

## **BPW Durham hosts 2006 World AIDS Day Breakfast in raising awareness about the plight of women & HIV/AIDS**

Business and Professional Women of Durham, Oxfam Canada and Voices of Positive Women were the Co-Hosts of 2006 World AIDS Day Breakfast event held at Sheraton Center on December 1<sup>st</sup> 2006.

An international coalition of HIV-positive women, Canadian and international HIV/AIDS organizations, women health care advocates and organizations and health care providers reported on the Canadian government's commitment to meet the needs of women and girls in the HIV/AIDS epidemic during the third annual World AIDS Day Breakfast at Sheraton Center Hotel in Toronto. Bahi Krishnakhanthan from Business & Professional Women presented a cheque for \$20,900 from last year's proceeds to Voices Of Positive Women.

The International Federation of Business & Women's Clubs, of which BPW Canada is a founding member, has consultative status with the United Nations as a NGO, Non governmental organization and are actively involved in programs supporting women all around the world. BPW's mandate is to actively work towards improving economic, political, social and employment conditions for women in Canada and worldwide. Bahi Krishnakhanthan, from Business & Professional Women Of Canada said, "BPW Canada has specifically and enthusiastically endorsed the recommendations of Stephen Lewis, as we agree that the best deterrent to spread of AIDS among women and their children, is to educate and empower women. In alignment to our mandate, it is a great pleasure for us to be a co-host of this event."

Every 16 seconds, a woman is infected with HIV. Every 29 seconds, a woman dies from an AIDS-related illness. In Canada, 25% of new infections in 2005 were women and young women. 35% of these women are youth between the ages 15 and 29 years. In Canada and around the globe, many women face socio-economic barriers and violence in and outside the home, that prevent them from being able to negotiate safer sex practices and from being able to access to care, treatment and support. Globally almost 50% of all new HIV Infections occur in women. Worldwide, of the 4.1 million adults newly infected with HIV in 2005, almost half were women over

Barbara Hall, Chief Commissioner of the Human Right Organization shared, “We need to address the stigma attached to those infected with HIV/AIDS. As a society we need to change our attitude. We need to develop a deeper understanding of the AIDS crisis as a human rights issue and set a clear agenda for future action to effectively tackle the issues that affect the treatment, care and prevention of AIDS. We need to stand up and make their voices heard.”

Louise Binder, Vice-Chair of Voices of Positive Women and co-founder of the Blueprint for Action on Women and Girls and HIV/AIDS said, “Many of these women are infected within their marriages—monogamous and unable to negotiate safer sex practices with their husbands. Others are infected because socio-economic factors make it impossible to negotiate safer sex or other risk reduction practices. This must stop or women will truly become endangered. Ultimately, therefore, so will men. It is not just a question of women’s health, it is a matter of survival of the human race,” said Binder who was diagnosed with HIV in 1993.

The coalition gave the Canadian government an overall “D” Grade on its progress in addressing the areas on issues such as prevention, care, treatment, support and human rights violations, including all forms of violence against women and girl, to date.

Louise Binder said, “The **federal government has not done everything that it could** to save the lives of women and girls as a result of HIV infection. This has become a gender biased epidemic. The government must implement the demands in the Blueprint for Action on Women and Girls and HIV/AIDS if it is serious about turning the tide of this epidemic for this group. Then it will get a very good grade in our report card of its activities and strategies to combat this disease.”

“While Canada has human rights laws that protect women and girls in theory from discrimination, including HIV-positive women and girls, these laws are only as good as their enforcement. Women and girls must feel safe enough to bring complaints of sexual harassment and discrimination because of gender, race, religion and HIV status. We must then act on those complaints. It may actually help to save lives,” said keynote speaker, Barbara Hall. She emphasized that all levels of government and society have shared responsibility in the protection and promotion of the human rights of women and girls who face sexual harassment and discrimination.

The women infected with HIV/AIDS feel shame, guilt and discrimination leading to hopelessness in their lives. In addition to this the cultural stigma of the society makes them live in denial not being able to come forward and have their voices heard. **These women need your support.** Please get involved with any of these organizations to show that you care and support them to **educate, empower and enrich the lives of many women in your region.**

Contact Kim Beatty, the President at BPW Durham for more details. She can be contacted at 905 579-8184.

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