

Home Visits: A Doorway to Prevention



Photo by Pedzisani Motlhabane

MCDA peer educators practice what they preach

“A lot has happened concerning the way I look at things. Certain perspectives in my life are clearer and more understandable. For me the “AIDS thing,” as I used to call it, was a way of depriving people of their fun and a sense of adventure. But now I look at things differently and positively, like condomising always regardless of the circumstances, and valuing my body more than money just because it put food on my table.”

- MCDA Peer Educator since 2010

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Telling Our Story

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The Matshelo Community Development Association (MCDA) is working to identify and train sex workers as peer educators who provide information to their peers and clients on the risks associated with engaging in unprotected sex with multiple concurrent partners. As a result of training and support received through RTI International's HIV-Most-at-Risk Populations (MARPs) project, peer educators in Francistown work as outreach health agents, sharing ideas with their counterparts and clients through one-on-one interactions, group sessions, and home visits.

Best Practice: Home Visits

Since the beginning of the HIV-MARPs project, peer educators have worked hard to learn about risk reduction, HIV prevention, and sexually transmitted infection (STI) detection and treatment. Because of their relationship with their peers, they are welcomed into sex workers' homes for casual conversations in a relaxed environment. Home visits provide an opportunity for peer educators to maximize sex workers' participation with very little disturbance or risk. Even the shy ones feel comfortable enough to practice using condoms, ask questions, and engage in conversations. Home visits can be scheduled when sex workers are available and do not interfere with their working hours in the way that hot-spot outreaches do.

Peer Educators' Personal Benefits

The peer education program has benefitted more than just the sex workers who receive the information. Women engaged as peer educators with MCDA claim the role has increased their status among their peers, which motivates them to act as role models. As a result, peer educators have made efforts to practice correct, consistent condom use and demonstrate positive health-seeking behavior, such as seeking regular HIV testing and early STI treatment. This mentality of practicing what they preach has had major positive impacts on their lives. Some women have reported feeling healthier and more in control of their lives, and some have left sex work altogether.