



Express Yourself Essay Competition Form 1-5 Winner:

What can you do to help stop the spread of HIV/AIDS in St. Vincent & the Grenadines?

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HIV/AIDS better known as Human Immunity Deficiency Virus is the main cause of disease known as Acquired Immunity Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). This disease is transmitted through direct contact with blood or bodily fluids of someone who is infected with the virus. The main ways of the spread of HIV/AIDS are by having unprotected sex with infected persons and from sharing needles by drug addicts. A pregnant woman with the virus can also pass it on to her child. This disease from the time of its discovery in 1981 has become one of the worst

pandemic in the world. In relation to the Caribbean the first known case was in 1982. Since then, the number of people with the virus has increased rapidly. At first it was felt that the disease was confined to the homosexual community. Now it is mainly spread during sex between heterosexuals.

This disease is particularly worrying to the Health Planners and Health Practitioners as current information shows that the disease affects persons mainly between the age of sixteen to fifty-five. The implications of this are with so many deaths occurring, some of the most productive elements of our society and human resources will be lost forever. This disease is no respecter of persons and affects all persons irrespective of their socio-economic status. It can also cause severe economic hardship in the treatment of persons suffering with HIV/AIDS. The drugs for the treatment of HIV/AIDS are very costly for poor countries like ours, this is really a severe strain on the National Budget. To compound this, there is the social stigma and isolation of persons who are known to have the virus. This makes them uncomfortable to live even in their own homes, much less in the society at large. The hard cold facts about this disease are that even though one may not have the virus, when some relative or family member is infected the family support is needed. This is where I come in. As a young person in SVG I feel I am duty-bound to do something to help stop the spread of this horrific disease. From my limited knowledge this disease is a silent killer and one cannot look at another and know that he/she has HIV/AIDS, because one can look quite healthy or normal but carries the virus which can infect others. We are a poor country and the antiretroviral medicine needed for just basic

treatment is quite costly. My approach therefore is one of educating persons in my community and SVG at large using various methods.

First of all I will become a volunteer at the Local House of Hope so that I can obtain firsthand information about persons living with HIV/AIDS. I will seek to educate myself on all aspects of the disease. I will also seek to obtain training in mass communication so that I would be effective in passing information to people of all walks of life. I will establish links with all stake holders, the health professionals, business persons, the mass media, as I would need the cooperation of all and sundry to educate the public about the scourge of this disease.

Having prepared myself, my first assignment would be the production of leaflets which would educate the public about safe sex and ways to reduce the risk of exposure to the HIV/AIDS. To organize Health Programmes on radio and television, one to one contact with persons wishing to learn about HIV/AIDS. I will also visit schools and other institutions to carry the message of hope.

Due to my age there will be some areas that I would not be able to tackle. To this end, I would seek assistance from professionals, guidance counselors, educators. My ultimate aim is to encourage my peers to change their attitude towards unprotected sex and general behavior.

In conclusion, I would say time for action, the most important thing of all is to do something, it costs nothing to care. Let's take HIV/AIDS seriously and make a real difference. You can't change the world, but today you can change someone's world somewhere, perhaps in SVG.