

POSITIVE KNOWLEDGE.  
A DRAMA IN EDUCATION PROGRAMME RAISING AWARENESS OF HIV/AIDS.

"So far education is the best medicine we have.  
Spread it around."

(Brazilian HIV/AIDS Worker).

THE HALF MOON YOUNG PEOPLE'S THEATRE.

The Half Moon YPT services the needs of young people in Tower Hamlets and in the East London Boroughs. The company's permanent work covers three main areas;

1. A professional Theatre In Education team, working in Infant, Primary, Secondary and special schools.
2. The Youth Theatres - seven groups run by part time youth tutors, co-ordinated by a full-time Youth Theatre Director.
3. The Technical Training course - intensive vocational training for 16-25 year olds.

It is the aim of the HIV Team that the six month pilot project will also become a permanent feature of the Half Moon YPT.

HISTORY OF PROJECT.

The history of the project is a relatively short one. The Half Moon YPT had been considering to do some work around HIV/AIDS for some time, however they also felt that to only do lip service to the subject matter, by producing a one off show would be unacceptable. The feeling of the Half moon YPT was that the research demands alone, for such a project would take up a whole term, plus the work should be ongoing, addressing the needs of a wide spectrum of social groups. The decision was made that if work on this subject should take place then it should be in form of a permanent project.

At this stage, Tower Hamlets Health Promotion approached the Half Moon YPT with the idea of producing some sort of HIV/AIDS work.

It was agreed that the available funding would be enough to set up an initial pilot project with a view to finding further funding to make the project a permanent one. In January 1990, Caroline Burns was appointed as project worker. David Belshaw was appointed as the co-worker in february 1990.

## AIMS AND OBJECTIVES.

The major underlying objective of the programme is to prevent HIV transmission in the district. This is also supplemented by a series of other aims which support the general understanding of HIV/AIDS.

1. It was clear from the outset that the project should accurately serve its' client group of young people aged from 14-16 years of age. It was necessary to research the current attitudes, levels of awareness and educational needs of the client group in Tower Hamlets regarding HIV/AIDS. This also meant going into the related issues of sex, relationships, use of drugs and drug abuse and sexual identity.
2. Understanding how the virus works and how it is (and isn't) transmitted from one person to another.

"Knowing how a virus is passed on and how it is not passed on is a key issue in counselling someone about HIV infection. It is easy to give patients a list of do's and don'ts but to fail to explain where the advice comes from. Giving them reasons why the virus is transmitted in some ways and not in others helps them to make judgements about what risks are involved in novel situations not covered by the advice"  
(Green and McCreaner).

Empowering young people to make their own decisions, allowing them to take control over a situation, over their own emotions and actions, makes the whole issue more tangible for the individual. HIV is a containable virus.

3. To cover the wider issues which have been raised and used alongside the fear of HIV/AIDS, such as homophobia and racism. Our project aims to both study the roots of these fears and question their role.
4. To be non-judgemental in our work.
  - a) We aim to make no assumptions about the group we work with; that they are all heterosexual, they all have knowledge of drugs, they all have knowledge of sex etc.
  - b) To examine the roots of behaviour patterns, like the use of intravenous drugs, rather than simply labelling this behaviour as antisocial.
5. When examining drugs in relation to HIV infection we should be aware that we don't just deal with intravenous drug use but that we also examine the wider areas of addiction such as the effects of drinking alcohol on a person's judgement.

6. To be aware that we are using drama in a way that actively engages the group in problem solving, enabling the individual to personalise the information surrounding HIV and to judge for themselves areas of their behaviour they need to change.
7. To approach the subject in a way which allows the individual to feel safe in discussing the various issues around HIV.
8. To create a forum for discussion which allows young people to examine the social implications of living with AIDS and living with HIV, to examine the prejudices which occur due to a persons HIV status.
9. To produce a workpack which enables the Teacher/Youth Worker to undertake follow up work with the group, in order to examine the issues in more depth.
10. That the workpack should be written in such a way as to be accessible to the young people themselves. Part of this will be to ensure that the pack, is translated into Bengali and Somali, the two most spoken languages in Tower Hamlets next to English.
11. To allow everyone access to the information they need during the workshop without relying on the written word, this is important as there is a high rate of illiteracy and reading difficulties in Tower Hamlets generally, and among young people whose second language is English.

#### RESEARCH.

The first ten weeks of the project were spent researching the area, the subject matter and the needs of the local young people. This included visiting and talking to Youth Workers and young people at Youth Clubs and Intermediate Education Centres (IEC's).

Much of the work that has been done on HIV and on AIDS is as a result of the hysteria which followed the discovery of the virus. It was important then that we avoided this reportage and concentrated on the facts and latest information on the virus and its symptoms. Most our time researching HIV/AIDS was spent in the Terence Higgins Trust where we were able to use the facilities of an extensive library and consult with the workers there. This was also invaluable for gauging the type of responses and reactions that past HIV campaigns have been met with.

Further, and more specific, research was obtained by attending conferences on HIV/AIDS and on the needs of young people. For example we attended the "Bangladeshi Youth At Risk" conference in the Davenant Centre, which highlighted the changing attitudes and desires of second and third generation Bengali

and Sylhetti youth; the "AIDS And Oppression" conference which dealt with the inherent homophobia and racism, HIV/AIDS campaigns must deal with if they are to really educate people.

Another area of research was into the actual teaching of HIV awareness to young people. For this we consulted with other theatre companies who had also had programmes of work on HIV/AIDS. These companies included, "Red Ladder", "Major Road", "Crucible TIE" and "Theatre Centre". We also attended the conference, "Speaking The Unspeakable", which deals with how to teach HIV awareness to people with learning difficulties.

