MTV Staying Alive Foundation celebrating 20 years

The MTV Staying Alive Foundation celebrated its 20th anniversary with an inspirational gala at Guastavino's in New York City.



Alicia Keys, Viacom CEO Bob Bakish, Swati Dlamini-Mandela, among attendees. Image supplied.

The event recognised the foundation's 20 years of campaigning around HIV and sexual/reproductive health and rights, and empowering young people in the global fight to end HIV.

Impactful mission

Georgia Arnold, the organisation's founder and executive director, opened the evening by shedding a light on the foundation's impactful mission, "Twenty years ago MTV Staying Alive stood up and said, we will protect the next generation by investing in them; we will give them the power to use their voices, their experiences; to influence their own universes."

Hosted by former MTV VJ Sizwe Dhlomo, among those spotlighted at the event were MTV Staying Alive grantees Tyler Spencer and Shirley Oruco. Spencer founded the Grassroots Project, a Washington, D.C. based organisation that uses sports as a way to teach children about HIV.

Oruco, who is from Nairobi, Kenya, founded Partners in Action, an organisation that works to empower young people to make better, safer choices by educating them about all facets of their sexual health. Both grantees exemplify the organisation's work in providing funding to promising young activists working to make a difference in the fight against HIV/Aids.

Passion and ability to change a community

Nelson Mandela's granddaughter Swati Dlamini-Mandela was in attendance to celebrate MTV Staying Alive board vice chair Henry Luyombya. It was Luyombya's meeting with her grandfather as part of the MTV documentary *Meeting Mandela* that inspired the founding of the organisation.

MTV recognised he had the passion and the ability to make a change in his community, but lacked the resources - so the Staying Alive Foundation gave him his first grant. Dlamini-Mandela remarked that Henry's growth from the first grantee to the vice chair of the board had her grandfather "smiling down on this room tonight."

Brooklyn-based musical group Phony Ppl kept the crowd buzzing through dinner with a five song set, including their hits, *Why iii Love the Moon* and *Before You Get a Boyfriend*.

Confronting the scope of the Aids pandemic

Auctioneer Harry Santa-Olalla got the fundraising off to an energetic start, shattering the foundation's $100,000 goal for the evening, amidst jokes and good humoured-jabs. Among the evening's experiential opportunities up for grabs, the MTV 'Golden Ticket' VIP Package including tickets to both the MTV VMAs and MTV Movie and TV Awards, fetched the highest bid, selling for a cool $50,000.

Grammy award-winning artist and Aids activist Alicia Keys presented the award to Viacom president and CEO Bob Bakish for their founding support of the organisation. Keys shared with guests that her own Aids activism was inspired by a trip she took to South Africa on behalf of MTV Staying Alive in 2002.

"That trip to Cape Town literally changed my life," she shared. "It was my first big important trip to Africa and the first time I was confronted with the scope of the Aids pandemic, and the young faces and voices in the fight against it. I was truly and profoundly affected. It totally changed the course of my life in the most important and powerful way."

The program closed out with a musical performance from Jack Antonoff, lead singer of Bleachers, who played a four-song acoustic set, including Bleachers fan favourite 'I Wanna Get Better.'

To continue the conversation about MTV Staying Alive Foundation, visit their website, like MTV Staying Alive on Facebook or follow MTV Staying Alive Foundation on Twitter or Instagram using the hashtag #HeresTo20.

For more, visit: https://www.bizcommunity.com