

Speaking Out About AIDS

Interview by Alexandra Yeboa

Shamin Mohamed is the co-founder of the Children's AIDS Health Program and has been an inspirational speaker to thousands of youth across Canada promoting the message that youth can truly make a difference. The Children's AIDS Health Program (LetsStopAIDS) is a registered Canadian Charity that helps provide treatment for children and youth infected or affected by HIV and AIDS. It is a youth-driven organization that focuses on peer education to raise awareness about HIV and AIDS.

GNT: When did you start the Children's AIDS Health Program?

SM: Children's AIDS Health Program (LetsStopAIDS) was founded in 2004, by myself and a few other students.

GNT: What motivated you to start the Children's AIDS Health Program?

SM: HIV is a topic that is not highly discussed in my community. There were events relating to other causes, but none specifically relating to HIV. I wanted to do something about this. I gathered support from a great amount of friends and community supporters, and the motto "all it takes is one action to make one dream a reality" came about, which motivated our team and myself to know that

we can definitely take on any challenge and show that youth can help other youth and play a key role in international and national development.

GNT: What process did you have to go through to get the program up on its feet? What were the challenges you encountered?

SM: It takes a great deal of effort to get an organization like Children's AIDS Health Program up on its feet. It takes a lot of courage, determination, and, believe it or not, a stubborn attitude. You have to see your vision and not give up on what you want to see it be. I want to see LetsStopAIDS become the go-to charity that could allow youth easier access to information relating to HIV and greater opportunities to be involved in their communities. The charity was started when I was 15. They finally accepted [us] once we gained the support of numerous individuals who were of age. LetsStopAIDS constantly faces challenges, ranging from volunteer management, country/mission planning, public relation issues, all the way to donor support – it's something that motivates me to improve our charity to ensure that we can battle any barriers that stand in our way.

GNT: What assistance did you seek to get the Children's AIDS Health Program started?

SM: Support. It is way more valuable than any significant number. We received and still do receive support from the DAREarts Foundation, which aided in providing their network, support, and assistance to ensure our events ran smoothly. Their assistance has greatly allowed our charity to grow in a professional and reasonable manner. They have become a mentor to our organization – always there to support our initiatives and projects.

GNT: How do you juggle your schoolwork along with your administrative duties at the Children's AIDS Health Program?

SM: It's definitely a challenge, but you can ALWAYS make time for things you are passionate about. Being a charity of our size, there is a significant increase in governance and administration – we are still very grassroots, and proud to say that. We are developing and growing to ensure sustainability and stability. Time management plays a key role, along with support from friends and community members.

GNT: What are your future goals for the program?

SM: I have a lot of faith in LetsStopAIDS. One idea has



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expanded to have members from coast to coast. My future goals for LetsStopAIDS is to develop our core team and ensure greater visibility and awareness across Canada. I believe that LetsStopAIDS can be one of the leading charities relating to issues directly affecting Youth and HIV.

GNT: How do you feel about what you've accomplished?

SM: I am super psyched at what we have accomplished! We have to date been featured on every national Canadian media outlet, been mentioned by Bill Clinton and Bill Gates and the XVI International AIDS Conference, developed and expanded our core leadership team to ensure sustainable growth, and have connected with youth across Canada!



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I now live with bipolar disorder, and through a combination of medication and Nia, I am no longer under the stranglehold of anorexia or an exercise addiction. Through Nia, I work on self-compassion, body-esteem, and self-healing, and my experience has taught me that although every crisis carries the seed of destruction, there is also the possibility of renewed strength.

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