

“RAINBOW PRIDE BABY!”

HOW TO MAKE AN EMPOWERING RESOURCE FOR WOMEN WHO DANCE AND SOMETIMES HAVE SEX FOR MONEY

This report will tell you how we produced the “dancers are special” booklet and other resources to reduce risk of HIV amongst women of color engaging in informal commercial sex and other sexual relationships placing them at risk of HIV infection in the District of Columbia.

JUNE 30, 2006

For more information visit www.differentavenues.org

Or call 202/829-2103

Prepared by Darby Hickey of Different Avenues

Special thanks to Momo Douglas, Erika Smith, Skytrinia Berkeley, Penelope Saunders, Gonzalo Perez, Vina Vo, and Stephanie Wahab for project contributions, comments and feedback

Introduction

In 2005 Different Avenues received a grant to implement a new style of HIV prevention work in the District of Columbia. We developed, produced, and distributed a resource for exotic dancers– the booklet “Dancers are Special.” In June 2006, Different Avenues Program Coordinator Darby Hickey conducted an evaluation of this material, assessing women’s response to the booklet, as well as their own self-assessment of self-care.

Process

Different Avenues had been building trust with the clubs and with the dancers for approximately 2 years when the booklet creation process began. The outreach team knew from previous evaluation of their work that the dancers greatly appreciated the delivery of condom packs, but they did not know too much about Different Avenues’ mission and services overall. Creating this resource has opened up many more possibilities for work with women in the dance venues - the process itself has brought the dancers closer to the organization. What follows is a description of our process.

1. We advertised to employ a peer educator from the clubs. We thought it was essential to have a dancer directly involved in the project. We received five expressions of interest and employed an outstanding peer educator. She filled us in on a lot of background about the HIV risks faced by dancers, the way to approach our work and much more. An important example of her input was that she revealed that a very important HIV prevention situation for dancers occurs sometimes at private parties when condoms and lube are frequently needed. The new peer educator participated in every step of the material development process and wrote the majority of the text.

2. We surveyed dancers to get a better idea of how to develop a media material that would be useful in the work place. This began with focus groups held at our Drop-In Center, and later continued with individual interviews with dancers at clubs. In the confidential focus groups we asked questions, took notes about how dancers described themselves, what kinds of materials they would be interested in, and what kinds of issues they face. During outreach, we asked if it was okay to interview dancers and everyone we spoke to thought it was a good idea. All in all we interviewed 13 dancers during this phase. We took different examples of materials (booklets from other organizations, post cards, posters etc) and asked seven questions (listed below). We compensated dancers for their expert opinions on the subjects of the appearance (colors, images, format, size), information (focus, topics) and their personal experiences that could be used as role-model stories.

* Most people refer to women working in the clubs as 'dancers.' Is this how you describe yourself?

* What are the best things about being a dancer?

* Dancers often do really great things to help one another and others in the community. Can you share a story about something that another dancer did that really impressed you? Or, share a story about something you did yourself?

* What would you say are the most important issues facing dancers, in terms of health and/or safety? Or is it something else all together?

* What would make dancers pay attention about these issues?

* As you know we can make almost anything that would appeal to dancers and provide information at the same time. What would you suggest and what kind of imagery would appeal to

dancers on materials? Think wildly- we could make a card, poster, key chain, sexy t-shirts, bikini... sexy women, animals, cartoons...

* Before we asked about great thing dancers have done to help each other and the community. How could we use one of these stories to talk about health and safety?

3. We asked the designer to create some options concerning colors and styles, and solicited feedback from about a dozen dancers on this, during weekly outreach at the clubs. We showed the designer examples of materials the dancers most preferred.

4. We developed the text for the booklet. We gathered facts and statistics about health and safety, mainly from health department publications, and from materials produced by other organizations. Writers of the text were experienced in exotic dance and other sex industry settings. We used culturally appropriate language, and included all topics outlined by dancers. We also include non-identifying quotes that emerged from our surveying and interviewing such as “I won’t stop dancing until I feel like I want to stop. I don’t care what society says” and “I love to share my knowledge.” These quotes connected topics in the booklet and honored the dancer perspective and input.

