



MAILMAN SCHOOL  
OF PUBLIC HEALTH  
Columbia University

CENTER FOR GENDER, SEXUALITY AND HEALTH

Activity: Sexual Health Promotion for Gay, Lesbian,  
Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (GLBTQ) Urban  
Youth in New York City:  
Roundtable for Community-Based Organizations

Date: February 28, 2003

**Organizing Committee:** **Vagner de Almeida**, Center for Gender, Sexuality and  
Health and the Brazilian Interdisciplinary AIDS Association  
**Joyce Hunter**, DSW, HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral  
Studies  
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**The following document summarizes the presentations and discussions of this meeting. These are not verbatim quotes or transcripts from the meeting but statements summarized by note takers. The intention of this document is to provide an overview of the major topics covered during the roundtable. Please do not circulate without written permission.**

## **MINUTES\***

Vagner de Almeida opened the roundtable by outlining the agenda for the day and welcoming the guests. He then introduced Dr. Richard Parker, professor and chair of the Department of Sociomedical Sciences, to officially open the session. Richard Parker spoke about the new Center for Gender, Sexuality and Health at the Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University.

The Center has been designed to bring together the many different projects related to sexuality, gender and health issues and to develop dialogue with CBOs in the US and worldwide. (People are working with projects in Brazil, South Africa, Canada and a number of international networks and initiatives.) This was the first opportunity for the Center to focus on LGBT youth in an informal meeting with organizations who have been working in the New York City area, and for organizations to present their work.

Dr. Joyce Hunter began by calling for using this informal meeting to share information about the work organizations and researchers are doing, and to talk about neglected populations, such as transgender youth, whose issues are just beginning to become more visible.

## **PRESENTATIONS**

The following section of the minutes contains summaries of the presentations made by each of the organizations and programs working with LGBTQ youth and sexual health promotion.

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\* The original minutes were taken by Janice Baer (HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral Studies) and were summarized and edited by Miguel Munoz-Laboy, DrPH (Center for Gender, Sexuality and Health).

## **YES Program**

The first presentation was by the YES program. The **LGBT Center** provides group-based prevention, including an art space program, targeted at youth aged 13-22. There are a variety of groups, which are either drop-in discussion or activity oriented. They have begun a young transgender discussion group, a *WIO* group, a magazine called *Out Youth*, a weekly safer sex kit-making group with discussion and they provide drop-in counseling every afternoon. The trans group is drop-in group, following the *WIO* group, because many of the youth had very different needs, which include health issues, a need to set up referrals, etc., they plan to take this program on the road. They define their program as a 3-level system:

- Level 1: programming around basic needs
- Level 2: socializing, making friends in a safe space
- Level 3: leadership and community involvement (peer education program training youth to run discussion group on Saturday afternoons)

Other programs include a camp program, where youth camp for a week with a focus on how to build a community and safe space where everyone's voice is heard. Here, peer educators become camp counselors.

School-based programs include a Safe Schools intern program, which builds gay/straight alliances in high schools and giant GSA networking monthly meetings for cross training and sharing information about school activities. Their website provides tools for the safe school program. They have a computer lab, where they provide internet access, job search and typing skills. Currently they are trying to link peer education programs to the website.

Recently, they sponsored an artists' activity, working with David Drake, which resulted in performances at the dance theatre workshop about multiple oppressions faced and different identities. They also have collaborated with a gay men's chorus and young people's chorus, where they conduct auditions and prepare to perform during the summer at Carnegie Hall.

They have conducted focus group around what kids thought we should be taking about. The YES program serves about 1,000 youth each year.

### Center Lane

Center Lane is sponsored by WJCS. The mission of Center Lane is to provide a safe space for LGBTQ youth ages 15-21 and to make Westchester County more aware of LGBT youth issues.

Staff goes to schools, social services agencies and provides information about the existence of LGBT youth, gender and gender expression issues. There are 42 school districts; they work to educate each on the importance of including sexuality and gender in their antidiscrimination policies involving youth.

They provide support groups, educational workshops, which include speakers, prevention and life skills, etc., individual and family counseling, and group counseling. They have held a LGBT prom for the past 6 years. They have had a GSA network for 3 years, and a monthly meeting of youth and advisors from schools. They have held quarterly workshops with Montefiore and, more recently, Westchester County Medical. They give out condoms and dental dams, use the *Working It Out* program and video, and provide HIV counseling and testing.

