

## HIV and AIDs by the numbers

### In Manitoba:

- 1,313 people have tested positive for HIV in Manitoba since 1985 (when record keeping began) and up until Dec. 31, 2005. Almost two-thirds were between the ages of 20 and 39 when they were diagnosed.
- In 2005, 116 new cases of HIV were reported.
- As of Sept. 30, 2006, another 69 Manitobans have tested HIV positive.
- 245 Manitobans have been diagnosed with AIDS since 1985 and up until Dec. 31, 2005.
- 181 Manitobans have died from AIDS.
- Between 1985 and 1995, men having sex with other men accounted for 64.68 per cent of new HIV cases. Heterosexual sex accounted for 9.21 per cent of new cases, and intravenous drug use accounted for 8.64 per cent.
- Between 1996 and 2005, men having sex with other men accounted for 17.55 per cent of new HIV cases. Heterosexual sex accounted for 30.68 per cent, and intravenous drug use accounted for 21.97 per cent.
- The number of Manitoban women testing HIV positive is increasing: in 1996, women made up 18 per cent of all new HIV cases. In 2005, they accounted for 37 per cent.

### In Canada:

- 60,160 HIV positive cases have been reported to the Public Health Agency of Canada since 1985 and up until Dec. 31, 2005.
- In 2005, 2,483 Canadians tested HIV positive.
- HIV infection rates in Canada are almost three times higher among aboriginal people than non-aboriginal people.
- As of Dec. 31, 2005, 20,353 Canadians have been diagnosed with AIDS.
- 13,572 Canadians have died from AIDS.
- One in four Canadians living with HIV in Canada are unaware they are infected.

### In the world:

- At least 39.5 million people are now living with HIV (more than the entire population of Canada).
- In 2005, 4.3 million people tested HIV positive.
- 2.3 million people living with HIV are under the age of 15.
- More than 25 million people have died of AIDS-related causes since 1981.
- 95 per cent of people who are HIV positive live in a developing nation. 64.4 per cent live in Africa.
- Africa has 12 million AIDS orphans.
- Globally, only one-fifth of people who need antiretroviral drugs have access to them.
- The University of Manitoba has been in the forefront of international HIV/AIDS research and prevention projects.
- Since 1981, researchers have been studying a group of sex workers in Kenya who seem to be immune to HIV. They hope to identify the cause of their immunity and use this knowledge to create a vaccine.
- In India, Winnipeg researchers have been working since 2001 on capacity building projects in several rural states, as well as on HIV education, prevention and support programs. They have received over \$27 million in funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for their work.
- Last month, U of M researchers were given a \$22 million grant from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), enabling them to continue their work.

If you think you might be HIV-positive or want more information on where to get tested, call the confidential AIDS infoline at 945-2437 (in Winnipeg) or 1-800-782-2437 (toll-free outside Winnipeg).

Nine Circles Community Health Centre (located at 705 Broadway) offers a free drop-in clinic for HIV tests every Wednesday between 1 and 7 p.m. Call 940-6001 for clinic info.



**Winnipegger volunteer Cat Ross with Billy.**

**Just look at that face: Billy is an HIV-positive Kenyan orphan who may be saved with the help of antiretroviral drugs.**

# Fighting the right fight

## Two Winnipeggers join the worldwide battle against AIDS

### cover story

WORLD AIDS DAY  
DEC. 1, Everywhere

### Marlo Campbell

**C**at Ross and Ilan Schwartz are living proof that regular people can make a big difference.

The two Winnipeggers have become personally involved in the global fight against HIV and AIDS. Both have travelled to Africa and now, both are continuing to work on the issue by raising awareness and raising money.

Ross, 23, is a volunteer at Nine Circles Community Health Centre, a local clinic that supports Winnipeggers living with HIV/AIDS, and her desire to experience the pandemic at its worst led her to the slums of Kenya.

Global Volunteer Network is an organization that connects volunteers with community projects around the world. Placements can be as short as two weeks or as long as six months, and participants are given a choice of country and area of work.

Through GVN, Ross spent her summer vacation working just outside of Nairobi, Kenya — asking specifically to be stationed in the slums, where people live in makeshift shacks with no running water, garbage pick-up, electricity or sewer system. The bulk of her three weeks was spent in Kibera: only a few square kilometres, but home to over a million people.

The experience was intense. Garbage and feces were everywhere, says Ross, and the smell was unbearable. Shacks the size of Canadian bathrooms were home to up to ten people. On their first day in Kibera, Ross and the other volunteers saw a man beaten to death by a mob for stealing from one of the shopkeepers. Rape was common, and throughout her stay, Ross was escorted around by a security guard. For her own safety, she had a 6:30 p.m. curfew.

