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**NEW ORLEANS YOUTH ADVOCATES HOST TALENT SHOW FOR THE “STOP” SOCIAL MEDIA
CAMPAIGN TO ADDRESS ALARMING RISE OF HIV/AIDS AMONG AREA YOUTH**

***50% of New HIV Cases Among 15-24 Year Olds; Institute of Women and Ethnic Studies (IWES)
Campaign Empowers Teens to Discuss Sex Risks and Testing with Teen Peers***

New Orleans, LA (February 17, 2010): As New Orleans ranks second in the nation among AIDS case rates and 50 percent of the new HIV infections occurring each year are among 15-24 year olds, New Orleans youth are taking a new approach to STOP this alarming trend among their peers. Since the launch on World AIDS Day, December 1, 2009, fifteen STOP Core Group Members aged 14-25 years old have used their voices through discussions and videos on Facebook, MySpace and Twitter to speak bluntly with their teen-aged peers about sex, teen relationships and the consequences of risky behavior.

Developed by the Institute of Women and Ethnic Studies (IWES), the Social Marketing Technology Outreach Program, called “STOP”, has trained local youth advocates to communicate openly with other teens about the realities of sex, safer sex practices, HIV/AIDS & STI testing and making informed choices in hopes of reducing the incidence of HIV/AIDS among New Orleans teens. Through the STOP campaign, youth advocates have developed a multimedia HIV risk reduction campaign using social media outlets and venue-based product placement at local health clinics, schools and businesses to reach over 1,000 youth of color in the greater New Orleans area as of February 2010. The products available through the campaign include buttons, posters and fliers with campaign information and HIV statistics, mythbusters videos that disprove popular sex myths, as well as discreet STOP kits with safer sex materials and information on where to get tested.

“As the incidence of HIV, AIDS and STDs has steadily grown, post-Katrina youth in Louisiana are at a perilous intersection of emotional distress, diminished health resources and lack of sexual education,” said Dr. Denese Shervington, Chairman & CEO of IWES. “Our research has found that HIV risk behavior among New Orleans youth is linked to their socio-cultural experiences from violence, abuse and home instability to gender roles and attitudes about sexual relationships. Peer education and intergenerational dialogue are the best ways for youth of color to learn about sexual health, HIV/STD protective measures, relationships and how to make better, healthier decisions”

Although the STOP campaign primarily targets teens, the secondary audience includes parents, religious leaders, and others who work with youth (e.g., band directors, coaches, social workers, court advocates). These individuals often serve as gatekeepers and influencers to youth who are targeted by the STOP campaign.

A Timely Campaign for New Orleans' Teens

According to teens involved in IWES' HIV and sexual health programs, the STOP campaign evolved as a result of the limited sex education and information offered to New Orleans teens about HIV prevention through schools, churches or community-based settings. This lack of information may also be fueled by myths and misinformation about sex, stigmas regarding sexual orientation, false beliefs and negative attitudes regarding condoms. With media images that promote the norms around sex rather than safer sex, many teens lack emotional, family, and community support and may experience pressure to become sexually active due to pressure among peers or relationship partners. The STOP campaign is designed to address these issues by using teen-to-teen communiqué as a working model to change attitudes and behaviors and possibly save lives.

Youth Talent Showcase with an HIV Awareness Message

To celebrate the amazing success of the STOP campaign and raise visibility of STOP campaign materials and online resources, IWES will host the "STOP Youth Talent Show," which will be held on Saturday, March 27th 2010 from 7pm - 11pm at Warren Easton High School's Auditorium. The goal of the event is to create a fun, safe environment for New Orleans youth to showcase their creative talents, raise awareness of HIV among New Orleans youth, and access information and resources. The event is free and open to the public and will consist of 4 categories: 1) dance/step; 2) vocal (singing and rapping); 3) spoken word/poetry; and 4) fashion (with red, black, & green colored outfits).

Youth aged 13-25 are eligible to enter. \$750 in cash prizes will be awarded. In addition to the show, youth can be filmed in a "confessionals" booth where they will be asked questions about issues related to sexual health to be broadcast in the future on STOP's websites. Attendees may also visit a variety of health and information booths with information about other IWES youth programs as well as from partnering youth-serving organizations. There will also be a youth host announcing the project's key messages and providing the audience with youth-relevant sexual health information between acts. Core Group members will judge the show and have the opportunity to disseminate some of the sexual health information they've learned throughout the campaign.

About IWES

The Institute of Women & Ethnic Studies (IWES) was founded in 1993 in response to health disparities among women of color. IWES is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) community-based organization based in New Orleans, Louisiana, dedicated to improving the physical, mental, and spiritual health and quality of life for women of color and their families. IWES develops culturally proficient, multidisciplinary and holistic public health programs, activities, and research models for women, adolescents, and people of color that promote health rights and wellness in partnership with clinicians, women's advocates, youth groups, public health organizations, governmental agencies, and community coalitions. For more information about IWES and its programs, call (504) 301-3690 or visit IWES at www.iwesnola.org.