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FIRST 17 PEER EDUCATORS GRADUATE

NPL prioritises work with young people and has initiated a new young people's peer based sexual health project. Rita Uagbor, NPL's Peer Education Coordinator, reflects on the graduation of the first 17 peer educators.

The Peer Education Project emerged from NPL's 2 year study on BME youth sexual health needs and learning preferences. It was set up on the assumption that older youth can be

more effective than teachers and health professionals at influencing the sexual health attitudes and behaviors of other young people. The model starts from training workshops that support

young people in the development and delivery of sexual health information to a wider group of peers.

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FIRST 17 PEER EDUCATORS GRADUATE

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The main funding of the project from 2006-2009 comes from the Bridge House Trust. In 2006-2007, the first pilot year of the project, the focus is on schools in West and North West of London: City of Westminster College; Ealing, Hammersmith & West London College; and St Marylebone High School. From April 2007, we will roll out the project more widely across London, and also reach out to non-school settings, to teachers and to parents.

The first peer educator training workshops began in October 2006. We had originally hoped to have 15 peer educators in our pilot year. However, we have ended up with 17 dedicated students who are prepared to promote sexual health among their peers. They are all interested to do their best to reduce if not stop the increasing growth of STIs and unplanned teenage pregnancies in our communities. The peer educators were recruited by their schools and NPL's Peer Education

Coordinator. They come from a range of ethnic and religious backgrounds, e.g., Muslim, Christian, Afro-Caribbean, Black African and Mixed Race.

The next step is to ensure that all 17 peer educators have the opportunity in various schools to share their enthusiasm and information about sexual health. We also need to get ready for an internal evaluation of the project in March at the end of this trial year, so that we can effectively provide this service later in 2007 across London.

There are still challenges. The training of the peer educators continued over 7 weeks. However, we need to work closely with this initial group of pioneers so that their *confidence* grows over the coming months. We need to engage with the schools to ensure they give the young peer educators the *support* they need to deliver sensitive sexual health information. We also need to develop a more comprehensive *incentive* plan to

help sustain the focus and commitment of the peer educators over the long haul.

There are always challenges but we concentrate on the magnitude of the success that awaits us.



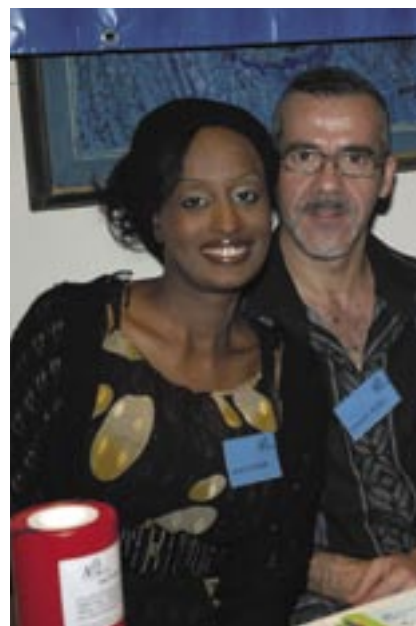
Rita Uagbor,
NPL's Peer Education Coordinator

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THE 60 SECOND INTERVIEW

Laurent Burel, a volunteer who works two days a week at NPL, talks about volunteering and life in the 60 Second Interview.



Volunteers,
Leyla Hussein and Laurent Burel

NPL: What's your role at NPL?

Laurent: I have many duties at NPL, mainly administrative ones like answering phone calls, sorting the mail, assisting the Office Manager. I'm also in charge of despatching print resources, and mailing

out the Kiss newsletter. In addition, I'm here to assist my colleagues whenever they need me.

NPL: What's different about volunteering for a sexual health charity?

Laurent: I think volunteering for a charity organisation is much better, as it puts you directly in tune with the people concerned.

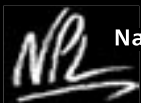
NPL: What's the best thing about volunteering at NPL?

Laurent: Working in a caring and friendly atmosphere. Sometimes it's like being part of a family! As an HIV+ person, it offers me a lot of support, and I'm not scared to talk about some issues I face in my personal life.

