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from where a leaf arises from a stem

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Listen, Learn, and Live

World AIDS Campaign 1999

New generation as the target

The theme of the World AIDS Campaign 1999 is "LISTEN, LEARN, LIVE! World AIDS Campaign with Children and Young People".

This is the third consecutive year " Youth and Children " continue to be the focus of World AIDS Campaign. The theme for 1997 is " Children Living in a World with AIDS " and 1998 " Force for Change, World AIDS Campaign with the Young People " .

Attention is placed on communication. This year we are reminded to *LISTEN to the young, especially their concerns and fears, to LEARN from each other, about respect, participation, support, and protection from HIV infection and stigma, and to LIVE in a world with fewer HIV and free from discrimination.*

Children and youth are vulnerable

UNAIDS explicitly calls for concern on children and young people. It is an outcry to protect the vulnerable ones. Parents should protect their children from infection via mother-to-child transmission. For children moving into adolescence, they should also be provided the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills to protect themselves from transmission because of unprotected sex or at risk drug taking behaviours.

Most important, targeting our actions to the new generations should contribute to building a world with love, care, and equality.

Worldwide, a number of observations show that the youth and children at risk of consequences of unprotected sex and drug use. Sex can start early. And early sex is generally unprotected sex, with subsequent unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV. In some, early sex is a result of violence, forced sex, sex abuse, and sexual exploitation. Drug use could cause HIV transmission through sharing of equipments. And it is among the various socio-economic factors, including unemployment, slum housing, family fragility and violence that contribute to unprotected sex.

Communication is the key

While a comprehensive response is essential to reduce vulnerability, discourage risk behaviours, and build a healthy world with equality, communication is the key. *Communication and caring between adults and children create bonds that could impact on the health of the young.* On a broad scale, communication can spark people's courage in overcoming unfavourable traditions, attitudes or even peer group pressures. It creates awareness of HIV/AIDS, get across the facts, and build survival skills. Most important of all, communication connects people – between parents and children, between the vulnerable ones and those with power to change, between the infected and uninfected. It also breaks down barriers.

Establishing trusting relationship with the young and children should not be limited to one or few groups. Communication should take place in schools, at home, workplace, social work settings, health care facilities, and religious communities. Communication within children and the young on healthy lives should also be encouraged.

Seven steps for moving forward

UNAIDS proposes seven steps to move ahead :

1. Establish or review national policies to reduce the vulnerability of young people to HIV/AIDS and ensure that their rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled.
2. Promote young people's genuine participation in the community to contribute to local and national responses to HIV/AIDS.
3. Support peer and youth groups in the community to contribute to local and national responses to HIV/AIDS.
4. Mobilize parents, policy-makers, media, and religious organisations to influence public opinions and policies with regard to HIV/AIDS and young people.
5. Improve the quality and coverage of school programmes that include HIV/AIDS and related issues.
6. Expand access to youth-friendly health services including HIV/STD prevention, testing and counseling, care and support services.
7. Ensure care and support of orphans and young people living with HIV/AIDS.

The above is abstracted and adapted from UNAIDS briefing document issued on Feb 26, 99. The original papers could be obtained at Red Ribbon Centre or UNAIDS websites.

Red Ribbon Centre

2/F, Wang Tau Hom JCC, 200, Junction Road East, Kowloon, Hong Kong.

Tel: 2304 6268 Fax: 23380534 Email: rrcorr@health.gov.hk

Website: <http://www.info.gov.hk/aids>

UNAIDS website: <http://www.unaids.org/highband/press/wac99e.html>