

Piaf nius

AIDS Ambassador speaks out

It takes more than a textbook to understand the impact of HIV in the Pacific Islands. It takes personal Pacific stories shared in a Pacific way.

Peati Maiava, who works as an AIDS Ambassador in Samoa, does just that.

In three months, she spoke with more than 3500 people at 28 events in Samoa and across the Pacific Islands sharing her story of living with HIV.

In July, Peati visited Tokelau with a staff member of Samoa AIDS Foundation to bring HIV education and her personal story to a country so far unaffected by HIV.

"Before, when they heard about the trip they were scared of this positive person coming," says Peati about her trip to Tokelau. "But now they want to know more."

During the visit, they visited all three atolls – Atafu, Nukunonu, and Fakaofu – presenting to the community in the evening and schools during the day. They met with over 600 people, almost half

the population. Many people told Peati that they had no idea what HIV really was until she came and spoke.

"People said they had only heard the words HIV, but had no knowledge. They didn't know the modes of transmission," says Peati. "The children had not heard about HIV and AIDS. They had never heard."

She said the trip was a valuable experience and that she was asked to return by the people in Tokelau.

Peati was also very involved in the South Pacific Games. She worked on the Safe Games campaign, assisted the Youth Peer Educators team, and helped stuff nearly 4000 bags with HIV prevention material and condoms!

Peati says it has been an extremely busy time, but of all her recent work, the most important thing is family.

"My whole family from overseas and from Samoa came to stay with me in my house. They are not scared of me anymore, they all came and



Peati Maiava, PIAF AIDS Ambassador in Samoa.

stayed with me. They understand now. I educated them first, with all my heart and all my feelings to help them to know about HIV.

My family first. That is the most important thing, and then my outreach.

When I'm stressed, the most stressful times, family is there. So it is the most important part of my outreach to my family. Once I have the support of my family I can go out, support others."

October: FJN+ speaks out

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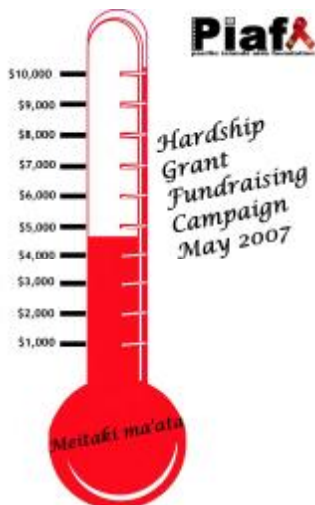
A quick tour of the region...

\$25 million (US) could be available to 12 Pacific Island countries starting in July 2008, through the Pacific Islands Round 7 submission to the Global Fund on AIDS, TB and Malaria. A final application for 13 Pacific Island states has been completed and submitted thanks to the logistical support of the SPC-Global Fund team. Both Solomon Islands and Fiji submitted independent proposals. The decision whether the Pacific will receive this funding will be made 12-13 November 2007.

Pacific journalists have started the "Health E-network" to begin building bridges between media and the regional health sector. Created during the Pacific Islands News Association conference in Honiara in May 2007, the forum will provide an online discussion space for newsrooms to raise questions, table stories, seek contacts and dig deeper into coverage of health issues, Pacific style. The forum is facilitated by the SPC HIV & STI section, and is open to members by nomination only. Contact nicoleg@spc.int for more info.

50,000 condoms were distributed during the Safe Games Campaign this August, in an effort to increase safe sex and HIV education during the South Pacific Games.

PIAF Hardship Grant:



Pacific Islands AIDS Foundation raised \$NZ 4415.00 in a region-wide fundraising campaign in May 2007 to help replenish our Hardship Grant.

The Hardship Grant is an emergency fund for HIV positive Pacific Islanders who are facing extreme situations. It is in place to help minimize the impact of HIV/AIDS on affected households and to save lives.

Since 2003, the grant has provided money for emergency antiretroviral treatment

for 20 HIV positive people in Fiji, as well as shelter, emergency food, children's school fees, and personal items such as glasses and dentures. These are items that are crucial to living a healthy and meaningful life.

PIAF sends a Meitaki Ma'ata out to all those individuals and organisations who joined in, with special thanks to RRRT, SPC HIV & STI section and YWCA NZ for organizing fundraising activities! We will continue to update you about the PIAF



www.pacificaids.or

PIAF ... refreshed and on the go

Pacific Islands AIDS Foundation (PIAF) has a new look and a bold new outlook.

In the past year, we have had an organizational review, a renewal in funding and an office relocation.

