

PARTNERS IN

Pride

Impact Report 2024



Stephen Lewis
Foundation



August 2024

IN SOLIDARITY...

On behalf of all of us at the Stephen Lewis Foundation (SLF), we extend our deepest gratitude for your support for our Partners in Pride campaign. The SLF continues to provide essential funding to LGBTIQ organizations across sub-Saharan Africa, who in turn serve as a lifeline for their communities. As a result of pervasive stigma, discrimination, violence and the criminalization of their very existence, these community-led organizations experience a precariousness despite their vital role in ending the HIV epidemic.

This year, we saw the negative impact that Ugandan anti-LGBTIQ legislation had on mental health and well-being among LGBTIQ communities in Uganda and neighbouring countries, as lawmakers, leaders and individuals became emboldened to spread hate and violence. SLF partners faced an increase in discrimination by health care workers, threats of violence and arrest, and stigma in their own families and communities.

In this report, you will learn that much of the SLF's funding for LGBTIQ-led organizations this year was channelled into psychosocial counselling and interventions. It is to address the increasing need for mental health support for human rights defenders, volunteers, staff and leaders of our partner organizations, and the communities they serve.

When you read about the life-changing impact SLF partners are having, and the tangible difference you have helped us make over the past year, we know you will be inspired and energized. Thank you!

The SLF is proudly committed to championing health and human rights alongside 2SLGBTIQ+ communities 365 days a year.

We share in our partners' vision of a future in which they can carry out their life-saving work without the threat of violence, discrimination and hate. Now is the time to increase our collective support for LGBTIQ community organizations across sub-Saharan Africa.

In solidarity,

The Stephen Lewis Foundation team





Photo Credit: HOYMAS/Kenya

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My dream is to see a beautiful Kenya where everybody will walk freely and where people will respect LGBTIQ people as human beings and where people will see me as me, and not see my sexuality — where people will see me as a human being, and where people will be treated with dignity.

— John Mathenge, HOYMAS

Globally, the overall HIV prevalence rate is 0.8%, but due to marginalization, discrimination and criminalization, HIV prevalence is highest among transgender people at 9.2% and among gay men and other men who have sex with men at 7.7%.

Source: UNAIDS

Mental health, resilience and recovery in Kenya

In October 2023, Mariam faced a harrowing injustice. A private video was shared without her consent, outing her as a sex worker and a lesbian in Kenya. Stigma and homophobia threatened her personal safety. Following this dangerous breach of privacy, Mariam was forced from her home, not knowing where to turn. Initially, she sought refuge with a family member, but the safe haven was short-lived. Mariam was suddenly and unexpectedly asked to leave when the relative began fearing repercussions for their family.

Facing rejection and abandonment once again, Mariam was in a precarious situation. It was at this critical juncture that she turned to Bar Hostess Empowerment and Support Programme (BHESP) for support.

BHESP is an SLF partner in Kenya that provides services for women to empower themselves, including through HIV prevention, testing and care and economic empowerment. As a community-led organization, they serve as a unified and amplified voice for sex workers and members of LGBTIQ communities who are often robbed of their right to self-advocate. As part of their mandate to reduce stigma and discrimination, BHESP engages with community leaders and decision makers to advocate for inclusion in policy dialogue.

When Mariam enrolled in counselling at BHESP, she was grappling with high levels of stress, the many adverse effects of being ostracized by her family and was suffering from depression. Amid the turmoil of these challenges, Mariam was not able to continue with her schooling and she began to use drugs.

BHESP's counselling sessions, supported by funds from the SLF, became a turning point in Mariam's life. Their empathetic, stigma-free and professional counselling helped Mariam navigate the complexities of her situation. She built resilience and a renewed sense of stability and hope. Through this vital support, Mariam no longer relied on substance use as she had before and returned to school.

Within a few short months, Mariam made substantial progress in overcoming the impacts of the injustices and barriers she faced. This successful intervention helped Mariam to shift the trajectory of her life, underscoring the importance of BHESP's life-changing mental health programming and their work to end stigma and discrimination.

Stigma-free and professional counselling helped Mariam build resilience and a renewed sense of stability and hope.

With emergency funding provided by the Stephen Lewis Foundation, BHESP was able to hire a counsellor on a 3-month contract to increase access to mental health services for 30 members of LGBTIQ communities who experienced homophobic and transphobic attacks.



Photo Credit: Wambui Gathee

Bar Hostess Empowerment and Support Programme (BHESP) is the first sex worker-led organization in Kenya. BHESP supports members of LGBTIQ communities through advocacy and outreach to protect human rights, improve policies and legal protections, build a more inclusive national agenda for health and well-being, and promote economic empowerment. They also run drop-in and mobile clinics that provide access to quality health services free from stigma and discrimination, including HIV testing and counselling and STI screening and treatment.

