

Aids Day/campaigns have helped Jamaica fight disease

As the world looks at commemorating World AIDS Day tomorrow, an estimated 27,000 Jamaicans are living with HIV. World AIDS Day has been observed globally on that date every year since 1988, and Jamaica has been contributing its fair share to the fight, knowing well that the Caribbean has the second highest prevalence rate at 1.1 per cent, behind Sub Saharan Africa at 5 per cent, based on 2007 data.

Strong theme

Universal Access to Human Rights is the theme for this year, and Jamaica has its own version "Yes I can ... support someone living with HIV/AIDS."

Roshane Reid, behaviour change communication officer with the National HIV/STI Programme in the Ministry of Health told The Gleaner why the theme was chosen.

"At the time we were developing a campaign that fits directly into that theme, which is anti-stigma, so we thought it was appropriate to use the tag line for that campaign."

Positive spin-offs

Reid said a committee of partners that work with people living with HIV, usually decides the theme.

The officer also pointed out that sometimes activities leading up to World AIDS Day, might impact on what Jamaica's theme will be.

Lovette Byfield, director of HIV prevention, in the National HIV/STI Programme, said the annual commemoration of World AIDS Day, and selecting a focus has had positive spin-offs.

"There has been a change in the attitude of persons towards persons living with HIV/AIDS. There is definitely a more positive response and they are more supportive of these individuals."

Byfield said people had moved from a stage where individuals were separated from their families who sometimes shunned them, to one where there is acceptance and support.

The HIV prevention director, who has been working with the HIV programme for over 10 years, said campaigns had also meant more people were willing to seek treatment.

"We have seen a change in the attitudes of health workers to persons living with HIV. There is no longer an issue of persons being secluded," she said.