NPL: What significant changes have you noticed since you started volunteering at NPL?

Laurent: Since I started working for NPL, I've seen the organisation growing and expanding, and I'm proud to see all the hard work put in by everybody has been recognised, and is paying off.

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THE 60 SECOND INTERVIEW

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NPL: What's been the highlight of your NPL volunteering career?

Laurent: Organising and bossing people around for greater efficiency and productivity!

NPL: What has been your proudest moment ever?

Laurent: It must be when I met Diana Princess of Wales in 1994. I was doing an HIV and AIDS photo exhibition for

World AIDS Day, when I was invited to meet her. I found her caring, intelligent and a great listener. I think she did a lot of very good work on HIV.

NPL: What's your biggest regret?

Laurent: None. What's done is done, and if I had to do it again, I'd probably do it the same way! You have to live in the future and try to remain positive -- whatever happens in your life.

NPL: If you could say one thing to Tony Blair, what would it be?

Laurent: I'd tell him to get his act together, listen to his people, and concentrate on fighting world poverty, HIV & AIDS -- and to stop following American foreign policies.

MORE MUSLIMS ATTENDING AL FAJAR HIV+ GROUP

The popularity of NPL's monthly social and support group for Muslims living with HIV/AIDS is increasing along with the number of participants, writes Khaiser Khan, NPL's Muslim Client Support Worker.

The aim of the group is to allow Muslim people to express and explore common ground and concerns around HIV/AIDS, and to tackle prejudice and stigma, which remain rife in our communities. The group is intended to create a safe, confidential and spiritually welcoming place. It provides a specialist service and addresses complex community issues.

Professionals are invited to the group to facilitate social, religious and political discussions, and to educate and inform the group members. Wholesome home cooked food is provided at the meeting to help build community and counter isolation, as well as simply to provide a healthy and nutritionally balanced meal.

The Muslim support group for people living with HIV/AIDS draws on other NPL services, liaising with other disciplines and professionals in housing, health, children and family services, and with the wider voluntary sector. This dedication to joint work leads to an effective and coordinated service for group members.

In the longer term, NPL hopes that the group experience will enable and empower participants to feel far more confident and take leadership roles on issues that are important to them in their Muslim communities and in wider society, their education, employment, cultural and religious contexts.



15th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS: PHOTO DIARY



AGM Panel - Nat Sloane, Neil Gerrard MP, Tahera Aanchawan (Chair) and Winnie Ssanyu-Sseruma



Live Somali music provided by Abdirisaag



Naz Vidas - Jose Resinente (Coordinator), centre



Naz Latina - Susan, Carlos Corredor (Coordinator), Alex, Chantal and Errol (Mr Exilio 2006)



Masala Boys



Friends of Naz Project London

ASIAN GAY MEN COPE WITH SEXUAL PRESSURES

Asian gay and bisexual men have been managing pressures to marry, talking about being gay and coping with HIV diagnoses, says Sanjay Kumar, NPL's Asian Gay Men's Counsellor.



Asian gay and bisexual men attending counselling at NPL often raise marriage as a major issue. Some clients have been driven to despair - even contemplation of suicide - by the pressure they feel to get married and conform to the heterosexual norm. The sessions allow them a space to explore ways to manage their situations and orchestrate solutions.

Most clients use the service as a safe space to talk about their sexuality when they haven't been able to elsewhere. Individuals often present issues to do with sexual identity and struggling to come to terms with being gay or bisexual. Though society at large in London may be more inclusive of sexual minorities, many individuals still go through tremendous traumas, particularly when compounded by religious and cultural beliefs and practices.

Asian gay men often experience fear of rejection, persecution and isolation in an Asian community that still has far to go in affirming gay and bisexual men and women. Homophobia is rife. Moreover, Asian gay people sometimes feel they do not 'fit in' or feel unwelcome in London's mainstream 'Gay Scene,' which is wary of them. This can result in depression, isolation and low self-esteem. Adding HIV to the mix, the situation is all the more volatile. Some clients have used the counselling successfully to cope with

an HIV diagnosis.

