



The Voice – Newsletter

20 Years of Education, Care and Advocacy

March/April 2008

~Welcome to the March/April 2008 Issue of The Voice~

We are not sure what would HIV and AIDS education, care and advocacy be like in Singapore without Action for AIDS (AfA)? Would there be another organization? Would the landscape be different? We cannot tell for sure but we do know that the hard work AfA has done so far is by no means minuscule - kudos to the founding members of AfA.

Turning 20 is indeed a big deal in the fight against HIV and AIDS in Singapore. All the invaluable experience AfA has amassed - the HIV Anonymous Test Site, the Programmes, the Support Groups, the Medical Subsidies, the Candlelight Memorial and the Singapore AIDS Conference and amongst others – the wonderful work shall continue and lead us into the next 20 years.

Our hope along with many others – affected, infected and those working in the same cause – remains the same. The hope that in the next 20 years, life will become easier and better for those in the same cause where stigma and discrimination will vanish, more people are going for test and that cases are detected earlier, hoping that behavior will alter and condom use will be commonplace.

We also hope that there will be greater understanding and willingness in terms of partnership with different stakeholders, volunteers and not forgetting the biggest hope - the ultimate hope of finding a cure or possibly vaccines against HIV. Meanwhile, as we inch closer to the 21st year, AfA hopes to continually provide better education, care and advocacy in and for Singapore. Watch out for an exciting year in 2008 – with 6th Singapore AIDS Conference and World AIDS Day Celebrations.

From Staff and Management of Action for AIDS, Singapore

New faces with AfA

Action for AIDS is proud to have the following new staff in the office:

- 1) Daniel Tung – Programme Director for MSM and HEW
- 2) Paul Toh – Director, Fund raising & Care
- 3) Edwin See – Programme Coordinator

Although Paul Toh is not new in AfA, he is taking on this new portfolio to ensure that People Living with HIV and AIDS can find solace with him managing all the support groups and patients' welfare and medical subsidies. Edwin See on the other hand will bring to us his outgoing personality as a previous scuba diver in organizing outreach activities for heterosexual males and special projects as Programme Coordinator – he will only start work in April. For now, let's hear what Daniel Tung has to say on his new role:

Dear Volunteers and friends of AfA,

I am glad to be given this opportunity to join AfA full time to manage the MSM outreach programmes. AfA has done a lot for the MSM community over the years and I hope to be able to bring our educational and outreach efforts to a greater height. I am thankful for the volunteers who have been around to always give their unfaltering support, and I hope that you will continue to support AfA and to create greater awareness amongst the community.

The challenging portfolio HIV Education Workplace (HEW) programme was also entrusted to me. I hope to be able to transfer the knowledge and skills from my previous workplace here. With Paul, I believe we will be able to develop more interesting programmes for workplaces. And of course, if you want someone to talk about HIV at your workplace, feel free to contact me. We will be more than happy to be of service.

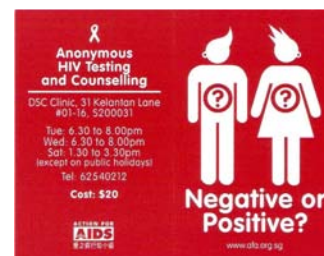
Daniel Tung
Programme Director

Daniel Tung is reachable at Daniel.tung@afa.org.sg

Anonymous HIV Testing 2007 at AfA

2007 is another record year for the Anonymous HIV Testing Centre for AfA. The number of clients tested saw a record of 6,903, another double digit growth of 14% on 2006's attendance.

We are also delighted to know that more than 30% of the clients that walk-in to our clinic are doing their first test at our clinic and that is a sign that there is strong public confidence in AfA and the growing understanding on the need of early testing. The number of positive cases detected at our clinic was 125 in 2007. AfA anonymous HIV testing and Counselling centre is opened on:



31 Kelantan Lane #01-16, Singapore 200031

Tuesday & Wednesday

6:30pm to 8:00pm

Saturday

1:30pm to 3:30pm

For more information on the clinic, operations and testing services please feel free to call 62540212 or visit our website <http://www.afa.org.sg>

Action for AIDS, Website is Top 10!



www.afa.org.sg is a Hitwise Top 10 Award winner for the quarter ending ending October - December 2007. During this period, www.afa.org.sg ranked **No. 10** by visits among all Singapore websites in the Hitwise Health and Medical - Organisations industry. The popularity of the Internet was also reflected in our recent survey at our Anonymous Testing Clinic that about 60% of the visitors found out about the test site through the Internet.

