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ABSTRACT

A preventative participatory forum for children in a time of HIV/AIDS: A case of the Soul Buddyz Club partnership

A new broad consensus to communication and education addressing health and development has prevailed, taking a shift from clinical/health institution driven systems to consider the importance of civil society and other institutional partnerships. This change informed the materialization of the Soul Buddyz Club (SBC). The Soul Buddyz Club was developed after the Soul Buddyz series was aired on television in 2000 and children were inspired by the series wrote to SCI asking to be Soul Buddyz wanting to become agents of change in their own communities.

The SBC is a platform for school children between the ages of 8-14 which helps them identify their social challenges and encourage them to come up with ways to mitigate them. Emerging from a health and development communication perspective the Buddyz program has the strategic goal of empowering children through education and life skills, increasing their efficacy to deal with adolescent sexuality and HIV prevention and becoming agents of change. The SBC activities are aimed at increasing knowledge and skills about health and HIV, gender, adolescent sexuality and preventing teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, dealing with social stigma and other themes intended for reduction of the rate of HIV new infection.

Currently SCI supports 5600 Buddyz clubs distributed across all education districts in South Africa. The program works in partnership with schools and the Department of Basic Education (DBE). Each club has an average of 25 members and a trained facilitator and these are supported by materials that are developed and distributed to each of the clubs. The clubs meet weekly and engage in projects and activities which empower them and which improve their communities. Clubs are awarded points for participation and excellence which result in a grading from bronze through to diamond. Face to face meetings are held at district, provincial and national levels.

This paper draws upon a case study of SBC activities in 5 clubs, to demonstrate how vulnerable children can be reached and empowered through a partnership between education and civil society. Various successes have been realized within these clubs, including establishing food gardens to produce and provide nutritious food parcels to people at risk and those living with HIV, facilitating the identification and documentation to orphans and identifying crimes of sexuality in their midst and linking victims to relevant support services in the community.

The Buddyz clubs case studies show that through education and support, vulnerable children can be educated and empowered in the prevention of HIV. In addition, the SBC give a strong indication on positive impact on future individual lives of the children, their communities and the national educational and health goals on HIV prevention. Consequently, such partnerships need to be strengthened in order to leverage resources to inclusively establish Buddyz clubs in all South African primary schools, prioritizing those within marginalized communities.