

The Youth Talent Show Project

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Effective Engagement with New Zealand-based African Communities on HIV and AIDS

1 Introduction

The New Zealand AIDS Foundation (NZAF) has been working with the NZ-based African communities since 2005. Under the able and visionary guidance of the NZAF African Advisory Board, the NZAF African Programme was able to effectively engage with the members of the African communities and came up with a number of community-based initiatives. These initiatives are founded on the Ottawa Charter (1986) strategies and principles. One of the initiatives was Love Cover Protect (LCP) which is a vibrant social marketing brand that utilizes social media to effectively engage the community, especially the youth. The engagement is aimed at increasing knowledge and awareness around HIV and STIs risk as well as supporting those affected by HIV. The annual Youth Talent Show Project (YTSP) held in November 2013 in Auckland, New Zealand (NZ) was a true testimony of effectively engaging and empowering the African youth in NZ.

3 Results

The event attracted about 300 enthusiastic youth, who do not normally engage in formal HIV community education sessions. The youth loved the idea of congregating at a nice "professional" venue (theatre) as opposed to a community hall to watch, participate and fellowship with their colleagues. The environment was regarded as safe and "professional" by all participants. The level of participation and engagement was visibly high. Questions on sex and sexuality were freely asked by the participating youth. LCP was able to distribute a lot of collateral (condoms, tee-shirts and brochures) and this was viewed and perceived by most participants as a very effective way of engaging and capturing the minds and hearts of young people.

The major lessons learnt are:

- The youth are more receptive when in a safe and fun environment
- The young people prefer to attend events at professional places
- In a right atmosphere and environment, youth are more likely to effectively engage

2 Materials & Methods

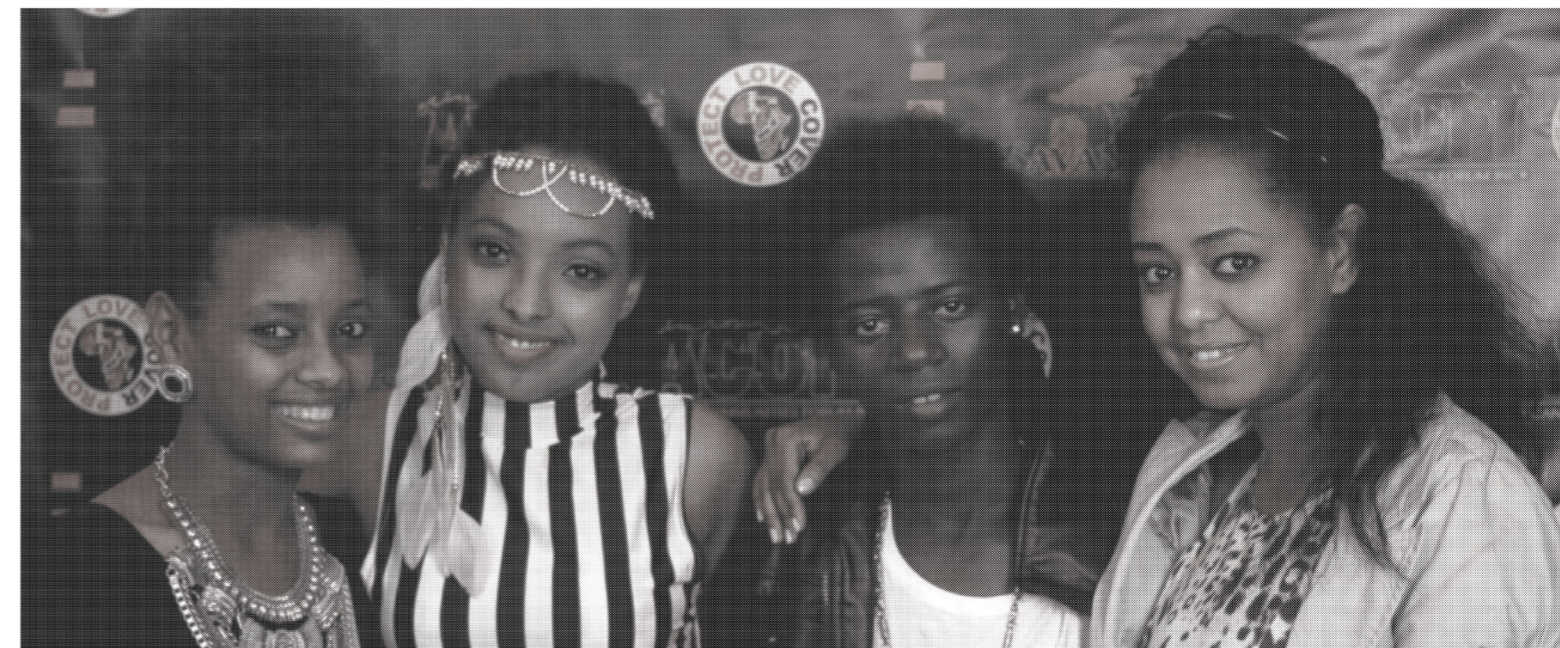
Community youth (16-24 years) were invited through the use of social media to participate in the YTSP. This involved submitting a performance concept of their choice (poem, traditional dance or musical item). Twenty young people registered and participated as competitors while five professional groups performed as invited guests. The venue at a renowned theatre and refreshments were fully paid for by NZAF/ LCP. The competitors were professionally judged by a competent team of four judges. Three LCP sponsored prizes were presented by the NZAF Executive Director, Shaun Robinson, who was the project patron. The chief objective was to spread safe sex messaging in an environment which empowered the youth and give them a strong sense of belonging as well as create love and appreciation for their African culture and heritage.

The Masters of Ceremony (MCs) were carefully selected and briefed in advanced regarding the intended objective of the event and what they were supposed to emphasize throughout the event.

4 Conclusions

The conclusion revealed the following:

- It is crucial to note, observe and respect the influence and importance of culture and tradition when engaging the youth in projects that are of profound interest to them.
- Youth engage more effectively when operating in an environment they deem and perceive to be safe, fun and professional
- The messaging of safe sex, sexuality and STIs should be carried out in a relaxed atmosphere coupled with fun activities that capture the keen interest of the youth
- Apart from educating the youth about HIV and AIDS and safe sex, the Youth Talent Show Project was a vehicle for empowering and emancipating the African youth in NZ
- Due to its success, the Youth Talent Show Project has now been rolled out to other cities in New Zealand



Literature Cited

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- New Zealand AIDS Foundation.1996. Most Communities Affected by HIV/AIDS in New Zealand

Acknowledgments

- New Zealand AIDS Foundation Management & Staff
- Carlos Abdelrahman & Team- Director of LCP Youth Talent Show Project (2013)
- The African Communities in NZ