

Providing culturally appropriate services



Sub-Saharan African Youth & Family Services in Minnesota (SAYFSM) provides culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate HIV/AIDS education and social services to all Africans in Minnesota.



# Mbiu



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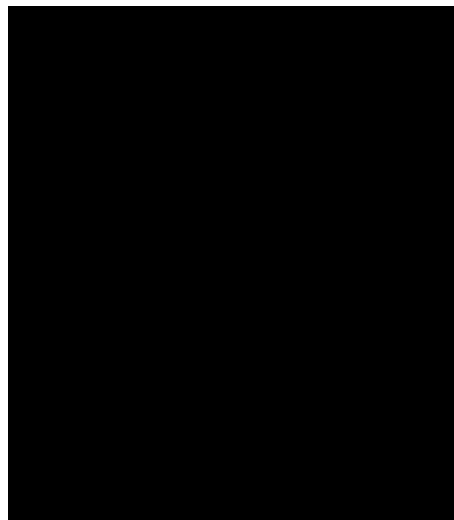
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## *I Can't Tell You My Name ...*

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Living with HIV since 1993

... or show you my picture

because of **STIGMA**. The stigma of HIV prevented me from asking for help and today it prevents me from identifying myself.

I am a woman from Liberia who is HIV positive, but you would never know I have HIV because I am healthy and living a full and active life. I haven't always been this way—for many years I suffered emotionally and physically. I nearly died.

Read my story on page 4 . . .



**From  
Consulting  
Editor  
Abdullahi Shekh**



## **Hundreds turn up to mark African World AIDS DAY**

The second observance of Minnesota's Africa World AIDS Day (AWAD) was held December 10, 2005, at the Sabathani Community Center in Minneapolis. Amid food and fun, the event brought together local African organizations, service providers, health professionals, and religious, community, and political leaders.

Dr. Monica Yugu, AWAD chair, reminded those in attendance to reflect on the millions of people living with HIV/AIDS around the world, many with no or limited hope of getting tested, treatment, care or counseling, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

She urged the crowd to unite in the fight against the disease, saying the occasion calls for a special *harambee*, an African rally call meaning "unity is strength" in Swahili. It is important to take the theme of this year's message seriously and to every corner and member of our community, she added.

Other speakers included representatives from the offices of Senator Mark Dayton, Governor Pawlenty, and Congresswoman Betty McCollum.

During the panel discussion, Dr. Ombosola Akinsete, HIV physician at Hennepin County Medical Center (HCMS), said that educating the community and empowering members to go for free testing and counseling need to be emphasized. Dr. Keith Henry, also an HIV physician at HCMC, passionately urged all

people who are sexually active to get tested and treated early if found positive. He said that it is now possible for patients to live a normal life and reach their life expectant years.

The rich aura of the festivity included African food, rhythms, dances, and poems, but the gripping moment was when an HIV-positive African immigrant woman from Uganda took the stage to tell her rape horror. She told the hundreds who turned out for the occasion about how she got infected with HIV infection after she was raped by a dozen solders in her native East African country, Uganda. The attack left her hopeless and helpless. She fled Uganda to join her son in the States but he rejected her and left her homeless.

Summarizing her gratitude to the people of Minnesota, she said; "I thank all caregivers and all Minnesotans who helped me and now I know I have a family of friends in Minnesota."



## ***Are you getting into a new relationship?***

**Both of you get tested and share your results with each other.**

- Determine if you are ready to have sex and be safe.
- Avoid any sexual activities when under the influence of alcohol or drugs because your judgment can be impaired.
- First talk about protection before engaging in any sexual act. Always ask yourself: "Am I safer with this person?"
- Learn about HIV/AIDS.





**Message from  
Rev. Moses Fasanya**

Since the beginning of human life, religion has played an important part in shaping man's destiny and more so for the faithful. It has provided words of wisdom and guidance for those seeking salvation. And most important, religion has provided refuge and healing for the sick at all times of need.

