

An HIV peer education programme: lessons from South Africa

An independent initiative looks set for national roll-out

In fighting HIV and AIDS, young people are a critical resource. At TSiBA (Tertiary School in Business Administration) in Cape Town, South Africa, we see our young people as brilliant, knowledgeable, articulate, responsible, socially vital, leaders, and co-creators. Here, young people dialogue between themselves about their issues, including what they want to know about sexuality, HIV and AIDS, and other personal concerns. Our peer education programme is a place to interact and dialogue in peer-led groups, and be part of a programme that is experiential, service-aware, context-driven, interactive, and, above all, fun.

The programme has different formats. For example, in hosting a session about the body's immune system (paralleled in army security), the session was held at army barracks where the General (paralleled in the body's CD4 cells) gave instructions, and those taking part experienced the consequences of following or not following instructions.

One of our goals is to be an AIDS-competent community. We draw on the power of a community and of people as the main resource to educate and reach out to other people. Besides our team of 110 HIV Peer Educators from our student body, we also have an extended team of professionals from other institutions who are part of our team. At TSiBA we have an ethos of **Paying it Forward** and the Peer Education programme acts as one of the pillars of this ethos. The **TSiBA HIV/AIDS Peer Education Programme** is entirely voluntary based and has been sponsored by Merck Sharp & Dohme.

The programme focus includes some of the following topics: decision making; HIV and AIDS awareness; stigma; male and female sexual anatomy; the body's immune system; sexual dynamics and health; healthy relationships; peer pressure; nurturance of the body; and debating skills.

The programme involves us bussing in approximately 120 grade 9–12 scholars to each of our eight sessions, run on Saturdays from 0900 to 1500 hrs. Our Peer Educators are trained on the various sessions and they in turn facilitate groups. We have been invited to run various workshops in the community and have successfully taken smaller groups of our Peer Educators to run these. As part of our programme, we also have a Health Day, where the community can be tested for blood pressure, glucose levels, TB, body mass index and HIV, or if need be, have their CD4 count taken. We close our sessions with a roadshow to bring hope and joy to various communities affected or infected by HIV and AIDS.

Dorothea Hendricks (psychologist) TSiBA wrote this with the help of several colleagues.

Next year, the scholars who attended the 2009 programme will become part of the TSiBA Peer Educators. We will run our 8-week programme in four different sites at schools that have been identified because they are well capacitated and have strong leadership to ensure sustainability. Our programme next year will include an 'eating out of your own garden' component, a marimba band, natural remedies, dance and music, as well as beadwork. We believe that this model can be replicated throughout South Africa.

The programme has received such rave reviews from the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) Programme Director for Peer Education, Mr Peter Fenton, that TSiBA was recently invited onto their Approved Peer Education Service Supplier Performance Management Quarterly Forum. In addition we have been tabled with a Memorandum of Understanding, and are busy negotiating with the Terms of Reference to conclude and finalise the structured relationship with the WCED, giving us access to the schools at which the programme will be rolled out in earnest next year.



TSiBA Peer Educators and co-designers of the programme (above) and Esmé Kleinveld, WCED HIV Coordinator (below) addressing Peer Educators

