

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



A newsletter of SAYFSM

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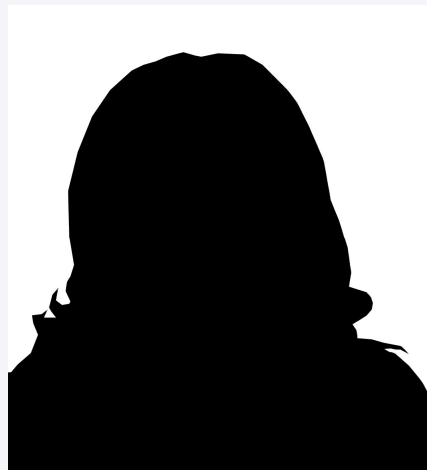
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Get tested, even if you're healthy!

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Living with HIV since 2004

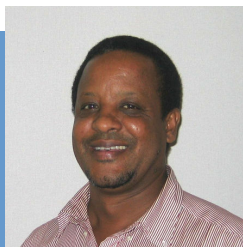
I am a woman from Cameroon.

I used to think it was shameful that someone would have HIV.

I thought only people who lived immoral lives got HIV and that as long as I was living a good, moral life, I wasn't in any danger of being infected.

Then I got a phone call.

Read my story on page 4 . . .



**From
Consulting
Editor
Abdullahi Shekh**

Be warned: HIV/AIDS infection is high and spreading among the African-born communities in Minnesota



The trend of new HIV/AIDS infections among African born in Minnesota is worrisome. There is a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS among African refugees resettled in Minnesota, according to Minnesota Department of Health 2005 report. There was an increase of African-born persons with HIV/AIDS in Minnesota from 331 in 2002 to 587 in 2005.

The six African countries reported to have the highest number of immigrants living with HIV/AIDS in the state are Ethiopia, Liberia, Kenya, Cameroon, Somalia, and Sudan, according to recent studies on African-born HIV/AIDS cases in Minnesota (MDH report, 2005).

There are more HIV/AIDS cases among African-born females than among males. Of the 587 African-born persons with HIV/AIDS in Minnesota in 2005, women accounted for 53%.

The war against HIV/AIDS infection is on. Winning any war has never been easy and the battle against HIV/AIDS is not easily won. It is a question of making painful choices and testing tough wills . . . wills based in knowledge about

the disease and trust in and faithfulness to partners. The choices are clear—abstain from sex, be faithful to your trusted partner, or use protected sex.

It is true that many times women find themselves in challenging sexual situations with partners but rather than having unprotected sex, they need to persuade their male partners to use latex condoms.

Men and women: say no and learn to say no loudly to the temptation of unprotected sex anytime, anywhere, and anyplace.



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.





**An Interview with
Community Leader
Nadifa Osman**

Ms. Osman is the executive director of WARDA, Women of Africa Resource Development Association, located at West Bank Community Center.

Mbiu: Since the mid-nineties a significant number of refugees/immigrants have come to Minnesota from Africa. What do you think are the challenges facing them?

Ms. Osman: Cultural barriers, housing, and employment. Others include barriers to health systems.

Mbiu: WARDA is one of the local organizations providing education to new immigrants. In what areas is your organization involved?

Ms. Osman: My organization is involved in educating the community about HIV/AIDS; reproductive health; women empowerment, leadership, and mentoring; and capacity building.

Mbiu: How do you think the challenge of HIV/AIDS facing new immigrants of African descent can be overcome?

Ms. Osman: HIV/AIDS is a global epidemic and affects a large number of vulnerable communities like refugees and the fact that they had no access to adequate health systems prior to their coming here complicates the situation. Most times people do not have accurate information about the disease and the simple methods of preventing it. They need to be empowered so that they know that simple preventive methods are better than the costly treatment of the disease.

Mbiu: What are the critical barriers hindering African immigrants/refugees living with HIV/AIDS from accessing services and how can this be overcome?

Ms. Osman: Most times they do not know how to search for resources. Help is not always at their fingertips and it becomes very difficult to search for such services since the disease is associated with stigma and shame. Providing them with the necessary resources and educating them on how to maximize them is the key.

Mbiu: What is the single most urgent message you would like to tell your African community members about HIV/AIDS?

Ms. Osman: Be in care, practice safer sex or abstinence, and go for testing. It is easier to prevent HIV/AIDS than to treat it. Testing is available and free at health facilities.

WARDA's contact information is 1808 Riverside Avenue, Minneapolis, MN 55454; 612-710-1209.

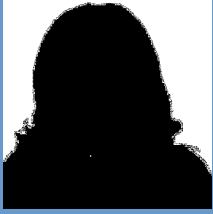


FREE HIV TESTING SITES

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.**



GET TESTED, EVEN IF YOU'RE HEALTHY by Mary Kimbong

I came to Minnesota on December 31, 2003. The ground was covered with snow. Never had I seen snow or felt such cold! I was very excited to be here. I had come from Cameroon to visit my niece and her family.

