

Peer education programme among prisoners

Introduction

This concept note describes peer education programme targeting prisoners. Peer education approach has been used by NGOs (non-governmental organisations) implementing HIV prevention programmes among prisoners under support of International HIV/AIDS Alliance in Ukraine for around ten years. Starting from the pilot project in one prison within nearly ten years the programme was scaled up to around 30 penitentiary institutions. Within the time these programmes influenced community mobilisation and developed leadership skills of peer educators participating in the programme. Some of peer educators started working for HIV services NGOs and even established community based organisations.

Presenting the experience of Ukrainian organisations we will explain how the typical project works and what stages it consists of. This concept note is based on the publications developed by International HIV/AIDS Alliance in Ukraine together with the leading Ukrainian organisation working with prisoners “Penitentiary Initiative”: ‘*Step by Step: Prevention work of public organisations in penitentiary institutions in Ukraine*’, Kyiv, Ukraine (available in Russian at: www.aidsalliance.org.ua/cgi-bin/index.cgi?url=/ru/library/our/stepbystep/index.htm) and ‘*Step by Step: Training module on training peer educators among prisoners, 2011*’, Kyiv, Ukraine (available in Russian at www.aidsalliance.org.ua/ru/library/our/2011/module.pdf)

Essential part of peer education programme is the training for peer educators who provide information and prevention commodities such and condoms, lubricants and disinfectants among their peers. In the practice of Ukrainian NGOs implementing HIV prevention programmes among prisoners, peer educators are called **volunteers** (this term will be used for peer educators further on): prisoners who are willing to participate in prevention activities, received training on different topics and passed an exam, and distribute informational materials, commodities, provide consultations and informational counselling to their peers.

Starting the intervention

1. At the initial stage it is important to agree our work with the administration of the penitentiary institution: activities; attendance schedule and names of staff members who are going to visit the prison; premises where trainings and consultations will take place. It is good to sign an official agreement with the institution and include all terms and conditions for cooperation there.
2. When we know what activities are included in the programme, we may think on how many people we need to implement them. Typically a team of two or three people visits the prison at one time to provide the training for prisoners, prison staff, organise HIV awareness events and provide consultations. We can plan different activities for different days of the week. For example, training for prison staff on Monday, training for volunteers and consultations (medical, juridical, psychological, etc.) on Wednesday, organisation of HIV awareness events on Friday.

The staff training includes not only the topics related to HIV prevention, but also the rules of conduct in the prison including ethics, health and safety and training of trainers to work with volunteers in participatory and engaging manner. It might be helpful to develop the rules for the team work and spend some time after each visit to discuss the day, what went well and what could be improved.

As monitoring and evaluation is an essential part of the programme, we need to think on the necessary documentation (for example, the protocols for group consultations, training reports templates, forms to register people who received commodities and consultations) and train our staff how to fill all these forms.

3. If there are several organisations working in one prison, it is good to discuss the planned activities with them to make sure the services are not duplicated and you visit the prison on different days. According to regulations of the penitentiary department, the people attending the prison need to be accompanied by prison staff. It may be problematic for prison administration to organise the visits of many people and it can be time consuming for them when the visits take place very often.

If the organisation provides services for the released, it would be good to establish partnership with the organisations providing services we are not able to offer (for example, shelter, clothes, food, employment, medical assistance, etc.)

Volunteers' movement

Finding volunteers

Ukrainian organisations use four different methods to find volunteers willing to become peer educators: through prisoners who have administration duties such as keeping the barracks in order, etc. (so called "supply managers"), through prison administration, during the lectures for prisoners and via advertisement.

"Supply managers" in Ukraine are usually higher in the hierarchy than the other prisoners, they need to cooperate both with the administration and prisoners and often have good leadership skills. We can invite these people for the first training session covering the aspects of HIV prevention, health, volunteers' movement and the description of activities and services in the frameworks of the project. If you make them interested, they can help to find volunteers.

We can run lectures raising HIV awareness for different groups of prisoners and in the end of the lecture tell about the creation of volunteers' group and sign up those interested to participate in it, then we run a lecture for the other group. This helps to introduce the programme to a big number of prisoners and quickly find volunteers.