### Neutral Zone

In 1992, the Neutral Zone program was developed. Greenwich Village Youth

Council targeted at-risk, street, drug and gang related youth. With midnight basketball seed money, they opened a drug- and alcohol-free nightclub. Thousands of young people came through the door—they ran the group for 2-3 years. The program is a volunteer and youth-based program. Prevention programs were developed within the program. During the summer of 1995, some community members complained about the number of young people and late night activity, possibly for racist or homophobic reasons. The program was moved to MCC and spent a year reevaluating. They have always had HIV prevention programming, which was peer based, and conducted outreach on the piers and in the west village. They moved to West 16<sup>th</sup> St, scaled back on numbers and focused on quality. In May 2002, they moved to E. 33<sup>rd</sup> St, where there is more space. They now have offices, counseling and drop-in space. On-site they hold a food program, Tue-Sat from 3-11 p.m., counseling from 3-6, and a drop in center from 6-11, which provides food service, art therapy, music and safe space. They also have a van, which is used for a peer-based street outreach program in Manhattan and the Bronx, late at night at strolls (Thur-Sat until 2 a.m.). They target different areas of city, depending on the weather, etc. They work to reach trans youth and gay and lesbian youth, many of whom are youth of color, engaged in survival sex, and aim to get them involved in counseling, psychotherapy (short and long term).

Their goal is to provide a safe space for youth to be themselves and explore who they are in a safe way, around positive role models.

The program now also works on community relations, trying to avoid youth hanging out in front of agency or calling attention to the center.

### Green Chimneys

This program consists of providing home for runaway and homeless youth up to age 21. They also have a boarding home for younger youth 12-15, a supervised independent living program, a transitional living program for runaway and homeless youth with 3 apartments with 10 beds total. The program is small, to give personal attention to each young person, helping them with grocery money, rent and utilities, with the understanding that they need to be able to move out on their own within 18 months, and either working or in school.

Although the program do not has drop in space per se, there is a case management program, shelter apartments with 4 emergency beds available, assistance for youth with groceries, clothing, resume and other life skills, medical services, and a treatment plan which includes goal setting for those who are couch surfing. They hold individual monthly meetings on these goals.

Case manager gets those in emergency shelter into more permanent housing right away. They always keep one bed available. The referral process includes assistance with legal documents such as emancipation documents for youth under 18.

## ABIA

In Brazil, ABIA is working with poor youth, on issues such as sex work, trafficking, families, and their inability to go to school. Many started working as sex workers at 10-11 years old. Vagner's presentation is focused on MSMs, but agencies are all working with young lesbians as well. Working with youth is not hard in Brazil, because attitudes toward sexuality are less repressed. Working with LGBT youth is more complex there. Many do not identify as gay. Each individual must deal with social exclusion and discrimination. Brazil has a rigid class structure. Many LGBT youth die young. If they are poor, they usually work for drug traffickers who kill them if they do not produce. Youth from higher classes do

not mix with poor youth. Different classes are geographically separate and have different lifestyles. Wealthier youth are not aware of the poor youth's needs.

School staff and administrators are not willing to provide a safe space for GLBT youth. Public schools are not safe. These youth drop out in response to rape and ridicule, which the staff do nothing to address. There is freedom to express sexuality, but for LGBT youth, this is a difficult experience.

Youth in groups begin to claim their rights along with other oppressed groups including women, children, blacks, and the poor. ABIA has learned how to build human rights against discrimination within these communities. They assist youth in getting involved in their community by teaching others about self-esteem, oppression, their rights, etc.

ABIA goes to nightclubs and other public places and supplies condoms, etc. They use peer educators. They also use a "*Let's get to know each other?*" flyer asking youth to come into the program. They target youth and transgender, because they cannot negotiate with clients for condom use. There are 4 flyers and calling cards, with condoms and messages.

ABIA's programs include photography and filmmaking seminars and conferences. Youth make their own documentaries and arts and crafts (Afro-Brazilian crafts). They sell what they make. They develop skills, including how to work with CBOs, write grants, evolve in the CBO, and go on from ABIA to community organizing. Often, when they reach the age of 16, they do not want to be sex workers and they stop.

Issues expressed in creative arts programs include: religion, family, first sexual experiences, etc. More than 60,000 flyers were distributed in poor west area of Rio de Janeiro. On of ABIA's philosophy regarding programs with LGBT youth is that

they must deal first with poverty, including issues of access to food, housing, education and a job, and improving self-esteem. Then we can deal with condoms and HIV prevention.

