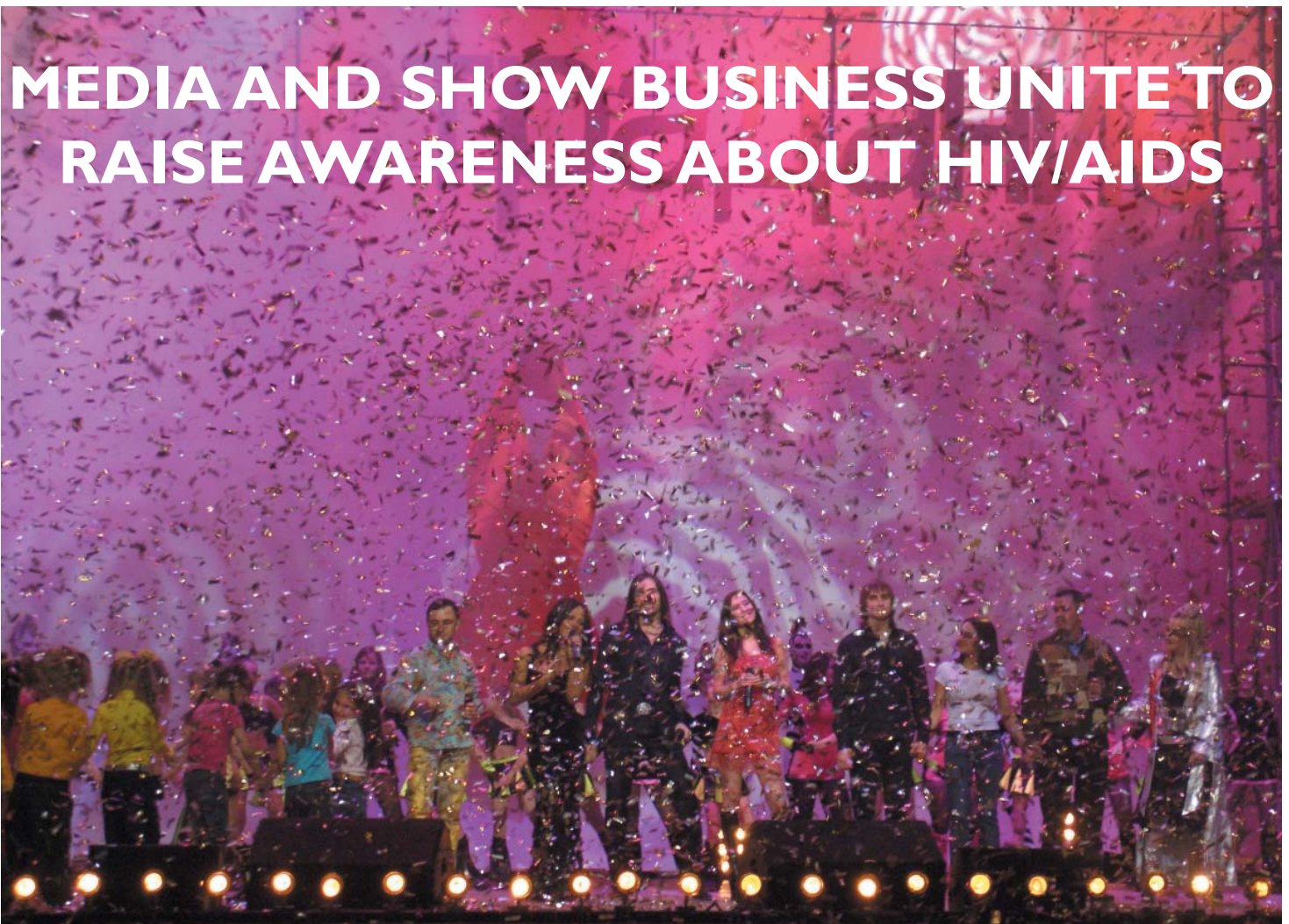


USAID INSIGHT



MEDIA AND SHOW BUSINESS UNITE TO RAISE AWARENESS ABOUT HIV/AIDS

Ukrainian pop and rock singers participate in *SOSstradenie* charitable gala-concert at the Ukraina Palace to show their support for people living with HIV (Photo: Antonina Yaresko)

In honor of World AIDS Day on December 1st, top celebrities in Ukraine united for two dynamic events – *SOSstradenie* (Compassion) charitable gala-concert at the Ukraina Palace and a nationally broadcasted *StopAIDS* telethon – to show their support for people living with HIV (PLWH) and help raise awareness about the country's surging HIV/AIDS epidemic. Ukraine is home to Europe's fastest growing HIV epidemic, and 80 percent of people living with AIDS are under the age of 30.

