

VTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON AIDS

PAPER: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A STREET BASED
OUTREACH PROGRAMME TO REACH YOUNG MALE,
FEMALE AND TRANSSEXUAL, STREET BASED
PROSTITUTES IN SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA.
Griggs, L., Toomey, M., Alan, D.L., Gold,
J., Turbitt, P., Anns, M., McElwee, P.R.

PRESENTER: JULIAN GOLD

ABSTRACT NUMBER: 6197

PRESENTATION DATE: JUNE 6, 1989

PRESENTATION TIME: 15.15

ROOM NUMBER: 409ABC

SESSION TIME: 14.00

THOSE OF YOU ATTENDING THE 5TH INTERNATIONAL AIDS CONFERENCE IN MONTREAL ARE ABOUT TO EXPERIENCE ONE OF THOSE POSITIVE MOMENTS. YOU WILL HEAR ABOUT A PROJECT WHICH HAS GROWN TO NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE IN AUSTRALIA AS A MODEL INTERVENTION IN PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF HIV.

LATE IN 1985 THE ALBION STREET CENTRE ... STIMULATED BY DEBATE AT THE 1ST NATIONAL AIDS CONFERENCE IN AUSTRALIA ... SET ABOUT TO DEVELOP AN INTEGRATED HIV PREVENTION PROGRAM TARGETED AT MALE PROSTITUTES AND STREET KIDS IN GENERAL. THE PROGRAM THAT RESULTED IS KNOWN AS THE ALBION STREET OUTREACH PROGRAM ... OR MORE AFFECTIONATELY AS THE AIDS BUS.

IT WAS CLEAR TO MANY PEOPLE WORKING WITH STREET KIDS AND MALE PROSTITUTES THAT THE CAPACITY FOR A LARGE SCALE HIV RELATED DISASTER EXISTED, AND WOULD NOT BE AVERTED WITHOUT SWIFT AND APPROPRIATE ACTION.

A SPECIALISED SERVICE WAS REQUIRED TO MEET THIS GROUP - IN THEIR OWN TERRITORY ... ON THEIR OWN TERMS - SO THAT IT WOULD FUNCTION TO DIRECTLY SUPPORT THEIR NEEDS.

THE DECISION TO SET UP A MOBILE OUTREACH SERVICE HOUSED IN A BUS GREW OUT OF EXTENSIVE CONSULTATION WITH THE TARGET GROUP. WE WENT TO BARS ... WE TALKED TO KIDS ON THE STREET ... WE WENT TO BROTHELS. WE ALSO WORKED WITH EXISTING STREET BASED SERVICES. THE CONSULTATION PROCESS WE USED NOT ONLY PROVIDED US WITH GUIDANCE AS TO THE TYPE OF SERVICE WE SHOULD PROVIDE, BUT ALLOWED US TO ESTABLISH CONTACT AND BEGIN THE LONG PROCESS OF DEVELOPING CREDIBILITY WITH OUR CLIENTS-TO-BE.

IT ALSO FOSTERED COOPERATION WITH EXISTING STREET BASED SERVICES.

SOME OF YOU MAY WONDER WHY THIS TARGET GROUP NEEDED TO BE SPECIFICALLY CATERED FOR OUTSIDE THE RANGE OF TRADITIONALLY AVAILABLE SERVICES.

IMAGINE YOU ARE 15 YEARS OLD ... YOU LEFT HOME BECAUSE OF FAMILY BREAKDOWN, INCEST, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE. TO SUPPORT YOURSELF YOU WORK AS A PROSTITUTE AND PROBABLY USE IV DRUGS. GAINING ACCESS TO TRADITIONAL SERVICES IS FRAUGHT WITH SEEMINGLY INSURMOUNTABLE OBSTACLES, THE MOST BASIC PROBLEM BEING ESTABLISHING YOUR IDENTITY WITHOUT APPROPRIATE DOCUMENTATION. THIS COUPLED WITH THE FACT THAT YOU DON'T HAVE MANY GOOD REASONS TO TRUST WHAT PEOPLE HAVE TO OFFER, MEANS THAT YOU NEED A SERVICE DESIGNED BY PEOPLE WHO HAVE BOTHERED TO FIND OUT WHAT YOU REQUIRE ... NOT WHAT THEY WANT TO GIVE YOU.