We need to have compassion for people living with HIV/AIDS. They should not be treated any differently from other people with diseases, such as cancer. But the responsibility of preventing HIV/AIDS lies with all of us. Prevention is better than a cure because there is no cure for HIV/AIDS.

The ABC formula of HIV/AIDS prevention first used in Uganda (A-abstain, B-be faithful, C-use a condom) has worked for many and needs to be adopted. Staying faithful within marriage or to partners and using condoms are the available options in preventing the disease.

Mistreatment, discrimination, and stigma are the most troubling for people with HIV/AIDS in seeking equality and treatment. Discrimination against another because of religion, orientation, color, political affiliation, or HIV/AIDS is against God's teaching. Jesus preached healing the sick with kindness and in the book of Luke Jesus even said we must love our enemies, but

people living with HIV/AIDS are not our enemies; they are one of us.

Jesus loved the sick and never discriminated. He had compassion for the sick and he touched them. Mathew 14:14 says, "And Jesus went forth and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion towards them, and he healed the sick."

*Pastor Moses Fasanya is the executive director of Good Image Family Services and a pastor at Seek Ye Evangelical Church. The church plays a leading role in educating people about HIV/AIDS by creating awareness through workshops and seminars. The goal is to create an environment that is healthy for people living with HIV/AIDS through support and education. For further information, please contact Pastor Fasanya at 651-338-2735, 651-399-7027, or [gifsmof@yahoo.com](mailto:gifsmof@yahoo.com).*



**FREE HIV TESTING SITES**

- SAYFSM ..... 651-644-3983
- Minnesota AIDS Project  
(MAP) AIDSLine ..... 612-373-2437
- Red Door ..... 612-348-6363
- Access Works ..... 612-870-1830
- Room 111 ..... 651-266-1352

**Tests can be done  
anonymously or confidentially.**

**Get tested.  
Get treated.**

## I CAN'T TELL YOU MY NAME

I would like to tell you my name, but if people in my community knew I was living with HIV, they wouldn't talk to me anymore. I would lose my friends and those who now respect me would shame me. So I don't want you to know my name, but I do want you to know my story.

When I was 15 years old I came to America all by myself, to join my family members who lived in Minnesota. I grew up in Liberia with my parents and nine brothers and sisters. Because of civil war in Liberia, I and many other Liberians fled to the Ivory Coast and waited to be granted visas to travel to the United States. Finally, I received my visa and arrived in Minnesota in 1991. I was so happy to be in the U.S. with my family!

In 1993, when I was eighteen years old, my neck started aching. My throat hurt when I swallowed and at night I would wake up, my sheets wet with sweat. I went to the hospital to find out what was wrong with me. After many tests, a doctor asked, "Can we check you for HIV?" I said sure. I wasn't afraid because I didn't believe I had ever done anything to put me at risk for HIV. You can imagine then how shocked I was when two doctors came to my room and told me that I tested positive. I told the doctors they had made a mistake.

Even though I believed the doctors were wrong, I was anxious and scared and wanted comfort and reassurance from someone close to me, but I was afraid that I would be rejected and harshly treated. A woman from the health department met with me. She educated me about the disease,

but I continued to deny that I had HIV and refused to take my medication. Besides, I had heard in my community that HIV medicine kills black people.

For months afterward, I worked hard at my job, trying to ignore that scary voice inside of me that would say, "What if the doctors are right?" In late 1993 I applied for a "green card" (permanent resident status) and had the required medical examination, including an HIV test. My HIV test again came back positive. I was terrified. At the time, I was living with my boyfriend and was pregnant. I told my boyfriend my status and he went for testing and to our relief he was negative.

**"I was afraid that I would be rejected and harshly treated."**

I was so worried that my baby would be born with HIV. At this time, pregnant women with HIV were not given medication to prevent the transmission of the virus to the fetus. When my daughter was born, she tested negative. But she had to be tested twice more within her first year to make sure. Thank God, she tested negative all three times!

