GrantSpace - Collaboration Hub

(SOS) Spiritual Outreach Services Program for HIV/AIDS Prevention, Care and Education

Participating Organizations

- AIDS Service Center of Lower Manhattan, Inc. d/b/a AIDS Service Center NYC, New York, NY
- Conscious Contact of New York, Inc., New York, NY

Please note that all data below was derived from the collaboration's nomination for the Collaboration Prize. None of the submitted data were independently verified for accuracy.

Formation

Type of Collaboration: Joint Programming to launch and manage one or more programs
Geographic Scope: City
Collaboration Focus Area:

- Education
- Health
- Human Services

Population Served:

- Economically Disadvantaged
- LGBTQ
- Minorities

Year Collaboration was Established: 2007
Goals Sought Through Collaboration:

- Expand reach and/or range of services / programs
- Address unmet and/or escalating community need
- Leverage complementary strengths and/or assets

Reasons Prompting Collaboration:

- Advancement of a shared goal
- Response to a community need
- Response to a funding opportunity

Who Initiated Collaboration:

- Executive Director(s) / CEO(s) / President(s)
- Volunteers

Number of Participating Organizations: 3-4
Were Partners Added or Dropped?: No
In 2006, after identifying the need to provide greater HIV-prevention services to its congregation and the larger community, UCAN (United Church of Christ HIV & AIDS Network) partnered with The Riverside Church Global HIV/AIDS Ministry (RCGHM)/Conscious Contact of New York (CCNY) to create a professional internship for developing UCAN HIV prevention, education and care services. Later that year, UCAN Executive Director, Rev. Michael Schuenemeyer, joined The Riverside Church Global HIV/AIDS Ministry (RCGHM) Chair/CCNY CEO, Oliver W. Martin, in a meeting with the Executive Director of AIDS Service Center NYC (ASCNY), Sharen Duke, to explore opportunities for collaboration. The outcome was a new collaboration to provide HIV services to the community, leveraging the bonds of trust formed within grass-roots faith-based communities and the HIV expertise and supportive services of a community-based HIV-service agency. It also sought to address gaps in service, focusing on HIV prevention for everyone, especially those not being served by governmental programs.

The collaboration, called Spiritual Outreach Services (SOS), utilized RCGHM’s reach into the NYC community and their connection to CCNY for administration, event organization, management and technical support; UCAN’s network of United Church of Christ (UCC) churches and other faith-based organizations, and ASCNYC’s programmatic capacity. It built on the complimentary strengths of each organization to offer HIV prevention education, testing, care and support to those connected to faith communities not being served via governmental programs. An MOU was established between UCAN, RCGHM, and ASCNYC and for the SOS program.

Management

Management Structure: Jointly managed by the Executive Directors of the partner organizations

UCAN is the managing partner and lead administrator. The UCAN network includes 87 NYC UCC churches and provides technical assistance to help churches connect to resources and build their capacity to plan and implement educational programming. The RCGHM, with CCNY, provides organizing, events management and marketing/communications related to skills building workshops and educational events. RCGHM also provides administrative support, reporting on events and sharing the story with the community, including the media, and also reporting to funder/grantors. ASCNYC provides core programmatic pieces, including HIV counseling, testing, referral and connecting HIV+ and at-risk persons to care. The structure has improved capacity to fill gaps in services by enabling churches to offer HIV 101 prevention education, testing, counseling, care and support to an often ignored audience in the HIV field: the faith-based community. The collaboration works on a consensus basis with direct and clear delineation of responsibilities coming from the Executive Directors/CEOs/Chairpersons of UCAN, RCGHM/CCNY, and ASCNYC. This decision-making structure ensures buy-in from all partners.

