

Young African Caribbean Men's Sexual Health Project Camden & Islington NHS Trust

Summary: This is a project engaging young African Caribbean and young African men (aged 15 to 25 years) in innovative and culturally appropriate initiatives to raise awareness on a range of health and social issues.

Background / Context:

Research has found that young African Caribbean men experience multiple deprivation and inequalities that can lead to poor health. There is evidence to show a rise in (sexually transmitted infections (STI's) amongst young African Caribbean men; Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham Health Action Zone research indicates a 10 times greater incidence of gonorrhoea in African Caribbean men age 15 to 25 years as compared to other ethnic groups. In addition early sexual activity, multiple sexual partners and low condom use have been identified as possible reasons for the high prevalence of STI's in this group of young people. Other statistical information showed that this group of young men were also over represented in other areas such as experiencing substance misuse problems, having poorer mental health and were more likely to be unemployed and more likely to have come to the attention of the criminal justice system.

Other anecdotal evidence indicates that current health promotion strategies are failing to reach young African Caribbean men in either social or educational spheres and that more work is needed in this area. Sexual and reproductive health is cited as amongst the major health issues in Camden and Islington, which has the second highest level of abortions in England and Wales and one of the highest rates of underage conceptions.

Project description:

The project was established by the Health Promotion service in Camden & Islington using the Social Inclusion element of local Health Action Zone (HAZ) strategy. A health promotion specialist who has a youth and community background leads the project. The project's aims were to pilot methods of working that would engage this 'hard to reach group' who were 'hearing' the health promotion messages but demonstrating no significant change in their behaviour. The project would also develop activities aimed at facilitating their inclusion and reducing the inequalities they experience in education, health and criminal justice.

Achievements:

- Completion of a **Mix and Tricks** project. This project worked with a local not for profit music and media company (Bigga Fish) that is run by young people. This project involved the production of a six track CD with tunes that feature health promotion messages on STI's, drugs and relationship issues. Twelve young people were trained in performance and two of them are now working for a professional organisation. They were also trained in writing song lyrics and dance. The project raised awareness around sexually transmitted infections, substance misuse and condom use. It was distributed for free to young people at youth clubs, raves and events organised by Bigga Fish (who are well known on the local music scene).

- Production of a **Magazine** for young people by twelve young African Caribbean men and women from City and Islington College and Highbury Grove School. This included master classes by media professionals on layout and production, sub-editing, photography, a visit to a popular magazine to see its inner workings, a sexual health session, research and editorial meetings. The young people had complete editorial control that included, for example, an article written by a student describing her experience of having an abortion. The magazine has been distributed by young people within the college, school, local youth clubs and given out in the street and at major festivals in London. One of the students has now begun an apprenticeship with a major popular magazine and four others were involved in modelling and fashion work.
- Completion of a **Video** resource to be used with the target group and other young people. The primary group was six young African Caribbean men. They made a video about a day in the life of a young African Caribbean young man and in the process learnt about filming and scripting techniques, acting and performing and post- production and special effects.
- Several **Research** sessions have been held with young African Caribbean people that focused on relationships issues between young Black men and women. The purpose of these experimental sessions was to identify the views of young people and the issues that are important to them. It is hoped that this will be useful in informing the development of future work. These sessions tended to use a Jerry Springer or Kilroy daytime TV type format as this is recognised by the group
- **Role Models** sessions have been used within a local school as part of a mentoring project. A group of African Caribbean young men have been working together and invite professionals to visit the group and talk about how they got into their profession, the group also has sessions on sexual health issues (among other subjects). The young people have set the curriculum for the group and the health promotion specialist facilitates the sessions. This project has also begun to identify other areas of concern to do with attitudes to women and sexual relationships.

Key learning

- The projects that were developed with young people arose from an earlier piece of research 'Lets Talk about Sex' that explored with young people their areas of interest and what they would really like to do or be involved in. The value of this approach has been that the project has identified areas of great interest to young people that have captured their interest and also imparted skills and experience in communications and media. Also their knowledge base on issues such as sexual and reproductive health has been explored.
- It has become clear that focusing on STI's and their prevention via barrier methods is a different way of focusing on reducing teenage pregnancy rates and with young men this may be a more realistic approach.
- The Project has identified massive needs for more work in this area - the work just seems to scratch the surface. It is also demonstrating that it is possible to develop culturally appropriate ways of working with this hard to reach group. This also raises the issue of how to evaluate the impact of this work in the longer term.

- Partnership working needs clear initial agreement about who's responsible for what so that one person or agency is not left with everything to do. It can be hard to start partnerships from scratch so a lot of work and time is needed to understand the contribution of each member of the partnership and their different values and agendas.
- Lack of capacity has affected the potential development of this kind of work in the community. Work with African Caribbean community groups has a limited lifespan normally only warranting a year's funding so that there is no long-term sustainability for the work. The work needs continuity and funding over longer periods (i.e. three years) so that it continues to work with young people.
- That ultimately, at the centre of the web of issues confronting young African and African Caribbean people, **identity** is perhaps the most significant in that it feeds all the other difficulties that this group must deal with. Uncertainty and ambiguity of cultural identity, loathing and hostility to African and black cultures because of trans-generational fragmentation of cultural values and a general media and educational malaise that essentially problematises black and so called 'third world' cultures, need to be addressed for any co-ordinated strategic success in engaging with this group.

Difficulties / Challenges

- The project has identified an area of great need and the individual projects have been more time consuming than originally thought. The success of the work has generated more work and the project worker is facing more and more demands on his time. The project needs more resources in order to develop (for example it needs more administrative support and more face to face workers on the delivering the work on the ground)
- The project has found it hard to find other projects or agencies on the ground with whom the work can be developed. This reflects the lack of work with this target group although despite this the project has been successful in forging partnerships with local schools and colleges and has begun to work with local not for profit media companies
- The infrastructure to develop this work is very limited and not long term. So although the HAZ and other bodies like Connexions and Neighbourhood Renewal have created some structures there is no real strategic approach to developing work with this group of young people. There needs to be some kind of local forum bringing together workers across a range of agencies who may have a remit to work with young people to focus on the needs of African Caribbean young people and plan and deliver a strategic response. The ideal would be that African Caribbean young people could make use of more culturally appropriate services alongside mainstream services.

Contact Details	
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Settings / context	Community Projects, Youth Projects, Schools, Specialist Training Centres.
Target group:	Young African and African Caribbean Men, and young African Caribbean women aged 15 to 25 years.
Identification of need	Research in London (LSL HAZ) identified high rates of STI's for this target group and local teenage conception rates and abortion rates were high.
Young peoples involvement	Young people were actively involved in developing the project and contributed to original research about their interests and concerns 'Lets talk about sex'
Evaluation	This has been mainly quantitative in terms of numbers in attendance, registers etc.
Funding	Health Action Zone under Social Inclusion element.
Staffing & Management	One A& C 6 with direct management initially from A&C 7 manager.

Arrangements	Some support from Healthy Islington. New manager in post December 2001
Life span	Three years from 1999 to 2002.