On December 1, nearly 5,000 youth and adults attended a unique charitable gala-concert with the slogan *Keep Living* in Kyiv. The event was organized by a coalition of leading HIV/AIDS organizations and businesses in Ukraine including: the International Charitable Foundation of Liliya Podkopaeva *Health of Generations*, *Transatlantic Partners Against AIDS/Global Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria* (TPAA/GBC), the *All-Ukrainian Network of PLWH*, *Mainstream Communication & Consulting*, and the *Olena Franchuk Anti-AIDS Foundation*. Financial support was provided by *Partner-Bank* and the *KONTI Company*.

In addition to attracting attention to the growing threat of HIV/AIDS in Ukraine, the concert's goal was to urge the public and government officials to take proactive steps to curb the epidemic's spread. The event stressed that HIV/AIDS affects everyone, and promoted

non-discrimination and tolerance towards those living with HIV/AIDS. Participating Ukrainian celebrities included singers Natalya Mohylevska, Ani Lorak, Tina Karol, Vitaliy Kozlovsky, Oleksandr Ponamaryov, Gaitana, Viktor Pavlik, EL Kravchuk, Alyona Vinnitskaya, Marta, Katya Chili, LAMA; groups *Alibi*, *S.K.A.Y.* and *Jango*, the Liliya Podkopaeva and *Free-Art* ballet company, equilibrist Anatoliy Zalevskiy, and the *Rizoma* theatre.

In an interview surrounding the event, Olympic gymnastics champion and UN Goodwill Ambassador on HIV/AIDS in Ukraine, Liliya Podkopaeva, stated: "We must not forget about tolerance and humanity in our everyday struggle for life. Stars of Ukrainian show business have gathered here today, eager to lend their helping hands to people who need this support very much. We all have allied in this action to tell HIV-positive people – LIVE! We appeal to the society not to shut its eyes and not to stay on the sidelines, but to withstand this pestilent epidemic together. I ask our government representatives not to forget about this problem and do all they can for people to live and not to die!"

Complementing the charitable gala-concert, Ukraine's TV Channel 5 broadcasted a four-hour *StopAIDS* telethon as part of the Ukrainian Media Partnership's *StopAIDS: Affects Everyone* campaign. A

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HELPING HIV-AFFECTED CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

The USAID-supported Families for Children Program (FCP), implemented by Holt International, has been working in Ukraine since 2004 to ensure that children could enjoy childhood, are loved, respected and cherished; and vulnerable families receive support and services that would help them to stay together.

HIV-affected families and children are one of the vulnerable groups targeted by FCP. The project helps to preserve family for children with HIV-infected parents, who are often isolated and stigmatized; offers trainings to relatives and foster parents who are looking to adopt or take care of HIV-positive children; shares international best practices; and provides funding support through its comprehensive grant program. As of October 1, the project had supported 25 grant projects that have allowed 7,254 people to participate in various training activities; to address the issues of HIV-affected families and children in 76 media appearances; and provide psychosocial support to 462 children and 589 families; and prevent 313 cases of child abandonment/removal from parental custody.



Anna Z. with foster daughters
(Photo: Larissa Kurashyna)

Finding Homes for HIV-positive Children

Nastya, 8, and Lena, 6, have life stories similar to that of many HIV-positive kids. Both girls had been abandoned in maternity hospitals right after birth; both lived in a hospital for almost a year; both were placed in the Makeyevka Baby Home where they have lived ever since. Nastya and Lena have HIV and receive ARV therapy. Now, both girls have a common family – loving foster mom and a foster sister.

Anna Z. first heard about HIV-infected children needing homes in August 2006 from a friend of hers who was working on a project implemented by Cherkasy Regional branch of All-Ukrainian People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLVHA) Network. The project supported by FCP was seeking families for HIV-positive children from the Makeyevka Baby Home, Donetsk Oblast.

In spring 2006, FCP initiated a pilot project aimed at finding homes for 23 HIV-positive children from the Makeyevka Baby Home who would otherwise be transferred to boarding schools and institutions for children with disabilities. FCP was seeking either to re-integrate children into their birth and extended families or place them into foster and adoptive families. For that purpose, FCP brought together Ministry officials, regional and local child welfare workers and HIV-service organizations to develop and conduct a targeted foster/adoptive parent recruitment campaign.