Condom Vending Machines



Do you sometimes find buying condoms embarrassing? Do you wish that when you purchase that pack of condom, the cashier at the till will not have some funny thoughts about you? Well, the solution is finally here. This the only Condom Vending Machine (CVM) Project in Singapore which is not for profit and installed with you in mind.

Gone were the days condom use is for contraception. Many even fail to accept that such noble invention exists to help in the prevention of HIV when condom is used correctly and consistently. In order to normalize condoms use, change the perception of condoms and to refute the excuse that condom is not available, our goal is to make condoms accessible to general public. Remember, the possession of condoms does not equate to vice but a means of protecting you, yes both guys and gals alike. If you think you want to help us further this cause to normalize condom use in Singapore, please feel free to let us know. We will be glad to arrange the condom vending machines to be installed on your premises free-of-charge. Please contact lionel.lee@afa.org.sg or 62540212 for details. Or visit our website for more information.

Our CVMs are currently available in the following good locations:

1. Harbour Front Cruise Centre Departure Hall Male Toilets
2. Tanah Merah Cruise Centre Departure Hall Male Toilets
3. Phuture (Zouk)
4. Velvet Underground
5. Male Health Centers

Employment Opportunities

Designation: Programme Coordinator (men who have sex with men) Part-time Contract

Requirements:

- Minimum Post-Secondary Education
- Keen interests in MSM (men who have sex with men) issues and HIV/AIDS
- Open-mindedness, Integrity & respect for diversity is necessary for this role
- Articulate and confident
- Proactive, possess a strong sense of responsibility & great efficiency
- Can do attitude, resilient, hardworking and fully hands-on
- Excellent command of English and good working knowledge of a local second language will be an asset
- Good in Microsoft Office especially Excel and PowerPoint

Job Description:

Reporting to the Programme Director, the person is expected to:

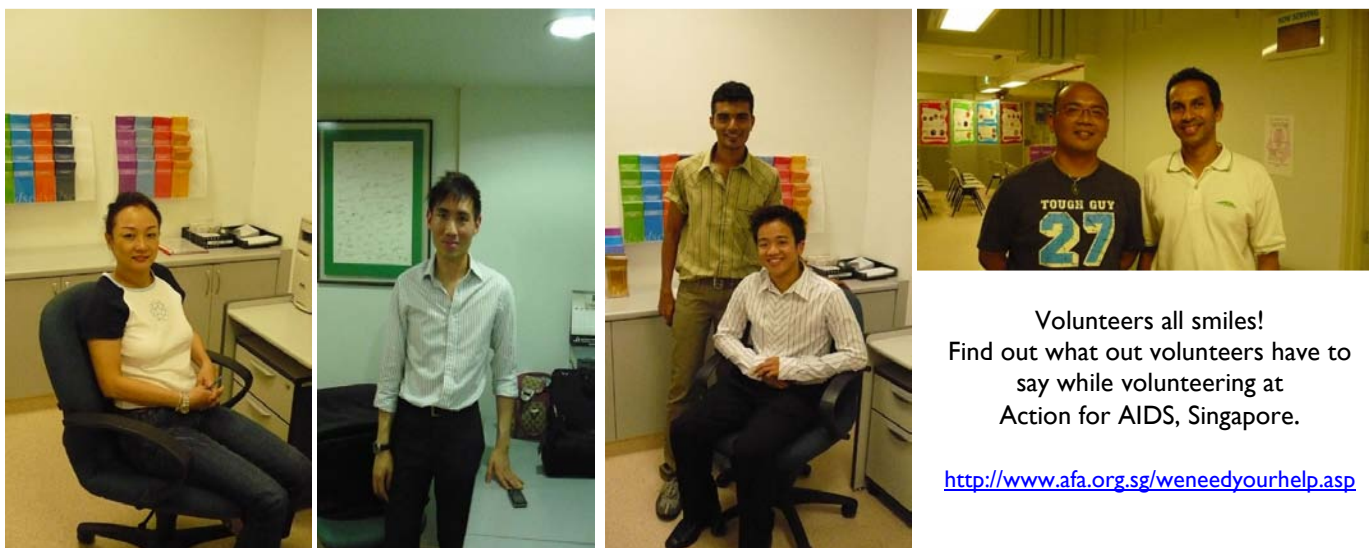
- Support the Programme Director on the MSM Programme
- Operationalised planned outreach activities
- In-charge of collating data from various research initiatives
- Coordinating the organization's telephone helpline
- Any other administrative and logistical duties as and when required to fulfill the objectives of the organization

What to do next:

If you think the role suits you, you are invited to write in to us with a full-page COVER LETTER, stating your motivation for applying along with your CV. Please also indicate your salary expectation including your last drawn salary. Send your application to:

Daniel.tung@afa.org.sg

The Voices of Volunteers



Volunteers all smiles!
Find out what our volunteers have to say while volunteering at Action for AIDS, Singapore.

