

Programme Title: Multi-pronged - Protecting MSM Subgroups from HIV

Executive Summary:

Project title: In-House Testing! - Voluntary Counselling and Testing for HIV (VCT) in the GLBT Community Centre

Aim

1. To provide a community friendly and convenient location for a blood testing station;
2. To provide VCT service in the evenings and on weekends.
3. To actively encourage more MSM to have blood testing;
4. To raise awareness of HIV and advocate safe sex practices every time; and
5. To stop the spread of HIV by encouraging early HIV testing with counselling to MSM.

Objectives

1. 900 MSM receiving Voluntary Counselling and Testing for HIV (VCT) service;
2. Raise in-depth HIV/AIDS awareness to 800 MSM in the counselling section;
3. 2,100 calls received from the hotline regarding MSM sexual health issues;
4. 2,100 enquires contacted through internet on-line service regarding MSM sexual health issues;
5. At the end of the VCT session, 85% of MSM express that they will practice safer sex compared to their sexual behaviour before the VCT session (behavioural change awareness).

Project design

Following the "Empowerment Model" introduced by overseas expert: Susan M. Kegeles, PhD, Professor of Medicine, Co-Director of CAPS (Center for AIDS Prevention Studies) invited by the Department of Health, HKSAR, in October 2008. Susan Kegeles teaches, "HIV awareness is most efficiently spread in the gay/bisexual community with peer support, community building and through advocating on other social issues of concern to the GLBT community." (www.mpowerment.org)

At Rainbow of Hong Kong, by setting up an MSM self-help organization, in the way that the majority of Board of Directors, staff and volunteers are members from the MSM community; constructing a GLBT Community Centre, free entry and encouraging members to stay in the centre as much as they want during its opening

hours; as well as advocating for the rights of the GLBT community, Rainbow of Hong Kong continues to gain great trust from the MSM community and as a result offers the best platform to convey messages, to educate MSM on HIV issues and bring awareness on protecting themselves from HIV.

A comprehensive VCT service set-up was implemented in this project, including hotline service, internet outreach, mobile outreach, delivering condoms and lubrication to the community.

Target population

Men who have Sex with Men

Main achievements

900 MSM receiving Voluntary Counselling and Testing for HIV (VCT) service.

Conclusions

Setting up the "Culturally Coherent Environment" as the GLBT Community Centre, it naturally attracts a good amount of gay and bisexual men to visit the centre frequently. MSM are also willing to talk more frankly about their relationships and sexual behaviours to our counsellors in VCT sessions.

We value this unique platform serving the MSM community, especially on the issue of protecting them from HIV. We take this as our personal responsibility; striving our best by building a healthy and loving community.

Project title: HIV Intervention for Marginalized Teenage MSM

Aim

1. To identify Marginalized Teenage MSM who are sexually active in Hong Kong;
2. To provide professional social support to improve their lives, so they can see a better future;
3. To construct peer support networks to reinforce the importance of maintaining health;
4. To provide HIV, AIDS, STI and safe sex education to marginalized teenage MSM; and
5. To have 200 marginalized teenage MSM access VCT within the project year.

Objectives

1. 60 Peer Educators will be trained throughout the project;
2. 1,200 teenage (under 20 years old) MSM successfully reached in Internet Outreach;
3. 1,200 teenage (under 20 years old) MSM successfully reached in Mobile Phone Outreach;
4. 100 teenage MSM successfully reached contact information in Outreach Action;
5. 500 teenage MSM attend Teenage MSM Peer Support Group Meeting; and
6. An extra 200 teenage MSM receive VCT Services.

Project design

Every year in Hong Kong, there are several news reports of school social workers who disclose same-sex behaviour leading to the student's boyfriend or sex partner being arrested. Anti-gay discourse in schools often reinforces isolation and prevents young MSM from seeking help when facing emotional difficulties related to their sexual identity. Many MSM are bullied at school and some are even mocked by teachers. As a result, many teenage MSM experience isolation at home from their parents or siblings, at school from their teachers, peers and even friends, in effect they are isolated from the mainstream of society.