OUR OVERALL GOAL IN DEVELOPING THIS PROJECT WAS OBVIOUSLY THE PREVENTION OF TRANSMISSION OF HIV. THE SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES WE IDENTIFIED THROUGH THE CONSULTATION PROCESS WHICH WOULD ENABLE US TO REACH THIS GOAL WERE:

SLIDE #1

1. TO TEACH MALE PROSTITUTES AND STREET KIDS ABOUT AIDS AND HOW IT IS TRANSMITTED - DISPELLING THE MYTHS.
2. TO PROVIDE DIRECT STREET SUPPORT TO MALE PROSTITUTES IN THE FORM OF CONDOMS, NEEDLES AND SYRINGES, MEDICAL CARE AND COUNSELLING.
3. TO NETWORK WITH OTHER STREET BASED ORGANISATIONS FOR REFERRAL AND FOLLOW-UP CARE.
4. TO PROVIDE CONFIDENTIAL HIV ANTIBODY TESTING IF REQUESTED.

WITH THIS SET OF OBJECTIVES, THE AIDS BUS HIT THE STREETS IN FEBRUARY 1986, OPERATING 2 NIGHTS PER WEEK. WE HAVEN'T BEEN THE SAME, AND NEITHER HAVE THE STREETS, EVER SINCE.

WHEN I SAY 'WE' I REFER TO THE INITIAL STAFF OF ONE COUNSELLOR AND ONE FULL TIME NURSE, GRADUALLY EXPANDED TO THE CURRENT LEVEL OF 2 FULL TIME, 2 PART TIME COUNSELLORS AND 2 FULL TIME REGISTERED NURSES ... WHICH NOW RUNS 7 NIGHTS PER WEEK TO INCLUDE SERVICING THE NEEDS OF TRANSSEXUAL PROSTITUTES, YOUNG FEMALE PROSTITUTES AND IV DRUG USERS. COVERING FOUR SEPARATE AREAS OF SYDNEY WHICH ARE, KINGS CROSS, THE MAIN DRUG USER AREA AND HAVEN FOR STREET KIDS, DARLINGHURST, THE LARGEST CONCENTRATION OF MALE PROSTITUTES AND GAY BARS, WILLIAM STREET, WHERE THE MAJORITY OF SYDNEY'S FEMALE STREET BASED PROSTITUTES ARE LOCATED AND PREMIER LANE, ALSO KNOWN AS TRANNIE LANE, WHERE THE MAJORITY OF STREET BASED TRANSSEXUALS WORK. 2 NIGHTS OF THE WEEK, AFTER THE BUS WORK HAS FINISHED FOR THE NIGHT THE COUNSELLORS AND NURSING STAFF WORK IN THE BARS CONTINUING NEEDLE AND SYRINGE EXCHANGE AND DISTRIBUTING CONDOMS AS REQUIRED. IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT CLIENTS WELCOME THE OPPORTUNITY TO MEET WITH THE BUS STAFF TO DISCUSS PROBLEMS IN AN ENVIRONMENT LESS CLINICAL THAN EVEN THE INFORMAL INTERIOR OF THE BUS.

THE EXPANSION IN STAFFING OVER A TWO YEAR PERIOD WAS IN DIRECT RESPONSE TO THE OVERWHELMING DEMAND OF THE STREET POPULATION, WHICH HAD BEEN TAPPED INTO BY THE BUS.

OF THE 326 CLIENTS TESTED 145 HAVE RETURNED FOR REPEAT TESTS. MANY OF OUR WORKING CLIENTS HAVE REQUESTED MONTHLY REPEATS ... WE ALSO TEST FOR SYPHILIS AND HEPATITIS A AND B AT THE SAME TIME. I THINK THE RESPONSIBILITY SHOWN BY OUR CLIENTS REGARDING REGULAR TESTING AND CONDOM COLLECTION CLEARLY DISPELS THE MEDIA PROMULGATED MYTH THAT MALE PROSTITUTES ARE IRRESPONSIBLE AND HELL BENT ON INFECTING THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE. IN FACT IT IS WELL KNOWN AMONG PEOPLE WHO WORK WITH PROSTITUTES THAT THE CLIENTS ARE ALWAYS THE ONE TO DEMAND UNSAFE SEX ... AND ARE USUALLY PREPARED TO OFFER A HIGHER PRICE TO GET IT.

OF THE 145 CLIENTS WHO HAVE HAD REPEAT TESTS ONLY 5 HAVE SEROCONVERTED TO DATE. IN INVESTIGATING THE REASONS FOR THESE SEROCONVERSIONS IT HAS BECOME CLEAR THAT OUR CLIENTS ARE WILLING TO USE CONDOMS IN THEIR WORK ... BUT TO SEPARATE WORK FROM THEIR PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS THEY FREQUENTLY FORGO THE USE OF CONDOMS. THIS ATTITUDE IS GRADUALLY BEING BROKEN DOWN BY THE CONSTANT REINFORCEMENT OF THE 'SAFE SEX ALWAYS' MESSAGE.