AIDS has had a devastating impact in Kenya. Over 6 per cent of Kenyan adults are HIV-positive, although many more undoubtedly live with HIV and don't know it. Over a million children have been orphaned by the disease, including Billy, a two-year-old boy Ross met in one of Kibera's orphanages.

Billy is HIV-positive and had lost both his parents to AIDS. Ross says the pair had a special bond the first time they met, and adds that if her financial situation was different, she would have brought him back to Canada.

"To see what he's living in (and) the hopeful look in his eyes... It's difficult. It's extreme," she says.

Ross' job included going on home visits and



**Ilan Schwartz with the Little Travellers**

assisting the staff at Kibera's only clinic with the administration of medication and food. But a lack of supplies and resources made providing adequate care almost impossible.

The maternity ward and the treatment room for people living with HIV and AIDS were in the same space as the tuberculosis centre, putting newborn babies and people with lowered immune systems in direct contact with a highly infectious disease.

Ross was given no gloves or mask. Her only gear was a white lab coat.

"My jaw was dropped all day," she says. "It was unreal. Absolutely unreal."

Ross returned home at the end of July. She plans to return to Kibera in the next year or two — and she wants to bring more people out.

"People need to know that this sort of thing is out there," she says of her experience. "People need to know this is achievable."

A volunteer stint in early 2005 inspired 24-year-old Ilan Schwartz to start a fundraising initiative for an AIDS clinic in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa.

Born in South Africa, Schwartz's family moved to Winnipeg when he was five. As he grew up and went back to visit relatives, he gradually became aware of the social and economic issues facing South Africa.

After graduating from university, Schwartz applied for med school at the U of M and found himself with a five-month break. He decided to use the time volunteering and ended up at the Hillcrest AIDS clinic, a non-profit organization that supports and cares for people living with HIV and AIDS.

South Africa is reeling from the AIDS pandemic. Over 18 per cent of adults live with HIV — an estimated 5.5 million people (although, like Kenya, the numbers are likely significantly higher). Some estimate that 1,000 people die of AIDS every day. Within the KwaZulu-Natal province (where the Hillcrest AIDS centre is located), over 30 per cent of adults are HIV positive.

Like Ross, Schwartz was profoundly affected by his experience, which included assisting nurses and volunteer workers.

He recalls bringing a young mother to a hospice where she was initially refused admission because she was "too sick" and couldn't walk. After finally getting her in, Schwartz peeked inside the ward.

"(There was) bed upon bed upon bed upon bed with these young women, all 26 to 35, reduced to skin and bones, with deep set eyes, hollow cheekbones... It was just so overwhelming," he says.

Schwartz couldn't get the image of the woman and the little girl she left behind out of his head.

"That was the definitive moment when I decided that I was going to dedicate my life to this," he says.

The Hillcrest AIDS Centre supports several income-generation projects, including a group of local crafters who make tiny hand-beaded dolls called "little travellers."

At his father's request, Schwartz brought a dozen dolls back with him to give out as gifts. However, after his classmates began asking him about them (he wears one on his shirt every day) Schwartz realized he could sell them and make some money for the centre.

Schwartz founded a group called Simunye ("We are united" in Zulu) and decided to go for broke, asking his classmates to pre-buy the dolls. In October 2005, Simunye brought in 1,000 little travellers.

"Those thousand never even touched the floor," he says.

In the year and a half since then, Schwartz has brought over 8,000 little travellers to Winnipeg and raised over \$45,000 for the centre. Almost all the money goes directly to the crafters, many of whom are infected with HIV.

The remainder supports Hillcrest's other ventures. Thanks in part to Simunye, the centre was able to open a brand new respite wing at a local hospital.

Each little traveller is unique. Some have big hair, some have cornrows, some are plump, some are wearing colourful dresses — there's even grey-haired grannies and winged angels.

"There's something very cool about these women, who are very poor and certainly don't have the opportunity to go travelling — they're making little representations of themselves and they're sent all around the world," Schwartz says.

Simunye sells little travellers through its website ([www.littletravellers.net](http://www.littletravellers.net)) and at several local stores. The suggested price is \$5, with larger donations encouraged, and Schwartz says Winnipeggers can also help selling the dolls.

Ross and Schwartz remain humble about their efforts in the fight against AIDS. Anyone can do what they did, they say.

"All these things... have to start one person at a time," Schwartz says.

"I'm just a regular shlub... Anything that I've been able to achieve is because of other people, enabling it."