As a MSM self-help organization, every year we encounter teenagers who have been verbally abused at home after coming out, some even fearing domestic violence. In this Project, we make a special effort to reach out to marginalized teenage MSM who may not have good relationships with their parents, peers and/or school, and who may not be reached by mainstream HIV/AIDS education programmes. Comprehensive measures such as outreach programmes, training course for peer educators, peer support group meetings were implemented in this project.

Target population

Teenage MSM

Main achievements

With support from the Council for the AIDS Trust Fund, in this project, a gay-friendly social worker was hired to provide professional outreach and counselling services. This greatly increased our effectiveness in serving the rising number of sexually active teenage MSM, and providing professional HIV intervention to this target population. This was especially the case when vulnerable teenage MSM experiencing crisis needed social support, the professional social worker's service secured their safety and assisted them in constructing their future lives, which effectively prevented them from falling into the alternative unhealthy lifestyle of drugs, unprotected sex and the greater risk of HIV infection.

Conclusions

With more and more teenagers in Hong Kong having smart mobile phones, in addition with MSM smart phone cruising applications (Apps) being widely popular in the community, the HIV risk faced by young MSM is a rising concern.

Since Rainbow of Hong Kong operates the only GLBT Community Centre in Hong Kong, providing free entry and a relaxed atmosphere, we attract many teenage MSM who like to hang out at the centre. It is important for us to continue training more young MSM HIV peer educators, to have them reaching the wider emerging young MSM community, to protect the young generation from HIV.

Project title: Proactive to the Most Active - An Intervention - Changing attitudes in HK MSM Sex Parties to be Healthier

Aim

1. To identify MSM who attend sex parties in Hong Kong;
2. To make connections with and provide emotional support to MSM who attend sex parties;
3. To provide HIV intervention at sex parties with trained counsellors;
4. To change the attitude of MSM who attend sex parties to self-caring and promote safer sex practices; and
5. To have 200 MSM who participate in sex parties receive VCT within the project year.

Objectives

1. A total of 30 MSM Sex Party Outreach Counsellors will be trained throughout the project;
2. 320 MSM connections will be made at sex parties providing direct emotional support;
3. After follow-up contacts and virtual support, 256 (80%) MSM who attend sex parties will report behavioural change towards practising safe sex or taking better care of themselves;
4. 60 MSM attend Sex Party Safety Workshops;
5. 10,000 Condoms delivered to MSM at sex parties in Hong Kong; and
6. 200 MSM who attend sex parties will receive the HIV Blood Testing Service.

Project design

Men who attend sex parties are probably the subgroup that is most sexually active. The purpose of attending a sex party is usually to have sex with several people at once. Sex parties are events that are specially set up for multiple and group sex.

There is a good model in Australia where ACON, a community-based GLBT health and HIV/AIDS organisation works closely with sex parties. When HIV intervention is accompanied by community support, HIV prevention work is most effective.

In this project, we train outreach workers, set-up outreach systems, conduct monthly evaluation meetings, workshops, an emergency hotline and deliver condoms and lubrication.

Target population

Men who have Sex with Men

Main achievements

Through persisting outreach efforts, by making connections and invitations, several MSM who attended sex parties tested HIV positive at our VCT service. We believe early test and treatment is one of the most important measures to thwart the spread of HIV.

Conclusions

Our Outreach team has noticed changes in the sex party scene in Hong Kong. Until early 2011, there were large scale sex parties of around 20 participants held in hotel rooms, where the rate of condom use was usually fairly high. Since spring 2011, large scale parties became rare, and smaller home-based parties of up to 10 participants happen more frequently and the rate of condom use is lower. With mobile cruising applications (Apps) being more and more popular, many MSM forthrightly ask for joining sex parties on their profile as it is their preferred pattern in sex.

With only a part-time worker supported in this project, we experienced a lack of resources to effectively reach the pace of this rapidly rising sex party culture in the Hong Kong MSM community.

Project title: HIV Intervention for a High Risk and Infected Group - Ethnic Minority MSM

Aim

1. To reduce new HIV infections among Ethnic Minority MSM in HK;
2. To increase awareness of HIV risk among EM MSM;
3. To affect the use of safe sex practices among EM MSM; and
4. Have 200 EM MSM access VCT within the project year.