#### DEVELOPING THE PROJECT.

As this project was initially created as a pilot scheme, the structure and content have been constantly updated as the programme developed. This is to mirror the needs of the client groups on a basic level. On top of this each group we work with has differing levels of awareness. We decided to organise a pre-meeting with each venue, the Teacher or Youth Worker is then able to discuss their particular group with us in an informal and confidential way. This means we are able to alter the workshop to specifically deal with the needs of each separate group.

A course on all the issues surrounding HIV could last for a whole school term, however we have to fit into the school and youth club timetable. We felt a one off session would be too hit and miss for any group so we finally decided on two, two hour sessions. These are outlined below, bearing in mind that the blocks are optional, depending on the needs of each group.

Session .1.. This deals with the basic facts of HIV, how it is, and isn't, transmitted, what HIV does in the bloodstream and what the difference is between HIV and AIDS. This covers a very basic level of knowledge but it ensures that no confusion around HIV exists in the group. We also deal with language; different names for parts of the body and their particular use and status. This is a useful exercise which allows us to create a common base for the rest of the workshop and to ensure that no further confusion exists around the words used to describe our bodies.

The second section of workshop one looks at the pressures young people face, one of which is to have penetrative sex at an early age. We introduce a short piece of drama which looks at two such young adults, 'Danny and Maria'. The group then examine the role of each character, and on a wider level, of young men and women in general in relationships. The group then ask what should have happened? And what could happen now? In this way we are asking them to take on the responsibilities

of the characters, and look at the effects of any action taken by those characters.

Session .2.. This section actively involves the young people in bringing an imaginative input into the workshop. The basic premise for this is how do we see people with HIV and/or AIDS, and how do we treat them? This can take us into a number of alternative structures. There are quizzes on real life scenarios, asking whether these events are real or not. We can look at the language and images used in the media when discussing HIV/AIDS, this also includes looking at advertising. We can take individual stories and act them out. We can also devise scenarios around the opening of a new centre (a centre, similar to the London Lighthouse is currently being discussed for Stepney) for people with HIV and/or AIDS, or around the developing of a new cure, of which there is only enough for one person. These latter scenarios invite the group to engage in debating many of the issues around HIV.

At the end of the second session we hold a de-brief section which allows the group to ask any questions which have been raised by the work.

The Workpack. Each school and youth club taking part in the project will get a copy of the workpack which is currently being devised and collated by the team. The workpack contains the exercises used in the workshop as well as ideas for further work, using drama, discussion and visual materials. It will stand as a self contained package, which can be sent out to anyone working with young people.

#### EVALUATION OF PROJECT.

The project has always had a steering committee, which is made up of experienced Youth Workers, Drama Workers, Teachers and Health Promotion Workers. This committee meets monthly to discuss the project, make recommendations for future work and to ensure that what the team say is what they are actually doing. It serves as an advisory body as well as checking the overall quality and reach of the work.

Each workshop and workpack idea is thoroughly tested on voluntary groups of drama workers and then young people before going out. The overall workshops are always 'showcased' to teachers and youth workers. We also plan to run a showcase for head teachers, senior youth workers and parent governors.

The evaluation of this programme is made difficult because we are dealing with changing peoples behavioural patterns, the scope of this programme is unable to carry out such detailed research into whether each individual has changed or will change their behaviour.

The evaluation could take the form of how much 'positive' knowledge the young people take in we feel however that with a subject such as HIV young people have become 'fact blind' this is to say they will take in the information you present and will regurgitate it for you but will never actually take it on board and change their behaviour.

Because this programme is so much linked to the needs of our client groupings we felt that the evaluation process must mirror this, thus it was important for us that both participants and group leaders were part of this process.

Certain groups were given 'evaluation' sheets both for participants and group leaders.

The majority of these have yet to be returned but verbal responses have allowed us to adapt the programme to suit the needs of the groups and to some extent evaluate the programme for ourselves.

The take up of the programme (see booking sheet) indicates that this type of work is important and the use of drama is seen to be beneficial in the personalising of the subject matter.

#### FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS OF THE PROJECT

We wish to develop the programme in a number of different ways:

1. To employ a third worker. The team feel at present the workload for two workers is too great also that a third worker would enable us to explore the possibilities of taking on larger class groups (at present we are forced to split class groups)
2. Over the summer period we want to work on the research and devising of a primary school programme including performance and workshop elements also to create a workpack for such a programme.
3. To research and devise a programme for 'special needs' young people.

4. We also want to carry on the 14-16 programme and move all programmes on to a London wider bases.

5. Over the summer period to carry on the 14-16 Yrs programme in youth centres and on summer playschemes.

6. To research and devise a programme of inset training for youth leaders and teachers.

The present pilot funding from Tower Hamlets Health and Local Authorities ceases at the end of June 1990, thus the team are looking to other bodies for funds.

The total cost of the work is £ 42,825

|            |   |   |
|------------|---|---|
| £34,500    | - | Workers   |
| £ 700      | - | Workpack  |
| £ 700      | - | Hire of hall  |
| £ 100      | - | Hire of venues  |
| £ 800      | - | Publicity   |
| £ 520      | - | Admin costs   |
| £ 600      | - | Advice and Consultation (includes purchase of publications, attendance at conference/training day costs, advice, phone calls to obtain advice etc). |
| £ 300      | - | Documentation   |
| £ 3,622.50 | - | NI  |
| £ 700      | - | Advertising for post  |
| £ 300      | - | Touring costs   |

TOTAL - £ 42,825

We have applied to The National Aids Trust for a grant to the cost of the wages. We hope however that the cost of the programmes can be jointly funded from statutory bodies and other funding agencies.

If you would like any further information on these programmes for example if you would like to see some of the evaluation sheets etc then please contact David Belshaw or Caroline Burns who are based at

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