



U.S. Agency for International Development

Bureau for Global Health

SUCCESS STORIES

HIV/AIDS

Club Cool Shapes Young Attitudes Around Safe Sexual Behavior

THE ORGANIZERS BEHIND CLUB COOL are straining to satisfy the demand for new clubs. Such is the success of this high-energy youth club model that is helping young Haitians avoid HIV/AIDS. A network of 26 clubs now operates in all nine provinces carrying out hundreds of creative interpersonal communication activities such as concerts, theatre, and discussion forums that are helping to shape young attitudes around safe sexual behaviors.

Haiti has the highest HIV infection rate in the Americas driven, in part, by the country's extreme poverty, conflict, and unstable governments. Haitian youth face a great risk of contracting HIV/AIDS with early sexual debut—age 15 years for girls and 13 years for boys—and major misconceptions about their risk.

Population Services International (PSI), supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development, responded to this youth crisis with the innovative Club Cool model. Since the first Club Cool was organized in Port-au-Prince with a dozen or so members, the popularity of the organization has soared and so has its impact on youth. "Kids are starved for information and crave opportunities to get together for fun and a purpose," said Doug Call, formerly with PSI in Haiti, based on his experience with Club Cool members.

Traveling around Haiti, it is common to see young people wearing their bright yellow T-shirts emblazoned with the name Club Cool. But there is a lot more to being a Club Cool member than wearing the same T-shirts. Members are actively writing songs,

producing skits, and organizing videos and other events that engage their peers while at the same time communicating behavior-changing, lifesaving messages.

Facts about reproductive health inform youth about their bodies and how to respect and care for them. Clear messages—wait to have sex; be faithful to your partner; be smart and use a condom—discourage damaging relationships, early sex, cross-generational relationships, and other harmful behaviors that imperil youth.

Each club is organized and run by the young people themselves. To ensure ownership and sustainability, each club has had to petition to form a chapter under Club Cool guidelines. Members adopt a constitution and by-laws; elect officers; manage budgets; conduct community service; and develop and implement peer education activities in their communities. Clubs receive important start-up and follow-on support from PSI in the form of initial funding and training in the basics of reproductive health; HIV/AIDS prevention;

"When my close friend died of AIDS, I realized I didn't know much about the disease. Then I got involved in Club Cool. It's sometimes hard to talk to adults about AIDS, but it's easy to talk to your friends."

—Geraldine Jasmin, 22, college student and Club Cool member



Photo courtesy of PSI

Club Cool members sport their yellow T-shirts at a Club Cool event.

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governance and elections; problem solving; and animation skills to teach them how to get messages across using songs, poems, and drama.

Using straight facts, honest communication, and entertainment formats, the network of Club Cool organizations across Haiti has successfully tapped into and motivated a huge and growing resource of talent and energy to help fight the spread of HIV/AIDS. At the same time, it is giving members a host of valuable skills in organizing, managing, training, programming, fundraising, and communication.

Haiti, May 2003