



Health Education

Reproductive health, HIV/AIDS prevention and drug abuse prevention

Scaling up the response

With more than 45 million members, the global YMCA movement is committed to promoting healthy lifestyles among youth. The movement recognizes the urgent need for programs to reduce health risks, raise awareness of adolescent reproductive health and prevent drug abuse.

In 2002, the YMCA World Council responded to the challenge of YMCA grassroots communities around the world by calling on all YMCA movements to prioritize HIV/AIDS strategies within their current community and youth empowerment processes. YMCAs are now actively participating in the struggle to prevent HIV/AIDS and drug abuse. Through focused programming combined with integrated youth and development strategies, YMCAs are empowering millions of young people to make healthy choices.

The World YMCA movement must work to defend youth, families and communities from one of the greatest single threats to humankind through innovative information and education programs, as well as the strengthening of YMCA networks and strategic alliances.

The YMCA should also support and advocate for people living with HIV/AIDS.

-- 2002 World Council Resolution on HIV/AIDS

YMCAs offer compassionate individual, community and global responses to those seeking help. According to community priorities and cultural contexts, YMCAs may choose from a wide range of programming options, all tested and modeled within the global YMCA movement. YMCAs around the world are using life skills and peer education, adult involvement and youth-parent dialogue, information-education-communication strategies, anti-stigma campaigns, home-based care, support groups, health education, medical referral services, voluntary testing and counseling to address adolescent reproductive health and HIV/AIDS. YMCAs promote the sharing of best practices and Global learning through e-forums, as well as regional and global training events.



Youth at Russia's YMCA perform drama productions addressing healthy lifestyles.

Meeting needs

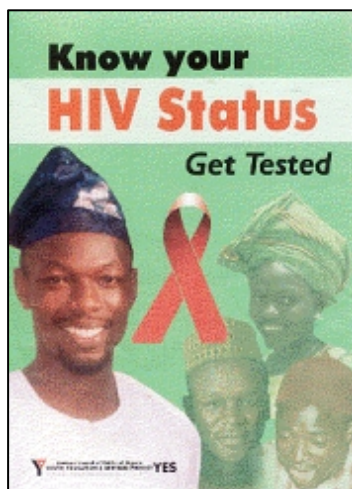
YMCAs work where the need is greatest and with interventions that are proven to be highly effective. In **Russia**, YMCAs reach teenagers and vulnerable groups such as orphans and street children with programs that address their expressed needs for referral and medical services, counselling, peer education training, drug abuse HIV/AIDS prevention and health education.

Facilitating dialogue

In a context where reproductive health topics are difficult to address and where YMCA research has found that young people engage widely in high-risk behavior, the YMCA of **Nigeria** has set challenging and ambitious goals. The Youth Education and Services (YES) Program is supported by the **David and Lucile Packard Foundation** and is jointly managed by the YMCAs of Nigeria and the USA. The program seeks to

improve the reproductive health and practices of more than 200,000 youths and families in Nigeria.

Despite high rates of HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies, research has found that most youths who have reproductive health questions or problems rarely seek medical advice or treatment. Often, they fear social stigmatization or believe they can't afford social services. The YES program aims not only to get young people to talk to one other via peer education, but to increase adult involvement by encouraging parents, teachers, religious leaders and adult health professionals to talk about issues related to adolescent reproductive health.



Poster by the YMCA Nigeria YES program

In response to expressed community need and interest, the YMCA movement mobilized a coalition of partners with complementary program expertise. The group designed a highly responsive program that addressed health education, counseling and offered increased access to medical services and information on contraceptives. In addition, the program focused on institutional strengthening for long-term program sustainability.

Results are already being seen. After five years, an evaluation found that youth knowledge of HIV transmission had increased by 40 percent and youth abstinence had increased by 15 percent. In addition, 50 percent more youths perceive that medical services are available if they have questions or face health problems. Parents and community leaders reported that communication between children and parents had become more open as a result of the program. They also concluded that adults had developed an understanding of adolescent reproductive health.

