



Questions and Answers (Youth)

Q. Why do people focus upon youth?

A. Everyday 14,000 people around the world become newly infected with HIV, more than 50% of those new infections are occurring in youth. Because of this, youth require special attention when addressing the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Of those new infections in the youth, young girls are disproportionately being affected: 60% of new infections in youth are occurring in women and girls.

Q. Why are youth being infected at such high rates?

A. There is no simple answer for this, as there are many factors. One is that youth are first learning about their sexuality and exploring their bodies with others, they may or may not know the risks of HIV transmission. Second, poverty can drive young people to do things they might not otherwise do. Young girls want material goods or need to pay school fees and seek older men for achieving that goal, often trading sex for such things. Older men seek out young girls for the purpose of sex and in return offer money or material goods. In some places it is said that women "need three men: one for sex, one for show, and one for money." Gender abuse and inequality also relate to young girls becoming newly infected. Sexual violence against girls is higher than 65% in some countries. Additionally we can see the globalization of sex in our media, making many sexual partners seem and safe.

Q. All the organizations work with older people, what do we do?

A. Youth can be the group that changes the future. Studies show youth are more likely to change their behavior when compared to other groups if they learn about HIV/AIDS. Secondly, youth are great community mobilizers and can take responsibility for teaching their own community. For example, Working To Empower has created peer education teams, many composed only of youth, who are working to change their own community. Every week they hold community projects to raise awareness and change the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In one refugee camp our peer educators have been able to increase HIV testing by an average of 50% every month since Working To Empower held its training seminar there.

Q. If I am not part of WTE or any other organization, what do I do?

A. While Working To Empower was working in Benin, a young man attended the HIV/AIDS seminar but was not a peer educator. He decided he wanted to do something so he took the HIV/AIDS seminar summary (available online), printed 50 copies, got three friends and held a meeting at his school to teach his schoolmates about HIV/AIDS. This is only one example of someone taking the initiative, totally on his own, to change his community.