



CARINE SILTZ

Founder/Exec. Director,
African Advocates Against AIDS

AFRICAN ADVOCATES AGAINST AIDS (AAAA) was started by Carine Siltz. Her objective was to coordinate community outreach projects for prevention and education of HIV/AIDS within African communities in the United States of America. African Advocates coordinates community outreach projects for prevention and education of HIV/AIDS within African communities in the United States of America. Our goal is to create awareness and educate the African community about HIV/AIDS as well as help people access prevention and treatment services.

AM: Can you tell us about your organization African Advocates Against A.I.D.S. (AAAA)? How did you start it and what was the inspiration behind it?

Carine: Having lost both of my parents to HIV/AIDS at a young age in the Congo, I have been deeply affected by this disease. I chose to dedicate my life to fighting this disease in every way possible. With the help of others, I started African Advocates Against AIDS (AAAA) to bring people together to fight HIV/AIDS. (Originally, our organization was called African Teens Against AIDS. However, I soon saw the need to reach the adult population as well and so we later changed our name from "Teens" to "Advocates")

We recognized that although there were a large number of African immigrants living here in the USA, there was nothing specifically designed to reach this particular population. Meanwhile, HIV/AIDS continues to destroy our community and countries in Africa. A culturally appropriate approach to educate this specific population and to help them access services in the USA was needed that addressed the language and culture differences of African immigrants. Ultimately, when it comes to HIV/AIDS, it does not matter if you are black or white

or Hispanic and it does not matter what language you speak...what matters is that this disease is killing humans of all cultures and we need to join our hands and our efforts to combat this disease for a healthier community.

AM: What kind of activities does AAAA organize?

Carine: Through workshops, HIV101, training conferences, and seminars that are culturally appropriate and designed to reach each particular population, AAAA educates the community and raises awareness. We also refer people to community services such as HIV testing and counseling, and treatment and housing for those who are HIV positive.

AM: AIDS in African Communities: what are the facts?

Carine: Many Africans need to be educated about this disease. Unfortunately, some aspects of our culture enhance the spread of HIV/AIDS. For example, polygamy is common in many African countries, but it also increases the risk of transmission of HIV. There needs to be education to address this. Our women especially need to know about preventive measures they can take to avoid being infected.

• As another example, there is an African myth that says that you will be cured

of HIV/AIDS if you sleep with a virgin. Misinformation and ignorance expose our young girls (and virgins) to infection.

• Over 45 million Africans were infected by 2002 of which more than 30 million were still alive. A further 12 million children had already lost one or both of their parents. The effects over the last 15 years have been a catastrophe. Seven countries, all in southern Africa, now have prevalence rates higher than 20%: Botswana (38.8%), Lesotho (31%), Namibia (22.5%), South Africa (20.1%), Swaziland (33.4%), Zambia (21.5%) and Zimbabwe (33.7%).

• Uganda remains the only country to have subdued a major HIV/AIDS epidemic, with the adult HIV prevalence rate continuing to drop from 8.3% at the end of 1999 to 5% at the end of 2001. Huge challenges persist, however, such as taking care of the 880,000 Ugandan children who have been orphaned by AIDS. 60% of all adults infected are women.

AM: Do you think the current media (Especially TV and Magazine) plays a major role in the propagation of AIDS in the Black Community?

Carine: Yes, I believe the media has a lot to do with it...often the media promotes certain negative images of black women, through music videos or TV shows, that make girls and women think that it is ok to be called certain



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names or thought of in a demeaning way. This is not what women were created for. We women have a major role to play in this fight. We have so many positive qualities that we may be unaware of but which are useful in fighting back against this disease.

- As women, we bring life into this world and we need to create a positive legacy. We need to encourage mother/daughter communication in order to avoid early pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. I believe everything begins in the home and is reflected in our society. What you happens in your home, is the way your children are educated. Hopefully, they will one day be valuable citizens in our communities
- So my call is for women, as well as men, to make sure that we make time for our children to teach them and let them know about the risk factors for HIV/AIDS...make time for it by eating dinner together or family activities so that the children can feel comfortable talking to you. Our agency provides training on communication skills for parents and children, Together we can save our next generation and stop the spread of HIV/AIDS forever.

AM: Many people are afraid to get tested for HIV/AIDS. Is there any reason to that? How safe are HIV tests?

Carine: People need to know their status. Many people who have HIV don't even know they have it and they pass it on without knowing, which enhances the spread of HIV/AIDS.