THE EXTRAORDINARY DEMAND FOR CLEAN NEEDLES AND SYRINGES WHICH THE AIDS BUS IS NOW MEETING REFLECTS THE GENERAL DEMAND FOUND BY DISTRIBUTION POINTS THAT HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED. IT IS CRITICAL THAT THESE OTHER DISTRIBUTION POINTS ARE UP AND RUNNING AS SOON AS POSSIBLE IF WE ARE ABLE TO CONTINUE TO PROVIDE THE QUALITY INTEGRATED SERVICE WE INITIALLY ESTABLISHED.

THE FACT THAT THERE IS NO 24 HOUR NEEDLE EXCHANGE IN SYDNEY EXACERBATES THE SITUATION AS THE BUS ONLY OPERATES FROM 8PM TILL 1AM, AND HAS TO COVER 3 SEPARATE LOCATIONS.

I'M SURE I DON'T NEED TO REMIND ANYONE HERE THAT IV DRUG USE IS NOT A 9 TO 5 OCCUPATION. IF WE'RE SERIOUS ABOUT IV DRUG USERS NOT SHARING WE BETTER GET EQUALLY SERIOUS ABOUT MAKING SURE THEY HAVE THE ACCESS THEY REQUIRE TO CLEAN NEEDLE AND SYRINGE DISTRIBUTION POINTS.

ANOTHER ROLE OF THE BUS THAT I MENTIONED EARLIER IS THAT OF HIV ANTIBODY TESTING. I'D LIKE TO TALK FOR A FEW MOMENTS ABOUT THIS IMPORTANT ASPECT OF OUR SERVICE.

IN THREE AND A HALF YEARS OF OPERATION WE HAVE SEEN WELL OVER 2,000 CLIENTS, AND HAVE TESTED 326 PEOPLE. THE BUS HAS AN AVERAGE VISIT RATE OF ABOUT 1,000 PER MONTH.

SLIDE #2

THIS SLIDE SHOWS THE CHARACTERISTICS OF BUS CLIENTS. THIS PROGRAMME HAS ABOUT 1,000 VISITS PER MONTH INCLUDING THE PEOPLE WHO ONLY COME FOR NEEDLES AND CONDOMS. OF THE 326 REGULAR CLIENTS MOST ARE YOUNG MALES UNDER 25 YEARS OLD. THE 15, OR 6.5%, ANTIBODY POSITIVES IN THIS GROUP REPRESENT A MUCH LOWER PROPORTION OF HIV INFECTIONS THAN WE WOULD EXPECT IN A CITY WHERE 25-30% OF HOMOSEXUAL MEN TESTED ARE HIV POSITIVE.

SLIDE #3

AS THIS SLIDE SHOWS MOST CLIENTS DESCRIBE THEIR SEXUAL PRACTICES AS EITHER HOMOSEXUAL OR BISEXUAL 60% ARE INTRAVENOUS DRUG USERS AND ALMOST 80% WORK AS PROSTITUTES. THE INFECTION RATE FOR EACH GROUP RANGES FROM 1% IN HETEROSEXUALS TO 15% FOR HOMOSEXUALS.

SLIDE #4

INTRAVENOUS DRUG USERS ARE OUR MAJOR POTENTIAL AT RISK POPULATION. THIS SLIDE SHOWS SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR DRUG USING CLIENTS. IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT MOST ARE MALE, EITHER BISEXUAL OR HETEROSEXUAL AND ALMOST 80% ARE CURRENT USERS. YOU CAN SEE THAT 79% WORK AS PROSTITUTES WHICH GREATLY INCREASES OUR CONCERN THAT WITHOUT ITS INTERVENTION PROGRAMME THE SPREAD OF HIV WOULD BE MUCH MORE EXTENSIVE.

SLIDE #5

THIS SLIDE SHOWS THE MONTHLY DISTRIBUTION OF NEEDLES AND CONDOMS THROUGH THE AIDS BUS. EACH MONTH THE NUMBERS ARE INCREASING EXCEPT WHEN THERE IS A LOCAL POLICE CRACKDOWN USUALLY TEMPORARY AND GENERALLY POLITICALLY MOTIVATED. AS YOU CAN IMAGINE, REAL LIFE ON THE STREETS SEEMS TO RETURN TO NORMAL BUSINESS VERY QUICKLY.

AS YOU CAN SEE, OUR NEEDLE EXCHANGE HAS RISEN DRAMATICALLY SINCE THE FORMALIZATION OF NEEDLE EXCHANGE PROGRAMS IN THE STATE OF NSW. IN FACT, THE DEMAND ON THIS ASPECT OF OUR SERVICE IS NOW SO GREAT THAT IT HAS INHIBITED US IN CARRYING OUT OTHER VITAL ASPECTS OF OUR WORK.

