



Health/Education

CDC confronts AIDS epidemic in African-American women

CONTRIBUTED STORY
FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

A startling report from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) indicates that the rate of HIV/AIDS is progressing faster among African Americans than any other group in the nation. Even more disturbing is the news that African-American women account for more than half of all new AIDS cases among women.

Patricia Nalls and Belinda Rochelle of Washington, D.C. have taken these statistics to heart and created an innovative HIV treatment education program in their community. The program, called HIV University, is one of many HIV Universities that have been cropping up in various cities across the United States, thanks to the program created by W.O.R.L.D. (Women Organized to Respond to Life-threatening Diseases) and the national HIV University training program sponsored by Glaxo Wellcome.

Pat is the Founder and Executive Director of the Women's Collective, a community-based organization in Washington, D.C. serving women with HIV and their families. She teamed up with Belinda to create "Fighting for Our Lives," their highly successful version of HIV University. Belinda has been a treatment advocate for years and now works at the Women's Collective.

Pat and Belinda's program is living proof that HIV University positively impacts the lives of women with HIV. Through their leadership and understanding, Pat and Belinda have provided a vital support network to women living with HIV/AIDS in their area, and the information they need to manage their illness.

After completing a training program in San Francisco with other women, Pat and Belinda returned to Washington, D.C. to create their own HIV University. The Women's Collective recruited other women activists to plan an intensive two-day training workshop for over 70 women. They publicized "Fighting for Our Lives" to women in Washington D.C., as well as to women in rural areas of Virginia and Maryland, who otherwise might not have access to treatment information or support services. They also designed the topics for each of the workshops, arranged for speakers and coordinated transportation, meals, day-care and overnight lodging for women who had to travel a long distance.

"The AIDS epidemic is changing, and the way we organize around these issues has to change as well," said Belinda. "HIV University is a program that brings together under-served populations of women with HIV and empowers them. If you are a woman of color, or a poor woman with HIV, it is very easy to feel that you are ignored. We want to change that," she added.

Issues that were addressed at "Fighting for Our Lives" included treatment choices, welfare and Medicaid, discrimination and confidentiality, doctor/patient relationships, how to care for children, sexuality and spirituality. Participants also had the opportunity to speak to physicians one-on-one about their medical concerns.

"I felt that it was particularly important to invite HIV positive women to act as co-leaders in the workshops. As they shared their personal experiences about living with HIV, the group not only felt empowered, but also began to feel that they were in a safe place, and the women began to open up to one another," said Pat. "We were happy to see that the women were interacting with the healthcare providers and with one another because we feel that women have a lot that they can share

and learn from each other."

"Fighting for Our Lives" culminated with a graduation ceremony where each of the women were presented with certificates and flowers, and were given the opportunity to tell the group how they had benefited from the program, in their own words, thus inspiring each other further.

Pat's interest in getting women involved in programs like HIV University is just one example of her activism in communities of color. As a woman of color who had lost her husband and youngest daughter, Tiffany, to the disease, she felt very alone. For three years, she remained silent about her HIV status, fearful that a revelation might provoke discrimination against her and her remaining two children. Finally, with the help of a counselor, she was able to break the news to her children and get the support services they needed.

Today, as more and more women of color are affected by HIV/AIDS, what

began as a support group that met in Pat's home, is now a full fledged organization that serves over 370 women and their families. It is one of only a few organizations nationwide, created by and for women living with HIV/AIDS. "The power of HIV University is that it is peer-based, women helping themselves, their families and each other," added Pat.

The original HIV University was created by W.O.R.L.D. (Women Organized to Respond to Life-threatening Diseases), a community-based organization located in Oakland, CA. For the past three years, Glaxo Wellcome, a pharmaceutical company committed to HIV research and developing new treatments, has sponsored a training program in San Francisco where teams of two women from 10 U.S. cities are invited to learn how to implement HIV University in their communities.

For HIV treatment information, please call toll-free at 1-888-TREAT-HIV.

US WEST commits to extend learning

CONTRIBUTED STORY
FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

A \$50 million commitment from U.S. WEST to boost technology in schools will expand learning opportunities for Oregon students, State Schools Supt. Stan Bunn said today.

"This commitment will expand our classroom walls to beyond the horizon," said Bunn. "Students will be able to learn more, because they will have access to a multitude of resources."

Bunn said in two years all of Oregon's high schools will have the equipment and connectivity to provide two-way (audio and video) distance education. "The possibilities are endless," said Bunn. For instance, instruction can be provided where teacher shortages do not allow classes to be offered. Foreign language and advanced math and science programs are good examples.