### Working It Out

This program has been developed through collaboration between the HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral Studies and Hetrick Martin Institute (HMI). This program is based on the health belief model/self efficacy (if you give them the knowledge it should work), with an additional component focusing on the development of coping strategies for LGBT youth. The program consists of a set of 135 video vignettes. Focus groups were held at HMI and the YES Program, working with youth to identify 14 vignettes that addressed the issues that were barriers to risk reduction for example, sex, drugs and suicide. The Ford Foundation was the initial funder, for the development of the video "*Working It Out: Scenes from the Lives of Lesbian and Gay Youth.*" Themes included themes family rejection, sex with peers, sex with older people, girls trying to meet each other and social/emotional/cognitive isolation. Initially, the video was shown at community conferences and received additional funding for a research study in the metropolitan area. An intervention was developed with six agencies, which used the video as the focus, included 10-14 weekly sessions with trained facilitators and encouraged youth to help each other with issues.

"*Working It Out*" had many good outcomes. Several of the original agencies, as well as additional agencies in the metropolitan area and other states, are still using the program. The community was involved. People's time was important; they were reimbursed. The intervention is adaptable to other areas and it is cost-effective, so people continue to use it. The youth who had participated for any time in

the community-based agencies did not improve on the self-esteem scores, but they had high scores at the beginning of the program. However, the program in Salt Lake City showed significant improvement, although there were only 2 groups.

The *Working It Out* Program had trans youth in it, but did not deal with their specific issues around gender. Since then it has been adapted for transgender youth at the LGBT Center in NYC, as part of a research-community collaboration.

### LICC, Pride for Youth

LICC is a mainstream youth organization located in Bellmore, Long Island. This is the only gay-youth service provider in Nassau County. There is diversity in the communities served, which include both affluent and poorer communities. Their program, the *Coffee House*, began in 1995, Fridays 7:30-11:30 p.m. It was designed on a youth development model, with a youth advisory group, which met right before *coffee house*, contributing to decisions about how the program should be run. The youth advisory group elected co-chairs, who sit on the organization's Board of Directors. The youth do a lot of performance art, including skits and theatrical presentations, incorporating prevention messages. There is also open mike and guest speakers. Funding is for HIV prevention, and includes peer education (a three-week training in summer focusing on leadership skills and health issues). The youth advisory board presents monthly at the *Coffee House*, where they have 40 to 100 kids on a Friday night. There are monthly themes, where youth conduct outreach to peers, literature drops, and tabling. Prevention information is given in a three-part series, and includes basic and advanced HIV knowledge and skills as well as activities such as HIV jeopardy, role plays on negotiating safer sex, refusal skills,

substance abuse issues, and “*Working It Out*” with discussion on more advanced issues. There are also creative arts programs, which are separate for males and females. These include social change activities. (i.e., built lockers, with slogans, took them to display at various places).

The program also includes case management services and risk reduction for youth and high schools in Nassau County, with a worker based in the schools who meets with students, runs groups, or programs at their center. There is a waiting list in the school program, so they prioritize with kids with no health insurance.

New youth have a 30-45 minutes orientation the first time they come to the *coffee house*. The website, which is targeted to LGBT youth, but also may reach a larger population, includes IM is for messages from/to kids, a place to answer and chat and a self-scoring test. Posters and business cards provide information about the website to kids.

There is some parent involvement in activities, such as outreach through PTAs, etc. They work with P-FLAG Long Island. Although P-FLAG does not have a lot of resources as a volunteer organization, they cosponsor forums for professionals, etc. About half of the youth are not out to parents at all. Approximately 10% have parents who are supportive, and some parents have volunteered. Some do not want their parents coming to their turf. Open house for parents has worked and succeeded in getting the parents to come once. But channeling them into a group has not happened.

## Project REACH

This program was begun in 1991, by Chinese, African, lesbian members of a lower East Side support group. They were not primarily LGBT identified. Young people from HMI, YES, and GLYNY became involved, and youth wanted to get to

know each other. The Youth Organizing Training Assistance summer program has 60-70 young people participate every summer, including LGBT, HIV+, intersex, those in foster care, homeless, those who have been involved with the criminal court system, differently abled youth, young mothers and fathers, immigrants including those who are undocumented. They deal extensively with racism and sexism.

The program provides crisis counseling and leadership training. They conduct workshops at Creating Change. They also had a dinner workshop which was organized by HIV-positive young people. Project REACH employs 8-12 HIV positive young people, many of whom are ill, going through transitions in housing, etc. Now they plan to have HIV-positive young people partnering with HIV-negative youth for support and to train youth on HIV prevention.

