



XVII INTERNATIONAL AIDS CONFERENCE

3-8 August 2008 | Mexico City

CD-ROM Publication

Track C - Prevention programmes for men who have sex with men (MSM)

CDC0842 - Drop in centre as a safe space for community empowerment and ownership

M. Shinde, G. Acharya, S. Silmula, Y. Sarlam

The Humsafar Trust, Mumbai, India

Issues: The MSM is burdened with multiple levels of stigma and discrimination. Stigma attached with same sex behaviour, societal norms and expectations of gender and sexuality, lack of safe spaces and different gender constructs lead to MSM being closeted.

Description: The Humsafar Trust a MSM CBO implementing HIV prevention programs is challenging this stigma by establishing a safe space in Thane region in Maharashtra, India. A multi-pronged strategy linking prevention, care and treatment help reach the MSM and provide support in dealing with their sexuality and other threat factors that affect their well being. The safe space acts as an epicentre for empowerment where MSM with different identities can come together and foster a community bonding. The community has developed its own ethical code of conduct at the drop in centre which all visitors follow. In three years of its work 4000 new MSM have accessed the drop in centre and 6,240 new and regular MSM became part of community events through workshops on weekends.

Lessons learned: Drop In centre is effective community mobilisation tool. MSM accessing safe spaces are very vocal and instrumental in implementation of various community programs. Identification, training and mentoring of peers is made easy and they act as positive re enforcers for behaviour change.

Next steps: Creation of safe spaces needs to be integral part of intervention programs and advocacy efforts at various levels can be initiated within the safe space. The drop in centres should be systematically planned as a tool for community empowerment through programs that encourage community participation and ownership.

Presenting author email: smaheshin@gmail.com