In November, Anna applied for a mandatory training course for foster parents and completed it successfully in December 2006.

She started collecting documents to register a foster family. In May 2007, Anna visited the Baby Home to meet the children. Then she was introduced to little Lena whom she took for a walk. In September, Anna returned to meet the second child and to ask Lena if she wanted go with her home. Lena was delighted. Anna also asked Lena if she had a friend. She introduced Anna to her friend Nastya.

Now, Anna has three beautiful girls (including her own 5-year-old) who love each other and bring a lot of joy to their mother. To date, 13 children from Makeyevka Baby Home have found families. Meanwhile, the effort continues.

Thinking of a summer camp, the first image

Moms' Summer Camp

that comes to mind is of a summer getaway, which offers kids and teens a chance to become more responsible and independent, to share their experience communicating with peers. But have you ever heard about moms' summer camp? Would they benefit from such a getaway if they are given a chance?

In the summer of 2007, six HIV-infected mothers with children between 18 to 24-months-old participated in a summer camp organized by *Peremoha* (Victory), a charitable organization based in Brovary, Kyiv Oblast. Women who didn't know each other before by the third day they were already baby-sitting each other's children. Soon all toys were brought together to a common "play room" set up in one of the houses, while the play area was set up outside. When it was time to go home, there were a lot of tears and hugs because neither moms nor their children wanted to say 'Good bye.' This summer camp was a wonderful opportunity for the mothers not only to share challenges of their lives but also to share experience about coping with difficulties and raising their children. They now continue to see each other at the support group meetings and also come visit each other.

Peremoha, a Brovary-based charitable organization, works with at risk families, including HIV-affected. Established in 2003 to provide social support services to vulnerable people, in 2005 *Peremoha* expanded its services to people living with HIV/AIDS. In March 2005, the NGO actively participated in a series of community family care workshops organized by FCP in the Brovary rayon. As a result, *Peremoha* initiated additional services to families and children affected by HIV/AIDS. It also applied for and won a FCP grant to support the establishment

of the Comprehensive Services Center for HIV-affected Families and Children from the Brovary city of and rayon. In addition to the services offered at the Center and home visits, *Peremoha* staff searches for new activities to affected families, and Mom's summer camp was one of them. Currently, the Center is providing services to 20 families with children.

Liniya Zhyttya (Life Line), the only HIV-service

Life Line Opens Day Care for HIV+ Kids

ing organization in Gorlovka, Donetsk oblast, works to provide support and services to various groups affected by HIV/AIDS, including 37 mothers, mostly single, with small children. This October, FCP awarded *Liniya Zhyttya* a grant to start a day care room for children born to HIV-positive mothers.

The need for such a service become quite pressing, as more and more mothers dropped by the center asking the NGO's staff to look



Kids discover new toys and games at day care room.
(Photo: Olesya Dolynska)

after the toddlers for a couple of hours so they could go to see a doctor, meet potential employers, talk to a social worker, or go to a support group. Regular childcare, unfortunately, was not easily affordable to them. *Liniya Zhyttya* was ready to provide a room for the kids but did not have enough money for refurbishment, furniture and toys. With the FCP grant, the room was organized and equipped, and a caregiver was recruited to look after the children. The project started in October 2007 and since then 15 children between 6 months – 4 years of age have already visited the room, some with their mothers. The children are happy to meet other kids and play with them, to discover new toys and play games, while moms can attend *Young Mothers Club*, a new support group.

Ukrainian Doctor Learns to Answer the Tough HIV/AIDS Questions

Dr. Antonina Skripka has directed the Mykolayiv Antenatal Clinic No. 2 for 21 years and has been a doctor for 30. Despite more than 10 years of experience working with HIV/AIDS patients, she still feels uneasy when informing pregnant women that they are HIV-positive. Even as she has helped them cope with potential psychological stress, she has always had more questions than answers on the proper way to deal with the situation.

"In my clinic, we conduct HIV post-test counseling very often. No matter how long you have worked in this area, it's still very hard to be the one to inform a young pregnant woman about her positive HIV status," Dr. Skripka said.