These three events come at a significant time for PIAF, a regional organization focused on improving the quality of life for people living with HIV and AIDS. We have celebrated our 5th year of operations in the Pacific Islands and have launched into our new strategic plan. PIAF is refreshed and looking ahead.

The biggest news is that PIAF has received a renewal in core funding from New Zealand's International Aid and Development Agency (NZ Aid) for another three years of operation. We are thankful to NZ Aid for this continued support in PIAF's efforts, and look forward to continuing the work we do to support those most affected by HIV in the region.

In preparation of moving into a new funding agreement and strategic plan, an external organizational review was arranged, with assistance from NZ Aid. The aim was to evaluate the progress, achievements and challenges of our

work on PIAF's initial strategic plan 2003-2005. PIAF's new strategic plan has integrated recommendations from this review, and has identified new areas for growth along with strengthening existing successful activities.

"When we began, in 2002, there were many gaps in the HIV work begin done in the Pacific Islands region and our strategic plan reflected this," says Maire Bopp Allport, Chief Executive of PIAF.

"Our current plan has shifted, in recognition of the partners who are taking lead roles in the Pacific HIV response. However, we will always try to look at the broad picture and we will continue to support HIV positive people and to address the gaps that still exist."

A sixth theme has been added to PIAF's five key themes for the new strategic plan:

- Positive Living
- Positive Health
- Positive Partnerships
- Positive Action and Prevention
- Positive Investment
- Positive Management & Governance

The new strategic plan will be posted on PIAF's website in the near future.

Along with a review and a renewal in funds, PIAF has also moved to a new office, just down the road from our old office in Rarotonga, Cook Islands. All contact information remains the same.

We welcome all who travel through the Cook Islands to stop by and say hello!



PIAF staff, Cook Island community & government partners at PIAF's new office opening ceremony. Rarotonga, Cook Islands

Learning the real impact of HIV in the Pacific

PIAF is currently undertaking a study on the Social and Economic Impact of HIV/AIDS among HIV positive people in the Pacific.

The first of its kind in the Pacific, the study aims to identify the impact of HIV diagnosis and to understand more about what it means to be living with HIV in the Pacific Islands.

How are people living with HIV and AIDS treated? What happens after someone is diagnosed? How well are

people coping with any experiences of stigma/ discrimination?

So much of the HIV response focuses on HIV prevention – but HIV is a reality and we need to answer to that. This means we need to know how best to support people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS.

The study involves people from Fiji, Vanuatu, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Tuvalu.

The final report of the study's findings will be released in early 2008.

PIAF Staff:

Maire Bopp Dupont Allport
Chief Executive Officer
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Communications Officer
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Sally McBride
Project Officer (intern)
Emily Kydd
Project Officer (intern)

GUAHAN Project: Reason to Celebrate

Congratulations to the Guam HIV/AIDS Network Project, also known as the GUAHAN Project, for celebrating four years of action as Guam's only HIV organization.

Founded in April 2003, the GUAHAN Project has become a dynamic force for the HIV response in Guam providing community outreach, HIV education and awareness, access to free HIV testing, and care and support for those living with and affected by HIV.

"Quite possibly the greatest achievement of the GUAHAN Project is the mobilization of the community to move into action to fight AIDS on Guam. This is not easy, given the highly conservative nature of the Guam community and the many myths and misperceptions that continue to distort the facts about HIV/AIDS on the island," says Alex Silverio, the founder of GUAHAN and current staff member.

Two other major achievements in the

"The greatest achievement of the GUAHAN Project is the mobilization of the community to move into action."

past four years include: The opening of the Pacific Resource and Training Centre (PRTC) that offers a wide range of resources on HIV/AIDS, TB and STIs, as well as free internet access, training rooms, an exam room and a gay, lesbian, transgender resource room; The opening of the GUAHAN Project Counselling, Testing and Referral (CTR) centre, a discreet and separate facility for HIV screening operations and HIV positive support groups.

GUAHAN Project is one of the few civil society organisations in the Pa-

cific Islands offering direct support services to people living with and affected by HIV and AIDS. The organisation offers free personal care items and equipment (wheelchairs etc.), home and hospital visits for people living with HIV and an array of free resources that address living with HIV, including psychosocial materials.

"In addition, the GUAHAN Project offers people living with HIV opportunities for empowerment and improved quality of life support," says Alex.

The organisation is also very active in the region - a representative of the Regional Strategic Reference Group on HIV and a core member with the Pacific Islands Jurisdiction AIDS Action Group (PIJAAG). They supported the most recent PIJAAG conference in Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia both through funding and by sending eight staff/volunteers to participate.



