The Mpowerment Project: Putting HIV prevention research about young gay/bisexual men into practice

Susan M. Kegeles, Ph.D., and Gregory M. Rebchook, Ph.D.
Center for AIDS Prevention Studies, University of California, San Francisco

Young Gay/Bisexual Men are at Risk for HIV
- Many recent studies document high rates of unprotected anal sex (> 40% report unprotected sex in past 2 months)
- Rates of unprotected sex are increasing
- Seroprevalence studies show high rates of HIV infection among YGM, ages 18-22 (12%)
- Effective interventions are needed for CBOs to implement

If you build it, will they come?
- Many YGM aren’t interested in AIDS & HIV prevention
- HIV is not a very compelling issue for many young men
- They are dealing with other issues (e.g., coming out, isolation)
- They desire opportunities for social interactions with each other
- Most communities have few social settings for YGM

Guiding Principles of the Mpowerment Project
- Community Building
- Social Focus
- Peer Based
- Empowerment
- Diffusion of Innovations
- Multi-level
- Gay/Sex positive

Outreach Model
- Formal Outreach
  - Outreach Events provide venues for safer sex promotion and invite YGM to get involved in Project activities
  - Outreach Volunteers promote safer sex through performances at events and in community
- Informal Outreach
  - Taught and encouraged in M-groups
  - 1 to 1 conversations with friends

Small Groups (“M-Groups”)
- Peer-led
- 8-10 YGM
- 1 time group
- About 3 hours long
- Promoted as a way of meeting other young gay/bi men, fun, discussion of important issues (NOT a “safer sex workshop”)
- Focus on personal risk-taking and informal outreach, building community

Organization
- Implementing Agency
- Coordinators
- Core Group
- Volunteers
- CAB
- Outreach
- M-Groups
- Project Space
- Publicity Campaign

Young Men’s Community Center
- Project Headquarters
- Space for most events and activities
- YGM’s drop-in center
- Resources and referrals
- Volunteers decorate and maintain space
- Home-like, safe, gay-positive atmosphere

Publicity Campaign
- Articles/ads in gay and alternative press
- Posters, fliers, brochures
- Web-site (with calendar)
- E-mail distribution lists
- Word of mouth
- Generally avoid “mainstream” press

The Mpowerment Project Works
- Original research in Eugene, OR, Santa Barbara & Santa Cruz, CA
  - 20% reduction in UAI with non-primary partners
  - 28% reduction in UAI w/boyfriends
  - Sustained for 1 yr w/ “others”
- Research in Austin, TX and Albuquerque NM shows that it reaches men in larger and more diverse cities too (outcome analyses pending)

Disseminating the Mpowerment Project
- CDC reviewed all intervention research to determine which programs have been rigorously evaluated and show evidence of effectiveness
- Research resulted in Compendium of HIV Prevention Interventions with Evidence of Effectiveness
- The Mpowerment Project is the Compendium’s only model program developed for and tested with YGM
- CDC is urging the implementation of prevention programs with evidence of effectiveness

Moving the Mpowerment Project into Practice at CBOs
- Many CBOs have requested information, trainings, and technical assistance
- CBOs are at different stages of implementation
- Not all CBOs need the same assistance to tailor the intervention to the unique needs of their communities and target populations
- The Mpowerment Project team is offering help to CBOs that want to implement the intervention and will evaluate the effectiveness of the help

Mpowerment Project Technology Exchange System (MPTES)
- MPTES is individualized and stage-based for each CBO
- Components include:
  - Overview Pamphlet
  - Replication Package (2 manuals, 2 videos)
  - 3 Day Comprehensive & Interactive Training
  - On-going Technical Assistance
  - Online resources (website, topical chats, e-group)
- Contact Ben Zovod, 415-597-4951; bzovod@psg.ucsf.edu

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