ANOTHER INTERESTING FEATURE OF RISK BEHAVIOURS WHICH MAY HAVE LED TO THESE 5 SEROCONVERSIONS IS THE DUAL PROBLEM OF EDUCATING USERS TO INJECT WITH CLEAN EQUIPMENT AND ALSO, THE MORE DIFFICULT OF THE TWO, CONVINCING THEM TO PRACTICE SAFE SEX. IT IS CRITICAL TO FOCUS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF BOTH WHEN EDUCATING THIS TARGET GROUP.

WE FEEL SURE THAT THE LOW LEVEL OF SEROCONVERSION WE HAVE DETECTED AMONGST A CLIENTELE WITH SO MANY DIFFERENT RISK FACTORS IS DIRECTLY ATTRIBUTABLE TO THE EARLY INTERVENTION WE WERE ABLE TO MAKE WITH THE ENTHUSIASM OF THE RESPONSE GIVEN BY THE CLIENT GROUP. AN INTERVENTION WHICH CONSISTS OF FREQUENT DIRECT COUNSELLING AND EDUCATION IN ADDITION TO THE PROVISION OF CLEAN NEEDLES AND CONDOMS.

I HOPE THIS HAS GIVEN YOU A BROAD OVERVIEW OF THE WORK WE DO. WE COULDN'T DO THAT WORK WITHOUT THE TRUST OF THE GROUP WHICH WE SERVICE. I THINK WE HAVE THAT TRUST AND THERE IS MUTUAL RESPECT BETWEEN CLIENTS AND STAFF. WE HAVE NOT SET OURSELVES UP TO IMPOSE A PROGRAM ON PEOPLE THAT THEY CANNOT RELATE TO AND MAKE USE OF. THE STAFF OF THE BUS HAVE CONSCIOUSLY AND CONSISTENTLY MAINTAINED AN ENVIRONMENT FOR THESE GROUPS WHICH ARE NON-THREATENING, AND PROVIDE A HAVEN FROM VALUE JUDGMENTS. IT IS ONLY POSSIBLE TO AFFECT THE BEHAVIOUR CHANGES NECESSARY TO PREVENT THE TRANSMISSION OF HIV WITHIN THESE GROUPS IN SUCH AN ENVIRONMENT.

BUT OUTREACH WORKERS CANNOT BUILD THAT TRUST AND PROVIDE A SERVICE LIKE THE AIDS BUS INSIDE A VACUUM. WE REQUIRE THE POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORKS ESSENTIAL TO SUPPORT THE SOMETIMES CONTROVERSIAL WORK THAT WE DO. RECENTLY IN NSW, A NEW SUMMARY OFFENSES BILL WAS ENACTED WHICH INCREASES POLICE POWERS OF INTERROGATION AND ARREST. IT IS NOT MY INTENTION TO COMMENT ON THE BILL AS SUCH, BUT ONE OF ITS EFFECTS HAS BEEN TO SCATTER OUR CLIENTS SO THAT MANY ARE NO LONGER ACCESSING THE SERVICE AS REGULARLY AS NECESSARY. WE ARE CHANGING THE WAY WE CONDUCT THE SERVICE TO ACCOMMODATE THIS NEW SITUATION, BUT I'M SURE IT'S CLEAR TO EVERYONE HERE THAT THIS IS POTENTIALLY DISASTROUS FOR THE HEALTH OF BOTH OUR CLIENTS AND THEIR CLIENTS IN TURN - MANY OF WHOM AS WE ALL KNOW ARE MARRIED, BISEXUAL, MEN. TRYING TO FIND OVER A HUNDRED MALE PROSTITUTES GONE UNDERGROUND IN SYDNEY IS NO EASY TASK, BUT WE'VE ESTABLISHED A WORKING NETWORK ONCE ... I'M SURE WE'LL BE ABLE TO AGAIN.

THIS TALK THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN A MODEL FOR PREVENTION OF HIV
TRANSMISSION. I THINK THE EVIDENCE THAT I HAVE PRESENTED
DEMONSTRATES THIS - AND I SINCERELY HOPE THAT WHEN I ATTEND THE
NEXT INTERNATIONAL AIDS CONFERENCE, IT WILL NO LONGER BE
NECESSARY TO TALK ABOUT A MOBILE AIDS OUTREACH PROGRAM AS A MODEL
PROJECT. THE MODEL HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL. WE NEED MORE.

THANK YOU.