Leading the way: PSN Community Leadership Program kicks off in Hanoi

It was a chilly start to the PSN Community Leadership Program as Hanoi struggled to escape winter’s clutches. However, with the arrival of eleven enthusiastic young men, eager to meet one another, it soon warmed. The leadership program aims to enhance the skill set of young MSM and transgender leaders in the Greater Mekong Subregion and increase the number of young MSM and TG engaged at the national level, in their respective countries. Participants were recruited from countries of the GMS and applications were open to MSM and TG aged 30 and under. Eight candidates were selected to participate in the two-year program which will see them paired with mentors, attend training workshops and English classes, implement field projects with the technical working groups, but most importantly share, learn from and support each other. The program is possible through the support of USAID and FHI.

(Continued on page 4)
Understanding male street youth who sell sex in Vietnam

Street youth, or young people between 15 to 24 years of age who live on the streets without family care or connections are among the most resilient - and most vulnerable - people in Vietnam.

To fill in gaps in our knowledge about the young men who sell sex on the streets of Ho Chi Minh City, and learn how best to address their needs, I conducted interviews with 32 male street youth who sell sex, aged between 15 and 24. While the findings do not reflect all male street youth who sell sex in Vietnam, they provide some information about a group of highly vulnerable young people.

Pathway to sex work: Most of the young men were between 18 and 21 years old and had migrated to the city without family connections. They had been selling sex on the streets for several years. Younger men appeared to capitalize on their youth in the frequency of selling sex to clients or were in higher demand and therefore potentially at higher risk for HIV.

Like other street youth, they do not have identification papers. This limits their ability to access safe shelter, stable jobs or social services. Most believed that they have no choice other than selling sex because they have low education and no identity papers.

Sexual Orientation: Nearly all of the young men identified as heterosexual. Many have girlfriends. They do not self-identify as MSM and did not perceive themselves as ‘professional’ sex workers. This may be partly why they had not been reached by outreach workers.

Perceptions of selling sex and stigma: They usually try to keep their work secret from other street youth peers. Although they would not be isolated or discriminated against by other street youth if their friends knew, selling sex to MSM is not a respected type of work among street youth; it is seen as ‘womanly’.

Health and HIV risk: The young men who participated in the study described high risk practices including multiple sexual clients per week and low condom use. Interviews revealed limited awareness about HIV and STIs. Most had low HIV risk perception and paid little attention to HIV prevention because they believed that HIV is transmitted through heterosexual sex. Others believed that oral sex and ejaculating outside of the body could provide protection. The young men said that they leave the decision about whether or not to use condoms and lubricant up to the clients. They felt that as street youth, they do not have the right to decide.

Recommendations: Male street youth who sell sex need tailored sexual and reproductive health and HIV prevention education and services as well as general support to access identification papers, employment and social services like all street youth.

Mr. Le Quang Nguyen, Save the Children Vietnam with support from Dr. Simon Baker & Mr. Scott McGill, Save the Children.

The study was conducted for a PEPFAR/USAID through Pact supported HIV prevention program for street youth in Vietnam.

One of the young men who received health care after participating in the interviews

Photo: Lisa Sherburne
**REMINDER**

MSM Initiative Community Awards: Asia and the Pacific

amfAR, The Foundation for AIDS Research, is pleased to announce new funding for innovative projects that address HIV/AIDS among gay men, other men who have sex with men (MSM), and transgender individuals in the Asia-Pacific region. Grassroots organizations led by or closely linked to MSM/LGBT communities in low- and middle-income countries in the Asia-Pacific region are encouraged to submit relevant proposals. Funds for this round of awards are made available through the generous support of the ViiV Healthcare Positive Action and Aids Fonds.

**Application Deadline: 4 May 2011, 5:00 p.m. in New York City, USA (GMT/UTC 21:00)**

Visit [www.amfAR.org/grants](http://www.amfAR.org/grants) for forms, instructions and detailed information about this opportunity.

**Available Funding:**
Each organization may apply for an award of up to $20,000 USD to support project-related costs for up to 12 months. Only one application may be submitted per organization. Proposals for general operating support will not be considered.

**Areas of Interest:**
This request for proposals (RFP) solicits proposals for innovative HIV/AIDS-related, community-led projects that address HIV/AIDS among gay men, other MSM and/or transgender individuals. Visit [www.amfAR.org/grants](http://www.amfAR.org/grants) for detailed information.

**Who is Eligible to Apply?**
Community-based organizations closely linked to MSM/LGBT communities located in low- and middle-income countries in the Asia-Pacific region with annual budgets less than $1 million (USD).

