

March 14, 2007

ZAPHA+ (Zanzibar Association of People Living with HIV/AIDS) was started in 1995 by a UN doctor and some very courageous PLHAS (people living with HIV/AIDS) here in Zanzibar. As of January 2005 there were less than 40 members but in March of 2005 the first ARVS (anti-retrovirals) were brought to Zanzibar and today ZAPHA+ has over 400 members which includes a new branch that was begun in the sister island of Pemba. 2006 has been a very important and busy year for ZAPHA+ and I would like to tell you about it.



People have died and people have married. Mwashamba on the left was one of the very first people to receive ARVS on March 24, 2005 but she was very ill and struggled. She died this year and left 6 children who have been kindly taken in by her sisters and even a member of ZAPHA+. After Mwashamba died the ARV support group had two sessions on writing a will and in the course of their discussion asked the question “Should you tell your children your status?”. Mwashamba’s 12 year old daughter came to the next support group to tell everyone how her mom had told the children that she was HIV+ and that she was a member of ZAPHA+ - her daughter was grateful because she had people who cared about her and could support her. One the right is Veronique and her daughter – I didn’t know her well but I had made a copy of this photo and was looking for Veronique to give it to her when someone told me that she had died. Before ARVS this news would have been quite common but now people have a much better chance of living healthier productive lives. And many of them do like Kassim and Salma in the center who were married in 2006. It is quite common, and understandable, that people will come to ZAPHA+ and fall in love. Just because someone finds out that they are HIV+ does not mean that they are going to stop living the fullest life that they can.



In 2006 there were some wonderful projects – the cooking project that was funded by the Stephen Lewis Foundation was very successful. A group of the members came up with a healthy well balanced meal, bought the food, cooked it and served it twice a week to over 150 people and the diners received nutrition information as they ate the meal. Now that they have ARVS all of our members want to learn how to eat healthy so that they can stay as strong as possible. Hafsa loves to sew and is very involved in any sewing projects that we have going on. Zaina, on the right, is

making clove soap (Zanzibar is famous for its cloves) that they sell to local stores and hotels. Zaina has been making soap for the past two years and has become our in house expert. In 2006 they worked with a team of volunteers from Canada who helped them to redesign their packaging and assisted them in setting up good production and marketing systems. The profits from all IGA (income generating activities) go directly back into ZAPHA+ to benefit the members.



This has also been a very exciting year as the members are becoming very strong advocates as a group. On the left is one of our ARV support groups – we have two of them with over 40 people each!!! We now have over 125 members on ARVS and that’s remarkable as they no longer have a death sentence when they test positive. But there is still much work to do and they support each other in learning how to live positively. They discuss condom use, adherence and stigma. It is important for everyone to learn that they must take their medication twice a day and to eat food when they take it – if they stop the medication they can become quite ill and they then have to go on second line drugs which are very expensive and not readily available. One of the most frequent discussions are around condom use as it is important not to spread the disease or even to reinfect your partner. In the center is Abu Bakar - he found out he was positive and his family started to remove his belongings from his house assuming that he would die soon. He had to go to a lawyer to get many of his possessions back. It is very difficult living openly with HIV and the members of ZAPHA+ have found solace and support in being with others who are also learning how to live positively. On the right is our nurse Bi Saide with Saleh and Fatma. His wife died of AIDS but he is negative and he came to Bi Saide because he wanted to get married to Fatma but her family was concerned that even though he’s negative their daughter will end up becoming infected. Bi Saide counseled them and the family and they are going to be married soon.



Many of the members have been working so hard and now some of them are actually getting paid for it!!!! It is very difficult to get donors to fund salaries but we have been fortunate that CHAI (Clinton Foundation HIV/AIDS Initiative) and Africare are paying some salaries and top ups for

various people. Hussein is our assistant to the accountant and he is amazing – he didn't know anything about accounting but he is meticulous and by far one of the most honest people that I have ever met. In the center is Hawa who is actually dressed up to go to a wedding – she is the office cleaner and helps with anything that she can as she is eager to learn. She attends English class and studies hard and helps with any small project. At ZAPHA+ when there is any opportunity for a paying job or training, Consolata, the mwenye kiti (chairman), announces it at the big Saturday meeting and anyone who wants to can apply for the position. They are then interviewed by a committee of the members and the best one is chosen. Hawa opens the office every day and usually it is Hussein who closes it – they both are happy to have a purpose and to be recognized, especially financially, for the contribution that they make to ZAPHA+. On the right is the executive committee – they are elected members who meet often to discuss all that is going on with the organization. They are the group that makes all of the final decisions concerning ZAPHA+.