The program has a writing group for people of all orientations and backgrounds. They also hold Spring Training Anti-discrimination 101 to prepare 20-30 young people for organizing in the summer. This examines the ways in which issues of racism/sexism/homophobia intersect. as a result of women’s strike to address the sexism within the organization, there is now a women’s space. A men’s anti-sexism training was also held. There are openly LGBT staff and intersex staff. All staff and youth go through the antisexism and antihomophobia training.

As a result of these trainings, straight youth who had not been used to being around LGBT youth changed their attitudes. When they go back to friends and their neighborhood, they are able to provide a different view. Staff was forced staff to develop policies to address sexism within the organization. 13 young men who were very sexist were fired, the organization must be 50% or more women, it must have a

women's space and must provide antisexism workshops for men.

## GMAD

GMAD provided a packet from the recent Ryan White Conference: "An African perspective on Community Organizing HIV/AIDS Mobilization, Workshop 1". Epidemiological data shows that HIV infection is rising fastest among African American youth. That is GMAD target population. GMAD has adopted *Ubuntu*, which is an age-old African term for humanness, for caring, sharing and being in harmony with all of creation. As an ideal, it promotes cooperation between individuals, cultures and national World Forms of Civil Society. It is now part of the South African Constitution and includes dignity, negotiating good faith, self-expression, beliefs and practices, equity in the community, flexibility and accommodation, and honoring seniority in leadership. This is a holistic model, since you are not separate from the community. The behavioral science model needs to deal with youth as a whole, including addressing self-identity and self-esteem and recognizing that youth are more than sexual statistics. Epidemiology doesn't talk about education, self-esteem, etc. One's identity should not be rounded down to sexual orientation or behavior.

GMAD does not do direct training but helps others do the work. As adults, we forget what we suffered at the hands of adults. Some issues including holding meetings during the day midweek when youth are not available. GMAD's goals include: Teaching other organizations to navigate within government/funding guidelines and getting youth to advocate for themselves. We need to effectively negotiate with funders—to include all the issues; and, creating culturally appropriate material (e.g., Does Magic Johnson's face on the subway work for subway riders?).

Issues impacting behavior include history/folklore/mythology, culture, beliefs, philosophical thoughts, social attitudes and community behavior. Community mobilization includes security, status, self-esteem, affiliation, power, and goal achievement. Power was one of the biggest factors.

## Hetrick Martin Institute (HMI)

The founders of HMI began with advocacy, then the service need was great and decided they would do both. HMI is a multiservice center, which includes drop-in, a leadership program, health and wellness, and HIV and AIDS prevention. 50-150 youth will show up between 3:30-6:30, for the drop-in hours, or the meet, greet, eat (snacks, hot meal). All their programs use a holistic approach which includes a counseling center during the day and after-school hours and provides family therapy as well as adolescent specialties. They also provide clothing, non-perishable food for weekend, showers, case management services, and 3 outreach workers whose goal is not about getting more youth into program, but more about visibility and referral, especially among the homeless youth. HMI does not offer housing, but they have established relationships with homeless services programs. They want to support those who are already doing it well.

About 2,000 youth a year are in after-school programs; 25% are homeless youth. Harvey Milk School, a public high school program, is expanding. They have grown from 16 to 50 youth, and will further expand to 170 youth over next 2 years. They now have a 10-year lease from Board of Education for more space, which will triple the capacity and staff they have had. HMI staff will move to the 8<sup>th</sup> floor. The Harvey Milk School has a waiting list of about 250 youth, which is the biggest reason for expanding the school.

HMI has offered a variety of programs for all youth. But now the focus of HMI, primarily for LGBT youth, is on developing the six areas of expertise around education and building success, so that youth can survive, get through adolescence, and be successful in life. There is a focus on education and the after-school skills program. They are working toward being a national model for LGBT youth in education and embarking on a 3-year program to evaluate effectiveness of this model.

HMI has partnerships with Callen-Lorde and a number of other health centers that serve youth.

### GMHC: House of Latex and QUE programs

*House of Latex* was started because of rising HIV rates in the ballroom community, which began in the early 90s. The average age of participant is 16 years old. The program trains 40 young people during a four-day skills building at a cabin. This training includes conversations around isms and phobias that are waiting at home. After the training, they become peer educators and facilitate diffusion of innovation. The QUE-Queer Urban Explorers took place in summer, 2003 and included hiking trips, skills building and conversations. All GMHC services, including drop-in safer sex counseling, bi-weekly house talks, and family issues, are open to everyone.