



Kentucky

Project Title: *Pillow Talk*

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Description:

A low cost discussion group of black men and women over the age of 18 that comprehensively examines relationship dynamics, sexual communication, and responds to their sexual health needs.

Objectives:

- To increase HIV awareness, knowledge, and testing amongst African Americans over the age of 18,
- Increase the number of women actively engaged in HIV/AIDS advocacy,
- To address relationship dynamics and sexual health among individuals in the black community over the age of 18.

Partners

The core developers of the Pillow Talk program include Kentucky Department of Health staff, Office of Health Equity staff, and members of the United Methodist Church- Office of African American Ministries. Additional partnerships were established with groups interested in

hosting a Pillow Talk event. Thus far, the team has partnered with faith-based organizations, and sororities and fraternities.

Background

In 2009, NASTAD hosted a regional forum addressing the disproportionate impact of HIV on black women in the South. A task force of stakeholders from across the state was assembled to develop effective strategies designed to reach and address the health needs of Kentucky's black female population. Participants included health department staff, consumers (either infected or directly affected by HIV), and providers of prevention and social services. Following the forum NASTAD provided technical assistance to the task force and facilitated focus groups to identify problem areas within the state. These efforts resulted in developing an initiative focusing on 18 and older black men and women in order to comprehensively examine the relationship dynamics and respond to the sexual health needs within the black community as a whole. Pillow Talk is the first activity stemming from this initiative.

Approach

Pillow Talk provides a low-cost forum for discussion around relationship dynamics and sexual health within the black community. The intervention relies on in-kind donations for resources such as meeting space, food, and door prizes. Pillow Talk was designed to use a fun and non-traditional structure as an impetus for education and awareness. The "edu-tainment" approach presents a comfortable environment for participants to dialogue freely. The event is conducted in a conducive, non-formal, intimate setting with a group of about 20-30 participants. Food is provided at the events, which is beneficial for participants transitioning from work. Partnerships with faith organizations, and historically black fraternities and sororities provided participants and avenues for funding. Oftentimes, organizations have community service commitments which offer ideal opportunities to partner with health department staff and providers on programs. Subject matter experts facilitated lively discussions around dating, relationships, sex & sexuality, health, HIV, STDs.

Upon arrival participants check-in and participate in an ice breaker activity. The purpose is to stimulate conversation and help the attendees feel comfortable with each other. Door prizes ranging from movie tickets to gift certificates are offered as incentives, which helps keep participants engaged in the event and foster early conversations. Additionally, individuals submit anonymous questions for the discussion that prompt the Pillow Talk conversation on gender-specific colored cards. Participants are allowed to submit questions

during the event. Each Pillow Talk event begins with a discussion of ground rules where participants agree to engage in a lively discussion that is cross-gender, cross generational, cross socio-economic status cross-cultural, objective, educational, informative, respectful. A fact sheet prepared by the health department on HIV/AIDS and the black community in Kentucky is distributed to participants. Various sex and sexual health related materials are also provided. Event facilitators start the conversation with general questions that include “what does the term ‘in a relationship’” mean to you?” and “how has the era of HIV/AIDS impacted commitment within relationships?” Finally, participants are guided through a discussion of the anonymous questions previously submitted. Facilitators of the Pillow Talk event close the conversation by providing participants with facts on the state of the epidemic within the black community. Evaluation cards are distributed to participants in order to acquire participant feedback and continue to improve the program.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

The Kentucky team identified challenges and lessons learned within the development, planning and implementation stages of the black initiative in general, and the Pillow Talk program in particular. Once the team committed to the development of the program a “task manager” was identified to ensure that all deadlines were met. Identifying a detail oriented individual for this role was paramount in the progression of the Pillow Talk initiative.

With regards to the planning process, reallocation of capacity based assistance funds provided the minimal seed money for the initiative. Current support stems from various non-traditional partnerships. The team drafted a sponsorship letter that is mailed off to local venues asking for specific resources necessary for the event. In the past local companies donated meeting space, food, and door prizes, which helps keep the cost of the event down. Securing hard resources, such as pens and badges, that can be continuously used proved to be the most beneficial. Partnerships with faith organizations, and historically black fraternities and sororities provided both funding and participants to Pillow Talk events. The team discovered that these types of organizations often have available funding for community service events, and offer outlets to other nontraditional collaborators.

Sustainability of events continues to be a challenge during the implementation process. The team identified providing edu-tainment that continuously recruits participants as an on-going obstacle. Allowing participants to ask questions anonymously and creating an informal environment to dialogue with one another helped the team maintain a successful participation rate.

Team members committed to staying innovative, and listening to the responses from participant evaluations. Learning from past events and continuously adapting the model proved to be very beneficial for the program. Additionally, staying true to the edu-tainment format, the team agreed to not overwhelm their audience with HIV and sexual health information and focused on providing key facts along with relevant resources. The fact sheets and sexual health materials were provided by the health department.

Overall, a major factor in the success of the Pillow Talk program stems from the continued commitment of health department staff and buy-in from community partners. Champions in supporting and developing initiatives that target the black community in general, and black women in particular the Kentucky team continues to search for innovative ways to fight the spread of HIV and raise awareness.

The Way Forward

Future events for the Kentucky team include a Pillow Talk event in a region with the highest HIV and STD rates. The identified region is also home to the state's largest black population. A large number of infected and affected community members are expected to participate in the event. The identified area of Kentucky receives Part B funding, and the team partnered with Volunteers for America for additional sponsorship.

In the more distant future, the team envisions sustaining current endeavors, and hopes to expand to other programs targeting the black community. They identify that a key element to their success is staying innovative. In the past they held events during the daytime; however, they are interested in exploring the option of hosting evening functions. Evaluation is another key component that developed through a recent partnership with university students. Interested in exploring mechanisms to gauge how the Pillow Talk events are affecting participants, the Kentucky team is working with research class at a local university to develop a stronger monitoring and evaluation format for the events. Through continued collaboration and partnerships the team hopes that the Pillow Talk initiative evolves into a tool that various organizations can utilize on their own.

Resources:

Resources are available upon request.