

## PLAYING SAFE WITH SEX

- There is no medical reason why persons with HIV/AIDS should abstain from sexual expression.
- Regardless of whether or not your partner is HIV +, it is still advisable to practice safer sex.
- HIV - partners it is important to practice safer sex to prevent transmission of HIV the uninfected person.
- HIV + partners practicing safer sex will:
  - (1) prevent infection with AIDS
  - (2) prevent reinfection
- Your views as to what sex really is may have to be extended so that intimacy can be achieved in ways that protect and satisfy you and your partner.

Many people have asked, "Why is there a Black Outreach Project", and for many of us, the need for community-based AIDS work in our community, and by our community is obvious. The name AIDS was given to this disease in 1981, and shortly thereafter White Gay men decided to take an active stand against it. Though AIDS work & still is was very needed in the gay male community, it is a very common perception that AIDS is a gay disease. Though we have Black gay men in our communities, AIDS has not been viewed to truly affect Black people here in Nova Scotia.

There is no doubt that AIDS has hit the gay community very hard but AIDS does not discriminate. There have been Black gay males, Black straight males, Black women, whether they are lesbians, bisexual, or heterosexual, all infected with HIV in Nova Scotia. You may know some people and you may not know, but unfortunately - there are people infected. It is very difficult for an HIV positive person to share his/her circumstance in a community where everyone knows each other, and where they know they will suffer ostracization, in whatever form that takes. We have had many barriers with not only issues on HIV/AIDS but with every single aspect of our lives, whether it is the education system, the government, or employment. We have worked very hard and come for in all of these areas but we still live in a racist society, so the struggle continues. We must further embrace AIDS as an issue in our communities for this approach will save lives, our lives, and our lives are precious.

2. Since 1981, and specifically since the AIDS movement which includes initiatives on education, information and support services, very little AIDS work was done in the Black community. The Black Outreach Project, which started in 1991 has been trying to play "catch up" with AIDS work in our communities, but the truth is, we are about 8 years behind "mainstream" AIDS work. This has meant us denying that AIDS affects us, the existence of several myths and misconceptions, and a reluctance to embrace AIDS as an issue. This has also meant people being infected with HIV. Some of our urban communities may have received some specific information due to living in the city, but many of our rural communities never had any pamphlets or brochures sent, no access to speakers, no support for infected persons and their families & friends, and a non-realistic view that it has nothing to do with us. Our history shows that we can endure this epidemic, just as we have endured so many incredible hardships in the past. We must be a team and keep fighting to stop HIV infection.

POINTS TO MAKE:

## Points to make:

### Denial

- we have come very far in dealing with AIDS in our community but still have a long way to go.
- many people still deny that AIDS affects us as a community.
- the " African Origin Myth " has contributed to our denial because this implies that Black people are to be blamed for AIDS.
- because this is a racist myth (see AIDS & Racism section) and because we know we're not to blame, we tend to go in the opposite direction and do not want to associate with AIDS at all.
- we also deny that AIDS affects us because we don't tend to see anything about AIDS that relates to us.
- pamphlets, brochures, films, posters and other sources of information were not readily dispersed within our communities and the odd time they were, they reflected white gay men.
- this perpetuated the myth that AIDS is a gay disease.
- we sometimes don't think that AIDS affects us because we may not know any HIV positive persons.
- this is dangerous because what most people don't realize is that Black HIV positive persons in Nova Scotia often don't make their status known.
- this happens because Black HIV positive persons:
  1. see community reluctance to associating with AIDS.
  2. are afraid that they will be ostracized.
  3. may feel that they will not have support.
  4. would also like the respect to keep their business to themselves and their families.
- as you can see this is a " vicious circle"
- some people won't acknowledge AIDS until they know someone who is dying of it and persons with AIDS won't seek community support until they see the community fully acknowledge it.

## Communication

- part of doing culturally sensitive AIDS work in our community is knowing how our community communicates.
- "Mainstream" organizations often have no idea about this which is another barrier in White organizations trying to work for the Black community.
- one thing we have always prided ourselves in is our churches and the functions that they serve.
- most Black communities, no matter how small, have a Baptist church within it, and many of those are a part of the African United Baptist Association.
- often information in our communities gets channeled through our churches.
- There are various different methods such as the church bulletin board, the Reverend including issues in his/her sermons, church announcements, and sometimes guest speakers.
- realizing that not everyone goes to church, often the congregation takes the announcements, or issues spoken about and shares it with family, friends, and neighbours.
- the church often initiates thoughts and discussion on many things that affect our lives and are vitally important in the encouragement of addressing AIDS.
- we also have several strong Black organizations dealing with many issues that face our community.
- these organizations have many times given our communities a voice when we were ignored on specific issues within their mandate.
- these organizations have also spent a lot of time building networks within our community and bringing issues to the forefront.
- these organizations provide services that we all rely on and help to disperse out what information they may have.
- some of our organizations do work right across the province and this is particularly helpful when certain kinds of information seem Halifax based.
- many of our communities also have community centers that run every thing from day care, to teen dances, to wedding receptions, to workshops, to tutoring programs, to holiday socials and community gatherings.
- they play a significant role in the means of communication our community use.
- youth who may not be in school often access services of community centers and look to the centers to not only alleviate boredom but to find out "what's going on?"
- these three modes of communication and information dispersement are very important to raising the awareness around HIV/AIDS in our community.

- it is therefore very important that our churches, organizations and community centers continue to play a significant role in embracing AIDS as an issue.

- these institutions are vital to AIDS awareness and a truly effective community response.

- we must build this community response and utilize our in community mechanisms to not only help in guiding us to a better tomorrow but help strengthen us as a community to deal with AIDS.