**Spread the Word!** Please forward this announcement to anyone you know who may be interested in this opportunity.
For more information about the MSM Initiative visit [www.amfAR.org/msm](http://www.amfAR.org/msm)

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ICAAP10 Update

The International Advisory Committee, for ICAAP10, has extended the deadline for abstract submissions to ICAAP10 to 10th May 2011. A meeting will be held from 29 May - 2 June 2011 in Busan to review and select abstracts, symposia and skills building workshops as well as the scholarship applications. Please submit your abstracts soon! For more information, visit [www.icaap10.org](http://www.icaap10.org)

The pre-congress Community Forum will be 24-26 Aug 2011

**Radiation Threat:** Some people may have concerns about the level of radiation that may have travelled to Republic of Korea because of its proximity to Japan. The Korea Meteorological Administration stated recently that the nuclear radiation incident in Japan is unlikely to pose a serious risk to the Republic of Korea.

**Milestones:** It has been 30 years since AIDS was identified. The first ICAAP happened 20 years ago and resulted in the birth of ASAP, the AIDS Society of Asia and the Pacific. This year the 10th anniversary of the 7-Sisters Coalition and the UN General Assembly Special Session on AIDS (UNGASS). Please join us in Busan as we commemorate these significant milestones and anniversaries. We thank you again for your support and look forward to your participation in ICAAP10!

**Zahid Hussein, President, ASAP**
**Myung-Hwan Cho, Chair, ICAAP10 LOC**
**JVR Prasada Rao, Special Advisor to Executive Director, UNAIDS**
**Vince Crisostomo, International Community Chair, ICAAP10**
The first workshop, on “Understanding Research”, provided an opportunity for participants to get to know one another as well as learn about different research methods, ethical issues in research and the importance of community involvement in research. Participants also met with researchers, community workers and other staff at various site visits which included Vietnamese Community Mobilization Center for HIV/AIDS Control (VICOMC), Centre for Creative Initiatives in Health Promotion (CCIHP), Bach Mai Hospital, Centre for Community Health Promotion (CHP), Light House DiC and GoGo Sauna. Support was provided by UNAIDS Vietnam and FHI Vietnam for 4 local participants to attend this workshop. The workshop was facilitated by Vietnam-based researchers; Dr Donn Colby, Dr Hoang Tu Anh, Dr James McMahon and Dr Do Duy Cuong.

The next workshop, on HIV Interventions and Evaluation, will be held in Bangkok in June.
...the best thing about the leadership program is bringing potential community leaders [together] from different countries and developing their skills and knowledge so that they can become more active and helpful in supporting MSM community. Besides, in this way, PSN can create a support network for MSM and TG in the Greater Mekong Subregion, which increases the power of “We”.

In joining the leadership program, I feel more responsible towards my community, especially in preventing HIV infection and transmission among MSM. Actually, I have only known about the Vietnam HIV Technical Working Group (TWG) for a short time but by taking part in the leadership program, I have more chances of working with the TWG and starting a new way for my life. Mr Ngoc, from FHI, who encouraged me to apply and Dr Thien from Safe Living, who will be my mentor, are the people whom I consider my role models.

Regarding the first workshop in Hanoi the two best presents I received from it are good friends and useful knowledge. Anan, Bunthorn, Burlesque, Bao Chao, Xiao Chun, Quan and Wii are not only lovely friends but also good examples for me to follow. They’re like a motivating power urging me more to do my best in activities supporting the MSM and TG community. Beside the friends, I no longer feel lonely in this diverse world.

Qualitative research and ethical issues were the most impressive content for me. I learnt statistical research methodologies at university, but at that time, basic concepts of quantitative and qualitative research were very strange to me. Now, they have become clearer.

Through the workshop, I understand how to conduct qualitative research without committing ethics violations. I realized that results of qualitative research are not only the answers, the solutions, but also the chance of expressing participants’ thoughts and feelings, whereby they can feel stronger and better. The most important thing is participants’ voluntary agreement, not researchers’ expectation.

(Continued on page 6)
Quan

It was not the first time I had been in Hanoi but this time I was eager to meet everyone; Kylie, Midnight and new friends from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, China and Vietnam, even Hoàng Việt (Noel) as we only knew each other for 2 weeks before the first training in Hanoi. Finally we meet each other; I was so excited and thrilled. At that time I knew that we would be a great team for social activities and to do work for MSM communities.

(Continued on page 7)
During the four days of training I learnt a great deal of about research; both quantitative and qualitative research. The lectures and activities helped me understand more clearly. I appreciated the field trip to different places in Hanoi; Bach Mai Hospital (Department of Infectious Diseases), CCIIHP, VICOMC (Green Hope), Light House and Gogo sauna. We had a lot of questions to help understand more about different models in different countries, challenges in doing research and the HIV/AIDS prevention interventions.

