

The Inkunzi Isematholeni Project for young boys in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Article produced as part of the KIC Project



Schools provide an ideal environment for projects involving very young people, as there are many support structures available to them

TAI, Targeted AIDS Interventions, is a South African NGO in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal state. In 1998, it started the Shosholozza AIDS Project, which targets young men between the ages of 15 and 18. After much consideration, it was decided to use soccer (South Africa's most popular sport) as a means of mobilizing and motivating the participants. In collaboration with the South African Football Association (SAFA) eight affiliated teams were selected and underwent a three-day training workshop, which concentrated on issues such as sexuality, puberty, STIs, HIV and AIDS, communication skills and project planning. Time was given for the peer educators to first come to terms with HIV in their own lives. When the groups felt prepared, they began to implement small projects within their communities: holding training workshops for neighbouring soccer teams; organizing HIV-oriented soccer events; engaging spectators at matches; distributing condoms; and holding personal sessions with friends.



Although the Shosholozza AIDS Project was enthusiastically received, TAI realized that, as a result of their early sexual debut (between 14 and 16 years), many of the boys could already be HIV positive. In fact, according to a study by the Planned Parenthood Association of South Africa, more than 70% of South African teenagers are sexually active by the age of 14. Thus TAI resolved to work with an even younger group of boys (11 to 15 years), and the Inkunzi Isematholeni Project was initiated in 2001.

Inkunzi isematholeni is a Zulu idiom, which when literally translated means 'how the calf is raised will determine the quality of the bull'. This summarized the spirit of the project, which was to help guide boys and young men away from the violent and destructive behaviour that had become predominant in KwaZulu-Natal, and to support their development into good fathers and sexually

responsible partners. TAI approached 20 predominantly rural schools in the province to take part in the project. It was felt that schools provided an ideal environment for projects involving very young people, as there are many support structures available to them, including teachers, principals, school governing bodies and the school's facilities. School principals were contacted, the project was introduced to them, and their potential involvement outlined. Their permission to implement the project was obtained, and one committed teacher from each school was selected to guide the process. These teachers were tasked with selecting ten participants from their school. For each school's peer-educator group, a mixture of extroverted students (for public speaking) and introverted students (for personal discussions) was encouraged.

Reflection, information and skills

Some 200 boys and young men were involved in the programme. First, three-day training workshops were conducted, which focused on providing correct and relevant information on puberty, sexually transmitted infections, HIV/AIDS, and condom use. The workshops encouraged reflection on issues such as culture, masculinity and femininity, personal HIV vulnerability, and prevention strategies. Firm emphasis was placed on encouraging participants to think for themselves. Creativity was encouraged, and many issues were explored through the use of role-plays, case studies, and other thought-provoking exercises. It was felt that it was important to develop certain skills in the participants, such as communication skills to enable them to talk about these very sensitive and difficult issues; project-management skills, which would enable the groups to implement and manage their own initiatives; and negotiation skills.

Second, TAI coordinators regularly visited the groups to reinforce the training. These visits served the purpose of allowing the participants to discuss issues facing them, their personal decisions, and questions they had been asked and were unable to answer. Further relevant information was also provided during these sessions. The third activity focused on promoting caring behaviour, and involved the establishment of vegetable gardens in all 20

Lessons learned

An evaluation of TAI's programmes by JOHAP, the Joint Oxfam HIV/AIDS Programme, showed that the greatest success has been with the younger boys, i.e. in the Inkunzi Isematholeni Project, demonstrating the efficacy of interventions in earlier rather than later adolescence. Some elements of success identified were:

- *The use of the peer education model* – TAI realized early on that adolescent boys and young men do not necessarily identify with adults and have something of their own sub-culture. In order for their message to be heard and accepted, TAI used focus group discussions to learn from the language of the youth.
- *Facilitating discussion on gender issues* – Through this method of co-creating the interventions, TAI was able to facilitate discussion about many other issues raised by the boys that impact on the broader constructions of masculinity, thereby contributing to the development of alternative masculinities and change in the patterns of gendered behaviour and gender relations.
- *Allowing time for growth* – TAI understood that the learning and internalizing process could not be rushed and to spend the first year working with a small group of boys before suggesting they develop strategies for reaching their friends, thus building resilience and self-esteem in the boys, and allowing them time to believe in what they would be teaching.
- *Bottom-up approach* – The 'bottom-up approach' that TAI has used in its interventions with the boys and young men allows an experience of empowerment that gives the peer educators the feeling that they are 'in-charge' of their projects. By encouraging the boys to develop and implement their own strategies to prevent the spread of HIV in their schools and communities with only minimal guidance from TAI, the process becomes participatory and collaborative.

Leaving out girls?

One of the recommendations in the JOHAP evaluation is that TAI should consider including girls and women in their intervention programmes. The reasons for this is that discussions with the male peer educators showed that girls and women play an important role in the maintenance of a gendered system which is exploitative of women. The reports states: *"A very good example of the reciprocal role played by women in the maintenance of hegemonic patterns of behaviour is the opposition that came from girls who were opposed to the peer education program because it was 'affecting their source of income because their boyfriends are leaving them' once awareness of HIV/AIDS was raised. Given the important role that women play in maintaining a masculinist system, it is important that they are included in gender-based interventions."*

Source: *A gender analysis of Targeted AIDS Interventions (TAI)*, G. Lindegger & J. Maxwell, JOHAP, 2006:
http://www.oxfam.org.au/world/africa/south_africa/AIDSGenderAnalysis.pdf

schools to provide food for children in need (identified by the peer educators and the principal). A programme to plant indigenous trees was also initiated, and peer educators were entrusted with caring for young trees.

