



**World AIDS Day
Celebration of
Community Leadership**

**“Lead – Deliver –
Empower”**

In keeping with the World AIDS Day theme of “Leadership,” we are celebrating the leadership by members of vulnerable communities who are part of the Caribbean Vulnerable Communities Coalition (CVC) family. Mindful that it is ideal that leadership comes from the groups we work with, in our context this is not easy and means the leaders risk stigma and discrimination by taking a stand for their community. This World AIDS Day we are therefore commending their bravery and commitment to a world without AIDS and a Caribbean where social justice is a reality.

**Elias Ramos – Leadership
for Youth**



Addressing their vulnerability is not easy for young people, but especially for young people from marginalised groups. In the Dominican Republic, 24-year old Elias Ramos is a leader of a new youth strategy by and for young people. "Jovenes de la Vida Real" (in English, *YurWorld* or *Youth in the Real World*) is a project by COIN in the Dominican Republic that targets marginalized youth to increase their resilience to HIV.

Elias explains how the young people at *YurWorld* are finding solutions:

Marginalized youth are a vulnerable population with complex needs. In light of this, sustainable prevention and treatment of HIV and AIDS amongst marginalized youth requires empowering them to act and bring about change in their own terms at the individual as well as the collective level.

He believes that an effective response takes more than disease specific interventions and includes broader development strategies. This approach is

championed by *YurWorld* which encourages change through employment and cultural values, ownership of assets, and political and civil opportunities that empower marginalized youth.

**Ionie Whorms –
Leadership for Drug
Users**



It is an early morning and the film crew is setting up their equipment in the neighbourhood of Fletcher's Land, Kingston, Jamaica. Residents come out to hail and support a woman who has become their heroine doing yet another television interview. She has become Jamaica's leading advocate for crack cocaine users, herself in recovery for the past 15 years. This time she is on set for the filming of *Complex Problems, Simple Solutions*, the documentary on access to HIV treatment for women and men who are homeless substance users. *Complex Problems, Simple Solutions*, a collaboration between CVC and the

Caribbean Treatment Action Group produced by the Caribbean Institute of Media and Communication (CARIMAC), is also released as part of the broadcast media package for World AIDS Week, distributed throughout the region by the Caribbean Broadcast Media Partnership. This is yet another one of her avenues for advocating for the rights of this vulnerable community.

She is Lonie Whorms, whose work is built on the conviction that she would not want anyone else to go through what she went through when she was on crack cocaine.

“It really bothers me to see lives been wasted away in this manner” she confesses “and so I must do anything possible to stop it.”

That “anything” about which she speaks ranges from taking a meal to those who are homeless, to transporting others to health centres, being part of a civil society response to substance use and advocating for policy change. She considers these to be simple solutions to complex things.

**Nigel Mathlin –
Leadership for Gay Men**



Men who have sex with men in the Caribbean region are said to be invisible and hard to reach for HIV interventions. Nigel Mathlin has engaged the response to HIV in a manner that proves that does not have to be the case.

He is engaged in arranging activities for the gay, lesbian and bisexual population in his home county of Grenada through GrenCHAP, the local AIDS-prevention community-based organisation of which he is a co-founder. But his work has not stopped at home. He is also integrally involved in the sub-regional and regional movements through the OECS-based Caribbean HIV/AIDS Partnership (CHAPS) and CVC respectively. No longer can it be said that leaders for this community cannot be found neither can it be said that this population is not taking its own action.

**Miriam Edwards –
Leadership for Sex**

Workers



“This is our profession, we must stand up and protect our rights” boomed the confident voice from across the room to the applause of the thirty other male and female sex workers gathered for a national consultation of sex workers in Georgetown, Guyana.

The speaker is Miriam, sex worker organiser and a leader in the Caribbean sex work community.

After seeing many persons die from HIV infection and nursing her own sister on her death bed, Miriam is intent that HIV awareness among sex workers must be heightened in the region. That led her to found a local Guyana organisation called “One Love” and later to co-found the regionally-based Caribbean Sex Work Coalition and then Guyana’s national organisation of sex workers, Guyana Sex Work Coalition. At any given time Miriam can be seen in training session for sex workers, distributing condoms and safer sex material, visiting those living with HIV in the

hospitals or their homes and advocating at the national, regional and international levels for the rights of sex workers and other marginalised groups in the Caribbean.

**Donna Snagg –
Leadership for Deportees**



Throughout the Caribbean, there is a profound misconception of members of our societies who have experienced deportation, to the point of them now being labelled and depersonalised as “deportees.” This label overshadows who these persons really are and their potential to contribute to society. Often lost in a system that is unaccommodating and hostile, the associations with the label “deportee” in many respects deflects attention from the violations of their basic human rights that are commonplace.

Human rights activist and stalwart Mrs. Donna Snagg had the experience of being deported from the USA approximately ten years

ago but has used that encounter to mobilize other persons with similar experiences in her home country of Guyana. So important are these issues to her that she founded the *Juncata Juvant Friendly Society*, an NGO that caters for the needs of involuntary re-migrants. The organisation's focus is also to assist this population to reintegrate into Guyanese society and empowering them to be self sufficient. Added to that, Donna and the other members of *Juncata Juvant* recognize the challenges this group of persons encounter and their vulnerability to HIV. This inspires their activities and the conviction that with the right support they can overcome these hurdles with dignity and respect.

**Nicholas Morgan –
Leadership for
Vulnerable Children**



For Nicholas Morgan the maxim “we are all living in a world with HIV” has a new and different meaning. From as young as 11 years old he accompanied his

mother on her volunteer efforts with a Jamaican AIDS organisation. What he saw then was so deeply imprinted on his young mind that he immediately busied himself with providing support to orphans and other children living with HIV.

Defying the age barrier, his early efforts were centred on baby-sitting children living with the virus. He helped them with their homework and with such ordinary tasks as learning to ride a bicycle, playing computer games and just general things that children like to do. It is those "ordinary" tasks that gave way to extraordinary ones such as becoming one of the Panos Caribbean youth journalists and being editor of their newsletter called "Our Own Voices." His voice is stamped on their public service announcements for radio and he is also one of the mentors to other children in the programme. All this is in determined fulfilment of his desire to make lives better for orphans and other children made vulnerable by HIV. To Nicholas, we are all equal, we are all affected. He believes firmly that:

it is up to those who have the power, the influence to make a difference in the lives of young people, to help not only those who are infected or affected but to those who we can help to remain aware and to make informed decisions.