Participants, including 8 GUAHAN Project staff and volunteers, at the 2nd Annual PIJAAG Regional Summit Pohnpei, FSM

Cook Islands: On top of the National Strategic Plan

Cook Islands have yet to take the National Strategic Plan (NSP) on HIV to the top, but activities to achieve it are already underway.

The final draft of the NSP on HIV has been adopted by the Cook Islands National AIDS Committee (NAC), and final touches on the monitoring and evaluation of the plan are almost complete. The plan should be finalized before the end of October, and will be brought to

the Cook Islands parliament to seek leader's endorsement of the plan before the end of 2007.

The CI NAC members have begun preparing for World AIDS Day 2007 advocacy.

The Cook Islands Ministry of Health has been working to address Chlamydia – a recent Cook Islands study showed 19% of women in the study infected. Testing for Chlamydia is currently not available

in the country, however with assistance from the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, the Cook Islands along with Solomon Islands is soon to be part of a pilot program for Chlamydia testing.

The five priority areas of the CI NSP: Prevention of transmission of HIV & other STIs; Prevention & control of other STIs; Infection Control & Blood Safety; Treatment, care & support for people living with HIV; and Management, Advocacy & Coordination.

Global News: First International Women & HIV Summit

This week, more than 2000 women donned their national costumes and danced proudly to the beat of African drums, at the opening of the first ever global conference on HIV and AIDS for Women, in Nairobi.

Many of them are HIV positive - amongst them, AIDS Ambassador Paulini Vakacegu from Fiji. She is part of a movement which is finally acknowledging that women are very vulnerable to HIV and must therefore lead the charge in the fight against the spread of the virus.

"Being here is very encouraging because I always felt that I was alone in Fiji. I don't normally meet up with people who are HIV positive because of fear and discrimination. Here I am able to talk openly with people who are like me."

Hosted by the World YWCA, the summit will focus on women and AIDS, hoping to mobilize participants into action against the rising HIV/AIDS infection rates among women and girls.

Other key issues at the summit include feminization of the HIV pandemic, gender inequality, health care and treatment, sexual and reproductive rights, women's leadership and economic empowerment.

Speaking at the Opening Ceremony, former president of Ireland and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, urged women to rise and fight injustices meted on them and other vulnerable groups.

There is little doubt that women in Africa are the worst hit by AIDS. But as the virus continues to spread globally, women in other regions including the Pacific, are starting to feel the very real impact of the virus on their own lives and their families.

In the Pacific, the infection rates are rising rapidly, because people in the Pacific still refuse to believe that HIV is already in their communities.

Papua New Guinea's outlook is alarming. The World Health Organisation predicts that one in five PNG people will be infected with HIV within the next decade, unless urgent action is taken. That's because the incidence of HIV and AIDS in PNG is similar to Southern Africa a decade ago, with a 50 percent increase in the infection rate annually.

For Pacific Islands Aids Foundation founder and executive director Maire Bopp Allport, the Nairobi conference marks history in the making.

"It's really a milestone and an acknowledgement that there is a consciousness at the highest level amongst women that we are very vulnerable to HIV," says Maire.

"Women have a vital role to play in preventing the spread of the virus and transforming society so that the conditions in which the virus does spread are eliminated."



Maire and Marama Smith at opening church service for the International Women & HIV conference.

The simplistic messages of the past have failed to stop the spread of the virus. Messages like ABC "Abstinence, Being Faithful and using Condoms" have made no difference to many of the women here.

The YWCA World Council has recognized that HIV is a complex virus that takes hold in communities afflicted by poverty. More often than not, it is women in those communities who have the least power, the least ability to negotiate their sexual rights and the use of condoms. Their financial independence frequently leaves them open to exploitation and abuse.

Women have also borne the burden of the virus. Explains Alison Lewin, National Director of YWCA New Zealand: "Women make up nearly half of all the HIV infections globally. Women are often the primary caregivers of those who become ill as a result of HIV infection. And if they lose a partner they tend to become the sole breadwinner which puts a huge financial burden on them."

The mood here in Nairobi is optimistic. But the delegates have a big mountain to climb. While the international community has finally started to pour much needed funding into stopping the pandemic, its time the Pacific regional governments matched that effort.

by Ingrid Leary

Independent journalist Ingrid Leary covered the Nairobi International Women, July 3-12 2007 thanks to a partnership between SPC and PIAF.

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Dedicated to improving
the lives of people living
with HIV / AIDS,
and preventing the
spread of further infection
by improving prevention
messages from HIV
positive people.

