

THE LGBTQ PRIDE GUARDIAN

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

WCWGMC 2
Organizational
Profile

Statement by 3
the Director

Radio 4
Programs &
Outreach
Sessions

Meeting with 5
NAS & MOHS
NACP

Live Testimo- 6
nies from
LGBTQ Youths

LGBTQ Youths 7
Party Pictures

Dear readers, friends and partners of WhyCantWeGetMarried.Com,

*On behalf of **WhyCantWeGetMarried.Com** (WCWGMC) and the LGBTQ Student Network hello and welcome to our third newsletter of 2011 (issue 3) featuring our organizational profile, with statement by the Director, radio programs, outreach sessions, meetings with National AIDS Secretariat (NAS), Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MOHS) National AIDS Control Program (NACP) and party pictures as well. We also have live testimonies, comments and suggestions from LGBTQ youngsters in Freetown and Makeni.*



You can read more about the activities and events undertaken on the newsletter. We hope that readers of our newsletter will find this issue to be thought provoking and informative. We welcome contributions and suggestions from LGBTQ young people for future editions, the editor can be contacted on Cell Phone Numbers: +232 33844310 / +232 77 383761 +232 78 349 866 or Email: sierra.leone@whycantwegetmarried.com

WhyCantWeGetMarried.Com Organizational Profile

What is WhyCantWeGetMarried.Com?

The main purpose of WhyCantWeGetMarried.Com is to challenge any individual, government or society from preventing two adults from loving each other - if they are causing no harm to anyone and are happy together. Our project particularly focuses on ending discrimination experienced by inter-racial couples, inter-religious couples and couples who identify as part of the LGBTI (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Intersex Transgender) community. Our project is about promoting love, peace and equality for loving couples worldwide.

Vision Statement

Making LGBTQ rights a reality for young people

Mission Statement

To empower LGBTQ young people minimize discrimination, stereotypes, homophobia, trans-phobia and patriarchal norms for the attainment of equal rights.

Organizational Values

- Equality and diversity
- Active youth participation
- Individual freedom and liberties
- Dialogue between stakeholders
- Integrity, Accountability and transparency





Statement by the Director

George has been in WhyCantWeGetMarried.Com since 2007 (as the Founder and West Africa Regional Director). He has been involved in LGBTQ rights advocacy for the past 10 years and has been greatly involved in international LGBTQ activism

By George Reginald Freeman

Coming from Sierra Leone, for me it's still difficult to retreat from local realities while thinking about LGBTQ rights, but it is especially difficult when it concerns rights of young LGBTQ people. Simply because in the country where I was born frequently homo(bi)sexuality and youth is somehow an incompatible combination. Ideas of homosexual propaganda are still highly waving in the air blending non-heterosexuality with paedophilia, deviation, perversion and contagious diseases. But even turning off to areas where it might seem that LGBTQ rights have burst into blossom and even have become some sort of tradition, things are not that perfect as they might look at first sight.

Constantly all over the world loads of young people have to go through process of normalization to have equal opportunities to participate in everyday life. It requires lots of energy and causes much stress. And obviously many young people fail to pass the norms, which means that they are much more likely to experience peer bullying, difficulties in finding friends and developing friendships, health disorders and other problems. Young people have far fewer coping skills and possibilities to stand up for themselves than adults, besides usually they are dependent on adults, which make them especially vulnerable and exposed to the negative influence of heteronormativity and homophobia.

Very often young people's sexuality and gender identity are questioned by parents, teachers, peers and even psychologists, but actually it is only those not compatible with the heteronorm which are questioned. At least I have never heard anyone saying that one's heterosexuality is just temporal stage which will pass when a person matures or seen a parent dragging a kid to doctors because of his heterosexuality. Even the fact that we are constantly talking about the importance of the coming-out process shows how far from equality we are.

Rather often I have experienced the moments when coming back from international events and waiting for a plane to my home town has become very emotional. Not because of coming home, but because it felt more like leaving home, leaving a space where being yourself was not only allowed but even encouraged. Creating safe spaces for young queer people to be themselves, interact, get inspired and just to feel like home is a core play ground in LGBTQ activism. Yet it is always important not to forget going further, getting the roots of discrimination, inequality, act for diversity and against normativity.