<http://www.afa.org.sg/weneedyourhelp.asp>

Local News

HIV Ignorance Is No Defense in Singapore Plan to Curb Risky Sex

By Simeon Bennett

Health Reporter, Bloomberg News, Singapore

Reproduced with permission from Bloomberg

Feb. 12 (Bloomberg) -- Every weekend, men from Singapore take a one-hour ferry ride to Indonesia's Batam Island for cheap golf,



27-year-old sex worker from Jakarta identified as "Halimah" speaks with a man at a brothel on Batam Island, Indonesia, Jan. 15, 2008. Photographer: Jonathan Drake/Bloomberg News

beer and sex.

About S\$70 (\$49) hires an island prostitute for the day, compared to just an hour with a Singapore hooker. The trade has contributed to a doubling of Singapore's HIV infection rate in the past 10 years, the government says.

The city-state proposes to curb infections by making it a crime for those who engage in such unsafe practices, and thus have "reason to believe" they may be HIV-positive, to have sex without informing their partners of the risks. United Nations groups and AIDS activists say that would violate human rights and increase infection rates by encouraging anonymous sex.

"Stigma and discrimination are major drivers of the HIV epidemic," Dr. Roy Chan, president of the Singapore advocacy group Action for AIDS, said in written comments on the legislation, which may be considered by parliament this month. "The net effect will be poorer control of HIV infection."

The government disagrees, saying the bill would encourage people to get tested and avoid risky behavior such as having unprotected gay sex or frequenting prostitutes. Violators may be prosecuted even if they don't test positive for HIV.

"We're trying to find a way essentially to ask them to be responsible for their own actions," said Koh Peng Keng, the Health Ministry's senior director of operations. "There is a greater impetus to get more people to come forward for testing."

No 'Witch Hunt'

Offenders would face as much as 10 years in prison and a S\$50,000 fine. Penalties for those who know they're HIV-positive and don't inform their partners, already a crime under legislation that took effect in 1992, would be increased to the same level. No one has been prosecuted under the existing law.

Enforcement would depend on an aggrieved partner filing a complaint and prosecutors proving that a defendant had a history of high-risk sexual behavior.

"It's never the intention to go on a witch hunt," Koh said. "It's going to help in public education."

The government also plans to double spending on AIDS prevention programs to S\$8 million annually for the next three years, he said.

Zack, a self-employed electrical engineer who suspects he contracted HIV from a prostitute, isn't convinced of the government's motives, especially considering that gay sex is illegal in Singapore.

"People are going to hide," said Zack, 36, who spoke on condition his real name not be used for fear of losing his business.

Infected for Years

Singapore's HIV infection rate has doubled in the past 10 years. About 1 in 10,000 people were newly infected in 2006, compared with fewer than 0.5 in 1996, according to government statistics. More than half of those diagnosed in 2006 also had AIDS, indicating they'd been infected for years without knowing it, Koh said.

In total, about 7 of every 10,000 people in Singapore have HIV, the government says.

UNAIDS estimates the rate may be as high as 30 once undiagnosed cases are included. That's higher than estimated infection rates in other developed Asian nations such as Japan and South Korea. Singapore's rate is lower than in neighboring nations, including Malaysia and Thailand.

The UN agency calculated its figure from government data for high-risk groups -- including prostitutes and their customers, gay and bisexual men, and intravenous drug users -- and statistics provided by HIV and pregnancy clinics.

UN Opposition

Seema Paul, chief policy coordinator for Geneva-based UNAIDS, said the Singapore bill would force people to get HIV tests, putting them at risk of discrimination and violence if others learned they were HIV-positive.

"We have consistently advocated that HIV testing should be voluntary," she said in an e-mail.

Stuart Koe, chief executive officer of media company Fridae Ltd., said those who contract HIV won't disclose the names of their partners to doctors for fear of being prosecuted, and that will contribute to spreading the disease.

"There'll be a lot of unexpected negative effects," said Koe, who works with AIDS support groups in Singapore and whose company runs a gay Web site.

The groups primarily responsible for spreading HIV in Singapore are men who visit prostitutes, and gay and bisexual men, the government says.

Refusing Condoms

In Batam, brothels occupy storefronts scattered among homes, shops and bars like the PP Banana Laptop Lounge. Pimps ply their trade wherever foreigners are found.

The AIDS rate in the province including Batam is the third- highest in Indonesia after Papua and Jakarta, the national AIDS commission said on its Web site.