The \$50 million will pay other dividends, including teacher training and video conferencing, Bunn said. "For example, this will give us the capability to share the expertise of

our outstanding teachers with teachers throughout Oregon." U.S. WEST today delivered a check for \$25 million to Gov. John Kitzhaber

and a group of North Salem High School students. The second payment will be delivered in January 2001.

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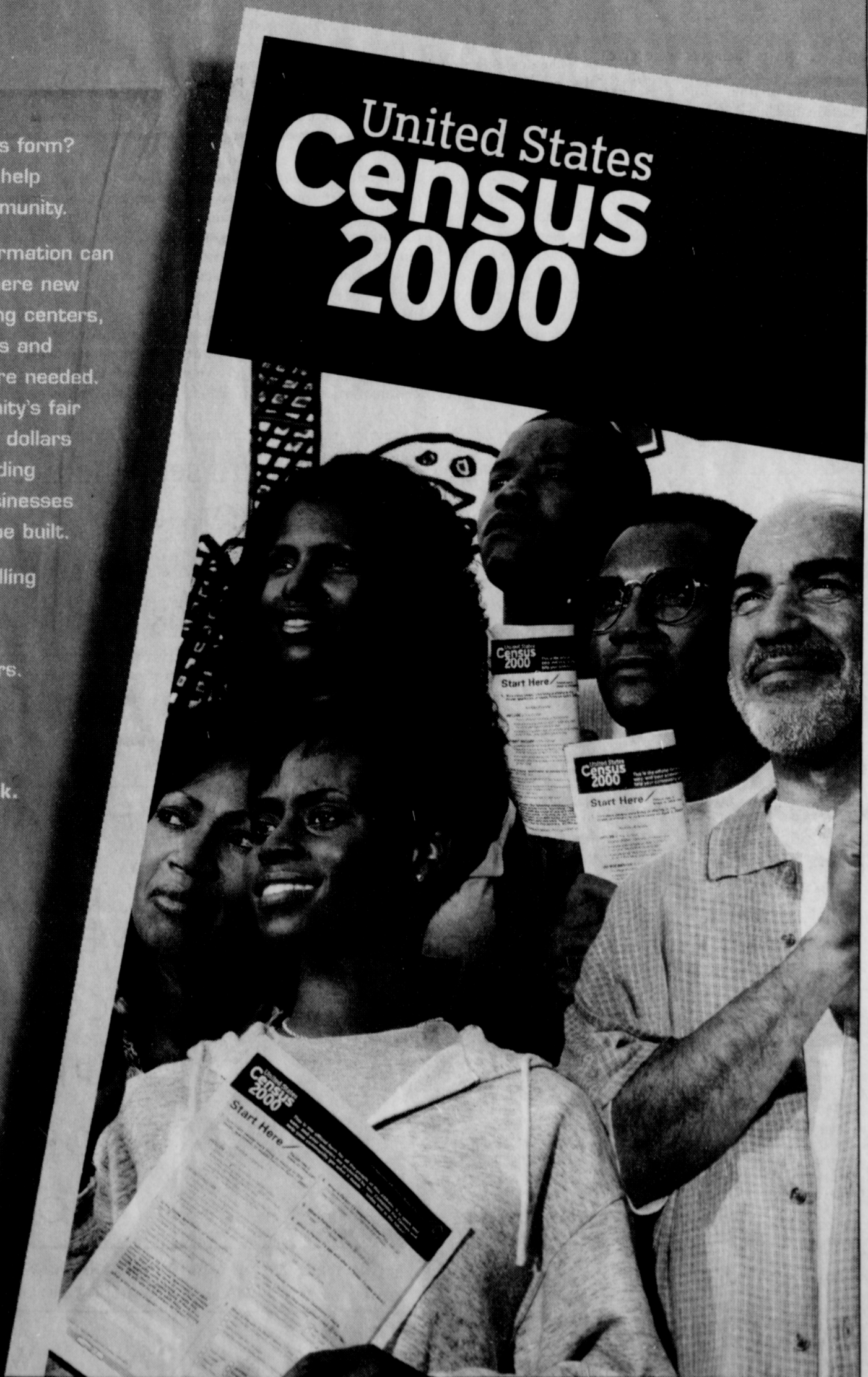
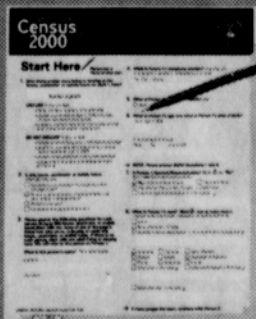
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