In 2023, BHESP supported **20 members of LGBTIQ communities**, who were targeted with violence, with emergency shelter, nutrition and personal care supplies.



Your Impact

The SLF partners with 14 community-led organizations in Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda who support the health, safety and human rights of LGBTIQ communities. Over the past year, with the support of donors like you, our partners have reached thousands of community members with life-saving and life-changing programs.

In 2023

4,360+ individuals were reached by the Justice is Ours project through workshops and advocacy to push for inclusive policies to protect LGBTIQ communities in housing, employment and health care sectors.

Minority Womyn in Action (MWA)

2 LGBTIQ human rights defenders were relocated for their safety after threats of violence. Rent and utilities were covered to ensure they could continue their life-saving work.

Bridge Initiative Organization (BIO)

1,109 individuals were supported and protected from violence.

10,200+ individuals accessed essential health and well-being supports.

Health Development Initiative (HDI)



18 LGBTIQ civil society organizations in Uganda were supported and strengthened as members of SMUG.

2 legal cases were filed to abolish the Anti-Homosexuality Act since it was passed in May 2023.

Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG)

55 LBQ women received critical financial support for food, medication, toiletries, safe transport and housing when the Anti-Homosexuality Act 2023 led to increased violence.

Freedom and Roam Uganda (FARUG)

28 LGBTIQ staff members, activists and community leaders participated in a 5-day retreat with a focus on counselling, self-care and well-being.

Ishtar MSM

4,729 individuals accessed health supports, including for HIV prevention and their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

HIV & AIDS People's Alliance of Kenya (HAPA-Kenya)



600+ LGBTIQ individuals accessed stigma-free care at RSM's new centre within its first six months of operating, including vital HIV and STI services.

Rainbow Sunrise Mapambazuko (RSM)



60 community members were trained to distribute anti-retroviral therapy (ART) and pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to increase awareness, prevention and adherence to treatment.

Health Options for Young Men on HIV, AIDS & STIs (HOYMAS)



2,339 LGBTIQ individuals were reached by **84 peer educators** and **6 outreach workers** with HIV services and interventions for mental health, gender-based violence and substance use.

Mamboleo Peer Empowerment Group (MPEG)



3,500+ individuals received HIV testing and sexual health support and protection from violence.

Mission for Advocacy and Advisory for Young Generation Organization (MAAYGO)



1,800+ individuals, including LGBTIQ community members, accessed HIV testing and sexual and reproductive health and rights services and **86** were protected from homophobic violence.

ZITAE Women Organization



The Right to Health and Healing

The Right to Health and Healing project is led by the Stephen Lewis Foundation (SLF) and six of our LGBTIQ partners from Uganda and Kenya with funding from the Act Together for Inclusion Fund (ACTIF). ACTIF is funded by the Government of Canada through Global Affairs Canada and is managed by Equitas in partnership with Dignity Network Canada.

In 2021, The Right to Health and Healing project received funding for two years to address the urgent need for inclusive, quality mental health and well-being support for LGBTIQ leaders and community members. To increase the project's reach and impact, Doug Stollery co-funded the initial two years. In light of increasing violence and discrimination against LGBTIQ communities and the pivotal success of its initial phase, the SLF has been able to extend the project to December 2025 with renewed funding from ACTIF and new funding from the Stollery Charitable Foundation.

Read the [case for support](#) and [implementation guide](#) developed from this initial phase of the project.



The need for mental health programming for LGBTIQ communities in East Africa has become even more critical since Uganda passed the Anti-Homosexuality Act (AHA) in May 2023, leading to intensified hostility against LGBTIQ communities. At the same time, Kenyan LGBTIQ organizations secured a legal victory allowing their official registration as business entities, which was met with violent anti-LGBTIQ rhetoric and backlash. The Family Protection Bill was drafted, with language that would criminalize consensual same-sex acts, similar to Uganda's AHA 2023. In the context of our partners' countries and communities, social stigma and human rights abuses faced by LGBTIQ individuals are linked to deeply entrenched beliefs, norms and colonial-era laws. Unrelenting, widespread harassment and attacks are often incited by local politicians, by religious leaders from around the world, and by a rise in global funding for anti-feminist, homophobic and transphobic movements.

Amid these challenges, our partners have significantly advanced mental health training

and support. Building community resilience is key to resisting and counteracting systemic oppression. Activities that equip staff and volunteers with skills to support mental health in LGBTIQ communities have been scaled up to increase personal and professional capacity, like counselling and crisis intervention.

The Right to Health and Healing project has increased access to data and educational materials and supported awareness-raising campaigns and community outreach around mental health. The SLF and project partners collaborated on learning exchanges among participating organizations, launched two co-created publications on best practices, and advocated for increased and better funding for LGBTIQ-led mental health initiatives.

