

Heart Talk Support Groups Implemented in China

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Increasingly, individuals and organizations must work together locally, regionally, and internationally in order to maximize resources and create opportunities. However, the nature and processes of these bilateral and multilateral collaborations are largely un-documented or perhaps their well-intentioned plans fall through. Common reasons for alliances not to reach their goals have to do primarily with misunderstanding socio-cultural contexts, and lack of trust and commitment. Establishing shared agendas and opportunities for equal exchanges, on the other hand, may lead to improved collaborations. This study describes the phases of a successful partnership between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Central America, in China, and AIDS Project Los Angeles (APLA) in California. It connects the universal concerns that surface in collaborations and describes several phases worthy of consideration among organizations and individuals forging partnerships abroad:

- 1) Developing the collaborative relationship and establishing kinship;
- 2) Identifying pivotal concerns;
- 3) Generating sources of commonalities and differences experienced by the different countries;
- 4) Formulating recommendations and strategies that inform future activities; and
- 5) Managing expectations regarding limited resources and the prioritization of shared goals.

AIDS Project Los Angeles (APLA) and AIDS Relief Fund for China (ARFC) have teamed up to start a new project that would introduce a different kind of prevention effort to MSM service providers in China. The project aims to equip grassroots community-based organizations from eight different cities with the technical assistance required to co-design and launch a two-month series of weekly small-scale discussion groups with young MSM focused on a wide range of psychosocial issues these young men deal with on a daily basis. Entitled "Heart Talk Support Groups," the program is designed to build and strengthen protective factors against HIV, including social networks and positive self-identity (J. Ramirez-Valles, 2002). With its pilot round currently funded and operating as of March 2008, APLA and its collaborators propose a comprehensive second round of activity, including evaluation of data, development of a facilitator's guide and a curriculum for subsequent rounds of the project.



"I think as a gay volunteer group, doing work in the community, these are experiences and methods that we would not be able to get doing outreach work."
-Xinxiang Group Leader

"In two hours of talking, Moonlight Boys all speak out their thoughts and opinions on these questions. There are stories told with deep emotion and fierce debates..."
-Benxi Group Leader

"I think that after going through today's Salon everyone should feel that the problems and challenges we face in the future are many, and that we should be saving up strength and knowledge, preparing to confront these challenges successfully."
-Benxi Group Leader