Special thanks to PSN, Dr Donn, Dr Tu Anh, James, local organizations in Hanoi and all of my sweeties… give me a chance to meet to learn new and great knowledge and be close together.

Xiaochun

Before I applied for leadership program I thought that I did not have a chance of becoming a successful candidate. [In the past] it would be extremely difficult to be able to take part in a training course abroad but now, having finished the first training workshop in Hanoi, and reflecting back I have found myself more and more confident.

Firstly, I would like to express my profound gratitude to Yunnan Technical Working Group because they encouraged me to apply for this program. When I found out we were going to learn about qualitative and quantitative research I thought it would be very difficult for me; I'm not very good at math and I did not graduate from a university of science and technology. So, before I went to Hanoi I looked for some materials on this workshop topic. Eventually, I feel I will be able to do some simple research and I now know how to respect interviewees involved in the research and maintain their cooperation. [The information learnt] is very useful to me. I liked the case studies [and discussion], because through practical examples we can understand the research better; not only the knowledge but also how the knowledge can be applied to practice. I like the sense of freedom in this learning; everyone had the right to express his point of view, which helped me understand about different people's values.

The next workshop will be about HIV interventions which I think is very important in our community work. I hope that I will be able to obtain a great deal of useful knowledge and ideas to apply directly to my work in my group.

From the beginning, I did feel very nervous, but I considered it as another challenge for me and it's also a chance for me to realize my dreams and discover and develop all of my potential. Thanks to PSN, I have made new and interesting friends as well as gained a great deal of useful knowledge and information.

Burlesque

I still recall the excitement of expecting everyone in Hanoi after learning the first workshop would be held in Vietnam. I was proud, and anxious, because I would be able to introduce my fellows to my beautiful hometown city. Having already met some participants in the program at previous regional youth consultations, working with them again in this training course would be extremely interesting. I was so thrilled to finally meet everybody in the hotel on the first night and talk to break the ice. Everyone has been so friendly and helpful to each other, which I appreciate the most. We have become a new family who I can share with and help. At the end of each day, we had great times hanging out; to relax but also to get to know each other better. PSN has done a great job to get us together and help us not merely with useful information, knowledge and skills but creating friendships.

In terms of the workshop, I have learnt a great deal of knowledge on doing research, which is new and stimulating to me. Dr Tu Anh with qualitative research and Dr Donn with quantitative research had us totally spellbound during their lectures with all the intriguing scientific knowledge about these two different types of research. They also gave us a chance to brainstorm during the presentations and ask questions. Practical case studies have enabled me to obtain a more comprehensive understanding in this field of study. The

(Continued on page 8)
The most interesting thing I learnt during the workshop was the presentation on ethics in research by Dr. James. It fascinated me because I had never thought of the necessity of ethical assurance when carrying out research. Personally, this part of the workshop was a surprise and sheer joy. Another thing I really appreciated and loved was the cozy and friendly atmosphere that the professors created during the sessions. We have been fully supported and given the opportunity to express our ideas and point of view. We have been so grateful for all professors' patience and helpfulness; they have done a great job to make all the information and knowledge relevant to HIV/AIDS interventions and prevention among MSM and TG. They also showed us methods that we could apply to what we do in the community and at national and regional levels later on.

Anan

The first workshop “Understanding Research” will be counted as one of the most memorable moments of this year, due to the opportunity to get to know my PSN fellows coming from different countries in the Greater Mekong Sub-region. All of them are extremely impressive, skillful and energetic, which inspires me to work more vigorously to accomplish my professional goals. In addition, it was a great pleasure to meet the facilitators of the PSN Leadership Training who were there at the workshop to guide and support us throughout the workshop; without them, I am certain that the workshop would not have been so fruitful and productive. It was also a privilege to get to know all the lecturers who delivered the valuable knowledge and practical information to all the PSN leadership fellows.

During the workshop, I gained knowledge on research terminology and methodology, ethical issues, writing research findings and statistics. I have been involved in both qualitative and quantitative research, in the past, but I was not aware of several significant elements of research theory. For instance, a quote from Dr. Tu Anh has remained in my mind and will remain with me if I undertake research in the future: “Qualitative analysis mostly depends on the researcher’s perspective and interpretation; judge from your eyes not from your mind. Truth is just subjective; there is more than one truth [in research].”