Challenges

Challenges to Making the Collaboration Work:

- Defining and measuring success
- Addressing lack of staff or allocation of staff resources
- Raising funds or integrating fund development to support the collaboration

Staffing in the face of resource constraints has been a challenge. SOS has maximized staffing capacity by developing well-trained, skilled consultants who serve on an on-call basis, as funding is available. Remuneration for services by consultants, such as volunteer recruitment, is from grants received for specific projects. Fund development to support the collaboration has also been a challenge. Each organization has incorporated fund development as a core component of their organizations, including fund development strategies for the SOS program. In addition, partner agencies work to identify and apply for grant proposals and other funding opportunities. For example, $25,000 was awarded to RCGHM by the Citizens Campaign to execute SOS programming pieces in 2010.

Impact
Internal Efficiencies and Effectiveness:

- Greater ability to allocate resources to areas of need - Greater ability for each partner to focus on core competency
- Greater ability for each partner to focus on core competency - Greater ability to allocate resources to areas of need
- Improved marketing and communications, public relations and outreach - Improved marketing and communications, public relations and outreach

Community Impact:

- Increase in number of clients / individuals / organizations served
- Previously unmet community need now being addressed

The SOS program is an innovative collaboration that has brought together groups of secular and faith-based organizations in the delivery of HIV prevention education and connection to care. It has increased the capacity of houses of worship to effectively fill gaps in these services by reaching people connected to faith communities in the NYC area not being served via governmental programs. Through HIV testing, the program enables people to learn their status, connects high-risk persons to services, helps get those who test HIV+ into care, and reconnects those who were once in care back to care.

By establishing a consistent presence at various houses of worship, the collaboration dramatically improves access to HIV testing, medical care, substance abuse services, housing placement assistance, and other services. Since 2009, SOS has reached 1062 individuals through workshops and outreach events, provided 193 HIV tests, and made 1,213 referrals for supportive and clinical services to 711 persons. These numbers show a clear desire and need for services, particularly in the face of state and local service cuts. When most agencies are experiencing shrinking resources and cutting back, this collaboration has found ways to help more people, make a bigger impact, save money, and save lives. Nevertheless, we still see a need for more education related to risky behaviors, the benefits of knowing one’s HIV status, as well as the need to reduce the stigma of HIV in the community, which remains a barrier to testing and care.

Through UCAN’s presence on the New York City Faith in Action Coalition, SOS has also benefited from improved marketing and communications, public relations and outreach. Thus, SOS better utilizes the internet, event exhibiting, and press releases for increased visibility of HIV related events and services provided through faith-based organizations.

Model

The SOS collaboration is an innovative collaboration between seemingly unlikely partners utilizing a community model. It brings faith communities together with AIDS service CBOs to address the HIV epidemic and fills HIV prevention education, testing, counseling, care and support gaps in their communities. It leverages community trust and expertise to better reach and provide access to services in communities affected by the HIV epidemic. The outreach and prevention is tailored to the needs of each participating faith-based organization, providing SOS the ability to access and build on existing capacities, leveraging the strengths of each collaboration partner.

The SOS model can be replicated in a number of contexts and on differing scales, from periodic collaborative events to ongoing collaborative service delivery, depending on local context and resources. An example of a replicable event is the annual, week-long Stepping up in Faith for HIV and AIDS, which offers a series of church and community based educational events, referrals, and HIV testing. SOS provides greater access to a continuum of HIV prevention and treatment services to a population often ignored by government funding but which has been devastated by HIV. It also reduces the stigma associated with HIV, which is one of the largest barriers to testing and entry into care.

Efficiencies Achieved
SOS' greatest operating efficiency is its ability to offer a full spectrum of HIV education and services to the faith-based-community that would not have been possible otherwise, due to the large investments in relationship building, training, and infrastructure development that would have been required. Faith-based-organizations (FBOs) are often wary of inviting AIDS service organizations into their congregation, yet throughout Harlem, East Harlem, the South Bronx, and parts of Brooklyn, their congregations are being ravaged by the AIDS epidemic. UCAN, the United Church of Christ’s national HIV/AIDS network was already conducting programming with many of its church’s in these areas but realized that many of these communities, where residents are poor, lack insurance and access to care, required more extensive services.

