

Development of a toolkit for use in HIV/AIDS support group facilitation and education



K. James¹, S Whiting^{1,2}, H Struthers², G E Gray², J A McIntyre²
HIVSA (1) and The Perinatal HIV Research Unit, University of the Witwatersrand (2), Soweto, South Africa

In developing countries, support groups are an extremely cost-effective tool in empowering and educating people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. HIVSA, an organisation committed to community support and education in Soweto, South Africa, has developed a toolkit which provides support group guidelines including an HIV/AIDS educational component. Psychosocial support as well as HIV/AIDS education is imperative for the support of communities who are affected by the epidemic.

Ultimately it is the community members themselves who need to take responsibility for the destigmatisation of HIV and AIDS and to ensure that the correct information is available to those in need.



This toolkit provides users with a systematic approach and the necessary basic skills, knowledge and attitudes to successfully run support groups. These guidelines are intended to equip people in rural and urban areas, who are currently running or wanting to implement support groups with the best model approach.

The Toolkit consists of:

- Facilitator Manual
- Client Workbook
- Activity Manual (Food Garden and Memory Box)
- Visual Aids
- Adult teaching guidelines
- Treatment literacy and adherence
- Basic skills necessary to run a Support Group

Produced in an easy to read layout, educators can access Information depending on their specific requirements.

The following topics are included in the Facilitator Manual :

- Basic HIV/AIDS
- Coming to terms with HIV
- Opportunistic Infections
- Nutrition
- HIV/AIDS and Human Rights
- Sex and Sexual Health
- Antiretroviral Treatment
- Prevention of Mother to Child transmission
- Infection control and basic home care
- The terminally ill stage

Some views expressed by support group participants:

"During the teaching I felt free and it showed me that I can live for a very long time I think that negative people should attend these talks because they are the ones who reject positive people and they need to learn more about HIV/AIDS",

"There is a stigma attached by ignorant people who lack information, I am now open minded because of the knowledge I received"

"My attitude to HIV/AIDS has changed because there are many things I have learned about HIV and AIDS that opened my eyes, I now live a better life and I am glad because the course has changed my husband's attitudes as well"

Clients who participated in the pilot phase of this programme reported that their knowledge around HIV/AIDS had dramatically increased, that they experienced less anxiety and stress, were willing to share their newfound knowledge with others and realised the importance of "positive living".

As treatment programmes become more of a reality in developing countries, HIV/AIDS support and education must be an integral part of community preparedness. This toolkit is easily accessible to communities and in the next phase of this project will be translated into local languages for use in rural areas, where this type of material is difficult to access.



Contact: Karen James, e-mail: kjames@hivsa.com

Acknowledgements: This work was funded by USAID



HIVSA,
PO Box 796, Melville, Johannesburg, 2109,
South Africa

Perinatal HIV Research Unit, University of the Witwatersrand,
Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital, PO Box 114, Diepkloof,
Johannesburg, 1864, South Africa