' to any of these questions, you might be infected and should have a test.

Am I infected?

You cannot rely on symptoms to know whether or not you, or anyone else, might have HIV because lots of people who are infected do not have any symptoms at all for many years. Other people will show symptoms that are similar to those of common illnesses, such as the flu (eg headache, fever, stomach ache, sore muscles, or a rash). The only way to know for certain if you have HIV is to go for a test.



Why should I get tested?

Finding out your HIV status could be one of the most important things you ever do. Here's why:

- If you are HIV negative, you can set your mind at rest, and take steps to make sure you and your loved ones stay HIV free.
 - If you are HIV positive, the earlier you are diagnosed, the longer you can live a healthy life. You can do so by using the free medication that is available and making adaptations to your lifestyle.
 - If you are positive, you can take steps to protect your partner(s) using safer sex techniques, and help to stop the spread of HIV.
- If you are positive, you can find out about the support groups and services that are available to help you, or you can even become an advocate for others.
- Knowing your status allows you to make informed decisions about your life. For example, women with HIV can still have children who will be unlikely to have HIV if the mother takes the Nevirapine medicine.

'A lot of people are afraid, but there are a lot of benefits to testing. If you're negative you can put your fears to rest and take steps to avoid catching HIV in the future. If you're positive you can improve your health a whole lot and avoid passing it on to others'
VCT Center nurse

What happens during the test?

Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) Centers in all districts offer the following, all for free and all with complete confidentiality:

- (1) Pre-test counseling
- (2) Signing of formal consent
- (3) Rapid blood test and results
- (4) Post-test counseling

The whole process takes only one hour to complete. Free testing is also available at other places (see next page). Private labs will carry out tests for a fee and then refer clients on for counseling.

First Things First: The HIV Test

It is recommended that a person takes two tests, six months apart. This is because there is a 'window period', or time lag between when the immune system starts to produce HIV antibodies and when these antibodies can be picked up by an HIV antibody test. During this period an HIV positive person will not test positive for HIV, but they will be infectious to others.

So even with a negative result, if there is a chance you might still have HIV, you will need to take precautions until you take your second test.



Telling someone you have HIV is a very difficult thing to do. It helps if you learn a bit about HIV/AIDS first so that you can help them understand. To prepare yourself, think about what you want from them and anticipate what different reactions they might have. Accept how they do react and have patience, because it can take time for those you tell to get used to the idea.

I'm HIV positive. What next?

VCT Centers offer a complete medical check-up and free care for those who find they are HIV positive. An HIV positive person can register at the VCT Center. If they are healthy, they may not need to return for months, but if their health worsens, they can come in more regularly for check-ups and medication. Follow-up counseling is available to discuss behavioral change, nutrition, safer sex, experiences you may find yourself going through, and other issues.

VCT care includes extra lab tests and access to medication for anyone who is showing symptoms of AIDS or whose tests show that they have a low enough CD4 count (the number of immune cells). The medication is either in the form of antiretrovirals (ARVs) to slow the progress of the disease, or prophylaxes, such as antibiotics or skin creams, to fight opportunistic infections that take advantage of the person's lowered immune system. HIV positive mothers can be provided with milk, so that their babies are not at risk of catching HIV via breast milk. They can also refer you to particular specialists and support services that are available to you.

Where do I go for more information?

Free Testing Centers

Belize

VCT Center - Princess Margaret Drive, 223-0541
BFLA - 2621 Mercy Lane, 203-1018

Stann Creek

VCT Center - Southern Regional Hospital, 522-3833

Cayo

VCT Center - San Ignacio Hospital, 8243129
VCT Center - Western Regional Hospital, 822-2263
BFLA - Church Street, San Ignacio, 824-2648

Toledo

VCT Center - Punta Gorda Hospital, 722-2026
BFLA - Main Street, Punta Gorda, 722-2289

Orange Walk

VCT Center - Northern Regional Hospital, 322-2072

Corozal

Corozal Community Hospital, 422-2080

COMING UP: diet/nutrition, opportunistic infections, bedside care, ...

Discussion Topic

Do you think HIV/AIDS is a problem in Belize? If so, why? What should be done about it?

