

C.O.D. HOSTS ‘BREAK THE SILENCE’ HIV AWARENESS SEMINAR

“Educate to eradicate” was the theme behind an HIV awareness seminar scheduled held earlier this fall at College of DuPage.

Co-sponsored by the Service Learning program at College of DuPage, Canticle Ministries in Wheaton (www.canticleministries.org) and Debt AIDS Trade Africa (DATA – www.datadata.org), the “Break the Silence” conference was held to educate the college’s students and members of surrounding communities on HIV and AIDS in terms of prognosis, treatment, trends in prevention efforts, cultural issues, legislative policies and funding. In addition, this free event looked at effective and ineffective practices currently in place worldwide to halt the spread of this disease.

“Our goal was to initiate a national, campus-wide movement – to serve as a model for other colleges across the country – by demonstrating that HIV transmission can be eradicated, not merely contained, when there is knowledge, engagement and activism,” said Allison Brown, event coordinator and Service Learning assistant at C.O.D. “We want students and community members to realize that by proactively addressing HIV-related issues in their own backyards, per se, everyone can have an impact on creating a better, healthier world.”

Another goal of the conference was to encourage the concept of a global testing campaign beyond currently targeted groups.

“We have to move beyond the perpetuated stigmas of HIV – that it only affects certain groups and not others. Universal testing is the only way to really institute effective global prevention of HIV,” Brown said.

The first half of the day included general information sessions, as well as a guest speaker to kick-off the event. The second half of the conference included breakout sessions, action plans and attacking the issue of “What are we going to do about it?” In addition, several local organizations were also on board with the project and provided information and take-home materials at booths scattered throughout the conference.

“This was a great event not only for the students and faculty at C.O.D., but for area schools as well,” Brown said. “Through this conference, we provided a comprehensive look at the causes, prevention and importance of education when it comes to stopping the spread of HIV.”

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