- KNOW YOUR STATUS! Get tested! The test is confidential and you know that HIV is not AIDS.
- HIV is a virus which will later cause your immune system to fail. This is called Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). It may take some time for certain people to show any symptoms of HIV infection; for some people it may take more than 10 years. If you get tested and find that you are HIV+, you can take medication and not develop AIDS. You earlier you detect HIV and get on medication, the longer you can live.
- Don't wait until your immune system is destroyed by the virus!
- So my friend, if you want to join me in this fight, we first must KNOW GET TESTED AND KNOW OUR STATUS!



AM: Which gender (male or female) is most affected by the AIDS virus in the African community?

Carine: Women are most affected. The number of women with HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) infection and AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) has increased steadily worldwide. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 17.5 million women worldwide were infected with HIV by the end of 2005.

- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), between 2000 through 2004, the estimated number of AIDS cases in the United States increased 10 percent among females and 7 percent among males. In 2004, women accounted for 27 percent of the 44,615 newly reported AIDS cases among adults and adolescents. HIV disproportionately affects African-American and Hispanic women. Together they represent less than 25 percent of all U.S. women, yet they account for more than 79 percent of AIDS cases in women.
- Worldwide, more than 90 percent of all adolescent and adult HIV infections have resulted from heterosexual intercourse. Women are particularly vulnerable to heterosexual transmission of HIV due to substantial mucosal exposure to seminal fluids. This biological fact amplifies the risk of HIV transmission when coupled with the high prevalence of non-consensual sex, sex without condom use, and the unknown and/or high-risk behaviors of their partners.
- Women suffer from the same complications of AIDS that afflict men but also suffer gender-specific manifestations of HIV disease, such as recurrent vaginal yeast infections, severe pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), and an increased risk

of precancerous changes in the cervix including probable increased rates of cervical cancer. Women also exhibit different characteristics from men for many of the same complications of antiretroviral therapy, such as metabolic abnormalities.

- Frequently, women with HIV infection have great difficulty accessing health care and carry a heavy burden of caring for children and other family members who may also be HIV-infected. They often lack social support and face other challenges that may interfere with their ability to obtain or adhere to treatment.

AM: AIDS in Africa: with the current situation ongoing in Kenya, people are afraid of an increase number of AIDS. Why and what can be done to control it, if true?

Carine: I believe that in those types of situation the HIV virus is easily spread because of the circumstance people are in. I think that the local government needs to come to one accord for peace so that the most vulnerable population, women and children who are actually victims of rape and impunity, find peace and support. African leaders need to stop fighting for power for the prize of people and death. Conflict just makes matters worse. We already have so many different issues affecting Africans (poverty, health, HIV, Malaria, and more). We do not need to now add more issues through conflict! Let's think about our future 10 year from now...where are we going?

"Many of the internally displaced are not living in formal camps. They are just gathered around a school or church. Then you have the worst-case scenario - where you don't have that level of law and order and you have people living on top of each other."

The only way to prevent the almost inevitable spike in violence towards women in times of crisis, she said, is for governments to tackle the sense of impunity.

"Before violence breaks out, and during, and after, [governments must] really push the question of impunity, make sure that people know that rape visited upon innocent women and children will be treated for what it is - a crime."

Let's pray to God, as we all are global citizens, to bring peace that we won't fight any more giving the HIV virus ways to take over.

TOGETHER WE STAND DIVIDED WE FALL.

AM: Tell us about your team.

Carine: AAAAA has eight board members, three paid staff, and twenty volunteers.

- AAAAA also has an orphanage for children who are victims of AIDS, such as myself, in Congo DRC. The orphanage is under the supervision of the catholic diocese to support the children. If you want to support a child, please contact our office in the USA at 1-866-456-AIDS or 1-919-771-0601.
- If you want to contact the orphanage in Congo directly, call 00-234-815181786 or visit us at www.africanadvocates.com

AM: How do you support your organization financially? Do you take any donation?

Carine: Yes. We are operate through donations made by people from the heart. You can support the fight against HIV/AIDS through financial support or donations to the agency that sustain the education programs. You can also donate your time, materials, or items to the fight.

AM: How can someone get involved? How can someone contact the organization?

Carine: You can get involve by calling us. We have a variety of activities and upcoming programs that you can be a part of to reinforce our efforts in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

AM: Thank you Carine for taking the time to chat with us.

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