

## **Aussie Teammates Visit Teen Mother Programme**

Sun St. Kitts/Nevis

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By Robert Dabney

On their days off between the matches in Cricket World Cup 2007 being held here in tropical St. Kitts, members of the defending champion Australian team have been spotted on the island's many beaches, in tourist shops, and sightseeing. But teammates Andrew Symonds and Mike Hussey, the Australian Team Ambassador, engaged in a different pastime last Wednesday.

The two cricketers visited a teen mother programme as part of "Unite for Children, Unite against AIDS". This is a partnership between the International Cricket Council, UNAIDS, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Caribbean Broadcast Media Partnership on HIV and AIDS.

The partnership has been set up to use the World Cup, the third-largest global sporting event, to draw the world's attention to the issues of HIV and AIDS in the Caribbean and the impact they are having on the region's children. Symonds and Hussey saw first-hand how the St. Kitts' government, with help from UNICEF, is working with young girls at the Women's Training Centre in Basseterre who become pregnant to ensure that they remain in school and receive information on safe sex practices and HIV prevention.

"These young women have a will to try to survive and be successful and they're not letting anything stand in their way," said Symonds, the flamboyant Aussie all-rounder who is recovering from a torn biceps and hoping to see his first action during his side's final Group A match this weekend against South Africa.

"The only way that I can describe my visit with these young ladies is to say that it has been both humbling and inspiring."

But Ambassador-at-Large for St. Kitts/Nevis Rosalyn Hazelle was at the forefront of a movement on the island to ensure that pregnant teens had the opportunity to continue their education and to receive information to help them guard against HIV infection.

"I am able to speak to you from personal experience because I, too, was a teen mother," Ambassador Hazelle told the girls. "At the time, I wasn't able to finish my education at home and had to go to Canada. If I had not, you would not see me standing before you today St. Kitts and Nevis' first women ambassador."

Symonds and Hussey met with four girls between the ages of 17 and 20 years who have had children and have continued their education, a challenge in some parts of the Caribbean.

Twenty-year-old Clauja Bradshaw had her child at the age of 16.

Thanks to the teen mother programme, she has been able to complete her secondary education and is about to enter college with the goal of one day practicing law. She had a poignant message for the younger girls during Wednesday's visit.

"No matter what, keep your head up and don't mind what other people say," said the aspiring attorney. "People will always talk, but you have to keep your goals in mind and do whatever you need to do to reach those goals."

Also part of the visit was Tom Olsen, the UNICEF representative for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean who expressed the gratitude of UNICEF and the people of the region for the cricketers' interest in the teen mothers.

"You could have chosen to spend the day on the beach or touring beautiful St. Kitts on your day off," Olsen commented. "But you chose to bring messages of hope and inspiration to these girls, and to help us raise the awareness of the world to the issue of making sure that we focus on the full development of all children everywhere."

As Hussey and Symonds wound up their nearly hour-and-a-half visit with the teen mothers, one of the members of the media covering the two cricketers shouted "will Australia win the World Cup?" In an answer that characterised the enjoyable time that the two Australian team members spent with the teen mothers, Symonds responded without missing a beat, "if we don't somebody else will!"