Roatan is a small island in the Caribbean off the coast of Honduras, and with approximately 28,000 people, is the most heavily populated of the Bay Islands. Known for its sandy beaches and spectacular diving, Roatan is an island of extreme wealth and excessive poverty. Its economy has grown exponentially in the past four years due to tourism, real estate, and the arrival of expatriates establishing vacation homes, permanent residences and business. The influx of dollars has further increased the population with migrants and squatters from the mainland, where approximately 60% of Hondurans live below the poverty line. Investments in the tourist industry have failed to trickle down to the majority of the poor, nor have they resulted in needed infrastructure to address the island’s increased growth.

The AIDS Concern
Honduras has the highest number of HIV/AIDS cases in Central America with 17,000 cases reported since the beginning of the epidemic. AIDS is the number one killer in Honduras, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Roatan has the second highest rate of AIDS per capita next to San Pedro Sula, the nation’s economic capital. Change for Children’s partner organization in Roatan, Familias Saludables (FS), estimates the rate of HIV/AIDS in Roatan to be as high as 1 in 10. Testing has been available on the island for approximately three years, with five to fifteen positive tests monthly. Although there has been some government response to the crisis, like the three years, with five positive tests monthly. Although there has been some government response to the crisis, like the setting up of testing centers, the rate of testing is low. The majority of pregnant women do not access them. The largest barriers to testing include fear of discrimination, lack of education and inconsistent prenatal care for all women. It is estimated that less than one in ten pregnant women at risk actually get tested during their pregnancy. Mother to child transmission of HIV contributes to a pediatric death rate 10 times higher than Canada’s.

Familias Saludables: The Program
Change for Children’s partner organization here, Familias Saludables (FS) has a program designed to reduce mother to child transmission (MTCTs), reduce general transmissions, and to support women, children and their families presently infected. The Familias Saludables Program includes three components:

Clinical Care focuses on free and confidential testing for the entire Bay Island population and the provision of prenatal care for all mothers. Familias Saludables helps to manage the pregnancies of HIV positive mothers including ARV treatment for women and babies. An infant formula program further works to reduce transmission rates via breast milk.

The Home Visitor Program provides PLWAs and their families with home support and education. Familias Saludables trains island women to provide support in the areas of counseling, prenatal care, health promotion and HIV/AIDS education. As clients (including children) move into their final life stages, they are introduced to the Palliative Care portion of the program in which the Home Visitor continues her/his visits and provides help with non drug pain relief, social issues of dying, future planning for family and personal care.

Community Education works to raise awareness and debunk myths surrounding HIV/AIDS. The 2000 individuals that have been tested by FS, have also received an average of 20 minutes of educational counseling at the time of testing. The Community Education program also includes awareness raising campaigns such as condom and information distribution in public places, poster blitzes and regular appearances on Bay Island radio and television stations. In addition, free seminars are provided to businesses, churches and schools by PLWAs and health promoters, in an effort to reduce stigma and facilitate increased acceptance and support for PLWAs in Honduran society.

CHANGE FOR CHILDREN ASSOCIATION (CFCA) is an Edmonton-based non-profit, non-governmental organization with a 30-year history of working for sustainable, grassroots community development in Latin America, Africa and the Philippines. Our development projects, their cost and priority, are determined by our Southern partners according to the needs of their communities. In Canada, our education program engages the public in a process of awareness raising, analysis and action on issues of global justice.

Change for Children gratefully acknowledges the support of the Canadian International Development Agency for this project.
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