

Psychosocial Support Groups for PLWHA

Progress update July 18, 2011

Logistics:

- Secured a location (Community Action, Inc.) and date (July 14, 6pm)
- Identified local restaurants for catering
- Prepared sign in sheets, intake forms, identified and resolved issues with collecting and entering information into ARIES
- Decided to keep the location confidential and share it only with individuals who called and received an initial intake from the therapist. While the agency was concerned about this affecting attendance, it was preferable to having the location be public and having attendees easily identified as HIV+ if they were observed going to the location at that day and time. The attendees were all very much concerned about privacy and appreciated the location not being revealed to the public. As such, the agency will continue publicizing the groups without revealing the locations to the general public.

Outreach:

- Created a flyer for the “meet and greet” held on July 14
- Distributed flyer to staff at Community Action, Inc., who distributed it to:
 - Agency clients
 - Hays, Caldwell Council on Drug and Alcohol Abuse
 - Hays County Adult Probation
 - WIC/San Marcos
 - Thorpe Lane Pharmacy
 - local Health Department
 - local MHMR center
- Sent two email blasts to the agency’s supporters (350 names)
- Ran an ad in the San Marcos Daily Record on Sunday, July 9 and Wednesday, July 13
- Added information about the meet and greet to the “What We Do” tab of the agency’s website, including a link to the flyer
- Posted on the agency’s Facebook page about the event, as well as other Facebook pages, such as AIDS Services of Austin, The Care Communities, David Powell Clinic, The Wright House, Texas State University School of Nursing
- Created a Facebook ad specifically about groups in San Marcos that resulted in 32 click throughs (destination was the “What We Do” tab of the agency’s website)
- Tweeted about the meet to the agency’s followers
- While the agency did get responses and inquiries from all of these sources, the best response came from Community Action’s clients

The Event:

- Four people attended the meet and greet, with one attendee wanting to invite an HIV+ friend the next week
- All agreed they wanted to start a group

- The location was a little difficult to find the first time, but it proved to be a great location, private and spacious
- An LCSW led the group, with Daniel Bustos, a case manager from Community Action, attending to ease the transition for their clients. This approach seemed to work well.
- The facilitator asked clients to identify areas for future discussion. These topics included many areas anticipated by the agency; however, clients also identified some surprising topics:
 - HIV and other chronic diseases and conditions (heart disease, high cholesterol, high blood pressure)
 - Managing medications and their side effects (nausea, sleeplessness, vivid dreams, high cholesterol, high blood pressure)
 - Medication interactions
 - Discovering purpose in life and finding ways to help others
 - Being newly diagnosed
 - Finances and unemployment, finding resources for financial help
 - Dealing with stress and anxiety, panic attacks, depression
 - Diet and nutrition for managing meds and other conditions for optimal health
 - Developing self-esteem and feeling good about yourself physically
 - Making yourself be more social
 - Disclosing HIV status to friends and family
 - Other people's prejudices/lack of information
 - Dealing with overly supportive family
 - Handling/managing other people's emotional responses, whether they are positive or negative
 - Privacy concerns
 - Finding optimism and the desire to live
 - HIV and aging
 - Overcoming shame

Future Plans:

- The agency looks forward to convening the group this Thursday with the four attendees and possibly a fifth. The group did agree that Thursdays at 6pm is a good time for them. One of the group members sometimes works on Thursday afternoons and will have to miss some nights, but wants to attend on the Thursdays that he is available.
- Continuous outreach will be performed to ensure adequate group membership
- Social media efforts will continue as a few people expressed interest through that avenue, although they were unable to attend the initial meet and greet. The number of monthly active users on the agency's Facebook page more than doubled after the Facebook ad was published, showing that this medium is a viable avenue for helping people become familiar with the agency and its services.
- Community Action will continue to refer clients and contact other local service providers on the agency's behalf. The agency will also use this opportunity to create its own relationships with these providers.
- Logistically, the agency must work out a system to bring food to the meetings on a weekly basis without overtaxing the therapist. The dietary needs of clients must be considered, and food that is inexpensive and easy to have delivered, such as pizza, is not an option.
- During the next 8 weeks, outreach will continue to drive people to the San Marcos group and explore other locations and targeted groups of HIV+ people, such as women, older people, and young gay men. A location in Travis County is a possibility.