PLENARY SESSIONS

Plenary Session 4
The Naked Truth: What’s Love Got to Do with It

Moderator/Panelists: Christopher Bates

Presenters: Marvelyn Brown
              Kemba Smith

This plenary session examined the experiences of two African American women whose choices took them down a path that drastically changed their lives.

Mr. Bates introduced the topic of sexual responsibility by encouraging the delay of initiation of sexual engagement and discussing the possible consequences of early sexual engagement which included guilt, unwanted pregnancy and diseases (STD, hepatitis and others) and infertility. His challenge to young people was to be responsible. His challenge to parents was to talk with children about sexual health in the kids’ own language. Mr. Bates ended by pledging to work with Diann Dawson in efforts regarding sex education.

Marvelyn Brown, a 23-year-old HIV positive woman, discussed her journey with HIV including diagnosis, notifying family, accepting the disease and determining her life course with HIV. Marvelyn became proactive as a spokesperson. Her messages for youth were threefold: 1) get tested (early detection is important); 2) educate yourself (HIV can be transmitted by just one sexual exposure); and be responsible (if sexually active, use protection). If a person has unprotected sex, he/she is giving his/her partner the control of his/her future.

Kemba Smith, a 37-year-old female, explained how poor choices led to her conviction on drug charges resulting in a 24 ½ year prison sentence. Her downfall included becoming pregnant at college with the wrong person, for the wrong reasons and ran away with the guy who was on a wanted list by the Police. She came back to her senses, vowed to care for her baby, returned home, and turn herself into the authorities. After 6 ½ years behind bars, Kemba was granted clemency and earned a B.S. degree in social work. Kemba’s hope is to uplift youth and inspire them to become educated about injustices that can occur in the criminal justice system.