Throughout the years international LGBTQ youth activism has provided me with inspiration and motivation, it has given me ideas and tools for action and most importantly it has led to understanding that we can change our local realities through international cooperation. Our different situations worldwide is more a merit than a demerit, as there is always something to share, something to learn from each other and at the end we all strive for a common vision- LGBTQ rights in Action. Therefore, WhyCantWeGetMarried.Com is here for all of us, it is you and I and together we can make a sustainable change!

Radio Programs & Outreach Sessions

WhyCantWeGetMarried.Com broadcasted five radio sessions on Citizen and Premier Talk Radio in Freetown and Radio Mankneh in Makeni. These radio programs were held on the 17th August 2010, 10th September 2010, 15th December 2010, 5th January 2011 and 12th March 2011. All our programs went on air at 5:30pm with the hope of catching listeners at home. We sensitized young LGBTQ people on Safer Sexual Practices, Condom promotion and Access to Voluntary Confidential Counselling and testing (VCCT) services. We also deliberated on general acceptance and tolerance of every human being regardless of the age, religion, race, tribe, sexual orientation and gender identity. We had a lengthy debate in the area of sexuality; at the end of the programs we received 15 homophobic statements and 5 acceptance text messages, with massive telephone calls against the LGBTQ access to HIV testing and treatment for LGBTQ youths in Sierra Leone. However, we had 5 encouraging telephone calls that supported acceptance and tolerance which demonstrates that LGBTQ rights is gradually improving in Sierra Leone.

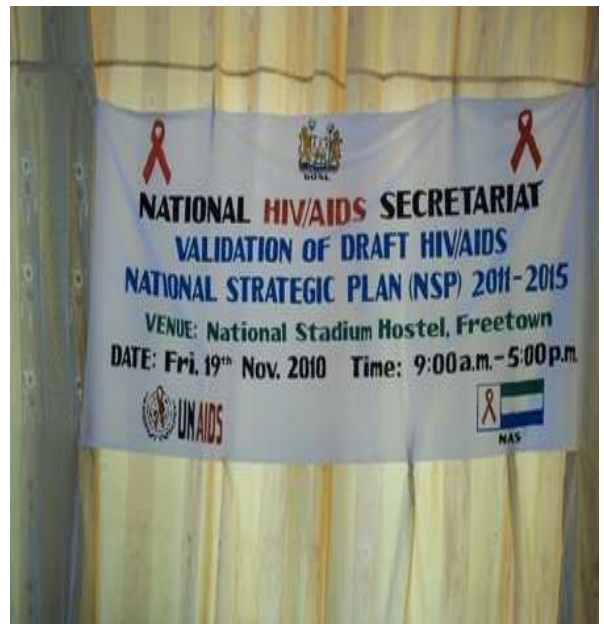


We held two outreach sessions in Freetown and Makeni, we started by dramatizing the importance of VCCT services, condom use and the HIV mode of transmission. At the end of the sessions we distributed 10,800 male and female condoms and got 50 LGBTQ youths tested for HIV both in Freetown and Makeni. We were also able to reach out to over 5,000 people indirectly and approximately 100 LGBTQ youths.



Meeting with NAS, & MOHS NACP

We were able to advocate to the National AIDS Secretariat (NAS) Strategic Planning meeting which was held on Friday 19th November 2011. We strived for the inclusion of LGBTQ young people in the HIV and AIDS agenda and we were finally included on the National AIDS Secretariat (NAS) Strategic Plan under the Most at Risk Population (MARPS) for the period of five years (2011 – 2015), which would be validated countrywide. Finally we were able to submit our findings and position paper to the National HIV AIDS Secretariat (NAS), the Parliamentary Committee on Health, Sierra Leone Medical and Dental Association and the Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MOHS) National AIDS Control Program (NACP)..



Live Testimonies and Comments from LGBTQ Youths

"I am a trans sex worker, HIV positive and I wanted to committed suicide. since I came in contact with Dr. Lakoh, I was motivated to see young LGBTQ people who are living positively with HIV in WhyCantWeGetMarried.Com support group. I am now taking my treatment and going for HIV counseling sessions and currently sensitizing my fellow LGBTQ youngsters with my testimony to build lost hopes in the lives of others. I am proud to be a member of WhyCantWeGetMarried.Com LGBTQ support group on HIV. I am appealing to all LGBTQ young people who are HIV positive like me to keep the candle burning and know that life is worth living; let's join hands and together we can save lives and those of our generation to come".

