

# OUTREACH

Spring 2009



At the 20th Anniversary celebration, MTA presented five peer educators with \$500 scholarships, made possible by the Altarum Institute and other generous donors. Pictured (from left to right) are: Duron Perkins, Vernice Puryear, Adam Tenner, Terra Moore, Mache Chase, Zataunia Heard

## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

### REFLECTING ON 20 YEARS OF SERVICE TO HELP FIGHT THE ADOLESCENT HIV/AIDS EPIDEMIC IN WASHINGTON, DC

**I**N 1988, THE WASHINGTON REDSKINS WERE PRO football champions. That same year, the deadly virus called HIV had become firmly rooted in the District, especially among African-Americans living in poverty. Local physicians were seeing increasing numbers of HIV-positive adolescents and sounded the alarm about this creeping epidemic. That year, our founder, Dr. Larry D'Angelo, mobilized a group of doctors, clinicians and others to establish the Washington Area Consortium on HIV Infection in Youth (WACHIVY). Originally organized as an information-sharing group, WACHIVY became a direct service organization and was renamed Metro TeenAIDS (MTA). When he started MTA, Dr. D'Angelo also initiated an amazing two-decade story of perseverance and grit – I've been honored to be part of this story for the last seven years.

## upcoming EVENTS

**June 11, 2009**

**16th Annual MTA Auction**

*Don't miss the exciting MTA Auction! Join us at the gorgeous Embassy of Finland for fabulous food prepared by the Embassy chef, Mikko Kosonen; delightful company; and the chance to bid on outrageous wines, restaurants, and travel opportunities. Be the lucky winner of a cookie basket from Top Chef finalist, DC's own Carla Hall! All proceeds support MTA's work to provide HIV/AIDS education, counseling, testing, and services to DC's youth. Tickets are \$125, and we still have opportunities for those who want to be sponsors or donate items. Go to [www.metroteenaidsonline.org/auction](http://www.metroteenaidsonline.org/auction) for more details.*



Links to HIV and Metro TeenAIDS in the news can be found at our homepage: [www.metroteenaidsonline.org](http://www.metroteenaidsonline.org)

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PROFILE



**Vernice Puryear**

Vernice Puryear, an MTA peer educator, goes above and beyond the call of duty in her work with MTA. Vernice got involved with MTA in 2007 as a high school freshman and has always been eager to help out any way she can. She participates in outreach events, Supreme Teen Nights, and is trained to provide counseling and testing to her peers.

Vernice is a member of MTA's Young Women of Color Leadership Council (YWOC), eight young women who engage in advocacy, outreach and education on issues related to women's health and HIV/AIDS in the DC area. She is particularly enthusiastic about expanding outreach and testing programs to young women throughout the community. Vernice wrote a grant to Cable Positive's Youth AIDS Media Institute to support a series of health information fairs in DC public schools. The grant provided YWOC with \$5,000 for 10 fairs!

When asked about what it's like to provide HIV/AIDS education to people her own age, Vernice says, "Sometimes, it feels like I'm talking to a wall. But I know that they're taking the information and using it." Although working in schools can be difficult, she says it's one of the best parts of her job. Vernice is currently working on a plan to make HIV testing available in her high school before prom.

Vernice described her plans for the future, "I'm applying to 13 colleges, all in Georgia," including Atlanta's Emory University. Her goal is to work for the Georgia Department of Health (DOH) as an epidemiologist and eventually as the director. However, she will never forget MTA. "MTA has been like a family to me," she says. "Between college and working for the DOH, I hope I can have Adam Tenner's job!"

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Dr. D'Angelo reflected on MTA's 20 years of service to the community at an event in February at the Embassy of Australia. He spoke of being frustrated, back in the 1980's, when health officials kept their heads in the sand while the virus moved deeply into communities of color, partly driven by the city's skyrocketing poverty and drug rates. He recalls that responses to MTA's call for attention to the youth epidemic ranged from apathy to outright hostility.

Thankfully, much has happened since 1988. Testing is faster, more accurate, and more widely available. City officials are now our best partners and leaders themselves in addressing the epidemic. More effective treatments have been developed and are widely available today, and people with HIV live longer. As widespread public education has taken hold, condom use has increased. The District's Health Department now has a dedicated HIV/AIDS Administration and is leading the way to end the epidemic. Dr. D'Angelo reports that, "More than half of the teenaged patients we care for at Children's were infected at birth, but are still alive and leading healthy lives today."



