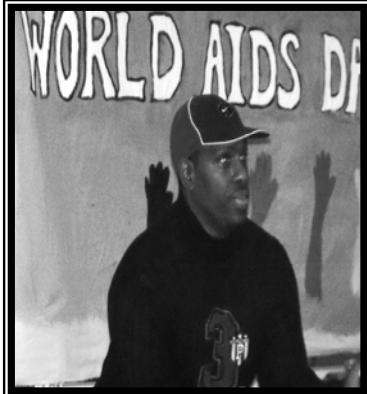


Saving Lives through Education

By: Carol Jones, Dir. Medical Case Management



Not only is Chris a member of the Speakers' Bureau, but he is a leader in our community serving on the Board of Directors.

The Alliance for Living's ***Positively Speaking*** program is a unique interactive presentation that can be tailored to any audience.

Schools, colleges, business and faith communities, youth/young adult groups, area agencies, substance abuse treatment facilities, community mental health agencies and public service departments are some of the current users of this program.

This program pairs a certified HIV/AIDS educator who will discuss the facts about HIV with a person living with HIV who will share what it is like to live with HIV. The process of combining both an HIV/AIDS educator with a person living with this disease provides a very moving and deeply connecting emotional, learning experience for everyone involved. Participants find themselves connecting in a personal way with the speaker's life story.

As facilitator of this program I have watched both the speakers and the audience exhibit great courage, break down barriers of stigma and help to support one another in experiencing the knowledge that this disease is a virus that can happen to ANYONE and that with education we can hopefully put an end to transmission of this disease. As part of the program we ask students to write letters to our speakers that are HIV positive and share what the experience taught them. I am sharing a letter with you now from an East Lyme High School student so that you can see first hand the impact this program leaves on individuals.

Dear Chris,

I think your story really opened a lot of people's eyes to the reality and dangers of STDs— I know it did for me. For one, it made me realize that risky behaviors result in dangerous consequences. There was a point in my life this year that I started to go out more and try different things. I had one friend that I would always hang out with during the weekends and school breaks, and we started going to parties and drinking. After hearing your story, I realized that by putting myself in these unsafe environments, I had a much greater chance of doing things that I wouldn't do if I were sober or somewhere else. I also recognized that when I was doing these types of things, I was presenting myself as a promiscuous type of person, and that I attracted guys who were looking for casual hook-ups or one night stands, and that was not the attention I wanted.

In addition to realizing my own risky behavior, listening to your experiences encouraged me to reach out to one of my friends who has been making some poor decisions lately. I care about her a lot, and by getting help now, I think she can save herself from hurting herself, or even worse, contracting an STD. Lastly, I just want to say thank you for coming in and talking with our health class. Your own life experiences have really reached out and affected my own outlook on life.

(As you can see, this young person chose not to sign her letter to protect her identity so she could openly share with Chris the impact his presentation immediately had on her. That is our goal through Positively Speaking.)