A trans woman in the closet.

"I am a gay man with several sex partner who engaged in unprotected sexual inter course, I came in contact with WhyCantWeGetMarried.Com in Makeni during their street theatre session, I had an opportunity to talk with George and he sensitized me personally and I went home and gave it a thought. I called George the next morning that I am willing to get tested for HIV and he linked me with Dr. Lakoh , Dr. Lakoh counseled and tested me for HIV and asked me to come the next day for my HIV result. That night I was restless and thought I was HIV positive, because of my unprotected sexual life. I called George that night who encouraged and built up my confidence to accept whatever result I have. The next day I went to Dr. Lakoh for my result with a doubtful heart and he told me that I was HIV negative and counsel- led me to practice safer sex and keep the promise of being negative. I felt so relieved and happy for my HIV result. I have never gone for HIV test before, but what I love about WhyCanttWeGetMarried.Com family was that they built up my confidence and have a strong support systems to motivate young LGBTQ people to go for HIV Counseling and Testing (HCT) services. Thank you WhyCantWeGetMarried.Com family!"

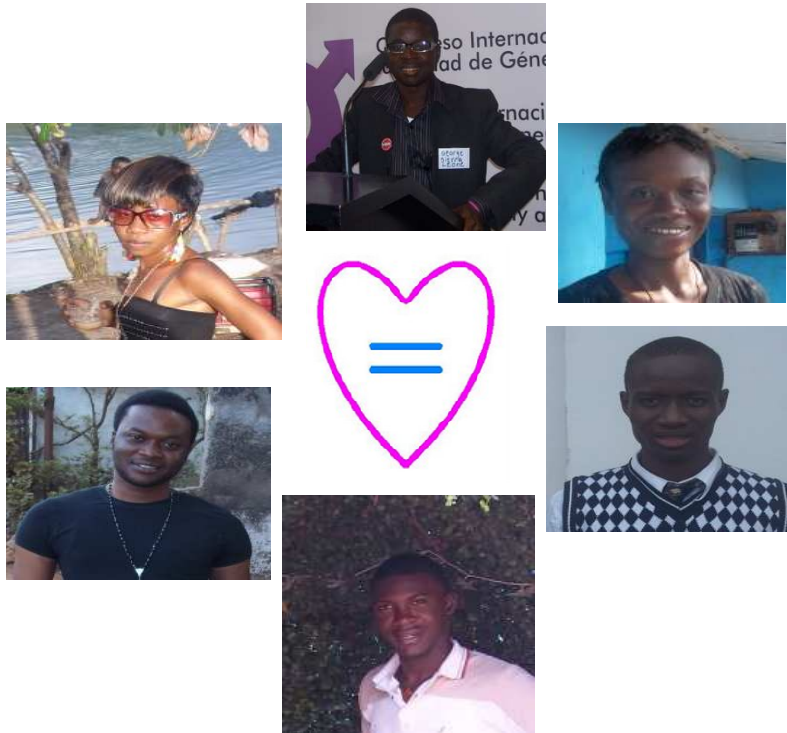
From Mohamed a Gay man in Makeni

I was so impressed with WhyCantWeGetMarried.Com LGBTQ young people HIV AIDS Innovative and transforming project in Sierra Leone. I have been following their updates and activities on their website and I have started mobilizing LGBTQ youths in my community and college in the Gambia. WhyCantWeGetMarried.Com have been giving moral support and vital advice. We have just started a WhyCantWeGetMarried.Com group in the Gambia. WhyCantWeGetMarried.Com have created a platform for LGBTQ youths to share ideas, interact and network with each other through interactive sessions and posting updates and comments. I am so happy about this wonderful project as it is my first time to meet with LGBTQ young people on social networking. I am delightfully motivated to actively participate and I believe that, together we can break the chains of homophobia, trans-phobia and promote peace, respect and understanding for us LGBTQ young people across the globe.

From Ajami a Lesbian in Banjul, the Gambia

LGBTQ Youngsters Party Pictures





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