It is also possible to ask administration of the prison to find volunteers for you. The NGO does not need to make many efforts with finding volunteers in this case, but the choice of people to participate in the programme is not always voluntarily which affects the main principle of volunteers' movement "the participation is voluntary". That is why Ukrainian organisations rarely use this method.

We can advertise the creation of volunteers' group: develop the text for the advertisement, think on the places where it will be advertised and agree this with prison administration. Together with the informational boards to display the message, we can use radio to advertise creation of the group and the place and time for the first meeting. Though that is an easy way to inform people about future activities, the results can be unpredictable. You may have too many people at the first meeting or nobody will come.

As prison is a closed setting where usually people stay in premises (in Ukraine they are called barracks) in groups, when selecting volunteers we need to make sure we have representatives from all the barracks in our volunteers' group. Finally when we have a list of people willing to become volunteers, it needs to be agreed with the prison administration.

Volunteers' training

The essential part of the programme is volunteers' training to equip them with knowledge and skills needed to peer educators. The series of trainings for a group of volunteers (around 15 people) consisting of 6-8 obligatory sessions may last from 2 to 3 months depending on how often you do volunteers' training. The list of training topics (one topic is one training session) may include:

- volunteers' movement (the aim of this training is to motivate potential volunteers to participate in prevention activities, make people acquainted with each other and NGO staff and introduces the organisation)
- teambuilding (the aim of the session is to unite the group)
- methods and approaches to prevention work in prisons (you may explain how traditional methods work and also ask volunteers to be creative and propose their ideas on what will work best in their setting)
- HIV (the difference between HIV and AIDS, routes of transmission and prevention methods)
- Sexually transmitted infections (STI) and safer sex (symptoms of most common STIs, prevention methods, safer sex negotiation, where to seek an assistance etc.)
- hepatitis (symptoms, prevention methods, treatment, where to seek an assistance)
- tuberculosis (TB) (symptoms, prevention methods, treatment, where to seek an assistance)
- harm reduction (principles of harm reduction, safer injecting, overdose prevention, substitution therapy, where to seek services when released)
- addiction (can cover not only drug addiction, but the addiction from other psychoactive substances)
- Positive prevention (life with HIV, anti-retroviral therapy (ART), healthy life style, etc.)
- communication (communication technics, building negotiation skills)
- peer education (basic counselling)
- social adaptation (plans for the future: what to do after release, what assistance is needed, how and where to receive needed services, employment)
- Mental health (how to deal with stress, relaxation technics, common mental health problems in prison settings and what to do with them).

It is possible to select 6-8 sessions in the beginning. The priority is given to the topics related to volunteers' movement, aspects of HIV, STI prevention and harm reduction. After these sessions the volunteers take an exam consisting of written and oral assignments. The volunteers need to

demonstrate they know the topics well enough and are able to educate their peers. Those who passed an exam can start educating their peers and distribute commodities. If some people have not passed an exam, they may continue education with the next group of volunteers.

It is important to continue educating the group of volunteers even after they passed an exam. During regular meetings with volunteers we may discuss their problems, share success stories and devote some time for the training selecting the topic based on volunteers' preferences. When possible the project staff may attend group sessions run by volunteers to give them the feedback and provide recommendations.

Volunteers' duties

Volunteers' duties involve peer education and distribution of commodities. In Ukrainian projects volunteers distribute condoms, razors, tooth brushes, sometimes soap and tooth paste, disinfectants.

It is difficult to imagine that the volunteers can run training for a big group of prisoners, but we can expect them to pass information they received at our trainings during one-to-one consultations or discussions with mini-groups of peers. When agreed with the prison administration, it may be possible for them to run informational sessions for "newcomers" (those prisoners that have just arrived) to acquaint people with the basic information on HIV prevention and services provided by NGO and volunteers in prison.

When distributing commodities it is important to select those people who need them most. As often the project budget is limited and cannot satisfy the needs of all the prisoners, the volunteers can give the first priority to the most marginalized people. It is good to discuss the selection criteria with the volunteers first.