The bad news is that HIV/AIDS is still with us, and we still struggle to stem the spread of this deadly epidemic and make sure that every youth has the skills and opportunities needed to stay healthy. A new epidemiology report released by the city's HIV/AIDS Administration reveals that at least 3% of the District's residents have HIV or AIDS, a percentage that is higher than any other U.S. city and puts rates in the nation's capital on a par with those in Uganda and Kenya. The virus now affects 15,120 Washingtonians – and that's just the people who know they are infected; it's estimated that between 30-50% of those living with HIV/AIDS don't even know they're infected.

MTA has been a major force in changing the climate to create a positive focus on adolescent health and support for youth in. We have long ago vanquished the apathy and hostility this subject aroused, and I am proud to lead MTA's work on the front lines of the HIV/AIDS fight. I hope you'll support Metro TeenAIDS' work of educating, advocating and pushing systems to achieve a future without AIDS. I hope you'll help us be the solution to end HIV/AIDS in the District.

—Adam Tenner, *Executive Director*

**MTA's Mission**

Metro TeenAIDS is a community health organization dedicated to supporting young people in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Through education, support, and advocacy, MTA prevents the spread of HIV; promotes responsible decision making; and improves the quality of life for young people infected with, or affected by, HIV/AIDS.



## EVENT REPORT

### Women and Girls HIV Awareness Day

In March, MTA celebrated “Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day” by hosting the Second Annual Film Screening at the new Busboys & Poets location at 5th and K Streets, NW. The event was sponsored by MTA’s Young Women of Color Leadership Council (YWOC) and overseen by Fushena Cruickshank, MTA’s Leadership Development Coordinator. The combination of yummy food, thought-provoking films, and HIV prevention information creatively raised awareness about young women of color’s risk for infection.

The event included the debut of three public service announcements (PSAs) about HIV prevention produced by Ballou High School students in partnership with MTA. (See page 4 for more on the PSAs.) The PSAs put the national HIV/AIDS epidemic into a local context; helped the audience see HIV/AIDS as a problem that deeply affects the DC community; and reinforced the fact that the disease can be avoided by making healthy decisions. The PSAs provided an opening act for DC’s premier of *All of Us*, a documentary about HIV in young women. Shot in the south Bronx, the movie follows Dr. Mehret Mandefro, a physician who works with HIV-positive women. Dr. Mandefro’s search to understand why Black women comprise 72% of all new AIDS cases among women nationally led her to explore the lived reality of her patients. In addition, one YWOC member read a poem she had written about living with HIV and trying to find a partner who will practice safe sex. YWOC members also answered questions from the audience about HIV/AIDS.

MTA is grateful to the PSA creators from Ballou High School, Busboys & Poets for their hospitality, and to Dr. Mandefro for her commitment to young women. Women and Girls Day Activities were sponsored by the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services’ Office on Women’s Health.

## UPDATE ON MTA ACTIVITIES

MTA never stops looking for ways to spread news about HIV/AIDS prevention to District youth. One way we do it is through the efforts of Chrissy Balz, MTA’s School Services Manager, and 14 CityYear volunteers, who reach public school students by partnering with many representatives of the District of Columbia Public Schools system (DCPS), including principals, nurses, and after-school coordinators.

Chrissy reports that the DCPS Department of Health, Physical Education and Athletics is an invaluable partner in achieving MTA’s goal for every single 7th grader to participate in the HIV and substance abuse prevention program called *Making Proud Choices!* (MPC). MTA’s goal is to inform and influence youth’s behavior before youth become sexually active and to help them learn how to make safe choices that work for them and are not forced by peer pressure.

Chrissy is also using her seemingly endless energy to manage MTA’s Visionary Youth Becoming Empowered (VYBE) Clubs in two high schools and four junior highs. VYBE is an eight-week after-school program focused on promoting healthy behaviors. VYBE goes beyond basic HIV/AIDS prevention education. It helps youth build healthy relationships, increase their communication and negotiation skills, and become more confident

about making responsible choices. Participants are “recruited” at health fairs, through trivia games, posters and by word-of-mouth. After VYBE ends, students are encouraged to visit MTA’s Freestyle Center and participate in its summer programs. When they experience what a fun and safe place Freestyle is, they come back again and again.

