

Local teacher has Aids plan

A Durban teacher, an attorney and a local storyteller are among those chosen to be apostles for change in the fight against HIV/Aids, writes **Buhle Mbonambi**

SHOMANE Pillay is the head biology teacher at Northwood Boys' High, in Durban North. As one of the "chosen", she says her knowledge of biology means she is well-placed to implement an HIV/Aids prevention plan.

She is part of an innovative project – born out of a partnership between American-based MAC cosmetics and the South African Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), who together have formed the MAC Aids Leadership Fund – focusing on supporting emerging leadership in prevention of the pandemic.

"As a teacher, I interact with many young people. Currently I am researching the sexuality of Indian adolescent girls. So this is an excellent platform to devise a plan that will lower the risk of them being infected with HIV," she said.

Pillay said her prevention plan would involve the promotion of positive sexual development and health, resulting in safe sexual behaviour and attitudes to reduce vulnerability to HIV/Aids among 15- to 20-year-old Indian girls in Durban.

Laurie Bruns, a programme director from the University of California, said scores of applications were received from South Africa.

"Sadly, we couldn't take them all," she said. "A dozen people may seem like a small number, but if one monitors their environments, communities and work places, it will be easier to gauge any changes in behaviour, which is essentially what MAC Aids is about."

Pillay agreed with Bruns. "I have learnt a lot these past few weeks, especially when it comes to project development and understanding how to draw up a plan," she said.

Another ambassador for positive change is Lulu Ngcobo.

Ngcobo works for Clowns Without Borders, an organisation based in Glenwood which aims to improve the psycho-social condition of children and communities in areas of crisis through laughter and art.

"Our main focus is on child-



Shomane Pillay, head biology teacher at Northwood Boys' High, is devising an HIV/Aids prevention plan.

headed households. Since Aids is the main cause, we can formulate plans using art to prevent children from becoming infected," she said.

"My plan includes using storytelling to inform kids about HIV/Aids instead of bombarding them with cold facts."

Also in the group of ambassadors is Amelia Vuyeka-Motsepe, an attorney whose aim is to develop and publish a handbook on HIV/Aids and the law for lawyers, health workers, police officers, NGOs and faith-based organisations.

"I decided the legal side of HIV and its implications on people needs to be addressed," she said.

"Issues like access to treatment, labour problems and even medical aid coverage are just some of the issues HIV patients have to deal with, and most of the time attorneys would not be able to deal with that."

The programme runs for a year and trains 12 fellows for eight weeks. Thereafter they have 10 months to apply their prevention plans.

"The fellows come from different walks of life – from teachers and attorneys to psychologists and a soccer coach," Bruns said. "That is why this is so exciting because we will be able to see a change in more than five different fields and we can only hope that good results come from this."