Objectives

1. To provide training so that 10 EM MSM will be HIV/AIDS Peer Educator and Counsellors;
2. To raise awareness of the risk of HIV infection in 3,390 EM MSM through workshops, gatherings and outreach in the project;
3. To reduce the incidence of high-risk behaviours among 3,390 EM MSM; and
4. To provide an extra 200 EM MSM with HIV Blood Testing Services.

Project design

To better reach different Ethnic Minority Men who have Sex with Men (EM MSM) in Hong Kong, in this project, four simple HIV/AIDS Information Leaflets were produced for the Ethnic Minority MSM communities in Hong Kong. One written in Filipino and English, one in Manak Hindi and English, one in Thai and English and the other in Modern Standard Arabic and English. The leaflets were used in workshops and outreach actions.

This project also provided training to HIV/AIDS Peer Educators and Counsellors, conducted workshops, outreach, and mutual support groups, and VCT with language translation when needed.

Target population

Ethnic Minority Men who have Sex with Men

Main achievements

With support from the AIDS Trust Fund, persisting outreach efforts were enforced. We are proud to see the beginnings of peer support amongst Ethnic Minority MSM in Hong Kong. Gay and bisexual men from different Ethnic Minorities get together, and show concern about their own health and wellbeing. We treasure this platform of New Ethnic Minority volunteer team devoted to protect the community, Fighting HIV and Stigmatization.

Conclusions

With the above mentioned efforts in the Ethnic Minority MSM community in Hong Kong, we aim to change attitudes and awareness about HIV/AIDS in this community which is nearly never reached by mainstream community services. In our HIV intervention efforts, we encourage the consistent adoption of safer sex practices and ultimately, to bring down the HIV infection rate in the EM MSM community in Hong Kong.

Project title: Healthy Relationships: An Action Plan to Foster an environment for effective HIV interventions for MSM

Aim

1. To provide MSM couples with skills to facilitate healthy relationships by fostering trust, commitment, emotional intimacy and honesty;
2. To provide single MSM with skills needed to develop and maintain healthy long-term relationships;
3. To create pamphlets based on the needs and experiences of HK MSM couples to help MSM in HK find and maintain healthy long-term relationships; and
4. To have 50 couples access Couples Counselling with VCT service during the project year (100 MSM).

Objectives

1. 3 experienced VCT Counsellors will be selected and trained to provide Couples VCT service;
2. 840 MSM in relationships will participate in the MSM Couples Support Group;
3. 840 Single MSM will participate in Discussion Groups to learn relationship skills for the future;
4. 300 MSM will attend a Public Talk About Healthy Relationships; and
5. 50 MSM Couples will access Couples Counselling with VCT (100 extra MSM receive VCT).

Project design

In this project, various trainings and workshops were conducted for the purpose of securing romantic relationships in the MSM community, as well as educate MSM to use condoms every time they have sex even when they are in a monogamous relationship. The methods being used in this project include: couples counselling, support group meetings, talks about healthy relationships for MSM etc.

Target population

Men who have Sex with Men

Main achievements

84 Group Support Meetings for MSM relationships were conducted.

10 Talks about Healthy MSM Relationships were conducted.

50 MSM couples accessed Couples Counselling with VCT service during the project year.

Conclusions

The Hong Kong Advisory Council on AIDS (ACA) published a strategy document "Recommended HIV/AIDS Strategies for HK 2012-16". One of its five "Priority areas for action" is to "foster an environment which supports safer sex, harm reduction and anti-discrimination." This strategy document sets targets for MSM for 2015: 50% receive an HIV test within the year, 80% use condoms in last anal sex with a casual partner and 70% use condoms in last anal sex with a regular partner.

The 2011 PRiSM study reported rates of consistent condom use by MSM in HK with regular partners of 42% and 52% (internet-based vs. venue-based sample). HIV testing rates also fell short of the target, with 41% and 40% reporting having a test within the last year.

In the study on MSM who attend group sex parties in Hong Kong by the Department of Health, it shows the rate of consistent use of condoms with regular partners was 49% and 29% (internet-based vs. venue-based sample).

Both studies suggested Hong Kong has a way to go, particularly with regard to condom use with regular partners before reaching the target.

Rainbow of Hong Kong is honoured to conduct the only project implementing this "Priority areas for action". We hope similar projects will continue to receive support from the government.

Together, using a multi-pronged strategy, we effectively fight against HIV.