

“Young people in control, doing it safe!”

Young people from the so-called Urban scene (young trendsetters for R&B and hip-hop music & lifestyle) in the Netherlands have knocked on the door of GGD Amsterdam (the municipal health service Amsterdam) to set up a safe sex project in the capital. This initiative was taken because of high figures of teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV among multicultural young people in Amsterdam.

These young people, involved in a well-known stand-up comedy group Ilovecomedy and the award-winning website Partypeeps2000.com, want to contribute to a decrease of these figures by talking to their peers on-stage and on-line. They want to reach out to their peers with true entertainment like comedy and DJ parties, in combination with education about safer sex, sexuality and HIV/STIs.

The project “*Young people in control, doing it safe!*” was first set up in 2003 by GGD Amsterdam and Ilovecomedy. In 2004 the NIGZ became part of the project and in 2005 Getentertained joined the team. Together, we set out some activities in the city of Amsterdam.

We organised safe sex comedy performances at theaters, youthclubs, cultural festivals and conferences; we distributed condoms, safe sex information and gadgets (designed by the young people themselves) at parties and events; and we launched questionnaires around sexual health issues that have been positively evaluated.

At the moment, the group is preparing its sixth ‘Safe Sex Comedy Show’ for a large audience in a theater in Amsterdam. These shows entail a serie of twenty acts of comedy, spoken word, rap, poetry, music and dance. The young comedians, poets and hip-hop artists write their own pieces based on their own sexual experiences, using their talents and slang (sub-group language) to reach their peers. This way, the young audience will more easily recognise themselves in the performances and will be challenges to talk about sexuality in general.

Through these interventions, we want to get young people’s attention, not only with a safe sex message, but also to give them some insight into their own behaviour and prejudices. From our experiences, we see that this helps to increase knowledge and reduce fear about HIV/STI’s and that it leads to healthy choices and attitudes within their relationships.

The project is based on three principles: in the first place it is a project ‘for young people by young people’, professionals are simply involved to help young people carry out their plans. Secondly, it is a project based on the community approach, and thirdly, to broaden knowledge and stimulate peer education within the Urban scene, we train a group of thirty young people (aged 18-24) in basic information on birth control, HIV/STIs and sexual health issues.

The project has been partly financially supported by the Dutch AIDS Fund, but was mainly based on voluntary investments from the organisations and young people involved. We are waiting to receive more funding in order to continue and intensify our work.

At the moment we are developing a package of safe sex comedy shows and workshops for teenagers in schools, for which we launched successful try outs in schools in two cities in the Netherlands.

Ever since we started the project, we have gotten very good responses from the multicultural target groups, parents and professionals. A team of experts will conduct a study on the effectiveness of the Education & Entertainment strategy in 2007-2008.

For now, we are impressed with the innovating enthusiasm of the young participants and their continued efforts to do this work on a voluntary basis. Actually, we can say that we are learning from them with regard to one key question:

How do you reach young people and their communities?



For more information, please contact:

Juan Walter, GGD Amsterdam: jwalter@ggd.amsterdam.nl

Kathelijne de Groot, NIGZ: kdegroot@nigz.nl

Aries, Getentertained/Finally-Aries: info@finally-aries.nl