TAI conducted targeted training workshops for the groups' guiding teachers and several selected school governing bodies (SGBs). This training aimed to help the teachers and SGB members understand the scale of the HIV epidemic, its impact on the education system, and their own role in curbing the spread of the disease. We also engaged the Inkunzi peer educators in a variety of exercises aimed at further strengthening the project and maintaining interest, including:

- exchange programmes between participating schools;
- a weekly discussion of themes such as rape, child abuse, domestic violence, etc.;
- making posters and designing quilt messages;
- producing HIV-related drama, poetry, and *scathamiya* (Zulu dance).

Sharing and reflecting on personal beliefs

Various research activities were conducted to assess the impact of the project. These included preventative counselling, focus-group discussions, and message development. These exercises provided

a real insight into the thoughts and feelings of the young men. The preventative counselling took the form of one-on-one sessions, in which a trained facilitator worked with each participant to fill out a questionnaire, which took about 45 minutes to complete. The focus-group discussions concentrated on several broad issues such as gender, violence in our communities, parental influence, caring, and social or environmental factors. The discussions gave the peer educators a chance to share and reflect on their personal beliefs, as well as allowing us to evaluate our project.

On issues of gender, peer educators showed a growing awareness of women's rights, as indicated by the response of the peer educators to the question 'what is women-abuse?': *"The common abuse in our areas is women-abuse. This form happens more regularly when men are not aware that they are abusing. Men will stress that certain chores are women's work, not considering that women are being overworked. If you are in love you divide work."* Some boys reported knowing of incidents in which girls were dragged into the bushes when they refused sex to boys (in the community) who propositioned them. The majority of peer educators felt that, even if the girl was their girlfriend, they had no right to force her to have sex.

The research on message development also provided inspiring results. The peer educators were given materials to make banners displaying various themed slogans. When asked what the benefits of using condoms are, one group wrote, “Listen if I tell you to use a condom, because we are trying to reduce the increase of orphans.”

Factors for success

We ascribe our success in engaging these young men to several factors.

- We have tried to be *empowering* and not dictatorial in our approach.
- The project is seen to have a certain ‘coolness’ factor, and it is almost prestigious to belong to the group.
- We structure our activities so as to provide a platform for young men to *express themselves* and talk about topics that are sometimes very painful and rarely discussed within their families and culture. Conducive and comfortable environments are created where trust is imperative.
- Last, but not least, the element of *fun* is vitally important when working with young men. Although HIV is a serious topic, there should be plenty of opportunity to laugh, joke, and just generally have fun. Activities should be culturally specific and encourage creativity.

Working with these boys and young men is a very rewarding experience. The project has become self-sustaining after the initial

training sessions. Many coordinators arrived for their follow-up visit to find that, as in one example, the initial group of 10 had now swelled to 16 members. We were surprised to learn that Inkunzi Isematholeni has acquired a group of female peer educators in one of the schools. Due to the pressure the girls were exerting, the boys felt it would be wise to include them. In retrospect, the main problem encountered during our work with young men has not been trying to get them involved, but rather trying to find the resources and energy to keep up with them. ■

Adapted from: ‘Taking the bull by the horns: working with young men on HIV/Aids in South Africa’, Gaetane le Grange (Targeted AIDS Interventions). In: Gender Equality and Men: Learning from Practice, by Sandy Ruxton (ed), Oxfam UK, 2004:
http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/resources/downloads/gem-12.pdf
 (p. 107-111).

Correspondence:
 Targeted AIDS Interventions
 162 Oribi Road, Bisley, Pietermaritzburg, 3201
 KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa
 Tel: +33 3863 475 / 3460 212
 E-mail: gethwana@wandata.com
 Web: <http://www.targetedaids.co.za>

Resources

Comprehensive approaches to HIV prevention

Joining hands. Integrating gender and hiv/aids

Report of an ACORD Project using Stepping Stones in Angola, Tanzania and Uganda
 ACORD/HASAP, 2006 (49 p.)

ACORD, an international alliance working for social justice and equality, has been active in assessing the effectiveness of the Stepping Stones process in different countries and contexts. According to this report, the scaling-up potential of Stepping Stones has shown to be strong. In terms of adaptability, it was found that the methodology can be adapted for use in a wide range of contexts.

http://www.acord.org.uk/joining_hands_1_.pdf



Empowering young women to lead change

A training manual
 World YWCA and UNFPA, 2006 (124 p.)

Empowering young women to lead change is a training tool for young women to catalyse positive change in their lives and communities. It is designed by and for young women in collaboration with a resource group of women leaders and activists under the age of 30 from nine countries. The manual has been tested in six countries to ensure it is a practical and youth-friendly resource in diverse cultural settings. The workshop guides included in each module are designed to enable young women to successfully lead fun and engaging workshops without need for ‘expert facilitators’. Available in English, French and Spanish.

http://www.worldywca.info/index.php/ywca/world_ywca/communications/resources

hardcopy: World YWCA, 16 Ancienne Route, 1218 Grand Saconnex, Geneva, Switzerland;

Fax: +41 22 929 604, E-mail: worldoffice@worldywca.org

