

Where are the Kids?

Thousands of people are in attendance at the International AIDS Conference in Toronto but not many of them are children and young people. Why should this be the case?

Diving in and out of the various discussions, press conferences and exhibitions I can clearly see that young people and children have finally "taken their place at the table" but that their actual physical presence must be somewhere under the table at this particular conference. I haven't met or seen too many children.

However, the people in power seem to have finally begun to waken up to understanding what life is like for HIV positive young people and children. Young people aged 15 to 26 are being represented at the conference. What about young children under the age of 15?

Children under the age of 15 make up 2.8 million of the world's HIV positive population and they are rarely ever mentioned at this conference unless it is as a result of the promptings of reporters. Are this age group not also entitled to a voice?

Many will think it unfair to bring eight year olds with AIDS to a meeting like this and to ask them to share their stories with others. Maybe it would be. But HIV does not deal in fairness or justice; nor will it discriminate between a child and an adult.

If it is wrong to put such a burden on a child, surely it is also wrong for us to let HIV take his mother and yet not let him cry for help? In a session yesterday which discussed children's rights and HIV, one speaker showed very moving and powerful videos with young children. Maybe this was a safe way to include their views

All affected children under the age of 15 must have many ways to present their voices at the next conference in Mexico 2008. Children are the face of the future and the here and now. If we are to eradicate AIDS we must include them in every effort we make in the present.

About this article

This article was written by Lyra McKee who was one of three young people from Headliners in Northern Ireland who attended the International AIDS Conference in Toronto. Their reports were published by [BBC Blast](#).

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