

Judge Cameron honours Peer educators

The South African Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS (SABCOHA) officially opened its inaugural Peer Educator Conference in Johannesburg this week. Opening the gala dinner, CEO at SABCOHA Brad Mears acknowledged the dedication and commitment of the peer educators who are often right at the face of HIV/AIDS.



"This conference represents a salute to our country's peer educators who without recompense and in addition to their normal work duties help to make a difference by educating, giving support and understanding to many who face the prospect of testing or starting treatment," said Mears.

Keynote speaker, Judge Edwin Cameron used the evening to acknowledge and celebrate the important job done by peer educators in South Africa. "We need to say no to suffering, stigma and ignorance, and an emphatic yes to testing, treatment, love and acceptance of a disease that has gripped the health and wellness of our society," he said.

Acknowledging the role that he and many other HIV positive people continue to play in addressing and educating the communities in which they live, he added that AIDS is important as it has taught the country that the lessons learnt from the Apartheid era means that the struggle for good sense, reasonable action did not end with Apartheid, but extends to the continued fight against the HIV pandemic.

"We now have a minister of health who has taken up the torch and is fighting the fight. It is only through the hard work and dedication of our peer educators and organisations such as SABCOHA, that we are standing at the edge of the light and we are fighting the darkness."

Educator programme can change lives

One of the companies who have shown their support of this year's peer educator conference, is the Aveng Group whose 95 delegates have enjoyed sharing the knowledge and expertise that has helped the group to be acknowledged the leading operating group in terms of HIV/AIDS management.

Patrick Sepuru, HR director at Aveng, said "We wanted to recognise our peer educators for the exemplary work that they do and the impact that they make not only in the lives of their fellow workers, but also to the company as a whole. Our success has been attributed to the fact that our peer educators operate across the board, right from line staff to management. It is my belief that when your peers see that they have the support of their fellow employees and management, you build an effective Peer Educator Programme that literally changes lives."

"We have shared the moving story of one peer educator who has been successfully living with HIV for 20 years and has overcome a number of challenges and obstacles to share her story of endurance and hope. As business we face a monumental task of providing an enabling environment for our country's workforce. We need to stand together and educate, inform and challenge the status quo, if we don't we face the potential devastation of the backbone of our county's economy", Mears added.

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