What an exciting year this has been – the PLHAS in Pemba, our sister island, decided to become a branch of ZAPHA+ and here are the elected leaders. Once again, it was a wonderfully open and democratic election. World AIDS Day was December 1 and celebrated in Pemba – here Consolata, the mwenye kiti, gives a powerful speech before the Zanzibar president and thousands of people. On the right is part of the group gathered after a three day strategic planning workshop that ZAPHA+ held with the support of UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). Many of the members met and strategized how they best want to go forward for the next five years.



There are so many exciting things happening in 2007 already!!! ZAPHA+ now has peer counselors working in various clinics in Zanzibar. When someone comes for testing a trained PLHA gives them the results and counsels them whether they are negative or positive. This has been a very big step and a lot of hard work of building a good relationship with the government and the health care system that is responsible to provide care and treatment to PLHAS. In 2007 ZAPHA+ was awarded a grant from RFE (Rapid Funding Envelope) that they wrote themselves. They will be doing sensitization of rural areas (that's going out to talk with large groups in

various villages to educate them about HIV/AIDS and to encourage them to get tested). They are also doing IGA (income generating activities) by expanding the soap making and tailoring. With the grant they hired two consultants to manage the projects which is wonderful because the members are willing and eager to work but have no experience of managing a project and that is vital to its success. Already Omar, the IGA consultant, has done a survey of 100 of the members, analyzed it, written a report and the members held a workshop to develop a plan to go forward. What is most exciting is that all of the members are involved in the process of choosing projects and developing the proposals. They have input and their voices are heard – they are able to be a part of and responsible for their own future. For 2007 we are developing a number of various projects, including a life stories book, a kitchen garden project and of course focusing on better home based care.

Our most valuable employee is Seif Abdulla who was hired January 1, 2006 as the coordinator of ZAPHA+. He is in the center of the photo on the right with two members of the Pemba branch. He has been our gift from Allah and works tirelessly night and day – sometimes it's hard to get him to go home!!! He is kind and patient with everyone – he often teases me when I come in very excited and “American” wanting to get something done immediately (not the African way to say the least). Seif is brilliant and cares so much for all of the members – he has done a fantastic job of building a relationship with the government and with the donors. When someone asks me “Why is ZAPHA+ so successful?” I answer “Because of Seif and Consolata”. Seif has been so important to the growth of ZAPHA+ - he and Consolata always have the well being of the members uppermost in their minds when making any decisions about the organization.



In the end it is mostly about the children isn't it? How can the children grow up safe, healthy and strong? The parents need to be alive and healthy to raise their children, to teach them how to live with this awful disease, whether they are infected or not. More and more children are being tested and everyone is fortunate that there is medication for the children, but as any parent knows, it's not easy getting a child to take medicine. Many of these children have to grow up very fast and I am in awe of them. They don't cry, they don't complain, they smile and shake my hand and say “Shikamoo” (a greeting to an elder). I do feel that I am very fortunate to be able to be a part of the exciting developments that are happening in Zanzibar. Because of Stephen Lewis, President Clinton and others who fight so very hard for vulnerable populations there is hope today.

A Zanzibari friend of mine, Suleiman, is helping me with my garden and he told me that when he becomes rich he wants to buy flowers. I asked him how he would define “rich” and without any hesitation he responded “You're rich when you have enough to give to others”. If you are interested in donating to the Zanzibar PLHA project that is wonderful but more than anything I would appreciate it if you would pass on some kindness to others who may need it. Look someone in the eye and smile or listen 100% to someone who is talking to you. Touch someone who may be in need – we can pass along wealth in many different ways.

Kathryn