Through its collaboration with CCNY and ASC via SOS, UCC churches (and subsequently, other community FBOs), have been able to serve their congregation by accessing a menu of services tailored to the faith-based community, including capacity building, workshops, outreach events, HIV testing, and connection to HIV care. The time and cost of providing such services itself would have been prohibitive to UCAN or any of the participating agencies. While UCAN is a national organization, it did not have the local staffing or HIV service provision capacity of CCNY and ASC. To this end, ASC provides onsite rapid HIV testing at SOS events under ASC’s NYCDHMH CLIA waiver, linkage to HIV services, and Peer Health Educators to provide informal peer coaching, education, and outreach. SOS participants that access HIV testing are provided with pre- and post- test counseling, risk assessment, harm-reduction counseling and referrals to supportive/clinical services provided at ASC’s three sites or through its many linkages with local hospitals, community health centers, drug treatment facilities, housing providers, and other community-based-organization. Individuals testing preliminary positive are escorted to expedited confirmatory testing at one of ASC’s partner hospitals throughout Manhattan (Beth Israel, St. Luke’s Roosevelt, NY Presbyterian, or Mt. Sinai) and connected to HIV services. CCNY acts as the local point of reference for SOS events and contributes its corps of consultants/trainers and community organizing expertise to create ongoing community programming. By utilizing a pool of well-trained consultants who are paid for each training/workshop, SOS is able to minimize cost and maximize flexibility. ASC also provides occasional training to CCNY’s SOS consultants. Finally, the partnership is able to utilize UCAN’s well-developed infrastructure to manage administrative aspects of the collaborations, such as payroll and record-keeping. UCAN is also instrumental in providing entire FBO community, not only through its network of UCC churches but by providing a measure of credibility within the FBO community.

As the economic recession continued, Conscious Contact of New York found that using the administrative services of UCAN, Inc and the Social Services of the AIDS Service Center New York City they eliminated duplication of services. By implementing collaboration tools and strategies supported by UCAN, Inc and AIDS Service Center New York City, Conscious Contact experienced the collaboration as a cost-effective way to better align their business, streamline internal and external processes and even cut costs.

With technologies ranging from Microsoft SharePoint to social media platforms, Conscious Contact, who provides the event planning for the collaboration, increased their capacity to easily share documents and collaborate on projects without additional content management systems or creating a new and lengthy business process engineering initiatives. By incorporating the above measures of the collaborative partnership, in 2010 the collaboration provided a 28% cost savings to our bottom line of Conscious Contact of New York.

The overall result of this collaboration has been improved services to the faith-based-community and increased delivery of HIV education and prevention services. From April 2009-May 2010, SOS:

? Reached 1,062 individuals through workshops and education topics, such as, how to talk to congregants about HIV; safer-sex; HIV transmission and epidemiology; and where to access services. At many of these events, ASC staff and Peer Health Educators provided one-on-one risk assessments, risk reduction counseling, and peer mentoring.

? Helped 193 individuals learn their HIV status by providing Rapid HIV testing

? Connected 711 persons to supportive and clinical services, such as support groups, substance abuse counseling, harm-reduction counseling. Since June 2010, we have trained 16 new consultants who have conducted 9 HIV-related trainings at UCAN churches, reaching 250 church leaders and congregants.

To date, SOS has measured success by tracking the provision of services. However, we are in the process of developing instruments to measure the impact of activities on participant knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and self-reported likelihood of sharing what they have learned with family and friends. One definitive measure of success has been the popularity of SOS programming both in UCC and other houses of worship (including a Chinese Buddhist Center and a mosque), which are inviting us into their congregations to talk about prevention, using condoms, and being safe. We are now being invited to the table as welcomed guests, rather than feared outsiders. This is proof that SOS is achieving part of its mission: to change cultural norms and reduce the stigma associated with HIV testing and care, one which often acts as a barrier to learning one’s HIV status and getting treatment.