Surprisingly, I have gained tremendously from the workshop than I thought I would as I was previously involved in research with Burnet Institute in Laos. I am grateful for the opportunity given by PSN. From the first day I learnt that I was one of the successful candidates, I knew that the door had opened for me to do some groundbreaking things with the MSM and TG community in Lao PDR. My excitement and rapturous feelings haven’t declined but increase day by day because this is a vital step in becoming a future leader of MSM and TG in my country and creating a brighter image for my community as well.
Joint efforts to scale up male sexual health interventions in Ho Chi Minh City

Started in 2004, MSM intervention programs in HCMC still show modest coverage, including low consistent use of condoms (24% and 21% with male clients and consensual partners respectively) and low HIV Testing and Counseling (HTC) and STI uptake (below 20% for both). Most of HTC and STI referrals are made through community peer outreach.

In this regard, HCMC AIDS Prevention Committee (PAC) organized the city-wide strategic advocacy workshop on March 25, 2011 with the participation of 150 representatives from local authorities, partners working on HIV/AIDS and MSM community. The purpose of the workshop, with funding support from PEPFAR through USAID and CDC and technical support by their partners in Vietnam (UNAIDS, FHI and PACT), was to call for the consensus and support of local government, mass organizations, public security [provincial department for social evils control] and mass media in the ongoing implementation of HIV/AIDS prevention intervention programs among MSM in HCMC.

These government entities have been identified as key drivers to success of the programs in terms of stigma and discrimination reduction, enhancing the availability of condoms, lubricants and BCC materials at entertainment establishments (EE), increasing access to and use of HTC/STI static and mobile services among the most-at-risk-population (MARP), particularly the hidden and hard-to-reach MSM unreached by traditional community peer outreach.

The talk show session, featuring Nguyen Anh Thuan - director of a HCMC-based social business and Thai Binh - college lecturer was drawing large attention from local governments and media on heated issues related to HIV/AIDS and MSM in Vietnam. The two guests who are openly gay were invited to share their experience about their personal life, social stigma and discrimination against gay community, as well as recommendations for the current MSM intervention programs in HCMC.

In some “sensitive” EE like sauna and massage parlors, condoms and lubricants, if found by police, are occasionally considered as a sign of illegal sexual acts, even prostitution. That is why some EE owners hesitate to cooperate with the intervention programs and PAC as they fear having problems with the government. This conservative social mindset has served as huge barrier for MARPs access to prevention commodities and services. “We would like the government and every single individual in the society to see condoms as normal consumer products like chewing gum or shampoo”, said Thai Binh. “Don’t be surprised if you see them [condoms] in the toilets in bars, discos, hotels or saunas. If we can do that, we can already contribute to the reduction of HIV prevalence among MSM”.

Social stigma and discrimination was strongly addressed by the presenters and two guests. “We would like the society and media to pay attention to what we have tirelessly been doing and contributing to the society, rather than allegedly criticizing the way we dress and what our gender identities are”, emphasized Thuan.

It was agreed among participants that it is vital to scale up MSM interventions in HCMC. Along with that, behavior change communication and provision of services should be more innovative to cater to diverse sub-groups of MSM, particularly male sex workers and MSM who inject and use drugs. In addition, it is hard to deny the very important role of different stakeholders, especially local government, public security and mass media in the whole process of implementing intervention activities. The advocacy workshop has also paved the way for PAC to carry out its 100% Condom Use Program in the coming time where condoms and lubricants are made available and compulsory at all EE in the city.

Nguyen Anh Ngoc
Vietnam Focal Point for PSN

"Don’t be surprised if you see them [condoms] in the toilets in bars, discos, hotels or saunas. If we can do that, we can already contribute to the reduction of HIV prevalence among MSM"
Call for articles Volume 9
July - September 2011

PSN Newsletter is a quarterly publication. The next issue will be out on July 2011. We would like to hear about issues affecting your MSM and transgender communities. Articles of up to 500 words, and photos, can be submitted to the PSN Communication Officer by Monday 20th June 2011.

email: kylie.johnston@treatasia.org

Calendar

May

4    Deadline: MSM Initiative Community Awards Asia and the Pacific, amfAR
www.amfar.org/grants/

10   Abstract submission closes ICAAP 10
Busan, Republic of Korea
www.icaap10.org

June

11-13 1st International HIV Social Science and Humanities Conference
Durban, South Africa
www.iaohss.org

July

11-22 6th Regional workshop on “Monitoring and evaluation of HIV/AIDS programs”
Mahidol University, Bangkok, Thailand
www.ipsr.mahidol.ac.th/ipsr/

17-20 6th IAS Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention (IAS 2011)
Rome, Italy
www.ias2011.org

Note: All dates are correct at time of publication