Ayu, a 28-year-old prostitute, said most of her clients are married Singaporean men and not all practice safe sex.

"Sometimes the customer does not want a condom," she said, her purple eye shadow sparkling under neon lights. "I cannot force."

Like many Indonesians, Ayu uses only one name.

Koh said the government works with activist groups to educate men before they get on the Batam ferry. Those efforts include handing out condoms and HIV prevention information.

"There's this huge reservoir of people who are HIV-positive and may not know," he said. "Once someone knows they're positive, typically they change behavior."

Many S'poreans still ignorant about Aids By Amy Tan , Straits Times, Feb 1 2008

MANY Singaporeans are still ignorant about how HIV and Aids are spread, a survey has shown.

The survey, which polled 705 people, was conducted by World Vision in conjunction with its One Life Experience (OLE) exhibition on World Aids Day last December.

About a third of the respondents believed that HIV and Aids could be transmitted through a mosquito bite or by kissing, which is a myth.

Over more than half of them were also unaware that the deadly disease can be spread through breastfeeding from a mother to child.

Yet when it came to protecting themselves from catching the viruses, more than 80 per cent of the respondents knew that they could do this by using a condom during sex or having an uninfected sex partner.

As part of the OLE exhibition, World Vision has teamed up with the Health Promotion Board to provide free anonymous HIV screening to the public.

However, one out of every 11 respondents indicated that they would not be willing or were unsure if they would go for a HIV or Aids testing even if they knew that they would be at risk of HIV or Aids.

Half of the respondents also said that they would be uncomfortable around someone with HIV or Aids. Most of the respondents also knew that they cannot contract the viruses by sharing their food with someone who has HIV or Aids but more than 50 per cent of the group would be hesitant to share a meal.

To educate Singaporeans on Aids, the OLE allows visitors to experience the fear and stigmatisation that people living with Aids face daily.

The OLE is ongoing at the Singapore Management University till Feb 3.

Singaporeans still baffled by basic HIV facts: Survey By Amy Tan

DESPITE years of public awareness campaigns, many Singaporeans still do not know the basics about HIV and Aids, according to a study released last week.

The survey, conducted by international development organisation World Vision, found one-third of respondents mistakenly believed the virus can be spread through mosquito bites and kissing.

More than half of the 705 respondents were unaware that HIV can be spread through breastfeeding.

'The results show there is a need to sensitise people to HIV/Aids before it becomes a silent pandemic,' said Ms Elaine Tan, executive director of World Vision's branch here.

The survey revealed a mistrust of those with HIV and Aids. Half of the respondents said they would be uncomfortable around someone with the disease.

While most knew the virus cannot be spread by sharing food, more than half said they would hesitate to have a meal with someone who was HIV-positive.

One out of 11 said they would shy away from taking an HIV/Aids test, even if they knew they might have the disease.

World Vision officials were encouraged by some of the findings, however.

More than 80 per cent of respondents knew they could prevent HIV transmission by using a condom.

World Vision began the survey on Dec 1, which is World Aids Day.

The organisation's One Life Experience exhibition, which features real life stories of Aids sufferers, is at Singapore Management University until tomorrow.

Regional News

HIV-positive Japan MP says getting married

March 4, 2008

TOKYO - A JAPANESE member of parliament who is one of the country's most prominent people living with HIV said on Tuesday that he has married.

Ryuhei Kawada, 32, said he married Mika Tsutsumi, a journalist and anchorwoman.

'I never thought that I would live long,' Mr Kawada said next to his wife at a press conference. 'But for the first time in my life, I've wanted to live long, even a day longer than Mika.'

Mr Kawada, a haemophiliac who was infected with HIV through tainted blood, was among plaintiffs who sued the government in 1989 for failing to take action to prevent tainted blood products from being distributed.

Infected with the virus when he was little, Mr Kawada turned into an icon of the court battles because at age 19 he became the first victim to come forward with his real name.

The tainted blood infected 1,430 people with HIV between the late 1970s and 1986, of whom more than 500 have died.

Mr Kawada won a seat in parliament in last year's upper house elections. He ran as an independent, vowing to use his role as a lawmaker to 'fight irresponsible bureaucracy.'

Ms Tsutsumi formerly studied and worked in New York, where she became known for her writing about the Sept 11 terrorist attacks and about poverty in the United States.

An estimated 33.2 million people, in a range from 30.6 to 36.1 million, are living with AIDS or the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) that causes it, the specialised UN agency UNAids says. -- AFP

Thailand Makes Effort to Protect Employees With HIV/AIDS, TB

MedIndia Net 04/03/2008

Several Thai government agencies are working to strengthen a project aimed at protecting workers living with tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS by encouraging the private sector to provide adequate care for employees, the Thai News Service reports.

