



In 2003, my friend, Nick Reding, showed me a short film that he had made of his theatre company in Mombasa performing a play that he had devised, written, produced and directed. The play was well-acted, entertaining, heartwarming and full of hope; I wish I had been given the opportunity to see it live. The play also had a message that was clear to me, but having had the privilege of over twenty years of information and education about HIV/AIDS, it should be. What Nick was attempting to do, and is now so successfully doing, is getting that crucially important information to places that desperately need it. To where there is an epidemic, to where peoples' prejudices are inflamed only by ignorance. To get across the message of safe sex, as well as a message of hope.

S.A.F.E. (Sponsored Arts For Education), which Nick formed in 2003, has now grown to include three theatre companies. The first company, Pwani, toured all over the Coast Province of Kenya with a show that challenged the discriminations and superstitions attached to the disease. Nick achieved this not by preaching but through powerful thought-provoking drama and by making people laugh. The next company, S.A.F.E GHETTO, was formed in the Nairobi slums. Open auditions were held and a company of seventeen actors was brought together to devise plays about their own experiences with HIV/AIDS in the slums and its effect on their lives. The third company, S.A.F.E. MAA, is with the Maasai in the remote Loita Hills on the Tanzanian border. This unique and remote community of 25,000 is only just becoming aware of the epidemic in their midst. Using traditional Maasai songs and story telling, a theatre piece has been developed that gives this community a comprehensive HIV/AIDS health education. S.A.F.E. is also providing a condom distribution network and is advocating for free ARV care to be made available to the Loita community. At the request of the women in the company, a new theatre piece is being developed to bring about a debate on female circumcision within their community.

Nick Reding

S.A.F.E. began small and considering the tragedy that affects Sub-Saharan Africa, it remains so. However, consider this: S.A.F.E. has performed to over 600,000 people in its brief existence. After seeing S.A.F.E. productions, more people have had themselves tested, enrolled in HIV/TB treatment programs and understood the need to protect themselves and use condoms than ever before. In fact, in 2006 the Ford Foundation sponsored an impact assessment which aimed to establish the impact S.A.F.E.'s professional theatre could have on knowledge, awareness, changes in attitudes or beliefs, intentional changes in behavior or practices and crucially, actual behavior change. Eighty percent of the respondents said they would be more likely to use condoms after the show and 95% of post-show respondents said they would be more likely to get tested. These figures illustrate perfectly how much Nick and his theatre companies have already achieved.

Nick Reding's skill as a communicator, as well as an innate ability to spot a problem and tackle it, coupled with a love affair of the human condition, has allowed him to achieve great things in a very limited time. With more support S.A.F.E. can continue to raise awareness. Most importantly in my mind, S.A.F.E. can create a platform for debate. Not discussions at a government level but where it is so desperately needed among the communities that are so deeply affected. This is where change happens, where attitudes can be reversed and lives can be saved.

I'm humbled by the work that you do and the love and compassion that you give so generously to all those around you. I am proud and very privileged to be your friend.

by **Daniel Craig**, Actor