



Interventions in Community Library Services for

HIV/AIDS

Awareness

RENÉ SCHOOMBEE

Information Facilitator, Primary School Rustenburg

The impact of Human Immune Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) in South Africa is more devastating than ever. The AIDS epidemic update of 2005 reveals that South Africa remains the epicentre of the global AIDS pandemic. Data collected shows that the HIV prevalence in South Africa has reached its highest level to date: 29,5% (UNAIDS and WHO, 2005:19-20).

The HIV/AIDS pandemic already affects South Africa negatively in various sectors, such as economic development, education, welfare spending, health and labour. While it is too late to or reverse the adverse effects of the pandemic, it is still possible to reduce its impact and duration. This can be achieved through

that service rendering should be approached with an aim to enrich communities culturally, spiritually and intellectually.

Proactive HIV/AIDS information services - their scope, rationale and infrastructures - are the themes of two important studies by international authors, Huber (1996) and Lukenbill (1994). Both helped identify the diverse options open to libraries willing to fulfil their social responsibility role in their respective constituencies in terms of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Huber (1996) surveyed the highly complex contexts whereby HIV/AIDS information is created by biomedical experts as well as HIV-affected individuals. The results of Huber's exploratory study provide additional insights into the types of information persons that are HIV-positive seek and the resources they consult in gathering information to improve their health and strengthen their well-being.

Current HIV/AIDS awareness interventions

Published literature on librarians and HIV/AIDS - written by South Africans - is currently limited to only a few articles. These include articles in the **Cape Librarian** by Hart (2001) and Kabamba (2000) and an article in the **Free State Libraries** by Le Roux (2002). These articles stress that libraries must have a lasting impact on their societies regarding HIV/AIDS programmes by concentrating on collection development, outreach programmes and in-house displays.

Community libraries have a variety of resources and means of disseminating knowledge to educate its users in aspects of HIV and AIDS; the prevention of social abuses; and the development of these resources and methods to disseminate useful information in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Based on articles reviewed during the literature review carried out for the study, the following HIV/AIDS interventions - that are currently used in South Africa or could be used in future - were identified.

Performing arts initiatives

The City of Tygerberg forged a partnership with the Community Arts Project to stage a dramatic performance concerning HIV/AIDS. The medium of drama proved to be valuable in educating children and raising an awareness of HIV/AIDS issues (Jacobs 2002: 46).

Collection development

When it comes to the needs of special groups, such as people living with HIV/AIDS, community libraries should consider the development of special collections as part of their strategic planning (Schimper, 2002:3). These collections should include non-fiction

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carefully-targeted prevention programmes. It is important that both government and civil society develop well-directed and purposeful preventative programmes to tackle the pandemic (Department of Social Development, 2002:11). Libraries - as part of civil society - should, therefore, also provide services that can contribute positively towards the provision of prevention programmes.

Several HIV/AIDS awareness programmes have been implemented by libraries worldwide, to educate and empower people to make informed choices about their personal health. The purpose of these programmes is to prevent the statistics on HIV/AIDS infections from increasing every year.

Social responsibility of community libraries

As providers of information and knowledge, all libraries have a social, cultural and political responsibility. The National Educational Policy Investigation Report (South Africa, 1992:203), for example, proposes that community libraries become more proactive in terms of their roles in social issues. The report suggests

Right: An HIV/AIDS display by Monica Wagner featured in the Jan/Feb 2004 issue of the *Cape Librarian*

and fiction material - shelved separately - so that it is more visible for special user groups.

Displays

According to Wagner (2004:47), the following should be considered when planning an HIV/AIDS exhibition:

- ✂ select a prominent space in your library for setting up the display
- ✂ the display need not to be large, but it must be bold and visible
- ✂ use the colours, red, white and black for dramatic contrast
- ✂ select and photocopy articles on AIDS from newspapers and trace the wording in pencil as a guide to tearing letter shapes out of the newspaper
- ✂ display leaflets and brochures that can be taken home by library users
- ✂ check the daily newspapers for the latest articles. Photocopy and enlarge these and add to the display
- ✂ use photos of celebrities associated with the fight against AIDS to focus attention
- ✂ the display needs to be kept alive and must contain as much information and as many contact numbers as possible. Photocopy and duplicate these lists which can be displayed as hand-outs for users
- ✂ keep the display eye-catching and accessible
- ✂ send out invitations to local high schools in the region to visit the exhibition. See example of display on page 47, January/February 2004 CL.

Outreach programmes

The three outreach programmes identified in the literature review include:

- ✂ provision of programmes related to serious community issues, such as HIV/AIDS (Kabamba, 2000:13)
- ✂ forming partnerships with schools to set up HIV/AIDS research projects and discuss HIV/AIDS with children (Hart, 2001:11)
- ✂ hosting programmes that convey the message that the library cares about HIV/AIDS (Francis, 2000).

Kabamba (2000:13) emphasises the importance of outreach programmes by recommending that libraries should reach out because they are placed right at the centre of communities and must, therefore, provide programmes related to burning community issues - such as HIV/AIDS. The author stresses that community libraries would not go wrong to forge links with such noble causes. He adds that libraries need innovative ideas, the drive to serve, and make a lasting impact on society.

Hart (2001:11) gives two examples of a more proactive role for HIV/AIDS programmes that libraries can follow to address the HIV/AIDS issue:

- ✂ establish talk forums where young people can meet regularly and discuss HIV/AIDS
- ✂ form partnerships with schools to set up HIV/AIDS research projects.

