



February 13, 2006

Dear Session Point People and Working Group members,

Many of you probably already know that more than half of all new HIV infections worldwide are among young people between the ages of 15 and 24. Every day, 6,000 young people become infected with HIV.

The AIDS 2006 Toronto Local Host Youth Activities Programme supports the meaningful participation, integration and inclusion of young people throughout all levels of the conference, including planning and development. The AIDS 2006 Youth Advisory Committee, with 25 members from 11 countries, will be providing mentorship and preparation support to youth speakers, presenters and moderators. A successful outcome of the efforts of the Youth Activities Programme would be to have young people present, speak and participate side by side with adults in many sessions throughout the entire Conference programme; not to be siloed within in a youth-only programme. It is important to remember that youth can speak to much more than their experience as young people.

Youth involvement builds self-esteem, confidence and skills that leaders in this movement need to be effective agents of change. Meaningful participation creates a mainstreamed, active role for youth to empower themselves in the movement. They contribute to the skills, knowledge, and best practices shared by older participants at the International AIDS Conference in that they can successfully create youth-adult partnerships. Young people are not the only ones who benefit, young peoples shared experience, energy and perspective should be seen as added value to dialogue about important issues.

The Key Challenges of the Conference are being addressed through session content, but can also be addressed in how you design and model sessions. Key Challenge 3 and 4 *Intensify Involvement of Affected Communities* and *Building New Leadership to Advance the Response*, both speak to developing the capacity of young leaders and expanding opportunities for young people. Including youth as presenters within your session would be an excellent model of integrating the key challenges into the Conference.

If you have not already, the AIDS 2006 Youth Advisory Committee highly encourages you to include young people in your session as presenters, speakers, moderator, or as planners on the session working group. The AIDS 2006 Youth Activities Programme is in contact with many young people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS, and works closely with the Global Youth Coalition on HIV/AIDS a network of 1000 young leaders in the HIV/AIDS field globally. Many of these youth work, study, and/or volunteer in all sectors of HIV and are young experts in their fields.

Please contact Alex McClelland, the AIDS 2006 Youth Activities Coordinator, at alex.mcclelland@aids2006toronto.org if you would like assistance in including young people within your session, or with contacting youth with a particular capacity that they can speak too.

Thank you in advance for making AIDS 2006 a landmark Conference in its mainstreamed and meaningful youth participation!

AIDS 2006 Youth Advisory Committee