While traveling around Belize to gather information from the various HIV/AIDS-related organizations, *AIDS Link* took the opportunity to ask their views on the above questions. Other community members, from schoolteachers and priests, to nurses and business people, also gave their views. Every person believed that HIV/AIDS really is a problem in Belize, as is supported by the data. Here are some of the main responses to the other two questions:

Ms. Elisa Castellanos, PASMO

'Belizeans are very familiar with HIV/AIDS. It's not that they don't have the knowledge. They maybe just don't act on it.'

A staff member in a Dangriga bank

'I think the education is there, but people think it's only bad girls who get HIV, so don't mess with them and you'll be ok. They don't see the impact it has on people's bodies or the community because it stays hidden.'

Ms. Marta Coc, Chair of the Toledo AIDS Committee

'It's a growing problem. I think people do know about HIV, but it's just attitude. They're very promiscuous, and if you talk to them they say, "Well, something's got to kill you".'

Ms. Miyuki Yamashita, ex-project coordinator for the Dangriga HIV/AIDS Society

'The level of awareness of HIV has dramatically increased in Dangriga,

but HIV is still a problem because some people don't care about AIDS and others don't think they're at risk.'

Dr. Daniel Carlos, Orange Walk BFLA

'Most people do have the information, but they just act recklessly. It's not a matter of not knowing. More awareness is needed of the HIV prevalence in Belize.'

Mr. Joel Cowo, Corozal Human Services Department

'The problem is a lack of good parenting. Lots of people are neglectful and don't teach their children about these things. For some people, AIDS is still a myth. They don't believe it exists.'

A Cayo VCT nurse

'There is so much stigma and discrimination that it is actually supporting the idea of increased transmission, because people are afraid to disclose their status so HIV keeps spreading to others ... I think that this illness is affecting our society. The only way things can change is if society changes their attitude to HIV. If discrimination stops, people will disclose more so the spread can stop because people can protect themselves.'

The Pastor of the Methodist Church in Dangriga

'We need to help people understand that the risk is not worth it.'

A staff member, The Toledo Maya Women's Council

'Lots of Maya women think they will never get it because they are married and they are at home always. They think that HIV is limited to bar hoppers and prostitutes. They think they're safe in their villages, but in fact it's common for their husbands to be working away and they may well be cheating on their wives ... People need to be aware that we don't know who has HIV because people keep it secret. It's something almost invisible ... More work certainly needs to be done, especially concerning the mindset that people have, that it'll never affect their family.'

Belize Figures

600	Deaths recorded due to HIV/AIDS
over 5,000	People living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA)
over 400	Newly discovered infections last year
14,000	Children made vulnerable as a result of HIV/AIDS (more than 1 in 10)
2,000	Children orphaned by HIV/AIDS

Source: UNICEF Estimates

Dr. Osorio, Orange Walk Hospital

'I believe the problem is very culture related.' A lack of education, a machismo attitude, and an increase in migration (particularly of commercial sex workers and families from low socioeconomic backgrounds with less access to health education) are likely causal factors.

Discussion Topic

Do you think HIV/AIDS is a problem in Belize?

If so, why? What should be done about it?

A Toledo BFLA nurse

'HIV/AIDS education should continue, especially to encourage testing, because I find that hardly anyone comes to be tested.'

**A staff member,
the Dangriga Town Hall**

'It's a matter of communication, training workshops, and having pamphlets to give out.'

**A staff member,
Toledo Women's
Department**

'More education is needed, especially in the form of visual aids for people in the villages who may not be able to read or write.'

**A member of the
Corozal Red
Cross**

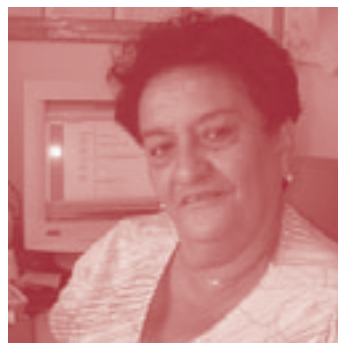
'Sometimes just telling people there's a problem isn't enough. Now is the time to show people, to shock them.'

**A staff member,
Orange Walk
Human Services Department**

'Within any one organization resources tend to be limited, so the solution is to pull together'.

**Nurse Bradley,
Belize City VCT
Center**

It would be good if there could be a multi-sectorial meeting for all of the HIV/AIDS organizations in the country a few times a year to see what everyone is up to. This might help to build a stronger multi-sectorial response.



**Nurse Bradley
VCT Testing Center, Belize**

From hearing these viewpoints, the general thinking appears to be that there has been a lot of HIV/AIDS education, but that this is just the first step. Education is important and

needs to continue, to adjust in some ways, and to expand to reach a wider range of targeted groups. On its own though, education is not sufficient to change deep-rooted cultural practices or mindsets that lead to behaviors which place persons at risk. By increasing the amount of resources channeled to behavioral change programs and by linking together more to make the best use of their shared resources, organizations can have a much stronger impact. The methods of educational and behavioral change work and how their effectiveness can be increased will be the topic for the next discussion.

**Ms Judith Alpuche,
National Committee for
Families and Children**

'I think there are certain cultural factors with regard to male promiscuity. It seems as though our public education programs aren't working to change people's behaviors. Somehow there's been a disconnect ... None of the education campaigns has systematically been geared towards indigenous populations in rural areas. Maybe we need to reexamine whether or not our communication strategies are working effectively.'



COMING UP: education, religion, gender issues, vulnerable populations, affects on children, ...

Highlights from Cayo District

Toledo District Resources

VCT Center

San Ignacio has a VCT Center behind the hospital. They work with Cornerstone on outreach. This teamwork, along with the donation of a portable testing device, means that the VCT Center nurses are able to go out to villages in Cayo to tell people about HIV/AIDS and to offer free confidential HIV tests. They are planning to cover one village every month.

Belize Family Life Association

The BFLA in San Ignacio provides free information on and treatment for STIs, HIV testing and pre- and post-test counseling. Their outreach work includes presentations and radio ads. The BFLA in Belmopan offers counseling and intervention.

The Cornerstone Foundation

Support is available to PLWHA and their families. Training on the home-based care of AIDS patients is available. Cornerstone is seeking donors to help provide support to families affected by HIV/AIDS. For more information, see 'Who's Who' on page 2.

Belmopan AIDS Committee

The AIDS Committee is renewing its meetings in October. Their target groups are schools, bars, CSWs and villages. They are working on a one to two minute commercial in which high school students give their views on HIV/AIDS and which will be aired for several months. Their main plan is to set up a home to look after PLWHA and they hope to provide a venue for a counseling center, manned by volunteers each giving a few hours a week.



AIDS Committee

When the committee was last active it had around 20 members from various organizations, who focused mainly on HIV/AIDS prevention through education and outreach. However, it has been inactive for many months due to a lack of resources to carry out planned activities, and also because the chairperson has been on maternity leave. The chair hopes to return to her post soon, and the NAC has committed to increase communication with the district AIDS Committees, so they can provide the necessary support.

Toledo Maya Women's Council (TMWC)

The TMWC is made of 35 member groups, most of which are Mayan women's groups. They improve the lives of Mayan women through relevant education, via trainings to increase their communication skills, leadership, health education, conflict resolution and economic status. They increase women's financial means by helping improve existing non-functional projects, or helping set up new projects. The topic of HIV/AIDS has been arising with increasing frequency, particularly linked with domestic violence and gender equity, so they are discussing it more in their education work. They have been working alongside the Women's Department to hold workshops on topics including HIV/AIDS, condom demonstrations, decision-making and negotiation skills.

The Red Cross

The Red Cross teaches courses in first aid and CPR in town and in the villages, which include a few hours on HIV/AIDS and its prevention.

New links

WIN Belize (based in Belize City) plans to soon set up a branch in Toledo, with the aim of empowering women by talking with them about issues such as HIV/AIDS and domestic violence. Also, the Ministry of Health (MoH) plans to set up an opportunity for the three Toledo groups providing health care CNAs, Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) and MoH staff to work together more.

Cayo AIDS Committee

The Cayo AIDS Committee in San Ignacio, operating from the Women's Department, provides outreach and education in the community. They also refer PLWHA to relevant support organizations in the community, as well as to the National AIDS Commission's Living With Hope program.

HECOPAB and VCT Center

HECOPAB provides health education, particularly in schools, and assistance for PLWHA. The VCT Center is the only place in Orange Walk that offers free HIV testing and counseling. Follow-up counseling is available from three psychiatric nurses, and medical care is handled by a doctor in the hospital. As well as providing ARVs, in the later stages of AIDS, PLWHA can have an appointment with the doctor and the person can be hospitalized if that is needed, all for free. HECOPAB runs mobile clinics for the rural areas, and CNAs educate about HIV/AIDS in the villages.