Ukraine, women now account for about 41.9% of known infections. The number of HIV-positive pregnant women has increased significantly over the past years – from 997 in 2000 to 6,269 in 2006, which demonstrates an average annual increase of 20%. The total cumulative number of children born to HIV-affected mothers is more than 14,500. Of these 8,950 had been tested as HIV-negative after 18-months of age. The MOH has reported that the rate of transmission has dropped from 40% in 2000 to 7% in 2006. However, a rate of 7% is not consistent with rates reported by international and USG partners who estimate transmission rates of 14% or higher.

When a USAID-supported voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) training was announced in Mykolayiv, Dr. Skripka was one of 19 obstetricians-gynecologists and midwives from Mykolayiv maternity homes who expressed a desire to participate.

During this three-day training, Dr. Skripka worked on refining her counseling and interpersonal communication skills, which are an integral component of the voluntary counseling and testing procedure. The training curriculum covered a broad range of topics, focusing not just on how HIV is transmitted and the trajectory of infection, but also on the stigma and discrimination that many people living with HIV/AIDS experience, and which can be as harmful as the disease itself.

Most medical facilities in Ukraine do not provide quality VCT at all. Access to knowledge and skills in this area is available primarily through international and national projects such as the USAID-supported project *Increasing Women's Access To and Use of Prevention of Mother-to-Child HIV Transmission Interventions in Ukraine* (PMTCT) that was successfully implemented by the Program for Appropriate Technology

in Health (PATH), from July 2005 through November 2007.

This project has strengthened Ukraine's ability to make PMTCT interventions to become a regular procedure of maternal and infant health services. Specifically, innovative approaches used in training for obstetrician-gynecologists, midwives and NGO volunteers have increased



Dr. Skripka practices counseling skills at voluntary counseling and testing training (Photo: Courtesy of PATH)

their level of knowledge on PMTCT and VCT, improved their interpersonal communication and family planning counseling skills, and increased tolerance to HIV+ pregnant women.

Training of more than 75% of mother and child health care service providers has significantly improved the quality of VCT, and strengthened community-based support for HIV-positive pregnant women and mothers in the cities of Mykolayiv, Odesa, Sevastopol, and Crimea.

"Voluntary counseling and testing training changed me a lot. First of all, it changed my attitude toward HIV-positive people and my understanding of the problem," said Dr. Skripka. "In addition, it gave me the structure and guidelines for conducting pre- and post-test counseling."

Following her training Dr. Skripka gathered her staff and conducted a mini-training for them.

"I just shared my feelings and thoughts about the importance of a proper VCT process and explained the main ideas," she explains.

As a part of the first visit, it is now routine for a doctor to conduct pre-test HIV counseling. Only after this counseling is the woman asked whether she wishes to be tested for HIV.

"Some women are just not ready to do this on the spot," Dr. Skripka notes. "They need to take their time to think, but almost all come back and take the test to ensure their future child's health."

Students Test to Learn Their HIV Status!

Eight leading Kyiv-based universities, 300 volunteers and over 50,000 students took part in the **Test for HIV in Your University** event dedicated to the 2007 World AIDS Day. Overall, 1,334 students and university professors took HIV tests. The event was the largest of its kind ever conducted in Ukrainian universities.

Each year since 2005 the HIV/AIDS Information and Resource Centre run by *Socium XXI* NGO organizes HIV testing campaigns in Kyiv universities. The event's goal is to reduce stigma and fear which often hamper efforts to test people for HIV, as well as to increase HIV awareness and to promote safer sex practices to prevent HIV/AIDS.

This year effective cooperation with student organizations and the Kyiv Student Council helped draw more universities and significantly scale up the event. The campaign offered an array of services: anonymous HIV testing and counseling, information leaflets, discussion sessions on HIV-related issues and free condoms with detailed information on STI and HIV prevention. Condoms were handed out in pocket size boxes specially designed for young people by *Uspishna Marka* advertising company in cooperation with the International HIV/AIDS Alliance in Ukraine.

The campaign was actively supported by key stakeholder organizations: the Kyiv city AIDS Centre ensured reliable testing in universities, USAID supplied 60,000 free condoms, and the Olena Franchuk *Anti-AIDS Foundation* and *International HIV/AIDS Alliance in Ukraine* provided *Socium XXI* with information materials and trained volunteers for running this campaign.

Test for HIV in Your University is a part of a larger scale effort to reduce stigma and fear associated with HIV testing conducted by the USAID-supported project *Scaling-up the National Response to HIV/AIDS through Information and Services* (SUNRISE). In close cooperation with Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH) the Alliance supports and promotes voluntary HIV counseling and testing (VCT) for vulnerable populations. As of September 2007, PATH had conducted 14 training sessions on VCT management for employees of AIDS centers, AIDS-service NGOs, drug-abuse and STI clinics. As a result, since the start of the VCT project in July 2006, about 30,000 people received counseling and HIV testing.



