



## ann arbor youth senate

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROJECT  
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### **AIDS and the West Africa Project, by Angel Chen, HHS – Grade 11** **Excerpted 10-03 from: The Ann Arbor Distinction – a districtwide student run newspaper**

42 million people worldwide are living with HIV/AIDS. About 70 percent of them live in Sub-Saharan Africa. Thirteen million of those people are under the age of 24. In fact, 80% of kids with AIDS are Africans.

Pretty scary numbers, huh? Unfortunately, they are true. Much is being done to help solve the problem. The Association pour la Paix et la Solidarite (APS), for example, is a non-governmental organization (NGO) working in Burkina Faso, one of the poorest countries in the world. In addition to economic development programs, they implement HIV and AIDS education and prevention programs in rural villages. They face a lot of challenges. The spread of AIDS has been increasing as young men come back from the war in neighboring Ivory Coast. The problems are compounded by the shame that people with AIDS face in their villages and that youth are rarely the ones teaching other youth about the disease -- the adults are.

The West Africa Exchange Project was formed by the Youth Empowerment Project (YEP) in Ann Arbor in 2001, funded by Pfizer Global Research and Development and NFL Charities, to work with APS to encourage youth to youth peer communication for AIDS education. Over the past year, since exchanging youth to youth AIDS education information with YEP teens, APS has begun to break through myths and shame in some provinces and involve teens in leadership roles for educating their peers. As a result, APS has asked YEP West Africa Project teens for help in securing technological equipment, including several video cameras and video TV's, laptops, and generators that will allow them to help more youth inform others about AIDS in 30 villages in three provinces that are without electricity. It adds up to over twenty thousand dollars.

To mobilize their peers and respond to this request for help, for the month of October the West Africa Project and the Youth Senate are co-sponsoring AIDS in Africa Awareness Month. With interactive games, informative announcements, and a dance after the PHS-HHS football game October 24, the West Africa Project is finding creative ways to fundraise in support of Burkina Faso youth and their fight against AIDS. As CHS senior Katie Mackenzie said, "In the US, we have a 300% increase in Coke, 300% decrease in milk, 300% increase in obesity. If you just give up pop for a month and donate \$1 a day, one high school alone can raise enough money for APS." Donations are being accepted during October in the grade level offices and the cafeteria or on line at: [www.youthempowerment.com/africa.htm](http://www.youthempowerment.com/africa.htm)

AIDS in Africa Awareness Month is not the only project the West Africa Project has undertaken. Over the summer, the West Africa Project brought teens together from across town at Bryant Community Center to learn more about each other while also sharing information with APS youth in Burkina Faso. The photo-journal that resulted and was sent to APS youth shows the many faces of Ann Arbor and its diverse people. Even after AIDS Awareness in Africa Month ends, the West Africa Project will continue to help reach youth in Burkina Faso and Ann Arbor about AIDS. If you want to help, donate your pop money and come to your school Senate meetings at lunchtime.