



IN THE LIFE

Documentary stories from the gay experience

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IN THE LIFE BRINGS AN INNOVATIVE HIV/AIDS ONLINE PREVENTION PROGRAM TO PUBLIC TELEVISION STARTING ON WORLD AIDS DAY

MANHUNT PARTNERS WITH IN THE LIFE MEDIA TO HEIGHTEN AWARENESS



NEW YORK -- With WORLD AIDS DAY approaching, a disquieting thought: HIV infection is still not only a threat, but the rate of new infections is on the rise in communities where men have sex with men. Only, nowadays, it's increasingly more likely for propositions to come via the Internet instead of in-person. But, the Internet is also a place where HIV/AIDS intervention, prevention and research can occur.

Researchers at New York City-based Public Health Solutions and New York University have collaborated to produce an innovative web-based campaign that tells the story of Josh, a young gay man in New York City. He meets sex partners online, and must deal with issues like online hookups, unprotected sex, disclosing HIV status and getting tested for HIV. According to research, his story is startlingly effective in reducing high-risk sexual behavior among other gay men.

In spite of past decades of traditional HIV-prevention campaigns and messages aimed at heightening awareness of the undiminished danger of HIV infection, a new generation of young, gay men still believe that getting infected with HIV is no longer a serious threat. In this digital-age approach to HIV/AIDS awareness, this campaign tests whether a web-based serial can affect the attitudes and behavior of the men who watch it.

The series combines the popularity, reach and interactivity of online video with the power of research-based learning strategies. When a sample of 500 men was surveyed three months

after viewing the serial's first episode, it found that men were three times more likely to disclose their status and about 1.5 times more likely to get tested for HIV.

In The Life Media, producer of IN THE LIFE, the longest running television show documenting the gay experience, hopes to widen awareness of this campaign to over 74 million households, and through the IN THE LIFE website. The broadcast program will begin airing nationally on public television stations December 1, "WORLD AIDS Day," and be available to view or download for free by going to the IN THE LIFE website: www.inthelifetv.org, starting December 2ND. There, viewers can also access the "HIV Is Still a Big Deal" website (www.hivbigdeal.org), and can share the videos with friends and link to additional resources on HIV prevention, talking about HIV with partners, testing and care.

In an unusual joining of forces, the serial and research project was promoted on MANHUNT, a social networking website, which supplied most of the research participants.

The series, grounded in behavioral research and the learning sciences, is the result of the work of the project directors, who come from the very different fields of epidemiology and learning theory. Dr. Mary Ann Chiasson is an epidemiologist and vice president for research and evaluation with Public Health Solutions. Dr. Francine Shuchat Shaw is a faculty member of the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development at New York University and a veteran educational media designer with expertise in learning theory.

"The recent spike in the number of new HIV infections has been discouraging," says Dr. Mary Ann Chiasson. "Since the early 1990s, it's estimated that there are 40,000 new HIV infections occurring each year in the United States. This past summer, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimated that approximately 56,300 people were newly infected in 2006. Over half (53%) of these new infections occurred in gay and bisexual men."

"The HIVBigDeal initiative seeks to challenge viewers of the videos to think critically about widespread attitudes, misconceptions, and practices that put men who have sex with men at high risk for infection and transmission," says Shaw. "Critical thinking is a complex process that can foster attitude change, the precursor to behavior change."

"As an industry leader supporting innovative, on-site prevention and research projects," says David S. Novak, MANHUNT's senior public health strategist, "we are grateful to our members who volunteered to participate in this study to enable researchers to learn more about which prevention strategies work online." Ken Herron, MANHUNT's chief marketing officer added, "We were proud to add In The Life Media to our list of growing collaborative partners around the world who tackle rising rates of sexually transmitted infections."

The series was directed by documentary filmmaker Todd Ahlberg ("Meth," "Hooked"), who has been creating cutting-edge video content for the Internet since 1997. "Talking About HIV," a short documentary on HIV by Ahlberg, produced in cooperation with Dr. Chiasson and her colleague Sabina Hirshfield, will also be featured on the site.

The first two episodes of "HIV Is Still A Big Deal" can be seen not only on www.hivbigdeal.org but also on YouTube, MySpace and other popular social networking sites that host online video. MANHUNT will again offer free banner space to promote this multimedia event.

About In The Life Media:

In The Life Media provides information about the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities, documents the ongoing LGBT civil rights movement, and produces diverse images of the LGBT community to create better understanding and acceptance. It is the producer of IN THE LIFE, the longest running television show documenting the gay experience.

About Public Health Solutions:

Public Health Solutions is a nonprofit organization that develops, implements and advocates dynamic solutions to prevent disease and improve community health. Public Health Solutions conducts comprehensive research providing insight on public health issues, creates and manages community health programs and provides services to other organizations to address public health challenges. Public Health Solutions was formerly known as Medical and Health Research Association of New York City, Inc. (MHRA). For more information, go to: www.healthsolutions.org.

About Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development at New York University:

Founded in 1890 as the School of Pedagogy, the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development was the first school of its kind in the United States. Today, NYU Steinhardt advances knowledge, creativity and innovation at the crucial crossroads of human learning, culture, development and wellbeing. Through rigorous research and education, the schools faculty and students evaluate and redefine processes, practices and policies in their respective fields, and lead in an ever-changing world. For more information, go to: steinhardt.nyu.edu.

About MANHUNT:

In the past five years, MANHUNT has partnered with over 300 non-profit community-based health and outreach organizations across the world, offering highly visible banner space and custom MANHUNT profiles, free of charge. In addition to offering up-to-date health information, MANHUNT also partners with several dozen organizations that run partner notification programs; assisting individuals with laboratory confirmed STD infections to anonymously and reliably notify their previous sex partners who may have been exposed to HIV or an STD. For more information, go to: www.manhuntcares.org.

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