



6 months for self care: community-based recharging of the batteries for gay HIV+ men

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Issues

As a community-based association, AIDES collects testimonials from gay positive men all over France confronted with the complications of HIV infection and who have negative views of their lives, bodies and sexuality.

These complications are manifold:

- Financial problems due to extremely low revenue (87% of the attendees were unemployed).
- Psychological and mental problems due to being HIV positive, changed physical appearance (the attendees had been HIV positive for an average of fourteen years).
- Sexual and emotional solitude, social exclusion (73% of attendees live alone with no long-term partner).
- Rejection and condemnation from the homosexual community which is governed by strict standards of age, physique and beauty.
- Homophobia in the society.

Whilst some give up all sexual activity, others adopt risky behaviour, going as far as rejecting prevention, poor observance and halting treatment.

In an innovative response to these difficulties AIDES has developed a project to help positive Gay men recharge their batteries. By drawing on peer support, this project aims to work with homosexuals who are particularly affected by HIV and focuses on improving their quality of life. This work is done as a group by sharing experiences and feelings. It is a factor in enhancing self image and rebuilding social ties which are indispensable if a person wants to take good care of his/her health.

Description

The project has four steps:

- 1 - Formation of a group of 12 positive Gay men with impaired quality of life, socially excluded, or having difficulties regarding their physical condition.
- 2 - A week's break managed by 3 members of AIDES and a physiotherapist. Activities include walks, group support sessions on being gay and being positive and relaxation and massage.
- 3 - In the four months following the break, an individual and communal follow-up is organized for the group and its members, focus groups go into the problems of health and prevention as well as other questions brought up during the week. Individual strategies to improve the quality of life are based on the life experiences of the group members. During these 6 months, individual follow-up creates a strong link with the organisation and gives 50% of the attendees the chance to stay in the project right till the end.
- 4 - Five months after the break, the end of the action is marked by a day's evaluation.

Lessons learned

In almost all the people we have noted an improvement: treatment has been initiated, going back to work, renewed sex life, etc. For some the break was the first occasion to talk about their past in prostitution or about repeated risk taking. Progressively, the participants started to talk about themselves and to project into the future. During the massage workshops, they got used to accepting body contact.

Next steps

Many avenues still remain to be explored in terms of evaluation, longitudinal follow up of the participants, which is impossible for our association. We need to associate researchers in order to demonstrate the efficacy of the project and also to adapt it to other populations concerned with HIV.

Profile of attendees	
Average age	44
Have been HIV positive for	14 years (av)
Live alone or with no long-term partner	73%
Unemployed	87%

Recharging of the batteries
for gay men 2008 poster

Rechargement gay AIDES
6 mois pour prendre soin de sa santé... 2008

2 RECHARGEMENTS SONT ORGANISÉS DANS L'ANNÉE.

ILS COMPRENNENT :

- 1 SEJOUR D'UNE SEMAINE à Corrençon-en-Vercors,
- 5 RENCONTRES AU LOCAL DE AIDES (1 par mois, après le séjour) ; avec les participants dans les départements,
- 1 RENCONTRE D'UNE JOURNÉE avec l'ensemble des participants.

LE RECHARGEMENT EST CONSTITUÉ D'UN GROUPE DE 12 PERSONNES.

LES DEMANDES DE PARTICIPATION SE FONT SOUS LA FORME D'UN ENTRETIEN, ET SUR LA BASE D'UNE FICHE DE DEMANDE DE PARTICIPATION. ELLES PEUVENT SE FAIRE A N'IMPORTE QUEL MOMENT ET SERONT VALABLES POUR LE PROCHAIN RECHARGEMENT.

Gays séropositifs*

AIDES, a French NGO

Set up in 1984, AIDES is the largest HIV/AIDS community-based organisation in France, with centres in over 70 cities. We support partner organisations in Central and Eastern Europe, North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa.

Our main goals:

- To inform vulnerable people about HIV/AIDS prevention and testing
- To support PLWHAs, (social & professional integration, therapeutic education)
- To advocate for the rights of PLWHAs.