5. We created a mock-up to field test with dancers. Responses (all positive) and suggestions for changes were recorded in outreach notes and on the materials themselves. Some of these were the same dancers who had already participated in the process, others were not – we showed the examples to over 15 dancers during weekly outreach.

6. We submitted a draft copy to the local CDC Materials Review Panel. We had to make one change to pass the review - it was difficult to find non-controversial language to describe oral sex that maintained its’ cultural appropriateness.

7. We made a list of referrals to include in the "referral section." We knew we wanted to include not only health resources, but also resources for dancers experiencing different kinds of violence, or violations of their rights. We called all organizations to confirm their information and participation in the publication.

8. We made final changes and sent it to the printer.

9. We distributed the booklets, incorporated them into our regular weekly outreach, which we found to be an easy way to provide individual dancers with a lot of information as well as condoms and lube.

Using and Evaluating the Booklet

Outreach team members, including peer educators, had distributed over 140 booklets in the venues as of June 30 2006. The response was overwhelmingly positive, with many dancers volunteering to become informal peer educators by distributing the booklet to their peers both within specific venues, and across venues. These responses show that not only are women in the venues receptive to such information, but that they actually crave the information, and the opportunity to share it with their peers. These are some of the comments of dancers during outreach:

- Two dancers said they liked the booklet a lot, including one who said, “I read it, but I know someone else who I will give it to, she needs it.” Another dancer said she had seen the booklet in the dressing room, but didn’t know where it was from, so she gladly took a new one.
- One dancer said how much she liked the booklet. “It’s really important what you’re doing.”
- We gave a dancer a booklet. She came back to us to say “This is amazing! Who made it?” When we told her, she said she was impressed and that we should make more.
- We gave out 5 booklets and received comments such as “it’s so cute,” and “this is great.” One dancer asked if she could have extra ones to pass out to dancers in Richmond where the “girls don’t know.”

To document more formally the responses of dancers to the booklet, the Program Coordinator created an evaluation instrument meant to measure dancers’ perceptions of the booklet while minimally intruding on their work. The instrument was designed to be easy to read and understand, and quick to complete while providing crucial information about dancers opinions about the booklet and about their own self-care. A copy is below.

This is confidential and anonymous. All questions are optional.

Please mark how you feel about each statement:	Really Disagree	Kinda Disagree	Kinda Agree	Really Agree	No Opinion
I like the "Dancers Are Special" booklet.					
I keep this booklet in my dance bag.					
The phone numbers are helpful.					
I learned something from this booklet.					
I share the information with co-workers.					

Please mark the answer you agree with most:

After reading the “Dancers Are Special” booklet:

- I didn’t feel I needed to change anything to take care of myself
- I thought about changing some things to take care of myself
- I decided to change some things to take care of myself
- I changed some things to take care of myself
- I felt good about everything I do to take care of myself.

Please add any comments:

Results of Surveying

Seventeen women in venues filled out these “comment cards” – including women from every venue with dancers (6) where outreach occurs. One of the evaluations was illegibly filled out, leaving sixteen completed comment cards. Of that total, 15 dancers said they “Really Agree” that they “like the ‘Dancers are Special’ booklet.” Only one dancer marked “Kinda Disagree” for this question. This matches with the anecdotal responses of dancers receiving the booklets during outreach. Eleven of sixteen dancers stated “Really Agree” in response to “I keep this booklet in my dance bag.” Two dancers had “No Opinion” on this topic, while one each marked “Kinda Agree,” “Kinda Disagree,” and “Really Disagree.” This statement had the most varied answers of all – which makes sense considering that many dancers might not choose to keep such a booklet with them, but might read it and pass it on, or simply keep it at home. In response to the statement “The phone numbers are helpful,” referencing the list of organizations and their contact information which is at the end of the booklet, 15 dancers said they “Really Agree.” Only one dancer differed – she marked “Kinda Agree.” Women in the venues therefore appreciate the opportunity to learn about more services besides Different Avenues, and they responded positively to the recognition the many issues may affect their lives, from health, to violence, to legal or workplace issues. The organizations listed in the referral section were carefully chosen both to represent a variety of social services, but also because peer educators at Different Avenues identified them as useful and sensitive to dancers.