The Right to Health and Healing project has enabled access to vital mental health support for LGBTIQ communities in Kenya and Uganda,

and it has also invested in sustainability of LGBTIQ-led organizations by supporting the mental health and well-being for their staff and volunteers.

Escalating homophobia and transphobia, threats of violence toward LGBTIQ organizations and their staff, and increased demand for services from community members have created immense pressure for the leaders of these organizations. This pressure takes a toll on the mental health of staff and peer educators, many of whom have reported feeling pushed to the brink of burnout. With specific programming focussed on staff and volunteer mental health and well-being, The Right to Health and Healing project is investing in these human rights defenders, increasing the capacity of their organizations to support their communities and strengthening the LGBTIQ human rights movement.

This project is funded by



The SLF and our LGBTIQ-led partners presented on The Right to Health and Healing at the 25th International AIDS Conference in Munich, Germany. An overflow audience gathered at the Canada Pavilion and heard directly from leaders and human rights defenders about the critical need for inclusive mental health and well-being services for LGBTIQ communities, activists and staff in the HIV response.

Spaces for hope and connection in Uganda

Content warning: This story discusses suicidal thoughts.


When the government of Uganda passed the Anti-Homosexuality Act in May 2023, Zahara, like all LGBTIQ community members in Uganda, saw an immediate and dangerous surge in homophobic rhetoric, discrimination and violence. The act criminalized the existence of LGBTIQ communities and denied freedom of speech for LGBTIQ rights.

Under constant threat to her safety and well-being, Zahara began to lose hope and suffered through suicidal thoughts. She says she had not previously considered mental health counselling because she did not feel comfortable talking with others about her personal challenges. However, as the stress caused by the hostile climate in Uganda became overwhelming, Zahara came to realize she needed and deserved support.

She turned to Icebreakers Uganda (IBU), an SLF partner and LGBTIQ-led organization. Through their mental health programming, Zahara connected with a psychologist for one-on-one therapy sessions. Thanks to IBU, she now has access to a safe space to share her feelings, thoughts and fears, and a phone number to call for help if she is struggling to cope.

IBU's LGBTIQ-friendly, stigma-free mental health hub has been a sanctuary for many. Extra security measures have been introduced since the Anti-Homosexuality Act was passed to ensure IBU can safely continue to offer its services. The space is a refuge where clients can find community, support each other, and be free to exist without fear of judgement or discrimination.





Through IBU, Zahara has been able to connect with peers who share similar concerns and experiences and support each other through challenges. Knowing she is not alone, her outlook is now more hopeful. She says, “Icebreakers Uganda’s mental health project has shown me the profound impact of creating safe spaces and a sense of belonging.”

Providing LGBTIQ-friendly, stigma-free services — including HIV prevention, testing and treatment as well as mental health support — is key to our LGBTIQ-led partners’ work. Funding from the Stephen Lewis Foundation supports organizations like IBU to deliver these life-saving interventions.

“

For me, Icebreakers Uganda’s mental health project has shown me the profound impact of creating safe spaces and a sense of belonging.

— Zahara

In 2023, approximately 57% of SLF partners protected individuals, including LGBTIQ community members, from violence. These community-led organizations provide survivors with safe places to live, help them navigate legal systems to seek justice, and offer ongoing support to process trauma.

In 2023, after the Anti-Homosexuality Act was passed in Uganda, IBU innovated to provide access to its clinic and stigma-free mental health services through remote phone consultations. More than **590 clients** safely used the new service.

Thank you SLF donors and supporters

SLF donors play a vital role in sustaining social justice and human rights work by SLF partners. Our union and foundation partners are committed to addressing inequities and injustices faced by 2SLGBTIQ+ communities in Canada and around the world, including African countries where our partners work. We deeply appreciate our funding partners who consistently demonstrate true solidarity with their flexible, enduring support. Thank you to the following organizations for their contributions to our Partners in Pride campaign this year:



Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) National has been a steadfast supporter of the SLF since we were founded in 2003, exemplifying their dedication to social justice, empowering community-led organizations and advancing 2SLGBTIQ+ rights globally.



Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) is committed to ending all forms of discrimination, including homophobia and transphobia, and has been a supportive partner of the SLF since 2013 through their Social Justice Fund.



Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU/SEFPO) has been a significant contributor to the SLF with funds raised in an annual auction and their Live and Let Live Fund dedicated to ending AIDS. Since 2003, they have generously donated nearly \$1 million to support SLF partners, including those led by and for LGBTIQ communities.



K.M. Hunter Charitable Foundation has been a dedicated supporter of the SLF since 2014. Their contributions to our Partners in Pride campaign reflect their deep commitment to LGBTIQ human rights and ending the HIV epidemic.