Over the past two years, almost 100 men have used NPL's Asian Gay Men's Counselling Project. Some have used the full 12 face-to-face sessions available, others have had a few sessions appropriate to their needs, while others have just come in for a chat.

One service user said, "I'm deeply grateful to the Naz Project for giving me this space to talk about my fears. I've been able to know myself better and have come to accept myself." Another service user observed, "Counselling has brought me back from the brink of suicide." For others, counselling enabled them to deepen their journey of self-exploration and acceptance.

The service began in May 2004 to provide a free, individual, confidential and professional counselling service for men who have sex with men (MSM) identifying themselves as 'Asian'. The service, although still restricted to just one day a week and one counsellor, has provided a valuable space for Asian men to talk about difficulties resulting from their sexuality.

The Project is funded through the London Gay Men's HIV Prevention Programme, which is supporting Asian MSM in their struggles.

ERITREAN MINISTERS FACE HIV CHALLENGE

Eritrean ministers in London are ready to raise awareness about sexual health within their communities after attending NPL workshops, writes Bisrat Yigletu, NPL's Women's Health Worker.

The 12 Eritrean ministers who attended two sexual health training workshops, organized by NPL in its work with Evangelical Churches, recognized many considerable challenges. The workshops, they agreed, had opened a new and difficult ministry, and they requested follow up activities and further workshops for ministers in their church.

As they watched a short film about an African priest living with HIV, the ministers considered how much the church's attitude towards people living with HIV needed to change.

The ministers had many of their questions answered about their roles, particularly relating to marriage counselling, and they learned that a couple living with HIV can be married and have healthy children. Before the workshops, the ministers had been concerned mainly with offering support to people living with HIV, and had not expected to become involved in providing sexual health information to their communities.

After going through basic information about primary prevention of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), they focussed on secondary prevention. They discussed how to approach people living with HIV, encouraging reduction in HIV transmission, and reducing HIV co-factors such as STIs. They also explored issues affecting individuals and people in relationships - including couples where one or both partners live with HIV, women living with HIV who would like to have a child, and children born of HIV+ parents.

The workshops were organised to inform the ministers of HIV and sexual health issues in their community, and to increase their understanding of the complex needs of Eritrean people living with HIV. They were also intended to explore the ministers' roles and responsibilities in the church, and to enable them to provide advice and sexual health education to their congregation and community members.

CONFERENCE ON BME YOUTH PLANNED

NPL is planning another national conference on the sexual health concerns of BME young people for mid-June 2007.

Working with its key partners, the Homerton NHS Trust and the African HIV Policy Network, NPL will host a conference on the sexual health concerns of BME young people in mid-June 2007

The conference will bring together clinicians, health care staff, researchers, social care services, policy planners and young people from across the UK to address the critical sexual health issues affecting BME young people.

Topics for the conference include an overview of the epidemiology of STIs and unplanned pregnancies among BME young people, discussion about what current service providers may be

missing, the confusing sexual health messages young people experience, and ways to improve BME young people's sexual health.

The conference has multiple objectives:

- Review advances in research on BME young people's sexual health issues, highlighting their knowledge, attitudes, and risk behaviours
- Identify barriers to sexual health among BME young people
- Emphasise the medical and socio-cultural dimensions of sexual ill health and its impact on BME young people
- Explore the reality of sex and relationships, including STIs and unplanned pregnancies, in the lives of young BME people
- Promote good practices and increased collaboration among clinical, community, educational and other professionals working with BME young people on sexual health promotion
- Improve the sexual health outcomes for BME young people

More details will be made available by NPL in early 2007.



HIV WORKSHOPS HELD AT SUPPORT GROUPS

NPL offers HIV lifestyle workshops within support groups as one project applies lessons and looks to strengthen volunteer work, writes Christina Soper, NPL's Positive Choices Coordinator.

In the last year of Positive Choices, we have been offering workshops to our service users living with HIV through well-established support groups both at NPL, and at other organisations. This follows the findings of an evaluation we carried out in May 2006 on the strengths and weaknesses of all workshops delivered to date: The evaluation indicated the need to target and tailor our workshops more effectively. Positive Choices is an NPL project that aims to strengthen the personal and career skills of our service users and to maximize volunteer involvement in NPL.

