STEP 8 - BE POSITIVE ABOUT POSITIVE PEOPLE

Courageous people are standing up everywhere, challenging the stigma and discrimination related to HIV and AIDS. Highlight these stories and involve people living with HIV and AIDS, our families and friends, in all aspects of advocacy and planning. HIV positive people call for meaningful involvement of HIV positive men, women and young people at all meetings which affect our lives, whether at local, national, regional or international level. This means not just being asked to present a speech or tell our own stories at meetings organized by others, but also involvement behind the scenes -- in the planning of the meeting. Make sure that issues of concern to positive women, men, boys and girls are integrated into the agenda. Make a place at the table and put our issues on the table!

Mobilize people to speak out about HIV and AIDS-related stigma and discrimination! Give special attention to the words that are used when you speak or write about HIV and AIDS, to make sure that they are inclusive and do not cause more hurt.

JOIN US. START TODAY. TAKE THE NEXT STEP.

Some helpful resources for planning your Next Steps

- Signs of Hope - Steps for Change CD-ROM by EAA (2003) - info@e-alliance.ch or www.e-alliance.ch
- Understanding AIDS by EAA (2003) - (English, French, Spanish)

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**STEP 2 - REACH OUT TO YOUR COMMUNITY**

Do people gossip about those in your community who are living with HIV and AIDS? Are people judged for being sick? Considered unreliable at work? Do people stop buying goods from someone with HIV or AIDS? Do children treated badly in school because their parents, or they themselves, are HIV positive? How can we change this?

What role can leaders in your community play to challenge stigma and discrimination? Are there public places in your community where people living with the virus can gather safely? Is there room for a display of posters and materials about HIV and AIDS-related stigma? Work with churches, schools, community groups and networks of people living with HIV and AIDS in designing a participatory workshop. Use your valuable local resources—stories of people in your community—as a starting point. Analyze whose behavior needs to change? What are the behaviors we would like to encourage? What are the key factors to influence this change? Examine your community’s experience and talk about what change is needed.

Establish contact with different groups and organizations within your church or community such as local organizations working in the field of HIV and AIDS, clinics, hospitals or associations of people living with HIV and AIDS. Schools or universities may be useful for providing people, facilities and expertise. Remember, networking is a two-way process. Share information.

Talk with church leaders in your local parish or community— mobilize others to make a difference.

Consider local sensitivities about the issue and develop an appropriate and helpful plan to present the issue to your church or community group.

Who might misunderstand? Identify those who may be afraid of the issue, or strongly oppose discussing it. Try to understand their viewpoint and work with them. Consider if they can be discussed in a way that cultural and religious sensitivities must be considered. Listen carefully. Hear others’ opinions. Never force the discussion. Learning and change happen when people are comfortable and feel their opinion is valid and understood.

In PAKISTAN, efforts are underway to involve children in the discussion about HIV and AIDS. In a local story of stigma and discrimination towards people living with HIV and AIDS that you or others in your group or community might develop into a dramatic presentation? Are there people living with HIV and AIDS who can help you make sure that this story is told in a way that does not pass on further stigma? Could you perform it in your church or in a school or theatre in your community?

In ARABIA, following the National Poster Exhibition Opening Ceremony, there was a premiere of a theatre performance entitled, “Let Us Save the World from Stigma and Discrimination.” All the actors were children and youth, and there was a lot of excitement about the performance and the production.

**STEP 4 - MAKE HIV AND AIDS A PART OF YOUR WORSHIP LIFE**

Pray for the church and all who are affected by HIV and AIDS. Use and create special liturgies that express hope, welcome, and support for people in fear and grief.

Encourage and support pastors and priests to preach about HIV and AIDS with messages that are accurate, non-judgmental and welcoming.

In INDIA, church pastors talked about HIV and AIDS from the pulpit because of the Global Poster Competition Against HIV and AIDS-related Stigma and Discrimination, which was a step forward in a “hitherto” silent church.

**STEP 5 - COMMUNICATE CREATIVELY**

In the battle against HIV and AIDS-related stigma, we must think creatively and communicate in-depth information about HIV and AIDS, messages of hope, and life-saving information through any means that work. Tell people how HIV is not transmitted, what the difference is between HIV and AIDS, and what it means to live with the disease. Consider how you can do this in your community. Communicate through sermons and articles, telling stories and in workshops, creating music and drama, and reaching out through the media.

Drama entertainers, educates, and provides an impetus for discussion with the audience. In INDIA, there is a local story of stigma and discrimination towards people living with HIV and AIDS that you or others in your group or community might develop into a dramatic presentation? Are there people living with HIV and AIDS who can help you make sure that this story is told in a way that does not pass on further stigma? Could you perform it in your church or in a school or theatre in your community?

**STEP 6 - ADVOCATE FOR CHANGE**

“Silence and inaction are not options for Christian communities. Injustice and suffering compel action in a world that desperately needs people of faith to creatively work together for change.”

ECCUMENICAL ADVOCACY ALLIANCE

Urge your church, local and national government to institute policies and practices that provide proper care, treatment, and support for people living with HIV and AIDS and respect their rights -- discouraging stigma and prohibiting discrimination. Effective advocacy requires knowledge, planning and passion about the issue. Following are some ideas for positive change in the local and global community:

- Collaborate with networks of people living with HIV and AIDS. Don’t advocate for them, but with them.
- One of the critical issues which requires a strong advocacy approach is that of equal access to treatment for all. Understand the issues around access to treatment for people living with HIV and AIDS in your community and become involved in change if treatment is not available.
- The fight against HIV and AIDS requires resources. Lobby your local and national government for their pledge of a fair share of funds.
- Examine your church policies on employment and leadership. Are these policies that do not discriminate and provide enough protection for people living with HIV and AIDS at their workplace? Help create change if needed.
- Reach out to the media so the story of faith-based efforts for change can reach a wide audience.
- Encourage leaders to be responsible role models and support stigma reduction activities, such as volunteering for confidential HIV testing, so others can follow.

**STEP 7 - CONTINUE TO LEARN**

Accurate information and community are the best hope for ending stigma and discrimination and for controlling the epidemic. Keep abreast of new information about HIV and AIDS and share the facts about the risks of HIV and AIDS and the impact it has on communities.

The Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance Toolkits for the Global Poster Competition (www.e-alliance.org) provide a wealth of information about basic facts on HIV and AIDS, myths, stigma and discrimination, ideas for workshops, worship and theological reflection. Many other resources are listed there, as well.