

Oakland AIDS Organization Leads Faith Based Coalition into Africa

On May 4th 2001, a coalition of AIDS service organizations and a Faith Based Collaboration called "Tapestry" will embark on a mission of mercy into Africa. Our vision is to bridge the African and African American communities in the fight for our lives against AIDS on both continents. As the devastation continues to make headlines we in the Oakland community organizing to better serve our own community have witness to the fact that knowledge is power. It is our mission to extend life in both places by sharing what we know and the resources we have available. The purpose of this trip is to gather information on just how we can best help each other help ourselves. Aid for AIDS/AFRICA "AFAA", and members of "Tapestry" a new Faith Based coalition of churches of all denominations and faiths also including AIDS service organizations and substance abuse organizations represent the team. AIDS Project of the East Bay "ABEB", City of Refuge and East Bay Church of Religious Science "EBCRS" AIDS Ministies plan to participate as members of a Faith Based Team. Representing City of Refuge is Reverend Yvette Flunder and a host of staff and supporters from her congregation. Representing EBCRS Aids Ministry is Sharon Cross, and Maurice Graham. Maurice is founder of Aid for AIDS/Africa, and is also EBCRS's representative for the Faith Based Collaboration being formed in the San Francisco Bay area, called "Tapestry". It is a coalition of Faith Based and Service Organizations developed to fill in the gaps left by the existing service organizations for our congregations. We are going to Ghana to visit HIV/AIDS clinics, orphanages, and refuge camps. We will particapte in panels on HIV Prevention at the universities, high schools, Salvation Army, the National Youth Council of Ghana and other public facilities. TV and radio interviews are also planned to emphazise our concern and state our intent of support for all of us. We will meet with government officials and Kings of several major tribes in Ghana. We will connect with faith-based communities in Ghana including Muslims, Christians and Indigenous Africans Religious Organizations. We are going there to share our faith with these groups. We are on a fact-finding mission endorsed and sanctioned by the United States Congressional Black Caucus. Representative Barbara Lee is the liason for the Black Caucus. The East Bay Church of Religious Science, The City of Refuge, Aid for Aids Africa and The Aids Project of the East Bay are the active participants. It is our intent to establish long-term relationships of support with the Faith Based Community in the US to the Faith Based Community in Africa.

The second trip is to Swaziland. Maurice Graham plans to represent EBCRS and Aid for AIDS /Africa as a counselor and health care consultant for EDF. Maurice is the HIV/AIDS arm of Economic Development Foundation "EDF" a US organization of Doctors and Health Care practitioners providing medical relief in West and South African countries. At the invitation of King Mswati, III, a kingdom of less than 1 million people who has reached an infection rate of more than 40% in the 20-24 age group, EDF has accepted the challenge of developing Counseling and Treatment programs to combat the rising numbers of HIV infected in the population. Maurice will be an asset as his message of hope can touch many lives in this effort.

We leave for Ghana May 4th and return May 18, 2001. Aids for Aids Africa will make an additional visit to Southern Africa (Swaziland) from May 30th to June 15, 2001. Your financial support will help us to defer travel expenses buy medication to help relieve the effects of the HIV/AIDS virus and the secondary effects of infection, buy clothes, books, educational materials and food. We are Raising \$10,000 in this effort, and appreciate already whatever you can contribute. What we would also like to ask is for your active participation in collecting medicines of all types not just HIV medicines, please include children's medicines as well, eyeglasses, and African American Bibles to be given to us to distribute for both trips.

Upon our return to Oakland we would like to report to you on our findings. This is Aid for AIDS/Africa's third year of doing this work in the African community. We have gained members and have constructed a Board and are in the final stages of becoming a non-profit organization. All of your donation can be written off as Gibbs Foundation as our fiscal manager is allowing us to use their Tax ID. Please make checks payable to Gibbs Foundation c/o Aid for AIDS/Africa and send to the address on the letterhead. Last years reports are on line and can be reviewed at GIBBS MAGAZINE website by going to gibbsfoundation.org then accessing the Archives, going to M for Maurice where you will find Maurice's Reports.

Thank you for your interest in addressing the needs of our brothers and sisters in Africa, our intent and purpose we hope are the same, helping to relieve pain and suffering in Africa and the US.

Sincerely,
Maurice Graham

The following is more detail information about Maurice Graham:

I am with HIV for more than 17 years and have survived addiction and other abusive situations in my own life and am no stranger to change. I now participate in my recovery by dealing with the underlying issues caused by my own life experiences. Now my recovery has been extended into the community and beyond.

I am writing to ask for your participation in the process of healing our community globally by assisting me and our organization of health care providers and educators in dealing with HIV/AIDS in Africa via a project being organized known as "Project Africa 2001". We are two organizations working together to bring about positive change specifically in Swaziland, Ghana and Liberia. I began organizing "Aid for Aids/Africa" after visiting Ghana in 1999 on my own to investigate how we and I as a community might help our brothers and sisters more effectively deal with Aids. I brought medicines collected in our community from my health care providers and personal friends to the clinic at Korle-bu Hospital in Ghana. However, they told me the most important thing I brought was Hope of surviving the epidemic. You see I did not use HIV medications for 13 years; I use ancient herbs and vitamins, which are available to them at little cost. I also visited the Ministry of Health, [National Aids Control Program] Director, Dr. Kwaku Yeboah and discussed getting more medications into Ghana and more equipment for testing. I spoke to churches, university organizations, government agencies, and the "National Youth

Council” in Ghana about my experience living with Aids. I also do this same work in the US, speaking in middle schools, high schools, and universities. I am putting everything I know into addressing these issues at home and in Africa. I know I am not alone, and I am not healed alone either.

Upon returning home I began to research starting a non-profit to effect the above mentioned issues and was contacted by “Economic Development Foundation” and asked to be their HIV arm in Africa. They are an organization of doctors, nurses, and other health care providers giving of themselves freely to work in the refugee camps and remote villages to provide free health care and other human services. We plan to go to Swaziland at the end of May and return to Ghana later this year. I am in contact with other organizations raising funds and gathering medications for this trip. We are asking more health care volunteers to join in this effort as well.

We need your help and support in finances to make this effort a success. I believe the success of the medication and education programs we have established are a powerful tool in the illumination of AIDS on the planet. Share in this vision with me.