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THE SCIENCE OF IMPROVING LIVES

## Street Smart

# Introducing Effective Behavioral Interventions for Key Populations

One of the main objectives of the USAID RESPOND is adaptation and implementation of effective behavioral interventions in the area of HIV/AIDS that are being successfully implemented internationally and are most relevant to Ukraine.

An Effective Behavioral Intervention (EBI) is an evidence- and theory-based method or procedure for delivering an HIV service. The U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention supported the testing, packaging and dissemination of over 75 EBIs; many interventions have been successfully adapted and implemented worldwide.

While selecting applicable to Ukraine EBIs RESPOND team-members were guided by the analysis of HIV epidemic among key populations in Ukraine, regional profiles and consultations with partners. Along with **Project Start** (intervention for people soon to be released from a correctional facility) and **mPowerment** (methodology to provide HIV-prevention services for MSM) RESPOND selected **Street Smart** to be piloted in Ukraine as an intervention for street-based youth who may be engaged in risky behaviors.

**Street Smart** - is an HIV/AIDS and STI prevention program for runaway and homeless youth and adolescents who may also be engaged in risky sexual behavior or drug use. This skills-building program aims to help young people reduce their unprotected sex acts, number of sex partners, and substance use. It is based on social learning theory, which links feelings, attitudes, and thoughts to behavior change.

Street Smart is a multi-session program conducted over a six- to eight-week period with 10-12 youth. Each session has specific goals on HIV/AIDS, STIs, pregnancy prevention, coping and negotiation skills, personalized risk behaviors and reducing drug and alcohol use. Group members participate in scripted and non-scripted role plays, activities, and video production. Street Smart is held in conjunction with existing services, such as group counseling, that attract youth.

Street Smart draws on social learning theory, which describes the relationship between behavior change and a person's beliefs that he or she can change a behavior and that changing that behavior will produce a specific result. It links thoughts, feelings, and attitudes to behavior change. Beliefs about perceptions of self-efficacy and the consequences of behavior are key determinants of effective behavior change. In research field trials, youth who completed the Street Smart group sessions reported lower rates of substance use and unprotected sex.

## Core Elements

Core elements are those parts of an intervention that must be done, cannot be ignored, add-ed to or changed. They are thought to be responsible for the intervention's effectiveness.

1. Increase clients' knowledge about HIV and its transmission, benefits of HIV testing and knowing one's HIV status, the role of stigma and the changing epidemiology of the epidemic
2. Have clients identify peers' and partners' social norms and expectations, to increase self-efficacy.
3. Have clients recognize and control feelings and emotional responses.
4. Have clients identify their risk, and teach personal use of HIV/AIDS risk hierarchy.
5. Use peer support to identify personal triggers to unsafe behavior.
6. Build skills in problem solving and assertiveness in social situations to reduce risk for HIV/AIDS.

## Key Characteristics

7. Convene groups of 6 to 10 youth, male and female.
8. Deliver 8 sessions (90 to 120 minutes each)
9. Hold 1 individual counseling session and 1 trip to a community resource serving at-risk youth.
10. Have groups meet 2 to 4 times per week.
11. Create a curriculum that is highly structured with built-in flexibility so it can be individualized to particular groups of youth.

## Implementation

Street Smart sessions include: 8 drop-in group sessions (1-1/2 to 2 hours each); 1 individual session; and 1 group visit to a community health resource. The sessions aim to improve youths' social skills, assertiveness, and coping through exercises on problem solving, identifying triggers, and reducing harmful behaviors. Although it is preferable that clients attend every session, the program is designed so that each session stands on its own. Ideally, 6 to 10 youth attend the 8 group sessions, which are facilitated by 2 trained counselors. The sessions take place in small groups to provide a supportive environment for behavior change.

This publication is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

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