Based on the success of school programs, Chrissy conducted a training for 20 community-based organizations to learn how to improve capacities to provide HIV/AIDS prevention information and supportive activities to youth. She taught them how to incorporate information and activities from *Making Proud Choices!* into a range of youth centered activities. And, because we know that education leaders need to engage in these issues, MTA will establish an advocacy group for school principals and educators around HIV prevention. To complement our in-school programs, MTA is also starting an adult peer education program to build parents’ skills to have accurate and open conversations with their children about sex. Chrissy’s goal is to provide parents with a health education program so they can reinforce the positive messages students are getting in health classes and after-school activities. Summer vacation? Not for MTA’s staff and volunteers!



## COLLABORATIONS

### Save The Date!

May 29, 2009  
Playmaking With Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company

The *New York Times* calls Woolly Mammoth “Washington’s most daring theater company.” MTA’s Freestyle youth are in stellar hands as they once again participate in Woolly’s Playmaking program. Each Friday, Freestyle youth work with Woolly’s artistic staff to compose short theatrical pieces which will be performed by professional actors on May 29th.

MTA’s youth participants increase their writing skills; find their creative voice, learn about character development and the importance of plot; and discover how to assemble elements that move from a creative idea, to paper, and to the stage. “They may write about HIV, their neighborhood, betrayal or a personal tragedy, or some other element of their lives,” reports Lamar Anderson, Freestyle’s manager, who accompanies the youth to the theater’s weekly classes.

“Playmaking really gives young people an artistic voice,” says Woolly’s Education Director, Louise Andrews. “The tremendous insight and creativity of these plays are the reason we continue to work with the incredibly talented students in DC.”

Come cheer on MTA’s creative playwrights and their work on May 29th! For more information, contact Metro TeenAIDS at 202.543.8246.

## Key Staff

Adam Tenner  
*Executive Director*

Molly Singer  
*Deputy Director*

Angel Brown  
*Director of Community Outreach  
and Partnerships*

Lamar Anderson  
*Youth Center Manager*

Chrissy Balz  
*School Services Manager*

Jeffrey Gluckman  
*Evaluation and Program Development  
Manager*

Auntre Hamp  
*Community Outreach Manager*

Carmel Pryor  
*Social Marketing Manager*

Arnita Wilson  
*Client Services Manager*

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## MTA NEWS BRIEFS

### PSA Campaigns

In January, the Sexually Transmitted Infections Community Coalition held a contest challenging youth to create PSAs about the availability of free condoms in DC. Aided by Howard University and Stone Soup Films, MTA's Freestyle youth created a PSA emphasizing that there's no excuse for not

using condoms, since groups like MTA give them out for free. MTA's youth group was a runner-up in the contest! (See [www.youtube.com/realtalkdc](http://www.youtube.com/realtalkdc).)

MTA's social marketing staff also worked with Ballou Senior High School student to create PSAs tackling myths about HIV and highlighting the importance of doing well in school as a way

to combat risky behaviors. Four PSAs were written, directed, acted, and produced by students supervised by Ballou's film teacher, Dr. Dimattio. The PSAs will be shown at events like the Film Screening, appear on the Internet, and air on public access television.



### Sandra Hanna

Three minutes into a conversation with Sandra Hanna, you know why she's such an asset to the Metro Teen AIDS Board of Directors, where she's served since 2003. Her sense of outrage about the incidence of HIV/AIDS in youth of color spills out as she talks about her introduction to the world of AIDS in the early 1990s, when she was doing HIV prevention and gang intervention in the New York City's public high schools.

MTA was on Sandra's radar before she ever left New York City. As part of her work on HIV prevention, Sandra helped organize a benefit concert called UrbanAID 4 LIFEBeat, sponsored by several record labels, which introduced her to MTA. Sandra moved to Washington to attend Georgetown Law School and joined MTA's board soon thereafter. It still shocks her that the Nation's Capital has the highest AIDS rate in the country; that the disease increasingly threatens youth of color; and that MTA is the only organization addressing it directly by reaching out to youth where they live, go to school, work, and hang out.

Sandra now practices law for Willkie, Farr & Gallagher LLP, focusing on white-collar crime. She is a consummate multi-tasker, combining her involvement in MTA with working fulltime, and raising two small children. She continues to be actively involved with MTA because the issue is so compelling and MTA's work is so effective. MTA is lucky to be among her most important "tasks."