

## **Children share emotions through Abbott AIDS exhibit**

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Dozens of black and white snapshots of people, young and old alike, lined a hallway at Abbott Labs on Wednesday to create a sobering message.

It is a display designed to bring the AIDS epidemic to light. But the real story is the kids behind the lens who used the photos to express how the dreaded disease has affected their lives.

Three young photographers - from countries directly affected by AIDS, such as Romania, India and the landlocked west African nation of Burkina Faso - have been documenting their country's struggle through Abbott Labs' "Picturing Hope" program.

It was created by Chicago-area native Craig Bender, a professional photographer who has traveled throughout the developing world to document Abbott's efforts to support children affected by HIV/AIDS and meet their immediate needs with medications and health care. Bender wanted to let children share their emotions and experiences through photographs.

Alex, a 16-year-old Romanian student diagnosed with the HIV virus in May 2000, is featured in the "Through Their Eyes" photo exhibit and said it has helped him see AIDS in a new light.

"AIDS is a problem," said Alex, a 10th-grader in Constanta, Romania. "But it shouldn't be seen as a bad disease. You can still have a great relationship with people."

Henri, a 16-year-old from Burkina Faso, said the program has helped him emotionally after he lost his father to AIDS when he was 9.

"Where I come from, children are never asked about their emotions," Henri said through an interpreter.

The photography program has helped him communicate messages to his peers, he said, capturing the emotions through pictures. That is something, he said, that would not be possible in other contexts because most of his peers are illiterate.

Manjula, a 12-year-old from Vijayawada, India, who was separated from her parents after they were diagnosed with the HIV virus, also had her photography displayed from her country in the exhibit.

"Some people get numb with the numbers," Bender said of the 14 million kids throughout the world who have been orphaned due to AIDS. "This program gives us a new way to talk about the disease from a personal perspective."

Abbott Laboratories, the world's largest manufacturer of drugs designed to help fight the AIDS epidemic, has been circulating the exhibit to help spread awareness of its new program.

The photo exhibit has also been displayed in Washington D.C. for World AIDS Day and the International AIDS Conference in Bangkok.

AIDS: Photos also have been displayed in Washington, Bangkok