Thailand's Department of Labor Protection and Welfare, the Social Security Office, the Department of Communicable Disease and the AIDS-Response Standard Organization, or ASO, last week signed an agreement pledging to continue the ASO-Thailand Project.

Labor Minister Uraiwan Thienthong at the project signing ceremony said that providing care to employees will benefit businesses.

She added that workers who have HIV/AIDS or TB should not be forced to resign because both diseases can be treated. Businesses that elect to join the ASO-Thailand project and pass the examination will receive ASO-Thailand certificates, Uraiwan said.

Source-Kaiser Family Foundation

HIV infections to soar by 75 per cent

The Australian 03/03/2008

By Adam Cresswell

HIV infection rates are forecast to soar by nearly 75 per cent in parts of Australia over the next seven years, fuelled by a rise in unsafe sex between men.

An analysis of infection rates in the eastern states has shown that if trends continue, infections will rise by 73.5 per cent in Victoria, and by almost 20 per cent in Queensland, by 2015.

However, in NSW – originally the state worst affected by the HIV epidemic – the number of new cases is predicted to fall over the next seven years.

The report, released by the University of NSW, studied the 44 per cent increase in the number of new annual HIV cases nationally in men who have sex with men from 1999 to 2006.

The biggest increase was in Victoria, which by 2006 had seen its annual number of new infections among gay men rise by 96 per cent from the 102 recorded in 1999. In Queensland, the number increased by 68 per cent from 85 in 1999, and in NSW, the 313 new infections reported in 1999 rose by just 7.3 per cent.

Condom use is known to dramatically cut the risk of HIV transmission. But even though researchers have previously found that condom use has been falling, David Wilson, the lead author of the report, said the reduction in condom use could account for only part of the increase in infections.

"The only way we could account for the increases that were observed is with the coupling of both the direct effects of the lack of

protection due to decreased condom use, with the increase in other sexually transmitted infections also caused by decreased condom use," he said.

Having another sexually transmitted infection, such as gonorrhoea or syphilis, increases the risk of both acquiring HIV and passing the virus to an uninfected partner.

Dr Wilson – the head of the infectious diseases modelling unit at the National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research at the UNSW – said the modelling showed that ultimately, lower condom use was driving rising HIV infection rates.

"That's why we want this (condom use) to be the aim of public health campaigns in future," he said.

Jonathan Anderson, president of the Australasian Society for HIV Medicine, said the increases in infection rates already seen in Victoria were bad enough, and "we would be very concerned to see rates like this (being forecast)".

"It would represent a failure of current approaches to the prevention of HIV infections," he said.

"It would mean we need to redouble our efforts to find new ways to engage with people about the behaviours that might put them at risk of HIV infections."

Dr Anderson said the Victorian Government was about to launch a new strategy in an attempt to rein in the recent rises seen in the state.

New HIV cases record high in Hong Kong

Xinhua News, China 26/02/2008

HONG KONG, Feb. 26 (Xinhua) -- A total of 414 new cases of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) were confirmed in Hong Kong in 2007, which was the highest number ever before, Hong Kong Center for Health Protection said on Tuesday.

The figure was 11 percent higher than 2006, the center said.

Center for Health Protection Consultant Wong Ka-hing said that sexual transmission was still the major mode of HIV spread in Hong Kong.

Of the new cases, 103 acquired the infection via heterosexual exposure, 168 via homosexual or bisexual contact, 43 through injection drug use, two through blood or blood-product infusion and one through perinatal transmission.

Last year's fourth quarter saw 87 people test positive for HIV, bringing Hong Kong's cumulative total of reported HIV infections to 3,612 since 1984. Of the 74 men and 13 women, 17 acquired the infection via heterosexual contact, 34 via homosexual or bisexual contact, eight via drug injection and one through blood or blood-product infusion, Wong said.

Seventeen new cases of acquired immune deficiency syndrome were reported in last quarter, bringing to 934 the total number of confirmed AIDS cases reported since 1985. Of the 17 new cases, 47 percent were related to heterosexual contact, said Wong.

Formed in 1988, Action for AIDS (Afa) is a voluntary community based organization and a registered charity. Our objectives are to provide support and assistance to persons living with HIV and AIDS (PWAs); to increase awareness, education and understanding of AIDS and HIV infection; to combat discrimination and stigmatisation of (PWAs) and their loved ones; and to encourage AIDS-related research activities in Singapore. REGISTERED: IRAS – Charities Act (Cap 37) – No. 1050 ROS 257/88 MOH IPC HEF0006/G

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