

SPOTLIGHT ON MISSION

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SIM encourages youth to Go Viral for AIDS

New campaign helps dispel myths surrounding HIV/AIDS

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Special to ChristianWeek

SCARBOROUGH, ON—A new initiative by a Scarborough-based mission organization is aiming to engage young people about HIV/AIDS and dispel some of the myths surrounding the disease by asking them to be quiet.

“Going Viral for AIDS” is a new campaign launched by Serving In Mission (SIM) Canada. Participants are asked to raise money from friends and family and then wear a campaign T-shirt and stay silent for one day—no talking, no texting, no e-mailing and no signing.

The participant can tag two more people during the day, who put on campaign T-shirts and go silent as well.

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HIV/AIDS infection rates are dropping, but still have a long way to go, says SIM Canada public engagement administrator Jacqueline Solomon.

Courtesy SIM

Spots

- Voice for AIDS started in 2008 as a partnership between SIM Canada and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). For every dollar SIM raises for its work against AIDS, CIDA matches it with \$3.
- December 1 is World AIDS Day, and SIM Canada is hoping people take the time to participate in Going Viral for AIDS around that day.
- People wanting to get involved can also take part through “Create-A-Campaign.” If they have an idea about how to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS, they can approach SIM Canada and if their project is approved, SIM Canada will support them in what they want to do.

Be a VOICE FOR AIDS

Join us now!

Get your youth or school group globally engaged to help prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, care for those affected and become a partner for a better future.

Visit us online for resources, information and opportunities to get involved today!

www.voiceforaids.ca

VOICE FOR AIDS

SIM
Serving In Mission

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At the end of the day, participants talk about what it was like to be silent. The exercise is meant to give participants an idea of what it's like to keep quiet about something, like people with HIV/AIDS, who are often unable to talk about their status because they risk rejection by their families, friends, employers and communities.

"AIDS has kind of slipped off the global radar in the past couple of years," says Jacqueline Solomon, SIM Canada's public engagement administrator. "But unfortunately the disease itself hasn't disappeared. So, we still have the same kinds of problems we had before."

First reported in June 1981, today there are currently 33.3 million people around the world living with HIV/AIDS—almost as many people as there are Canadian citizens. Of that number, 22.5 million live in sub-Saharan Africa, and 2.5 million of them are children.

"Even though infection rates are down, we still do have a long way to go," Solomon says. "There's still a lot of work to be done, and we can't successfully do that if we lose sight of why it's important to remember people who are living with HIV/AIDS and the way they're affected by the pandemic."

The Going Viral for AIDS web site, www.voiceforaids.ca, includes a campaign kit that instructs people who are interested in taking part on how they can solicit donations, publicize what they are doing and prepare for their day of silence. The kit includes a letter students can give to their school administrators to let them know what they are doing, and a press release they can send to local media.

While the campaign is aimed at young people, Solomon says it's not exclusive to them. Anybody who is passionate about fighting HIV/AIDS is welcome to participate.

Money raised by Going Viral for AIDS will be used to fund SIM Canada's HIV/AIDS-related work around the world.

Through prevention, treatment and care, SIM Canada is able to improve both the quality and quantity of life for many people affected by HIV/AIDS.

The organization helps prevent new infections, supports those who have been orphaned by the disease and provides ongoing care and financial opportunities for those who are HIV-positive.

"There's still a long way to go," Solomon says, "but there really is strong hope for people who are HIV positive and people who are affected by it, either through their family members or friends."



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