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http://www.usaid.gov/stories/guyana/fp_guyana_aids.html

HIV/AIDS program changes future for Guyanese youth

A New Life: The Story of One Peer Educator



Photo: GRPA/Gillian Butts

A three-day HIV/AIDS awareness workshop in Guyana attended by approximately twenty participants.

John is a special program officer and president of the Guyana Responsible Parenthood Association's (GRPA) Youth Advocacy Movement. GRPA is a non-governmental organization funded by USAID. Before taking on this leadership role, John had little experience educating the community about HIV/AIDS.

"I lived a very reckless life - 'hanging out' at the bus park, drinking beers every afternoon, and having many women. I never thought about the future and what I wanted in life, it was all about the present. One afternoon when my friends and I were at the bus park, we were approached by a woman named Dawn from GRPA. That captured our attention because my friends and I referred to GRPA as 'the condom place,' since it was believed that most people visited GRPA if they had AIDS. Dawn invited us to a one-day HIV/AIDS awareness workshop. Initially, we were not interested, but one of my friends suggested that we go."

"At the workshop we were educated about a number of issues about sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS, which were never considered seriously by us. This information forced me to reflect on my own carefree behavior and the people I knew who are living with AIDS and those who had died from the disease. I think the fear of what could happen to me made me decide to change my own behavior. After the workshop, I asked about the project and learned that one component of the initiative focused on mini bus operators. I was told when the next workshop would be held and attended. Since that day, I have been a frequent participant at the peer education workshops. Becoming a peer educator has turned my life around."

John conducts peer education activities with his colleagues and is currently facilitating HIV/AIDS awareness workshops with barbers and tattoo artists. This has served to motivate a number of them to become involved. John is chronicling his experience, and will be writing a book entitled, "A New Life."