

Kicking Aids Out of Speyside, Tobago **A real life-story from Trinidad & Tobago**

The group of young people kept all eyes focused on the young woman with the ball, trying to anticipate which direction she would throw it. The game of Russian Roulette made it to Tobago and the children didn't even know. The ball was released and those in the direction of its path scattered screaming loudly. One boy wasn't fast enough, it clipped his ankle. He had it... HIV; and had to step out. Game over for him. This was just a game but its message was no laughing matter; anyone can contract HIV. This was one of the activities of the Kicking Aids Out (KAO) programme. The young girl with the ball was Kalifa Martin, the peer coordinator of the programme in Speyside, Tobago.



With the picturesque backdrop of Speyside in the distance, Kalifa Martin and her colleague Kerlan conduct a Kicking Aids Out workshop.

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Kicking Aids Out is a programme that uses sport and games to teach young persons and adolescents about HIV prevention and issues of stigma and discrimination. The project was initiated by the Trinidad and Tobago Alliance for Sport and Physical Education (TTASPE) and brought to Speyside by UNICEF. Through this partnership UNICEF and TTASPE conducted workshops to train adolescents to become KAO peer facilitators. KAO is part of an international network of NGOs using sport as a tool for HIV and AIDS education. It has its origins in Zambia and was brought to Trinidad and Tobago through the Commonwealth Games, Canada.

“I heard there was an HIV workshop at the community centre and decided to go and learn more about HIV because I knew it was important to get the right information,” Kalifa said. “What I wasn't expecting was that I would learn about it through games and fun activities. I liked this and invited my sisters to attend and we are now all involved in the programme.”

When you first meet Kalifa she seems to be like any other 15 year old. She loves to laugh and spend time with her friends. However, speak to her and you begin to realize she has a level of maturity that is way beyond her 15 years. Growing up in Speyside she sees how HIV can affect a small community such as hers. “When something happens to one person, it affects the whole community. I want more people to get tested and start making wise choices. I would like Speyside to be an example to other communities.”

Speyside is a small community in Tobago and is best known for its fishing and diving facilities. There are many young people who spend their time hanging out and playing sports. In 2007, UNICEF, TTASPE and the Red Cross of Trinidad and Tobago teamed up to conduct a youth-led Vulnerable Community Assessment (VCA). The organizations trained the young people from Speyside to conduct the VCA. Based on this assessment, Speyside was identified as the first community to introduce the programme.

The youth-led members formed the Eastern Dynamic Achievers Culture and Sports Club (EDACSC), a group that was created with a goal of improving the lives of children and young people of Speyside. As a member of EDACSC, Kalifa assists with the organization of sporting events and other recreational activities such as capoeira dancing to get young people involved. In 2008, the Tobago House of Assembly (THA), the governing body of Tobago, recognized the work of EDACSC and its young members such as Kalifa. The THA decided to continue funding the KAO programme.

Kalifa has conducted many KAO workshops since its inception in Speyside. There are now 16-20 peer educators in the programme and she has witnessed how the programme has benefited Speyside. Her peers know more about HIV and readily share this information with their family members and school mates. Her mentors are her parents and the US poet Maya Angelou who Kalifa hopes to meet one day. She also dreams of being a doctor to “help people living with AIDS and even find a cure for it,” she says smiling.

“It is through projects such as KAO that UNICEF hopes to empower young persons such as Kalifa and have them actively involved in re-creating their communities where young persons make informed choices,” notes Marlon Thompson, HIV Officer; UNICEF Trinidad and Tobago . “UNICEF supports the use of sport as an intervention to bring groups of adolescents together and providing life skills training on issues relevant to young people, such as HIV/AIDS prevention and gender discrimination,” he said.

For now Kalifa continues her work in her community and says she is more confident of herself since she has been a part of KAO. She has even incorporated much of what she has learned into her poetry. She has written a powerful poem on HIV prevention which her friend Shenice performs to the backdrop of drums. “...it eh have no cure and it getcha STD the more people you let inna your front door...” as the sounds of the drum reverberate in the background.... “and remember if you nah have no glove, you nah get no love.” If Kalifa has her way, her poem and message of HIV prevention will be echoed throughout communities in Tobago and Trinidad.