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Southern AIDS Living Quilt
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Southern AIDS Living Quilt Raises Awareness on the Web

Women across the South share personal stories of living with HIV/AIDS

NEW ORLEANS, LA – Wednesday, October 22, 2008 – AIDS is the leading cause of death for African American women ages 25-34 today. HIV infections could be reduced by 30 percent per year if all HIV infected persons knew of their infection and adopted behavioral changes to limit the spread of the disease. The Southern AIDS Living Quilt, launched today at www.livingquilt.org, collects and shares video and audio stories from women on the front lines of the fight against the spread of HIV and AIDS. The Living Quilt highlights the need for routine testing, early diagnosis, and increased access to care for those living with HIV/AIDS in the South.

“The status quo must change,” said Dr. Bambi Gaddist, Executive Director of the South Carolina HIV/AIDS Council. “In order to turn the tide on the 56,000 new HIV infections annually, we must act now.”

In an effort to increase awareness of this crisis in the South, today’s launch of the Living Quilt at the Tulane University School of Public Health brought together representatives from the Southern AIDS Coalition, NO/AIDS Task Force, the FACES Program of Children’s Hospital and state health officials including Beth Scalco, Director of HIV/AIDS Program at the Louisiana Office of Public Health.

“This quilt serves to empower, encourage and educate those most directly impacted by HIV and AIDS,” said Evelyn Foust, Co-Chair of the Southern AIDS Coalition and AIDS and STD Director at the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. “I urge women across the region to visit the Living Quilt and consider sharing their stories. Together, we can make a difference.”

The true power of the Living Quilt project is in the stories it shares and the inspiration it brings to others. While some are telling their stories for the first time, others have embraced the importance of communicating the changing face of HIV/AIDS.

Visitors can also upload stories of their own, becoming part of the Quilt through their own unique narrative. The Living Quilt site also provides valuable information and resources on HIV and AIDS, including where to find testing resources across the United States.

Today's event will be followed by similar Living Quilt events in Miami, Florida and Raleigh, North Carolina.

HIV/AIDS in Louisiana

HIV continues to disproportionately affect African-Americans in Louisiana. In addition, Louisiana has faced specific challenges in re-building its HIV/AIDS program in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

By the numbers:

- Nationally, Louisiana ranks fifth highest in AIDS case rates and twelfth in the number of AIDS cases reported.
- In Louisiana, 66 percent of people living with AIDS are African American, 31 percent are white, and three percent are Hispanic.
- HIV/AIDS is increasingly affecting women in Louisiana. In 2006, 33 percent of new AIDS cases in Louisiana were women.

About the Southern AIDS Coalition

The Southern AIDS Coalition was formed in 2001 as a membership organization of government representatives, corporations, and community advocates. This unique partnership is borne from the burgeoning numbers of people whose new infection rates are much higher than the rest of the U.S. population. SAC highlights that federal funds do not meet the needs of those living with HIV in the South and are not equally distributed across the country. SAC works to provide southern citizens an opportunity for adequate HIV/AIDS prevention information, treatment, and health care. SAC is a federally recognized 501(c)3.

About Test for Life

Test for Life is an educational campaign that began in 2006 by the National Minority Quality Forum—a non-profit research and educational organization dedicated to ensuring that high-risk racial and ethnic populations and communities receive optimal health care. Test for Life raises awareness of the importance of routine HIV screening in preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS.