



Family AIDS Caring Trust

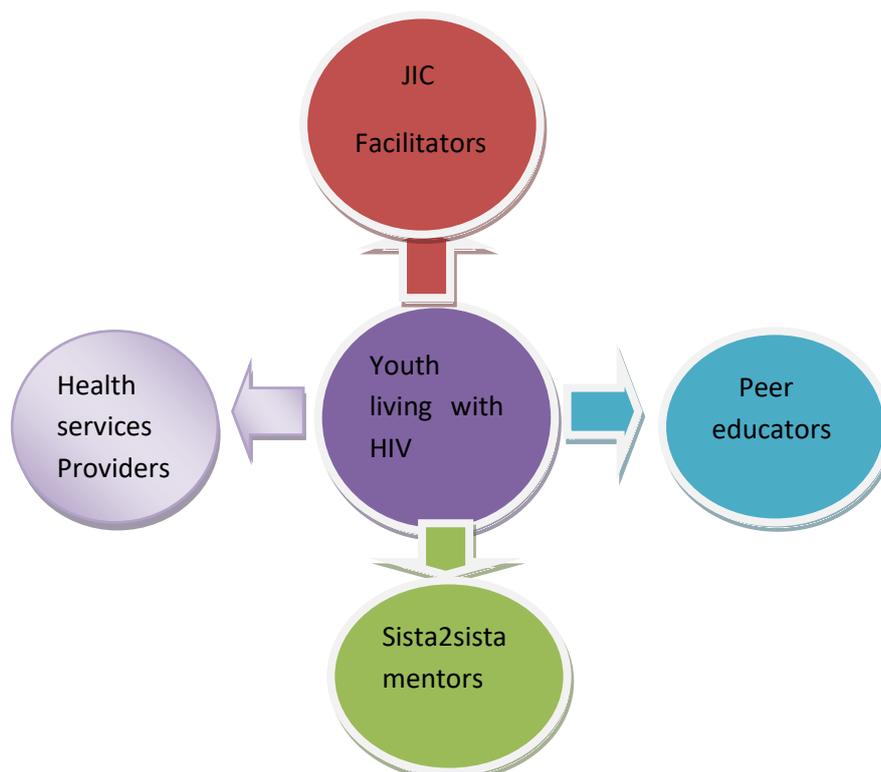
Project: IMP 129

**Title: Strengthening HIV & SRHR
Service Uptake by Youths in
Zimbabwe**

Promotion of SRH and HIV Service Uptake by adolescents living with HIV

The availability of Anti-retrovirus (ARVs) medicines has improved the quality of life of people living with HIV. Issues of adherence and disclosure have been noticed as a great challenge amongst young people living with HIV. The availability of ARVs has had a significant impact on improving the quality of life for those living with the Virus. Most of the young people born with the virus are now progressing into adulthood and hope to start dating. Challenges of disclosure have been noticed at two levels in their life cycle, disclosure by parents/guardians at family level and at dating level. At all the levels if disclosure is not properly handled will lead to poor adherence to treatment.

The project has been designed to address these challenges through training of young people living with HIV as peer counsellors (Champions of Hope). The peer counsellors have been equipped on strategies on how to identify and engage other young people living with HIV as they also have rights to access all SRH services and information. The peer educators double up as peer educators and JIC facilitators. They link up with other volunteers and service providers in an effort to meaningfully involve the other young people living with HIV as summarised in the diagram below.



2. Strengthening positive living among adolescents living with HIV

Adolescent period is marked by biological, psychological and emotional changes influenced by social determinants that impact on health as individuals' transition from childhood to adulthood. Many children infected with HIV at birth have grown into adolescents and young adulthood. In addition to the many biological changes associated with adolescence stage, they are faced by challenges of living with a chronic infection: issues of disclosure of their status and preventing transmission to

sexual partners. This has caused confusion, emotional and social pressures as they grow into adulthood. Many of these do not receive the care and support they need to stay in good health and prevent further re-infection and transmission. Faced with such a condition and limited access to SRH information and uptake of services, adolescents need health services and support tailored to meet their needs. This has been achieved through capacity building of nurses and volunteers that has resulted in increased uptake and access to SRH and HIV information and services by adolescents living with HIV.

Creation of an enabling environment at community and household levels has significantly reduced issues of stigma and discrimination of young people living with HIV. Despite their status, the project is proud that the youth living with HIV who are mature to get married are getting married and establishing their families without discrimination. To date in Mashonaland West 5 have been married without any discrimination. This is a major breakthrough that the project has achieved in terms of stigma reduction and promotion of sexual reproductive rights.

3. Establishment of Support Groups for Adolescents on ART

The Champions of Hope have established 26 support groups with participants ranging between 10 and 15 members. As most of the participants are still in school, the groups meet once a month on a Saturday when they collect their re-supplies of ART medication. During their meetings, they discuss various topics ranging from adherence to treatment, opportunistic infections, and side effects of ART medications, sexual reproductive health and dating. In some communities, parents accompany their children to attend the meetings without them actively getting involved in the discussions. This indicates a higher level of commitment by parents to ensure that their children access information and services.

4. Conclusion

Involving young people living with HIV as peer educators and JIC facilitators reduces stigma and discrimination at community level in terms of access to SRH services and information. The youth living with HIV have realised that they also have rights similar to those that are not infected by the virus. Creation of an enabling environment impacts positively on the survival of the young people living with HIV as they are now free to mix with other young people and access SRH related information and services.

5. Upcoming

- Knowing one's HIV status is the entry point to treatment.