After my second HIV test, I started on HIV medication, but I experienced side effects. Daily I vomited, suffered diarrhea, felt weak, tired, and dizzy. Instead of telling the doctor about the side effects, I threw the medications away.

Life began to get very hard. The stress of my being infected with HIV affected my relationship with my boyfriend. He began to physically and emotionally abuse me. He tried to control me by threatening to tell his family that I had HIV. I would do anything he wanted. I worked many hours to bring money home to him and tried to please him. I was so burdened by my secret and felt such shame and guilt.

In 1999 my mom came to stay with me. As I sat with her one day, I was moved to tell her my terrible secret. She cried, I cried, and then she prayed with me. The burden of my secret had

been lifted! But now my mother had to bear its burden. She comforted me and promised she wouldn't tell anyone.

The next year I was hospitalized because I was extremely fatigued and struggled to walk. My T-cell count had dropped to 34. My immunity was so low that I could not fight off infection and had developed neuropathy in my legs. I believed the doctors thought I would die and so I prepared for my death. I summoned my entire family and my pastor and told them that I had HIV. No one judged me or turned away from me. Instead they had great compassion and sympathy. My brothers and sisters faithfully took turns staying with me, each coming for two weeks at a time to care for me and my daughter and my boyfriend.

I knew that while my family was praying for me, people in the community were talking about me. I think some people visited me in the hospital just to confirm the rumor that I was dying from HIV. This put additional stress on my boyfriend.

As soon as I was admitted to the hospital, I started on HIV medication and I stayed on it in spite of the side effects. In time, my viral load became undetectable and this gave me hope, but I still was not cured of the neuropathy. For three years I couldn't walk and was confined to a wheelchair. I cried a lot and my daughter worried for me. She prayed that God would heal me.

In 2003, her prayer was answered! I began to feel healthy again and was able to use my legs. That was the beginning of new life for me. Then in 2004 I attended an HIV conference and stopped at the SAYFSM booth. I was interested in the emotional support group and contacted the facilitator. She invited me to attend and I found the group so uplifting and empowering that to this day I don't miss a session. We talk about living, not dying. We are empowered

through HIV education and emotional support. Everyone is respectful and caring.

Today I am a strong, healthy person. I have a new mindset: HIV is not going to hold me back from my dreams.

Today, people in the community don't believe I live with HIV because I have fully recovered my health. I think they

don't want to believe that someone who is healthy has HIV because it makes them fearful of their own status.

How was I infected? I suspect that when I was in Africa, I was vaccinated with a re-used needle. I will never know, but instead of looking backward, I choose to march forward. I am back in school, studying to be a nurse. Soon I will graduate and then I will use my degree to help my community, educating them about HIV, prevention, and treatment.

I want all people living with HIV to have joy, peace, purpose, and dreams, as I do. I hope to make a difference in my community, helping people to know the facts about HIV and to change the community's attitude toward those who are living with it. Then someday I can tell you my name.

**“HIV is not going to hold me back from my dreams.”**

SAYFSM has been facilitating the support group since 2003. If you want to join, call SAYFSM at 651-644-3983 (O), 763-226-7263 (C), or

763-228-2112 (C) and one of the coordinators will meet with you and invite you to the meetings. To protect the privacy and confidentiality of the group members, SAYFSM does not announce the meeting place.



## THE SNEAKY HYENA

Once upon a time there were three men who were on a journey that took them through a dense forest. It is customary for someone who takes this journey to spend a night somewhere along the route, so at nightfall the three men found an open spot, lay down next to each other, and went to sleep.

A few hours into the night, a sneaky hyena grabbed one of the three sleeping men and started to drag him away. The man sleeping next to the victim woke up and asked, "What is going on?" His frightened friend pleaded with him to be silent, saying, "I am being eaten." The poor man was gone in no time.

A few minutes later the hyena returned for an additional feast, grabbed the next man, and started to eat him. The man was so scared that he could not scream for help. When his friend asked about the noise he was hearing, the half-eaten man replied, "Please be quiet. I am being devoured." Soon he too was gone. Within a very short time other hyenas joined the first one to feast on the third man while he whimpered a belated call for help.

