AIDS Action
Committee of
Massachusetts, Inc.

Dear Friend,

Walk into an auditorium filled with high school kids throwing paper clips around and announce, "Hi, I'm Michael, and I have HIV" -- and you're likely to get their attention.

As a volunteer speaker for AIDS Action -- New England's largest AIDS service provider -- I go out as many as three times a week to talk about HIV and AIDS to people from all walks of life who want to know more.

I tell them the facts about HIV, and I tell them about my own experience living with the virus.

It's hard to get up in front of a group and reveal personal things about yourself -- like how you practice safer sex, or what it feels like to be discriminated against at the dentist, or how you feel about dying.

But when I was infected there simply was no information available about prevention. Now I want others to have the facts about HIV that I didn't have, so they can protect themselves as I couldn't. That's the "HIV 101" part of my talk.

The other part is what happens when listeners say things that are insensitive, hostile, or even homophobic.

One time a college student asked me why the law shouldn't simply force all HIV+ men to undergo vasectomies. I explained that medically this wouldn't prevent the spread of the virus. It wasn't even necessary to talk about the issue of discrimination -- I knew others could see it at work right in that room.

Later, the young man came up and shook my hand. I knew he was making a gesture of apology that everyone in the room could witness. And I felt as if I had accomplished an important piece of work.

I believe that many people give to AIDS Action in support of its lifeline services for people living with AIDS in our community. Today, AIDS Action's clients number about 1,300 -- and more turn to us every day.

But what about the education and prevention work that touches many, many more people still?

131 Clarendon Street
Boston, MA 02116

617.437.6200
Fax 617.437.6445

AIDS Action Hotline
617.536.7733
MA: 1.800.235.2331

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