By offering the training at the support groups, we have been able to provide interpreting, which has been a big help to many users who don't speak English. It has also been easier to make the training more culturally sensitive when only working with one client group.

For our LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered) service users, we are half way through the Soho Saturday Workshops Programme, a series of six full day workshops that take place in Soho. Anyone who is BME and LGBT is welcome to attend. We hope the rich mix of backgrounds and experiences will

work well, and all people will be valued as unique individuals.

From experience, we know that people from BME communities tend to be more suspicious of health care interventions, especially talking-based ones. Although this may be put down to a history of ineffective and abusive services, the unfortunate consequence is that too many people opt out and therefore miss out. These workshops are designed to address this problem head-on by placing race, culture and ethnicity at the centre of provision, and by ensuring an appropriately sensitive setting.

Positive Choices offers final workshops:

- **Getting the sex I want!**
20 January 2007
- **Religion, homosexuality and me** 10 February 2007

Contact Christina Soper, Positive Choices Coordinator, 020 8741 1879, if you would like more information or to book a place.

Now that we are in the final six months of Positive Choices, we're looking to capitalise on all the benefits and opportunities it has offered to users and volunteers and find ways to carry them forward beyond the end of the project.

Skilled and empowered service user volunteers are vital to the effective delivery of our sexual health services. The best way of assessing the value of Positive Choices is to listen to the responses of volunteers themselves: "Volunteering is always a positive thing to do. I would like to share what I have learnt from this training with others".

We feel it is vital that we build on the good work done already. Central to this are our plans to secure funds to appoint a full time Volunteer Coordinator, who will continue to support our volunteers but will also work on developing volunteer capacity and helping staff to create opportunities.



FUNDRAISING FEATURE: BREAKING ISOLATION OF HIV + SOUTH ASIANS

In this Feature, Vanessa Joubin, NPL's Fundraising Manager, shares with us one of her current priorities. Funding support services for people living with HIV continues to be one of the most difficult fundraising challenges.

NPL is looking to set up a sustainable new support group for South Asian women and men living with HIV/AIDS.

The support group will improve South Asian service users' health and welfare. In a safe environment, it will provide culturally and linguistically emotional support as well as information on treatment, potential side effects, adherence to medication, as well as pregnancy and parenting. The group will

offer an excellent opportunity for HIV+ South Asians to break down isolation and meet others living with HIV and AIDS. It will be a focal point for HIV+ South Asians to come and meet for friendship and a sense of community.

Such support for BME people living with HIV is second in importance only to high quality treatment. Unfortunately, HIV stigma and prejudice continues to be high in our communities. If BME people

living with HIV are to effectively manage lifelong adherence to treatment and to thrive in their lives, they need support spaces that they can draw from as needed.

We expect this group to eventually serve 50 S. Asians living with HIV and aim for a monthly budget of about £600 or £12 per person.

NPL DIARY

SUPPORT GROUPS FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV 020 8741 1879

GRUPO AMIGOS (NAZ LATINA):
Spanish-speaking Latin Americans. *Contact Carlos.*

GRUPO VIDA (NAZ VIDAS):
Portuguese speakers. *Contact Jose.*

MONSOON:
South Asians. *Contact Khaiser.*

MALEDA:
Ethiopians & Amharic speakers. *Contact Bisrat.*

BASHERO-KHER:
Somalis. *Contact Mohamud.*

AL FAJAR:
Muslims. *Contact Khaiser.*

SEXUAL HEALTH PROMOTION SUPPORT GROUPS 020 8741 1879

MASALA:
Young gay and bisexual South Asian men, aged 16-25.
Contact Ibrahim.

DOST:
South Asian, Middle Eastern and North African gay, bisexual and men who have sex with men. *Contact Ibrahim.*

KISS:
South Asian, Middle Eastern and North African lesbian, bisexual and questioning women. *Contact Parminder.*



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