In addition to that volunteers may promote healthy life style and raise awareness around HIV and STIs by:

- drawing posters
- developing informational materials
- organising sports events (football or basketball matches, etc.)
- organising and participating in HIV awareness events
- running the theatre (writing scripts, making decorations, acting, playing the musical instruments, etc.)
- mentoring for new volunteers

This list is not limited and depends on volunteers' motivation. The practice shows that the volunteers can be very creative and propose interesting activities helping to develop their personal skills and achieve the goal of the programme. For example, the volunteers in Ukraine made toys for the Children center, crafts for charity auctions, boxes for ARV, etc. But we need to remember, that we still work in a closed setting and people in prison have their own duties such as work, study, etc. and be realistic about the amount of work they can do.

Monitoring and evaluation

We remember that our volunteers are not obliged to do what we tell them, they take up the role of peer educator voluntarily and we can rather motivate them to help us, not to force. But we need to make sure peer education is effective and commodities are received by people who need them.

There are three main things we need to know about volunteers' work:

1. Do the volunteers have adequate knowledge and skills to educate their peers?
2. Do the volunteers conduct information sessions and provide counselling to their peers?
3. Do the volunteers distribute condoms, lubricants, disinfectants, informational materials, etc. to those who need them?

The first question can be answered during trainings we conduct for volunteers. When starting the training we may ask questions on information they learnt previously or propose short written assignments. When the topic already discussed previously arises during the training, we may ask the volunteers to explain the subject. The other option is to conduct "mock consultations" using role plays when the volunteers practice the consultation in training conditions. The feedback on the consultations can be provided by facilitators and peers. We can have special sessions to evaluate volunteers' knowledge in an engaging way. For example to organise quizzes and competitions.

In order to get information on the number of people served we can ask volunteers to fill in the reporting forms (templates may consist of the unique client's code, consultations provided, types and the number of commodities distributed). When we do not have enough time to deal with the distribution of commodities, we can have one volunteer responsible for equal distribution of commodities among all other volunteers. This person can write up a small report on the number of commodities given to each volunteer.

One Ukrainian organisation created volunteers' diaries distributed among them on a monthly basis. They contain interesting information, personality tests, stories and tasks for volunteers. The reporting template can be a part of the diary as well. After the diaries are filled in, they are given to NGO staff to read and provide their written comments. After writing the feedback the NGO staff gives the diaries back to volunteers. They serve not only as reporting forms, but also as a good mean of communication with volunteers.

We can discuss the problems volunteers confront with during regular group meetings. We can speak about difficult questions they did not find an answer to and interesting cases they had.

In order to evaluate the programme, Ukrainian organisations do surveys in the beginning and in the end of the project to see how knowledge and behaviour of prisoners and prison's staff has changed. When survey results show the areas that need improvement (for example, the prisoners do not know that HIV cannot be transmitted via mosquito bite), the changes are made in the training programme. We can also ask about the provision of services and in case there is evidence the services are not provided in full we can think how this can be addressed and initiate the changes in the programme.

Some advice on work with the group of volunteers based on the experience of Ukrainian organisations

1. Accept all people who want to become a volunteer.
2. Only the group decides if someone needs to be excluded.
3. All people in the group should be equal for you despite the prison hierarchy.
4. It is essential to make a team out of group of volunteers. When the team works well, volunteers can do a lot together.
5. Establish group rituals. For example, special exercises in the beginning of each meeting to know each other better; birthdays and holidays celebration. This helps to build the team.
6. From time to time give group home tasks.
7. Initiate division of responsibilities among group members and make sure people adhere to them.
8. Follow the ethical principles: do not use prison slang; call people using their names, not the nicknames; serve as a positive role model for them; do not promise what you cannot do; do not bring anything except of materials needed for the training and prevention activities; respect the group and group members.

Conclusions

- When starting the intervention, agree with the administration of the penitentiary institution on the future activities, select and train staff members to implement the project and build up partnership with other organisations working in this prison and providing services to people after their release.
- Find volunteers willing to become peer educators using one or several methods: through “supply managers”, prison administration, during the lectures for prisoners and via advertisements.
- Select 6-8 obligatory sessions for the volunteers, train them during 2-3 months and arrange an exam for them. After the exam the volunteers may start educating their peers and distribute commodities. Provide further support and training after that.
- Evaluate the work of the group and the project in general and initiate changes if something goes wrong.
- Listen to the volunteers when they propose their ideas and support their initiatives.
- Try to build a team out of group and respect the team and group members.



Theatre performance in prison. Photo by Natalya Kravchuk for International HIV/AIDS Alliance in Ukraine.