The United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) assistance focuses on the following areas: **Economic Growth, Democracy and Governance, Health and Social Sector.**

Since 1992, the USAID has provided \$1.6 billion worth of technical and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine to further the processes of democratic development, economic restructuring and social sector reform in the region.

For more information about USAID programs in Ukraine please visit the USAID website at: <http://ukraine.usaid.gov>

"No matter how long you have worked in this area, it's still very hard to be the one to inform a young pregnant woman about her positive HIV status."

Dr. Skripka

YOUNG ARTISTS HELP HIV-POSITIVE KIDS

On December 1, 2007, the USAID-supported ICF "International HIV/AIDS Alliance in Ukraine" marked World AIDS Day with 'Young Art Against AIDS,' a two-day charity exhibition-auction. The event's aim was to promote tolerant and inclusive attitude towards HIV-positive children and draw public attention to issues that affect children with HIV.

Tetyana Goryushyna, a well-known Ukrainian artist, participated in the event for the second time. "For me this exhibition-auction is an opportunity to help HIV-positive children. It's incredible feeling to be able to



A girl participate in Easter egg-painting workshop (Photo: Mila Teshaeva)



Father and son examine the photo exhibit (Photo: Mila Teshaeva)

apply artistic talent for the benefit of those who need help the most. The event brought together people of different professions; and maybe only by standing side by side and being as one, our society could overcome serious problems and issues it is currently facing," said Tetyana Goryushyna.

Over 500 young and professional artists and talented children donated

their works for the auction, which resulted in about 32,000 UAH in charitable donations. The raised funds will go to purchasing equipment for a mobile clinic designed specially for HIV-positive children.

Currently 1,500 Ukrainian children under the age of 14 have confirmed HIV status. The majority of them acquired the immune deficiency syndrome from their mothers. The HIV/AIDS epidemic, which started out and continues to develop in vulnerable groups, has been spreading out to the general population, thus becoming a nationwide issue.

"HIV-positive children remain one of the many faces of the epidemic and are most vulnerable to social exclusion. International and Ukrainian rights protection organizations have long reported rights violations of people living with HIV and especially children. In Ukraine access to education, specialised medical care, particularly in the regions, is still limited for HIV-positive children. There are no set national standards for medical care, education, social support and psychological rehabilitation for children affected by the epidemic," said Pavlo Skala, policy and advocacy manager at the Alliance Ukraine.

Indeed, the issue of access for HIV-positive children to primary education and high schools remains open in Ukraine. A school has no legal



Teens take part in beading workshop (Photo: Mila Teshaeva)

right to refuse a HIV-positive child but nevertheless such cases occur on regular basis. Experts explain this by lack of information on HIV and unrestricted access to confidential medical information by education and medical authorities.

'Young Art Against AIDS' remains a unique initiative for Ukraine, which draws together charitable organizations, private donors and diplomatic missions. But the Alliance Ukraine doesn't believe that this is enough. To reduce stigma and discrimination toward children with HIV, state institutions have to support and get more actively involved in development of information campaigns on HIV/AIDS for medical workers, teachers in orphanages, hostels and boarding schools. The Alliance Ukraine also called on the Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Family, Youth and Sports Issues to clearly define a pool of people at school who has access to confidential medical information on HIV-positive status of a child.

TV CHANNEL 5 COMPLEMENTS GALA-CONCERT WITH A FOUR-HOUR STOPAIDS TELETHON

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number of Ukrainian celebrities and notable guests such as musicians Mariya Burmaka and Fagot, Olympic champion Liliya Podkopayeva, UNICEF Representative in Ukraine Jeremy Hartley, and UNAIDS Country Coordinator Anna Shakarishvili participated in a live show. Key discussion topics included an assessment of government policies toward HIV/AIDS;

the impact of political instability on Ukraine's ability to combat the epidemic; overcoming the stigma of HIV in Ukraine; and the rights of people living with HIV. The telethon also included and a special screening of the documentary, *Street Children and HIV* by Igor Slisarenko. The telethon was a collaborative effort of TPAAG/GBC, TV Channel 5, the Petro Poroshenko Foundation, the International Charitable Foundation of Lilia Podkopayeva *Health of Generations* and the *All-Ukrainian Network of PLWH*.