

Hibiscus win Charity Awards 2006

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The winners of the Charity Awards 2006 were announced at a gala presentation dinner on 15 June. Hibiscus received the overall award for excellent charity management, and the Education & Training award for its hugely effective Eva Goes to Foreign campaign which dramatically reduced the number of Jamaican women being imprisoned for drug trafficking.

Eva goes to Foreign is a hugely successful publicity and education campaign set up by Hibiscus, the Female Prisoners Welfare Project. It uses a short animated film, comics, posters and media coverage to inform women that might be considering becoming drug couriers, of the risks of trafficking for both themselves and their families. Hibiscus was sure that if women were made aware of the severity of the consequences of trafficking, they would think twice before doing it.

The campaign has had a massive impact in Jamaica and is being taken up by other countries, including Trinidad & Tobago, Barbados, St Lucia and Nigeria. The project has involved women prisoners and women returning from the at risk countries, and has resulted in a higher profile for the charity's work and for the issues it raises.

The campaign's extraordinary impact has been a massive drop in the numbers of Jamaican women detained for drug trafficking offences. In fact, there have been no real arrests since January, says Olga Heaven, director of Hibiscus. Compare this with the nine to 12 women per day who were being arrested, and you can see what an amazing affect this campaign has had.

She says that with more than 700 Jamaican women imprisoned, with ridiculously long sentences, the charity knew it had to do something. Talking to women at risk of becoming traffickers, we found that the majority would not get into it if they knew of the consequences they just wouldn't take the risk.

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For more information please contact [Ruth Goldsmith](#)