Belize Family Life Association

The BFLA is on the same site as the VCT Center, so it does not offer HIV testing or counseling. Their HIV/AIDS work focuses instead on education and outreach. This includes poster distribution and radio ads. In July they held a one-week session on youth empowerment, which included teaching 65 students about STIs.

AIDS Committee

The committee has been fairly inactive over the last half year, due to their members lacking time. Their action plan focuses on HIV/AIDS education for schools and farmers, and a home management program (teaching families topics such as homecare and how to handle AIDS cases). They plan to have talk shows and radio adverts, to train consultants in counseling, including home-based care, and to train volunteers in HIV/AIDS. Also in their action plan is a 'Know Your Status' campaign. Most of this was planned for the past year, but most is yet to happen. For World AIDS Day, they plan to have a parade, involving school and youth groups, and a march and candle-light vigil the night before.

Human Services Department

The Global Fund has donated money to the Women's Department for teaching safer sex and HIV/AIDS prevention. COMPAR (the community and parenting office) teaches HIV/AIDS prevention and conducts bar outreach with commercial sex workers. The Human Services Office also provides support to PLWHA.



Highlights from Corozal District

HIV Testing

The hospital is the only location in Corozal that does free HIV testing, counseling, CD4 tests, and follow-up. There is no BFLA branch in Corozal, so HECOPAB also advises on family planning. The Health Educator is active in HIV/AIDS education and outreach.

The hospital has a group of 15 volunteers trained by AAA. The volunteers underwent an eight-week course held every Saturday enabling them to be certified counselors in HIV/AIDS. The group, which consists of nurses, teachers, housewives and a student, meet at least monthly and more often if they have events to prepare for. The AAA has provided financial support for supplies of condoms and to help with the September float.

AIDS Committee

The AIDS Committee has been inactive since December, and a new chairperson is being sought.

Human Services Department

The COMPAR officer visits communities and schools to talk about topics such as social issues affecting the community, including HIV/AIDS. School children are asked to pass the information on to their relatives.

The Red Cross

Most of the Red Cross HIV/AIDS work is prevention-focused and educational, involving visits to schools. They do not currently have leaflets or other information to give out, but would like to obtain them.

The Red Cross includes HIV/AIDS in all their speeches and training. Educational presentations begin at the primary level and continue upwards. Training is also provided to tourist guides, as well as to teachers. It has become a must for all teachers as part of their license to get first aid training, so the Red Cross use this as an opportunity to include HIV/AIDS.

Target High Risk Groups

Continued from Page 3

Some of the reasons that HIV/AIDS has been spreading so fast in Latin America are:

- **Risky behaviors**, such as unprotected sex, needle sharing, multiple partners, early start of sexual relations, migration, and mobility.
- **Political and economic instability**, which can limit the availability of national resources and weaken or interrupt services, threatening the response to HIV.
- **Stigma and discrimination**, which can cause a lack of social response, increasing the spread of the epidemic.
- **Lack of implementation capacity**, which can undermine the effectiveness of programs designed to combat HIV/AIDS or provide treatment for people with AIDS.

HIV infection in the region tends to be highly concentrated among certain high-risk, often socially marginalized populations, such as men who have sex with men, commercial sex workers (with infection rates of 12% to 15% in Guatemala and Honduras) prisoners, and street children. In most of South America, infections are caused by unprotected sex between men (with infection rates as high as 24% in certain Andean countries) and, to a lesser degree, use of contaminated drug-injecting equipment. Injection drug use plays less of a role in the epidemic in Central America which is more similar to the Caribbean than to South America in that unprotected sex is one of the largest sources of new infections.

As a general response to HIV/AIDS, research by the World Bank indicates that in Central America the minimum prevention package should include free condom distribution to high-risk groups, condom social marketing, information, education and communication for high-risk groups, counseling, and access to rapid testing. In Latin America, most patients receive at least an essential package of care services, and around three quarters of people needing antiretroviral treatment are receiving it for free. There is, however, great variation between countries, so further work is needed, both to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and to provide support to those who are living with the virus.

Sources: 'Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic', UNAIDS (2006); HIV Impact website; World Bank website

Universal Access Needed

Continued from Page 3

Dr Anders Nordström, Acting Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), spoke at the closing session of the conference. His message was that 'money, medicines and a motivated, skilled workforce' are key to delivering universal access to HIV care, treatment, and prevention.