About a year after arriving, I received a phone call from Africa. It was my sister-in-law. She told me that my husband's fourth wife had died of AIDS and that I should get tested for HIV.

I come from a polygamous home. The majority of Cameroonians practice polygamy. I was born in 1949 and was married on April 26, 1968. I was the first wife. My husband and I were married in the Church, so I didn't think he would choose another wife. Then in 1974, he married a younger woman. He married his third wife in 1993, and then his fourth wife when he was around the age of sixty. Each of the wives was about fifteen to seventeen years old when he married them.

I got along well with the second wife. Then she became very ill. She was skin and bones when she died. After her death, I took care of her seven children. I didn't have children and I raised hers as my own. I also raised my sister's

children, and they too were like my own.

After the phone call from my sister-in-law, I immediately went to the hospital for an HIV test. A week later, I returned with my niece and together we heard the test results: I was HIV positive. The diagnosis was shocking and my niece and I wept. Before I was diagnosed, I thought it was shameful that someone would have HIV. I blamed the person who was infected with living an immoral life. I believed that as long as I was living a good, moral life, I wasn't in any danger of HIV.

“As long as I was living a good, moral life, I wasn't in any danger.”

My niece is Red Cross trained, so she knows about HIV and wasn't afraid to be around me. Her husband, too, was very supportive.

They don't have the cultural misconceptions about the disease that so many Africans have, and they treated me with love and compassion. I am still living with them and their children.

I left the hospital that day very sad, believing that I would die. I had no hope. My niece called Elizabeth Namarra at SAYFSM. She knew Elizabeth from Red Cross training. Elizabeth sat down with me, educated me about HIV, and referred me to an HIV doctor. She also told me about the SAYFSM support group and encouraged me to attend.

I went to the next meeting of the support group and met wonderful people. I couldn't believe everyone there had HIV—the women

looked healthy and beautiful! The support group continues to be a source of strength, and I try to never miss a meeting.

A lot of Africans wait until AIDS shows up, and then they get tested. But I am here to tell everyone to go for an HIV test. Don't wait until you are sick; get tested when you are healthy. I have never had any symptoms of HIV. My doctor says that because my CD4 count is high, I don't need medication. I see him every three months and if I get sick, I call him.

I believe my husband's second wife died of AIDS. His third wife, who divorced him, has not been tested. My sister's second born was diagnosed with AIDS when he was 27. He seemed a dead man, but now, four year later he is doing well. In Cameroon treatment is available for those who want it. Many people, however, are in denial or ashamed to even be tested and many believe, as I did, that they aren't at risk.

I called my husband to encourage him to get tested for HIV. He refused, saying that he isn't sick. He regularly sees a doctor for hypertension and believes that if he were infected with HIV, his doctor would know. I've told him that the only way he can know whether or not he has HIV is to have an HIV test, but he doesn't listen to me. Please don't make the same mistake he is making. Get tested today, even if you are healthy!

The SAYFSM Support Group

Who is the support group for?

The program is for Africans living with HIV/AIDS. The meetings are highly confidential. Christians, Muslims, and followers of traditional religions participate.

When does it meet?

Every other Saturday.

What happens at the meetings?

The meetings are culturally and linguistically appropriate. They last from 2–3 hours and are divided into three parts:

- Fellowship and spiritual nourishment with prayer, singing, and encouragement. People of all religions and beliefs are welcome.
- Eating a meal together. A variety of African foods are provided at every meeting.
- Emotional support and health education. Experts in HIV/AIDS and other health fields educate the group about important topics.

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.

HELPFUL HINTS FOR THE SELF-ADVOCATE

You can be an effective **SELF-ADVOCATE** but you need to develop a plan for handling the obstacles that may arise. Learning how to handle obstacles makes advocating easier.

BELIEVE IN YOURSELF AND ASK OTHERS FOR HELP

Believe that you are someone worthy of advocating for. The more you reach out and get the services you deserve, the better you will feel about yourself. Advocacy means taking responsibility for getting what you want and deserve. It can be tiring, so don't think you have to be an advocate alone. You can ask for help.

BE ASSERTIVE

Assertiveness shapes the way we deal with other people. Being a self-advocate means you must be persistent and knowledgeable. Remember, "The squeaky wheel gets the oil."

MANAGE YOUR ANGER

Do not insult, yell at, or disrespect others while you are advocating for yourself. People will be less inclined to help you or answer questions if you make them angry, uncomfortable, or cause them trouble. Don't let people have the chance to use your anger as an excuse for not helping you. Teach yourself how to control your anger.

EDUCATE YOURSELF

Take every opportunity to educate yourself. That means asking questions, getting answers, and asking more questions. That also means taking advantage of every educational opportunity. Read about services that you may be eligible for and become aware of new and different treatment options.

Excerpted from *Making Sure Your HIV Care Is the Best It Can Be*, AIDS Institute, New York State Department of Health. Prepared by Joseph Rukeyser, Ph.D.

“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:

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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.