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Youth Aim To Save Generations Of People Through AIDS Health Program

By: Kayla Morrison, One80 Intern

"All it takes is one action, to make one dream a reality." This is the motto for an organization created by a group of youth dedicated to helping and educating youth about HIV and AIDS.

"It started off with a simple mandate, that we wanted to build a health care centre in a third world country, and that's still one of our long-term goals," said Shamin Mohamed Jr., founder of the Children's AIDS Health Program (CAIDSHP) and an 18-year-old University of Ottawa student.

Mohamed Jr. and a group of high school students based in Toronto created the CAIDSHP in 2005. It started from a single idea that Mohamed had, to create inspiration in the Toronto and GTA area to help solve the AIDS and HIV pandemic. Ever since, the organization has reached out to youth who are infected or affected by HIV and AIDS, and has also taken a step toward educating other youth on the issue nationally and internationally.

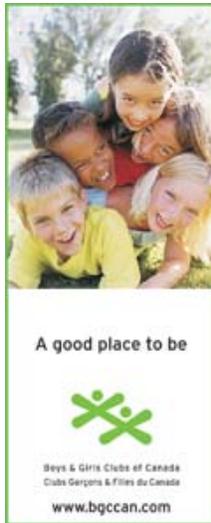
Last year, Mohamed Jr. and Vice President for National affairs of the CAIDSHP, Betty Chiu, travelled to South Africa to educate and run workshops for youth. "Thanks to us hosting the international mission to South Africa," said Mohamed Jr., "we added in the implement part about educating [the youth] about arts, sports, HIV and AIDS education, prevention, and leadership."

"Leadership... [so] they should start something that can affect others within their country," added Chiu, a 20-year-old University of Toronto student.

In June, three CAIDSHP volunteers and two youth from Canada that were chosen from an application process will travel to India for the second mission. They are going to help affected and infected youth, as well as educate others about safe sex and prevention. They're trying to break the myths of HIV and AIDS. "Realizing the Vision" is the slogan for the International Mission to India.

"We're just going [to India]," explained Melissa Shih, 21, vice president of international programs at the CAIDSHP, "to make a more sustainable change in people's lives. We're not just going there to make a momentary impact and give out a few condoms, or to just help kids that we see directly...we're trying to affect the community, affect generations by instilling these values within the children."

Another event that is approaching is the 24 Hour Wake. The event is a national fundraiser through which high school students, university students, and professionals stay awake for 24 hours to raise money for the CAIDSHP. This event can be organized by school groups, community groups, or by individuals. "The reason why we're staying up for 24 hours," said Chiu, "[is



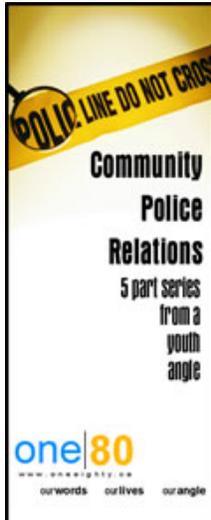
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because] it gives people an idea of what a weakened immune system feels like. When you stay up for such a long time, you're more susceptible to anything and everything."

The CAIDSHP is reaching out to all youth with a main message for activism. "If you're a youth," said Mohamed Jr., "and you're passionate, or if you want to be passionate about something like HIV and AIDS, get involved. Start a chapter or club at your high school or university. If you're in a workplace, you can definitely help us out with fundraising."

The CAIDSHP needs a lot of help raising funds for its \$20,000 mission, as well as the national programs. At least 92 per cent of all proceeds go directly to the charity's programs. The other 8 per cent is used for fundraising and administration.

"We can all help, it's important," said Matthew Robertson, an Aurora resident and current first-year University of Ottawa student. "The people abroad don't have anything to [help them] fight. So all the help that we can get them, all the medication, everything that we can help with we should do. Sex awareness is really important. We need to stop the spread of AIDS and hopefully help these people out."

"We run [this charity] from a youth perspective, for the youth," added Shih. "We [the youth] are the next generation, and we have a lot of energy and can make a change."

For more information on the CAIDSHP or its upcoming events visit the following Web sites:

www.letsstopaids.org

www.24wake.ca

www.india.LetsStopAIDS.org

Kayla Morrison is a One80 intern, and she will study journalism next year.

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