***Ask for help  
before it is too late!***

Introducing  
New  
HIV Therapy  
Formulation

this article  
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Available*



Color: yellow  
Marking: KA

*Ask your physician about new  
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“Knowledge is better than riches.”  
Cameroonian proverb

## What do you need to know about HIV?

### WHAT IS HIV/AIDS?

- HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. It damages the immune system, which is the body’s natural defense mechanism that protects our bodies from diseases and infections.
- After being infected, you can live for several years (5 to 10) without having symptoms or knowing you have HIV and can pass it on to others.
- After being infected with HIV for several years, your immune system is severely damaged and your infection can progress to AIDS.
- AIDS is the last stage of HIV infection.
- Only a doctor can diagnose AIDS.
- There is no vaccine or cure for HIV/AIDS.
- Treatment is available to help most people with HIV infection live healthy and longer lives, even though they can still pass HIV on to others if protection is not used or they share needles.
- In order to benefit from treatments, knowing your HIV status early is crucial. You can know the status of your HIV only by getting tested for HIV.

**HIV does not discriminate!**

**Anyone can get HIV!**

**Know the facts about HIV and protect yourself!**

## How Can You Be Infected with HIV?

By exposing yourself to the following *body fluids* of an HIV infected person:

- Semen: the man’s body fluid during sex
- Vaginal fluid: the woman’s body fluid during sex
- Blood: through sharing sharp equipment such as needles, blades, knives, or syringes when injecting medications or drugs, or through tattooing, body piercing, circumcisions, and blood transfusions in a resource-poor setting/country. All blood is tested in the U.S.

You **CANNOT** get HIV by living with someone who has HIV/AIDS.

An infected mother can pass HIV to her baby during pregnancy, delivery, or breast-feeding. Proper medical treatment during pregnancy can greatly reduce the risk of passing HIV on to the baby.

HIV is **NOT** spread by:

Coughs or sneezes  
Mosquito or other insect bites  
Animals/pets

You **CANNOT** get HIV through casual contact with someone who has HIV/AIDS.

Casual contact includes:

- Eating and drinking together
- Sharing food or drink
- Shaking hands, kissing, or hugging
- Sharing bathrooms and swimming pools
- Social interaction

Sub-Saharan African Youth & Family Services in Minnesota (SAYFSM) is a nonprofit organization created by African-born immigrants in the Land of 10,000 Lakes to provide culturally appropriate services to our people.

### What do we do?

- We indiscriminately serve all Africans regardless of their country of origin, religion, ethnicity, or political affiliation.
- We provide free, culturally appropriate HIV-prevention education to African communities and support services to those in need of HIV therapy and counseling.
- We link clients to available service providers to ensure reasonable living conditions for those who have tested HIV-positive.
- We respect the unique needs of groups and individuals while acknowledging that cultural differences exist and have an impact on service delivery.
- We facilitate a spiritual and emotional support group for Africans living with HIV/AIDS that is culturally and linguistically sensitive.

### Contact us for:

- HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention presentations
- Prevention intervention and health education for positives
- Emotional and spiritual support groups for Africans living with HIV/AIDS
- Counseling and testing
- Resources and referrals
- Housing, clothing, and food shelf needs
- Sewing and computer classes for women
- Interpreters for some African languages



Contact us with your story!  
Or send your letters and  
comments to:

*Mbiu* Newsletter, SAYFSM  
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St. Paul, MN 55104  
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### DONATIONS GLADLY ACCEPTED!

Yes! I would like to contribute to SAYFSM:  
 \$25     \$10     \$5     other

Please send your donation to:

SAYFSM  
1885 University Avenue, #297  
St. Paul, MN 55104

*Mbiu* is a Swahili word that means “the call.” It refers to the summoning of African communities, calling them to gather at a meeting place for an important announcement.