

Positive Lives - Concern Worldwide Exhibition

Concern's Positive Lives photography exhibition documents the lives of people with HIV and Aids

Everyone has heard of HIV and AIDS; few want to talk about them. But the photographers featured in Concern's Positive Lives exhibition showed they had no such reservations with their stunning tributes to those living with, not dying from, the virus.

The exhibition launch evening opened with talks from various figures within Concern Worldwide. According to Concern UK's Director and co-founder of Positive Lives, Lyndall Stein, it all began when she realised that the 'human story' behind HIV and Aids was not being properly portrayed.

'I came to the Terence Higgins Trust (a UK Charity) in 1990 and realised there weren't any images of people affected that showed a human story behind the epidemic. I knew that part of telling the human story was having the images'.

Photographing those affected meant that each photojournalist had to delve into the emotional struggles of each individual. One photojournalist present at the Belfast launch was Shahidul Alam from Bangladesh. He described the experience as, 'Insightful... what impressed me was people's ability to value one another and their sense of solidarity'.

The same feelings and more were impressed upon me later as I viewed the pictures. Whilst every photograph reflects the person's hardship, the emphasis is very much upon the word 'positive'. Even those with seemingly no hope at all have every thing to live for. Joseph Gabriel, a young man who requires constant care from his family testifies, through the exhibition, that love is the best medicine of all. 'I have been sick for ten years now. My belief in God makes me happy and I have the love and help of my family'.

The photographs tell stories from all around the world. They serve as a reminder that HIV and Aids do not discriminate when it comes to class, colour or creed. As Beryl Motonono-Watkiss, from Concern Worldwide says: 'It tells the story of HIV and Aids in so many different ways that it makes one stop and think, and makes them question their pre-conceptions and hopefully opens their eyes to a different way of looking at it'.

The Positive Lives exhibition challenges the uninformed, uneducated culture in which we live. This, says Positive Lives Director Kevin Ryan, is the biggest battle of all: 'The fight for the hearts and minds of the community'.

If everyone in Northern Ireland goes to the exhibition and sees what I have seen, then that battle will be fought and won.

The Positive Lives exhibition runs at the University of Ulster's Jordanstown Campus until February 10, 2006, from 11am – 4pm daily.

About the team

This story was produced by Lyra McKee, 15. It was published by [Culture Northern Ireland](#) website.

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