

# The Urban Youth HIV Video Project

**(film title forthcoming)** examines the lives of four New York youth, each coming from statistically marginalized African American and Latino neighborhoods and demographically at the highest risk for contracting HIV. As the viewer is taken through their accounts of their lives, and in their own words, this film exposes specific social conditions underlying high-risk factors that contribute to the spread of the HIV virus.



Each character portrait touches on different issues pertaining to the community at risk:

## **Kareem.**

Age: 23. Straight black man. Battles with instability, homelessness and his illegal hustling past. Learns he is soon to be father.

## **Shameke.**

Age: 22. Straight black woman. Twice a teen mother. Leads a lifestyle of substance abuse and unsafe sex. Struggles to maintain a stable home environment for herself and children.

## **Jessica.**

Age: 23. Latina. Discovered in her late teens she adopted, born to a teenaged crack addict mother, and prenatally infected with HIV/AIDS.

## **Serenity.**

Age: 20. Male to female transgendered Latina. Kicked out of her home as a gay teenager. Forced into sex work, ultimately contracting HIV.

The stories of these primary characters are interwoven with fast-paced montages of “the community chorus,” statistics, narration, “expert” interviews, and hip hop beats in order to paint the landscape of a community that is disintegrated and left vulnerable to the epidemic.

The film transcends the conventional HIV prevention campaign staples of “safe sex” and testing and operates on the idea that, to really prevent the spread of the disease, we must understand why these youth are at risk.

By focusing on the social situations these youth face, it becomes clear why, often times, they put themselves in harm’s way.

# Director's Biography: Tchaiko Omawale

Tchaiko graduated from Columbia University with a bachelor of arts in African-American studies. During her time in New York she interned for Spike Lee, Mira Nair, and worked on various music video productions. After graduating from college, she co-founded the youth-focused HIV/AIDS non-profit Conscious Movements Collective.



In early 2002 Tchaiko left the Law Offices of Donna Bascom, where she assisted Mrs. Bascom on several HBO and Miramax films, to pursue filmmaking full time. Her first producing project, *His/Herstory*, was screened at several festivals including the Toronto Film Festival and the African Diaspora Film Festival. Tchaiko was selected as an Artist in Residency through the Gaea Sea Residency Fellowship for artists working towards social change.

As a director, Tchaiko is in various stages of production on several film projects: *Trapdoors*, a documentary that explores the socio-economic risk factors of HIV contraception for youth of color in NYC; *Sita*, a dramatic short about a fairy who falls in love with a human, *Adeoumi's Room*, a love story inspired by *Giovanni's Room*; *A Short Film About Friendship*; a story about a girl who becomes a 'cutter'; and a feature length version of *Sita*, in which a world-wide plague has forced the criminalization of physical touch.

A consummate traveler, Tchaiko has lived in over 7 different countries, leading to her belief that a true understanding of internationalism is the key to eliminating war, oppression, and inequality. When she graduated from Columbia University, Tchaiko became a member of Abeja Obrera, a Cuba international solidarity organization that sees physical labor as a revolutionary quality for community development. She has participated in many other community development initiatives, most of which pertain to HIV/AIDS related issues.