Holistic responses to complex issues

The rapid spread and devastating impact of HIV/AIDS calls on all sectors of society to respond urgently, broadly and effectively. In **The Gambia**, youth participants at the digital communication studio (a component of the youth technology and employment program) design and produce YMCA materials for HIV/AIDS anti-stigma and prevention programs, while learning crucial information technology skills. Programs in Ukraine (a component of the youth leadership and civic engagement strategy) mobilize youths to care for people living with HIV/AIDS. The YMCA's holistic approach to youth development addresses critical community and youth issues, and builds core values among participants for healthy and rewarding lives.

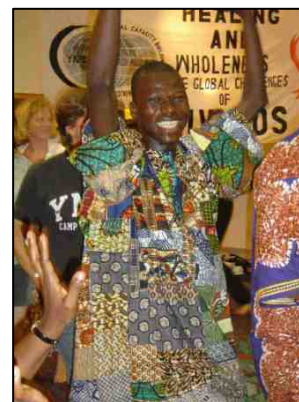
The YMCA is uniquely placed in terms of coverage and organizational mandate to access and make effective use of available resources for adolescent reproductive health programming.

-- Independent evaluation report, 2005

Building global HIV/AIDS capacity through technology

The YMCA Global Capacity Building Forum on HIV/AIDS in Durban, South Africa, hosted over 100 YMCA staff and volunteers representing over 30 YMCAs directly involved in HIV/AIDS work. Participants shared best practices and gained valuable information from other HIV/AIDS organizations. Proposals for continued information sharing were offered, while the need for further development of programs and interventions for HIV/AIDS-related initiatives such as resource mobilization, gender, anti-stigma and advocacy were addressed.

As a result of the forum, YMCA of the USA committed to organize electronic forums on HIV/AIDS topics and document these sessions for YMCAs worldwide.



Participant from Senegal at the YMCA HIV/AIDS Forum in Durban, March 2004

Building assets for drug-free lives

YMCAs employ an assets-based approach to drug abuse prevention. Assets are 40 factors critical to the growth and development of young people. YMCA experience has shown that young people with strong self-esteem concepts and a sense of competency are less likely to be vulnerable to substance abuse.

Using peer-to-peer and youth leadership methodologies, drug abuse prevention programs emphasize empowering messages about healthy lifestyles. They help youth develop skills for improving communication, decision-making, problem-solving, critical thinking and, above all, self-esteem. These skills strengthen young people's ability to evaluate information, negotiate choices and make positive decisions

With organizational expertise in designing programs that build assets, values and skills, YMCAs are strongly positioned to tackle the root causes that lead to substance abuse.

A time for action

Reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and substance abuse prevention are more than health issues—they are strongly influenced by poverty, marginalization and power. As a holistic youth development organization with wide-ranging programming and outreach capabilities, YMCAs can respond rapidly and effectively, mobilizing broad alliances and coordinating complex interventions to address these interlinked issues. Through these efforts, the risks which threaten young, healthy lives can be overcome.

HIV/AIDS causes broken families and neighborhoods. It strangles and stunts human development by stifling human potential. Its pathways are littered with experiences of blame, prejudice, denial and exclusion, each with debilitating social consequences.

YWCAs and YMCAs must influence the world AIDS pandemic agenda... Our efforts must be tuned towards fostering hope of a new life and dignity for those who are being excluded, or discriminated against, simply because they are HIV positive.

—Joint message from the Presidents of the World Alliance of YMCAs and World YWCA for the 2003 Week of Prayer and Fellowship

The YMCA has collaborated with:

Aidsweb • Australia AID • CEDPA • Citibank • Comic Relief
• Commercial Market Strategies • The Core Initiative •
David & Lucile Packard Foundation • Family Health
International • Family Health International • National Youth
Anti-Drug Media Campaign • Office of National Drug
Control Policy • Pathfinder International • Population
Council • Population Services International • Tulane
University • UNFPA • UNICEF • United States Agency for
International Development • World Bank •

