

## The 2010-by-2010 “Women to Vienna” Project

- Twinning Funds at the GSSG

**Cologne, September 2009 – The GSSG (Charitable Foundation Sexuality and Health) seeks funds to enable women to participate in the World AIDS Conference 2010 in Vienna, Austria. The donations will be made available as scholarships for women who are actively engaged in women’s health and/or HIV projects. The foundation GSSG is soliciting donations from sponsors and individuals to become scholarships for community involvement. These scholarships will cover expenses such as conference registration, travel costs, accommodation, and other out-of-pocket expenses.**

More than 20,000 scientists and researchers from different medical, bio-medical, and social science fields will attend the 18<sup>th</sup> World AIDS Conference in Vienna in July 2010. To prevent missing the “agenda of the affected”, community participation has been a conference standard since at least 1998. This standard ensures the representation of the affected community on all levels of conference planning and conduct. It also insures that the specific needs of the community are addressed. However, the financial and organisational resources of women affected by HIV are often insufficient to undertake the considerable investment necessary to insure their voices to be heard. Even in Germany HIV is often associated with material poverty.

Therefore, the foundation seeks to sponsor a minimum of ten interested women from Germany to travel to Vienna. The objective of the GSSG is to have these ten women collaborate with another ten women from Eastern Europe. This is described as “*Twinning Participation*”, meaning that each sponsored women would have a so called twin or partner for the conference. “Women from different countries should be able to exchange and advance their knowledge. Only together can we overcome the virus”, states prevention specialist Melanie Schoenheit. Melanie coordinates the international collaboration with the International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS (ICW) for Germany.

Considering that 2 out of 3 HIV infections in Germany are diagnosed in men, this will not be an easy task. In Germany as in most Western European countries, women represent a minority and are often stigmatized and tend to live isolated. “Acting as “twin pairs” the women would be less isolated”, reiterates Schoenheit.

The idea of the “*Twinning Participation*” was conceptualized in Cologne. The *German Network Women and AIDS* met with ICW in the office space of the GSSG and developed this concept. The aim is to expand the German-Eastern European Twinning action as a model that will become a European wide action plan. “To address the diversity of HIV positive living of women, we are planning to expand the twinning model across all of Europe”. This will enable women from Spain or Scandinavia to meet in Vienna a partner from Moldavia, Poland or the Ukraine and experience and evaluate the conference together.

The idea of the twinning is reflected by the project’s name “2010-by-2010”. This literally reads as “twenty ten by twenty ten.” “By using this term, we want to emphasize that we are enabling the participation of two times twenty women to join the World AIDS Conference in Vienna in 2010. In doing so, we are empowering women to better their living situation and we make an important contribution to prevention.”

The following are the prerequisites for scholarships: Women who would like to participate at the World AIDS Conference must be able to communicate in the conference languages of English or Russian, and must be prepared to share the knowledge they attained in Vienna once back in their home country. “We will support the women in the dissemination of information,” emphasize the representatives of GSSG and ICW.

The project is being coordinated by GSSG founder Harriet Langanke. “We’ve brought together the AIDS Networks of German and Austrian Women as well as the ICW. All by almost solely relying on volunteer activists. But now is the time to reach out and seek sponsors to fund this project.”

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