All 16 dancers completing the comment card indicated they agreed that they “learned something from this booklet.” Twelve of those marked “Really Agree” while four marked “Kinda Agree.” Again, this shows the dancers valued the information provided in the booklet, which covered breast health, HIV, STDs, sexual assault & rape, domestic violence, working conditions, drug & alcohol use & abuse, Different Avenues services, and more. With so many dancers indicating their positive perceptions of the booklet, it would seem logical that dancers would share the information with one another. Indeed, 9 dancers said they “Really Agree” with the statement “I share the information with co-workers.” Additionally, 6 dancers marked “Kinda Agree” in response to this statement, and one had “No Opinion.” This matches the comments made by dancers during outreach such as “I have one, but I know another girl who needs to read it,” showing dancers taking an active role in distributing the booklet among their peer networks.

Did the booklet help with HIV prevention?

We used the “stages of change model to begin to measure the impact the booklet could have on dancers’ self-care. This is a model that you can find out about online and it’s a way of showing how the people you outreach to respond to the information your program provides in terms of where they are at in their own lives—we were trained in this method by our funder and then we made up our own way of applying the model. The evaluation tool asked dancers to “Please mark the answer you agree with most” out of a series of statements to complete the sentence started by “After reading the ‘Dancers are Special’ booklet...” These statements were meant to reflect the “stages of change” – pre-contemplation, contemplation, ready-for-action, action, and maintenance. The statements were tailored for ease of comprehension and completion, and so only generally reflect the

stages of change, but nonetheless a clear picture emerged. All dancers answered this part, with 5 of them marking more than one response.

Eight dancers marked the statement “I felt good about everything I do to take care of myself,” indicating that they may be in the “maintenance” stage. Only 4 of these respondents did not mark any other answer – it is possible these women are more firmly in “maintenance,” while the other four are perhaps better classified in “action.” The statement “I change some things to take care of myself” was intended to identify dancers in the “action” stage – practicing a new behavior and intending to continue the behavior. Of the four, only one woman marked this statement only, and so again, the other 3 may be considered in “ready-for-action” or “action.” Seven dancers indicated “I decided to change some things to take care of myself,” four marking it exclusively. This statement measured those women in “ready-for-action” stage – either planning to make a change in behavior soon, or having just made it. Five dancers marked “I thought about changing some things to take care of myself” – with one marking it and no others. This corresponds to “contemplation,” when a person is thinking about making a change with no definite plans. Lastly, only one dancer marked “I didn’t feel I needed to change anything to take care of myself,” which was meant to demonstrate “pre-contemplation” or not thinking about changing. However, this last person was unique in other ways as well, and her comment that she added at the bottom of her card indicates that she may have intended to demonstrate her stage as “maintenance.” This dancer wrote “This opinion is coming from an experienced dancer.” She evaluated the booklet somewhat more poorly than most other dancers, notably marking “Kinda Disagree” regarding liking the booklet. What this feedback shows is that perhaps the booklet is less useful to some more experienced dancers because it does deal with some basics of dancing that are possibly geared more towards new-comers in the venues. Nonetheless, many experienced dancers did indicate their positive opinions of the booklet during outreach, so this conclusion is not clear cut.

Nine other dancers (the majority) also added comments to their evaluations of the booklets. These were generally very positive:

“Very helpful - shows that there are people out there who care & are dedicated to helping people without prejudice. I really appreciate it and we need more outreach people such as yourselves.”

“Need to make more.”

“Keep up the good work!”

“Rainbow Pride Baby!”

“Thank you!”

“Wonderful booklet”

“The book was very helpful in helping me to explain my lifestyle to others.”

“Thanks for the booklet. I’m glad someone thinks about dancers.”

Taken together, the comments and responses to the evaluation show that dancers not only like the information, but use it to change their ways of taking care of themselves. They also clearly benefit from the feeling that someone “cares” and is willing to put energy into supporting them to lead healthy, safe and respected lives.