Dr Nordström reminded delegates that even though the funds available globally for HIV/AIDS are growing, so are the needs. The Global Fund needs to be fully funded to be able to provide the drugs to those who need them. Even though worldwide HIV/AIDS resources have increased to over US\$ 8 billion a year, this is still far short of the estimated US\$15 billion needed by low- and middle-income countries this year alone.

Latin America Figures

1,600,000	Persons aged 15 -49 with HIV/AIDS, 2003
32,000	Children with HIV/AIDS in 2003
200,000	New HIV infections in 2005
0.5%	Adult HIV prevalence in 2005
59,000	AIDS deaths in 2005

Source: UNAIDS

There has been mixed progress with the medicine situation, and Dr Nordström emphasized a need to ensure that treatments are affordable as well as a need for 'growing momentum for innovation, research,

and addressing intellectual property issues to ensure maximum access to new products that save lives.'

The doctor's final main point was that 'universal access must include access to a skilled and motivated health worker. No improvement in financing or medical products can make a lasting difference in people's lives until the crisis in the health workforce is solved.'

Dr Nordström told delegates that along with treatment, care, and support, renewed attention must be paid to the prevention of HIV: 'It is not a case of doing one or the other'. Another recommendation was that universal access be made possible through a strong gender perspective so that men and women have equal opportunities. He finished by asking for 'a borderless society for health. One that embraces all who can make a difference, from political leaders, scientists, health workers to young people, persons living with HIV, the poor, sex workers, injection drug users, people in prisons.'

Sources: WHO Toronto Report; The Kaiser Family Site; www.thebody.com

Have Your Say

In future issues of *AIDS Link* this will be a space for you to have your views shared with people interested in HIV/AIDS across the nation. Write to us! If you would like to respond to any of the news articles or discussions you have read here or if there is anything else that you think should be said, this is your chance. Write to *AIDS Link*, Cornerstone Foundation, P.O. Box 242, San Ignacio, Cayo District, or to AIDSLink@hotmail.com.

Resources Required and On Offer

A version of the resource list compiled by the Peace Corps Training for Trainers workshop will be included as a supplement in the next issue, and from then onwards, a space will be kept here for any resources that come up over time as being needed or newly made available. The hope is that organizations who have the motivation to help with the HIV/AIDS situation and who have made plans on what they would like to do will no longer be held back by a lack of resources, because there is a huge amount out there once you know where to look.

Coming Events

The 2nd Annual Conference for the Protection and Care of Orphans and Children Made Vulnerable by HIV/AIDS will be held in Belize City on 15th November. For more information, please contact the Cornerstone Foundation at 824-2373.

World AIDS Day is on 1st December, and on this day, as well as during the week leading up to it, each district is planning a range of events, including marches, torch runs, candle-light vigils, music concerts, information distribution and more.

The AIDS Link Forum is a free electronic discussion group that will explore new ideas, listen to or share opinions on controversial issues, receive updates on international news, and more. News items and discussion topics will be emailed to each group member periodically. Responses are to be sent to all members in the group, keeping everyone in the discussion. To be a member of the email discussion group, send an email stating "Send me the *AIDS Link Forum*" to AIDSLink@hotmail.com.

A True Life Story

Continued from Page 1

a different way. I'm a private person, so I haven't been telling other people that I'm HIV positive.

I've been healthy so far, but I still go to the VCT Center every month to have a check-up and to get antiretrovirals. When I'm there they talk to me about things like how to stay healthy, and why I need to have a healthy diet, and eat lots of fruit and vegetables. I try to follow their advice, but I still like to eat lots of fried food.

I'm sometimes bothered by fears about confidentiality, but I haven't had any problems with this at all. Because I'm still healthy I can work and keep going with the everyday things in life. It helps me if I can put HIV at the back of my mind and blank it out. I go to work, I pray, when I come home I play with my dog and watch TV. Basically, I keep myself occupied.

My focus is my daughter, and she keeps me going. In the future, when I start to get ill, I want to be able to make sure she gets through her education. I think there should be more support available for people with AIDS who are too ill to help themselves.

Becoming HIV positive has changed me a whole lot. It stopped me going back to my old way of life. Now I'm careful to make sure that people around me are protected and that my daughter knows and understands enough to avoid making the same mistakes.

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AIDS Link

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