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Illinois Department of Corrections Partners with AIDS Foundation Chicago to Offer New Educational Video
"Outside the Walls: Life Beyond HIV" to be Shown Inside Illinois Department of Corrections Facilities Starting This Year

CHICAGO – Angela McLaurin describes it simply as “the wake-up call” – that moment in 1995 when she tested positive for HIV while in prison. Upon her release, Angela used an HIV services directory to link herself to resources, but she knows that a booklet of information is no substitute for individual assistance.

That’s why Angela and Tawon Dale—both members of AIDS Foundation of Chicago (AFC) Community Advisory Board—agreed to appear in an AFC-produced educational video entitled “Outside The Walls: Life Beyond HIV.” Beginning this year, the four-minute video will be shown inside the walls of Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) facilities and used by discharge planners to encourage offenders to know their HIV status and connect to HIV/AIDS services upon release.

“I’m a testimony to the fact that there is life beyond HIV,” says Angela, a motivational speaker and educator. “Early detection is key because what I’m seeing is that people don’t get tested until it’s way too late. And it’s sad because the help is out here.”

IDOC offers testing to offenders from intake through discharge. Upon discharge, these individuals are connected to HIV case managers and resources through community groups, such as AFC, to establish regular health care and a network of support. Studies have shown that HIV prevalence is higher for incarcerated populations than for the general population.

“Educating offenders inside the facilities is an important step to providing our inmate population with vital testing information, and can serve to reach people who have previously missed out on HIV and AIDS education,” said Illinois Department of Corrections Director S.A. Godinez. “This video also gives specific HIV resource information to offenders re-entering society who may not have otherwise sought out services.”

“This partnership between AFC and Illinois Department of Corrections is a great example of how collaboration can bolster our collective efforts to increase HIV/AIDS awareness and improve the health of the re-entry population,” said Reverend Doris J. Green, AFC Director of Correctional Health & Community Affairs. “People perish for lack of knowledge and this video aims to empower people to take the first step toward knowing their status.”

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Rev. Green has worked for years to bring HIV education into prisons and jails. Green made production of the video possible through her work as liaison between AFC and IDOC.

AFC works with IDOC and a variety of public and private partners, including housing agencies, case management providers, and other correctional facilities to link individuals living with HIV/AIDS to the services they need. The AFC model aims to create a seamless continuum of services and care for this hard-to-reach and transient population by improving linkages between correctional facilities and community agencies.

“When I got out of the penitentiary, I didn’t know what I was going to do,” says Tawon. “But what I did know was that I was gonna call the AIDS Foundation [of Chicago].”

Upon his release, Tawon was connected to a case manager at the South Side Help Center. The agency helped him get housing, access to medication, and job training through Sweet Miss Givings, a bakery and jobs program for people living with HIV.

“Outside The Walls: Life Beyond HIV” is an educational and inspirational personal account from two formerly incarcerated individuals who have taken control of their health care upon release from prison. The purpose of this video is to help encourage discussion around re-entry planning for people living with HIV. In order to make health care a priority, the video reaffirms the importance of knowing one’s status, and getting regular HIV tests.

The objectives of the video are:

1. To educate offenders who are HIV-positive, or who do not know they are HIV-positive, about coordinated re-entry programs for ex-offenders living with HIV/AIDS.
2. To help promote the services provided by re-entry programs and agencies that serve HIV-positive, post-incarcerated individuals in Illinois.
3. To help HIV-positive post-incarcerated individuals in making their health a priority.
4. To reassure HIV-positive offenders that they are not alone in their struggle to rebuild their lives, post-incarceration.

The video is available for free download at: <http://bit.ly/outsidethewalls> and is also being distributed in Chicago neighborhoods as a DVD through Men & Women in Prison Ministries, a non-profit that provides support to incarcerated populations, their families and the community at large. It can also be viewed at: <http://aidschicago.org/corrections>

Founded in 1985 by community activists and physicians, the AIDS Foundation of Chicago is a catalyst for local, national, and international action against HIV/AIDS.

aidschicago.org

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