

# UNESCO's Youth Vision targets HIV/AIDS in Samoa.



One of the most recommended interventions in HIV prevention around the globe is the peer-to-peer strategy where young people reach out to other young people to talk about issues that are conventionally sensitive to open up to.

Since the wake of the AIDS epidemic about two decades ago, the primary concern for all UN and Government resolutions in regards to HIV and AIDS, have been on prevention. However, the rising trend of this disease in every country around the world is evident of the complexity of human behaviour and the challenges of innovative strategies that could effectively contain this pandemic.

HIV/AIDS in Samoa is no different, and UNESCO through its Youth Visioning Project has allowed Samoa AIDS Foundation to "Talk HIV/AIDS to the Youth" through an exciting new Project that targets young people in public places in urban Apia.

This project was initiated to address that portion of young people who are not in the formal education system where most of these outreaches are done. Whilst this portion of our population is becoming more and more visible, so are the risks that they face on the streets.

These young people are known to be increasing in numbers especially in urban Apia selling wares, exchanging favors for money exposing them to sexual exploitation and increasing their vulnerability to all kinds of diseases including the deadly HIV virus.

The Fugalei Market was the initial venue for this Project where SAF's Peer Educators spoke with young people on their knowledge of HIV and AIDS and also on preventive measures and available services to allow for more informed choices in their relationships

in regards to HIV and the devastation of AIDS.

The program started with a small introduction, and informing the public of what outreaching on HIV/AIDS is about. People of different ages stopped by to ask questions and to learn more about HIV/AIDS.

A questionnaire was developed to assess young people's level of knowledge on STIs, HIV and AIDS with information sheets also available in both Samoan and English. The majority of young people who responded (36%) were between the ages of 16 and 18 years with a relatively good level of general knowledge on HIV/AIDS.

However, our attitudes towards this disease continue to become as stubborn as the virus itself. Findings reveal that one in every three persons who answered the questionnaires still holds common stereotypes, which turn into stigma and can lead to discrimination against our men, women and children living with HIV.

The turnout was excellent and the market setting allowed for a variety of people to listen to the messages in a non-formal setting and getting informed on their health without affecting their daily schedules.

SAF wishes to acknowledge UNESCO for allowing Samoa AIDS Foundation to be among the six Regional organisations to receive this Funding.

SAF also acknowledges the kind endorsement of the Accident Compensation Corporation Management for the use of the Fugalei Market for this outreach.

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