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NEW ORLEANS YOUTH ADVOCATES HOST TALENT SHOW TO “STOP” ALARMING RISE OF HIV/AIDS AMONG TEENS;

NEARLY 300 ATTEND EVENT THAT AWARDS YOUTH PERFORMANCES OF MUSIC, DANCE, SPOKEN WORD, FASHION, AND VISUAL ART WITH HIV/AIDS PREVENTION MESSAGES

New Orleans, LA (April 1, 2010): As New Orleans ranks fifth in the nation among AIDS case rates and 50 percent of the new HIV infections occur among youth under 25 years old, New Orleans youth are taking a new approach to STOP this alarming trend among their peers. On Saturday, March 27th nearly 300 teens and adults participated in the “STOP Shakedown”, a talent competition of youth performances of Hip Hop, Singing, Dance, Spoken Word, Fashion, and Visual Arts focused on HIV/AIDS prevention. The event was hosted by the Institute of Women & Ethnic Studies (IWES) through their “STOP” campaign. The campaign has trained a group of fifteen youth advocates aged 14-25 years old who’ve used their voices through discussions and videos on Facebook, MySpace and Twitter to speak bluntly with their peers about sex, teen relationships, HIV/STI testing, and the consequences of risky behaviors.

“The STOP Shakedown was a first for the Institute and we were highly impressed and inspired by the success of the event to bring together youth and adults around such an important message,” said Denese Shervington, MD, CEO & founder of IWES. “The fusion of performance art and HIV prevention messages is an innovative way to educate our community around a highly stigmatized issue, and we hope to continue work like this in the future. The success of this event highlights the effectiveness of using new media to reach youth where they are, through their peer networks.”

Developed and launched last December by the Institute of Women and Ethnic Studies (IWES), the “STOP” campaign (Social Marketing Technology Outreach Program), has trained local youth advocates to develop a multimedia HIV risk reduction campaign. The youth use social media outlets and venue-based product placement at local health clinics, schools and businesses to spread their message and disseminate trendy safer sex kits called “STOP kits” containing condoms and a list of local sites to get free HIV testing. To date, “STOP” has reached over 2,000 youth of color in the greater New Orleans area.

Youth Talent Showcase Awards Stellar Performances with an HIV Awareness Message

To continue the success of the STOP campaign, raise HIV awareness, and raise visibility of campaign materials and online resources, IWES hosted the “STOP Shakedown” on Saturday, March 27th 2010 from 7pm - 11pm at Warren Easton High School’s Auditorium. The event was free and open to the public and created a fun, safe environment for New Orleans youth to showcase their creative talents. IWES firmly believes that creating programs that foster positive youth development and providing a venue for the expression of their creativity is an effective deterrent to risky behaviors. In addition to the show, attendees were able to visit health and information booths about other IWES youth programs as well as from other youth-serving organizations like Job1, St. John #5 Camp ACE, & Brotherhood Incorporated.

An intergenerational crowd of nearly 300 attendees cheered on their favorite acts as they enjoyed a positive showcase of youth talent in a city that often focuses solely on violence and misbehavior amongst youth of color.

The night opened with the screening of short films on sexual health topics from both the STOP and MAP (Media Advocates for Prevention) programs that were created by and for local youth. The competition followed and consisted of 45 youth aged 14-23 competing in 6 categories: Dance; Singing; Spoken Word; Hip Hop; Visual Art; and, Fashion. In keeping with a public health “edutainment” approach, the emcee, Mandisa Moore, engaged the audience through announcements of the project's key messages by providing youth-relevant sexual health information and HIV statistics between acts. The night concluded with music from DJ Poppa and the awarding of over \$1250 in awards and door prizes.

And the Winner is....

The Grand Prize winner, Jerry Weathersby, was in the Dance category, and was recognized for his incredible homage to Michael Jackson that included a show-stopping jump from the stage onto the floor in which he landed in a split. Jonathan Moody was the winner of the Visual Art competition, for his dynamic portrayal of a young man who's body is affected by HIV called “HIV Bound.” Other prizes were awarded to the following contestants:

Spoken Word: Sana Shuja, 1st Place; Jeremiah “Reality” Douglas, 2nd Place

Singing: Yondi Gross, 1st Place; Langston Theard, 2nd Place

Hip Hop: Jermy “Lucky Lou” Tassin, 1st Place; Aston Shields, 2nd Place

Dance: Kendall Santacruze, 2nd Place

Fashion: Jameson Warren, 1st Place; Dominique Davis, 2nd Place

Visual Art: Ashley Ware, 2nd Place; Robert Atkins, Honorable Mention

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.