Evolution
SOS formed in 2006 in response to a gap in services, access to care, and ongoing training for UCC churches in East and Central Harlem, Washington Heights, the South Bronx, and parts of Brooklyn, whose congregations and communities were plagued by rampant rates of HIV infection and disproportionately high incidence of HIV-related mortality. As centers of spiritual and cultural life in many of these communities, church leaders wanted to provide support to their congregants but needed ongoing support and training. Nevertheless, it had been difficult for AIDS service organizations to gain entrance into the faith-based-community. It was in recognition of this challenge that the CEO of the ASC, Sharen I. Duke and UCAN Executive Director, Rev. Michael Schuenemeyer, were brought together by CCNY Executive Director, Oliver W. Martin to discuss how the three could work together to expand capacity, services, and access to care for the faith-based-community.

The collaboration began by targeting UCC churches with which UCAN was affiliated in East and Central Harlem but has since grown to include other houses of worship throughout Manhattan and Brooklyn. The management structure is based on consensus, which maximizes agency bye-in and cohesion. It is also reflective of the UCC national structure, in which five corporations work together as one to accomplish the mission of the church, each leveraging its own strengths.

SOS has faced several challenges over the years. Issues of communication between the AIDS service organizations and the churches were of critical importance. Some churches did not want condoms distributed on the premises; others were hesitant to talk openly about pre-marital or homosexual sex. This posed a challenge for service providers accustomed to talking openly and frankly about sexuality and risky behaviors. In response, ASC, CCNY, and UCAN worked together to develop protocols of how to address the varying rules and sensitivities of the different churches while remaining faithful to a prevention curriculum. CCNY also provided ASC staff and Peer Educators with cultural competence training in providing services within the faith-based community. Similarly, after trial and error, ASC recognized the importance of utilizing staff and peers who were either self-identified as religious or spiritual and who were not offended by or sensitive to the religious beliefs of others. As SOS’ reach into new communities and houses of worship expand, these issues remain of vital importance.

By establishing a consistent presence at various houses of worship, the collaboration dramatically improves access to HIV testing, medical care, substance abuse services, housing placement assistance, and other services. In 2009, SOS reached 1062 individuals through workshops and outreach events, provided 193 HIV tests, and made 1,213 referrals for supportive and clinical services to 711 persons. These numbers show a clear desire and need for services, particularly in the face of state and local service cuts. When most agencies are experiencing shrinking resources and cutting back, this collaboration has found ways to help more people, make a bigger impact, save money, and save lives. Nevertheless, we still see a need for more education related to risky behaviors, the benefits of knowing one’s HIV status, as well as the need to reduce the stigma of HIV in the community, which remains a barrier to testing and care. Through UCAN’s presence on the New York City Faith in Action Coalition, SOS has also benefited from improved marketing and communications, public relations and outreach. Thus, SOS better utilizes the internet, event exhibiting, and press releases for increased visibility of HIV related events and services provided through faith-based organizations.

The SOS collaboration is an example of innovative collaboration in the face of the HIV epidemic. Through collaboration between seemingly unlikely partners, SOS utilizes a community model to bring communities of faith together with AIDS service CBOs to address the HIV epidemic and fill gaps in their community by offering HIV prevention education, testing, counseling, care and support. It does this by leveraging community trust and expertise to better reach and provide access to services to communities affected by the HIV epidemic. The outreach and prevention of SOS is tailored to the needs of each participating faith-based organization, providing SOS the ability to access and build on the capacity they already have by leveraging the strengths of each collaboration partner.

The SOS model is one that can be replicated in a number of contexts and on differing scales, from periodic collaborative events to ongoing collaborative service delivery, depending on local context and resources. One example of replicable event is the annual, week-long Stepping up in Faith for HIV and AIDS, which offers a series of church and community based educational events, referrals, and HIV testing. SOS provides greater access to a continuum of HIV prevention and treatment services to a population often ignored by government funding but which has been devastated by HIV. It also reduces the stigma associated with HIV, which is often one of the largest barriers to testing and entry into care.