Pride 365 — Event highlights

World AIDS Day 2023

On World AIDS Day (December 1), we hosted an SLF Pride Talk on [Ending AIDS by 2030: A Reality Check](#). The lively conversation offered valuable insight into current realities of access to HIV prevention, testing and treatment in Canada and countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

Panelists were SLF partners and 2SLGBTIQ+ community members in Toronto who called out significant shortcomings in current HIV testing and prevention strategies for 2SLGBTIQ+ communities, because they fail to consider their specific needs.

SLF partners emphasized that, apart from services provided by community-led organizations, there are too few options available to LGBTIQ individuals. They explained that this is a result of draconian laws in their countries and limited understanding about health care needs for individuals with intersectional identities. All panelists underscored the urgent need for inclusive care and services for all.

Health Care Inequities: Barriers to care facing LGBTIQ communities

Panelists:

- Fauziah Alaine, BHESP
- Hildah Mungal, MPEG
- Mary Audry Chard, RAWO
- Tamar Carter, Maggie's Toronto (Moderator)

This graphic features a yellow background with a purple header box containing the title. Below the title, a 'Panelists:' label is followed by four circular portraits of the panelists, each with their name and affiliation listed underneath. A 'Moderator' label is placed above Tamar Carter's portrait.

IDAHOBIT 2024

On the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (May 17) we hosted an online panel on [Health Care Inequities: Barriers to care facing LGBTIQ communities](#). The discussion highlighted ongoing challenges faced by LGBTIQ communities that are caused by health services that fail to meet the specific needs of LGBTIQ individuals and discrimination by providers. While there has been some improvement in access to LGBTIQ-friendly HIV services, many community members remain underserved.

As a result, there continues to be limited access to adequate health programming related to HIV, cervical cancer, contraception, prenatal care and intimate partner violence. The panel shed light on this discrimination and those who attended heard from experts on the frontlines about the barriers that exist, the efforts to overcome them, and how to act in solidarity.

Ending AIDS by 2030: A Reality Check

Panelists:

- Samuel Kuria, MPEG
- Racquel Bremmer, Casey House
- Omar Mussa Omar, BIO
- Kenita Placide, ECADE (Moderator)

This graphic features a white background with a red ribbon icon and a red header box containing the title. Below the title, a 'Panelists:' label is followed by four circular portraits of the panelists, each with their name and affiliation listed underneath. A 'Moderator' label is placed above Kenita Placide's portrait.

Celebrating Pride with the SLF

Kicking off Pride Month, we hosted an [event](#) at our SLF office in Toronto on June 6. Together with SLF partners, donors and supporters, we celebrated Pride and reflected on the importance of an intersectional approach in our work to champion health and human rights.

Luswata Brant from Icebreakers Uganda and John Mathenge from Health Options for Young Men on HIV, AIDS & STIs in Kenya joined us for a virtual conversation to share about their vital work amid rising hate against LGBTIQ communities, and the role of organizations like the SLF. We were honoured to welcome diverse SLF supporters, including members of the legal community,

union partners, community organizations, Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign members and individuals who share a commitment to solidarity with the SLF and our LGBTIQ partners in sub-Saharan Africa, and to advancing equality around the world.



Toronto Pride 2024

In Toronto, where the SLF office is located, we were proud to participate in Pride Month activities again this year. SLF staff and volunteers hosted a booth in the Pride Street Fair. We distributed stickers, buttons and fans, while raising awareness about LGBTIQ-led organizations in sub-Saharan Africa and their life-saving work. SLF staff and supporters also marched in the Pride Parade with banners and signs, calling for action to end HIV stigma and protect LGBTIQ human rights around the world.





Grandmothers for Pride

[Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign](#) members also joined us in this year's Pride Parade and marched with our new Grandmothers for Pride banner. Grandmothers groups across Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia raise funds in solidarity with grandmothers and community-led organizations in sub-Saharan Africa. Anne Pollard, a member of Grandmothers of Steel, a grandmothers group based in Hamilton, Ontario, shared this about her experience:



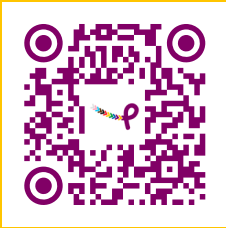
Many, many parade watchers were visibly touched to see their human rights supported by grandmothers. Spectators, most of whom were wearing Pride colours, smiled broadly at us, called out 'Grandma!' and reached out their hands.... A few actually burst into tears. I believe we touched the hearts of young people who miss the support of their own grandparents, and who appreciate the solidarity from other folks of that generation. I danced my way through Toronto for two hours, waving, singing, smiling and calling out 'Happy Pride!' to an ecstatic crowd. I have to say that I'm very proud to be a part of such a fantastic, loving organization.

— Anne Pollard, Grandmothers of Steel

Thank you for your ongoing solidarity and support.

Together, we can build a future free from AIDS.

Donate today



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