The Free State Library Services (**Free State Libraries**, 2002:23) joined hands with a non-governmental organisation, Alliance against AIDS in Africa, and hosted a programme that conveyed



the message that the library cares about community members suffering from HIV/AIDS.

The AIDS awareness programme run by the Gauteng Provincial Library Services comprises the following interventions:

- ✂ workshops for librarians
- ✂ purchasing of information resources
- ✂ distribution of condoms
- ✂ displays of AIDS material
- ✂ video shows on AIDS
- ✂ poster and essay competitions on AIDS
- ✂ dramas on AIDS from stories taken from library books
- ✂ information sessions on AIDS for the youth
- ✂ referral services in place at libraries
- ✂ the development of a database of experts available to individuals or groups for support or training
- ✂ publicity material on AIDS
- ✂ breakfast seminars
- ✂ recreational camps for the youth
- ✂ AIDS day festivals (Francis, 2000).

Promotional material

Francis (2003) determined during a face-to-face interview that the Gauteng Provincial Library Services designed, printed and distributed posters and bookmarks to indicate the Directorate's support for HIV/AIDS information dissemination.

Staff training

The Gauteng Provincial Library Services (Francis, 2000:1) organised HIV/AIDS education workshops for staff members to empower them to assist users who have HIV/AIDS queries. The workshop focused on the following areas:

- ✂ use of the core collection and resource packs
- ✂ networking with other organisations
- ✂ community information database.

The librarians who attended, received resource packs containing videos, books and posters.



Policies

The researcher could not find any information in the literature review regarding collection development and/or service delivery policies for South African libraries related to HIV/AIDS. The researcher contacted the directors of the various provincial library services as well as library managers from metropolitan municipalities. All of them indicated that their institutions have HIV/AIDS workplace policies, but these policies do not specifically cater for collection development and service delivery in libraries.

User profiles

The above interventions can only be successfully executed if librarians have an understanding of the types of users they are catering for. Little has been written about the types of users who seek information about HIV/AIDS. Salvadori (1992:7) reports that the following users might seek information about HIV/AIDS-related issues: students at all educational levels; people concerned about historical and philosophical issues on HIV/AIDS; people worrying about acquiring the disease, who are looking for information on prevention; and people living with HIV/AIDS who are looking for support.

It can be concluded - from the discussion concerning HIV/AIDS interventions currently embarked on within South African libraries - that the focus groups in South Africa are mostly children (Hart, 2001:9) and young adults (**Free State Libraries**, 2002:23).

The Children's Literature Research Unit (CLRU) of the Department of Information Science at the University of South Africa (UNISA) carried out a pilot project in secondary schools to examine South African children's reading interests and information usage. The study revealed that female respondents made more use of AIDS information than males (Machet, Olen and Chamberlain, 2001:105-107).

Summary of HIV/AIDS interventions

A summary of intervention types that can be used by community libraries to increase HIV/AIDS awareness among users is given in the table below.

Conclusion

Mchombu (2004:97) reports that increasing community knowledge on HIV/AIDS is only a means to an end, not the goal. The goal is to successfully fight the pandemic at community level and to have effective HIV/AIDS prevention programmes in place. Lukenbill (1994:236) suggests that one of the central strategies for promoting a new product is to create an awareness of - and a need for - the new service and product. The author adds that as the HIV/AIDS pandemic continues to expand, the library community - as a social responsible institution - 'may not have the



Intervention type	Description
Arts initiatives	Writing letters to people affected by HIV/AIDS Constructing murals Compiling art exhibitions Creating a quilt Hosting drama, poetry, singing and dancing events with HIV/AIDS as the main theme
Book displays	Mounting in-house displays and displays at community events
Collection development	Creating special resource collections that are shelved separately to ensure easy access Using e-mails and litservs for communication between activist groups and libraries Using donor funds to purchase materials on HIV/AIDS Making referrals to HIV/AIDS groups Enhancing the circulation of the HIV/AIDS collection through block-loans to schools and other interested organisations Including fiction and non-fiction in a collection
Community information programmes	Presenting seminars and workshops on HIV/AIDS Distributing condoms and HIV/AIDS brochures and pamphlets in the library Providing recreational camps for the youth

Information dissemination	<p>Making reviews available to users</p> <p>Making use of computerised networks</p> <p>Establishing cooperation between HIV/AIDS activist groups</p> <p>Promoting AIDS telephone hotlines</p> <p>Offering support to HIV/AIDS support groups</p> <p>Distributing pamphlets, brochures and AIDS newsletters</p> <p>Making information available about conferences, clinics and AIDS resource centres</p>
Promotional initiatives	<p>Participating in radio and television announcements</p> <p>Designing and printing posters and bookmarks</p> <p>Offering spaces for meetings and displays</p> <p>Mounting displays in libraries</p>
Outreach programmes	<p>Presenting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • workshops • lectures • film programmes • children and youth programmes • information and educational programmes • preventive educational programmes • delivering books to homebound patients • having poster and essay competitions on HIV/AIDS • celebrating AIDS day
Consumer health information services	<p>Providing a wide range of consumer information which is found in books, directories, health newsletters, magazines, clipping files and referral and computer databases.</p>



luxury of sitting by and waiting to be asked to dance'. The library community needs to create an awareness and a need among the public for its HIV/AIDS information services in order to make a contribution in the fight against HIV and AIDS.

The community might be so caught up in the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS that they might not ask for information at community libraries. The library leadership in South Africa must take the responsibility to embark on strong initiatives and actions to show that the community library can - and will - play an important role in providing HIV/AIDS information through carefully-planned interventions.

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