



KLASS CONDUCTS FIRST TAMIL EMPOWERMENT WORKSHOP

Indian community strengthened to develop culturally inclusive HIV responses

The Kuala Lumpur AIDS Support Service Society (KLASS), a partner organisation of the Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC), conducted its first Empowerment Workshop exclusively for Tamil-speaking people living with HIV. Supported by the Ministry of Health, the two-day programme was held from 1 to 3 July at a beach resort in Port Dickson with the aim to empower 34 participants with the knowledge, skills and tools to face the challenges of living with HIV.

The Workshop was launched by MAC President, YBhg Tan Sri Mohd Zaman Khan and witnessed by Red Ribbon Celebrity Supporters, Utthaya and Aanantha of THR Ragaa radio, participants and their families. MAC hoped that this programme would open doors to reach out to the Indian community, which had long been neglected and overlooked in the response to HIV, to mitigate the negative impact of HIV and formulate inclusive HIV responses that would address the specific needs of this culturally-rich ethnic community.

Expert and trained facilitators presented topics on HIV knowledge, prevention, treatment and care; health and nutrition; stigma and discrimination; as well as the legal rights of people living with HIV (PLHIV). Motivational team building activities fostered closer ties within the diverse group which comprised 18 men and 16 women, who were mostly employed and educated, with the exception of a few homemakers.

Over the course of the programme, participants discovered the power in numbers and by the end of the two days they had collectively formulated a framework to mobilise an active and systematic network amongst them and formed a bona fide Tamil PLHIV Support Group. Another mobilisation plan for the near future was the setting up of a PLHIV help or care centre where those in need of assistance, support or advice would be able to receive it directly from their peers. Participants also aimed to initiate a volunteer training programme to build the capacity of their resources to effectively communicate about HIV at the grassroots level especially.



MAC ADVOCATES FOR ENABLING ENVIRONMENT IN HARM REDUCTION WITH PDRM



The Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC), in collaboration with the Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM), organised a seminar, “Enabling Environment in Harm Reduction through Advocacy”, for senior officers of the police force and the National Anti-Drug Agency (AADK), held from 26 to 27 July 2011 at the Kuala Lumpur International Hotel. The seminar was launched by PDRM Director of Narcotic Crime Investigation Department, YDH Datuk Noor Rashid Bin Ibrahim. He was joined by MAC President, YBhg Tan Sri Zaman Khan, Malaysian AIDS Foundation Chairman, Professor Dr Adeeba Kamarulzaman, MAC Executive Director Roswati Ghani, and officials from government ministries and agencies.

The purpose of this seminar was to reduce discrimination and marginalisation of injecting drug users (IDUs); to strengthen and advance advocacy efforts with the relevant law enforcement agencies; and to develop structural interventions towards creating an enabling environment for Harm Reduction programmes, including a review of existing policies. Over 30 senior officers from PDRM and AADK attended the two-day affair, who also partook in an in-depth discussion on ways to create an enabling legal environment in Harm Reduction in order to reduce the risks of and vulnerabilities associated with HIV transmission amongst IDUs.

This stimulating seminar featured an esteemed panel of speakers comprising academicians, medical experts and civil society advocates in the field of Harm Reduction and drug policies. Over the course of the seminar, Tan Sri Zaman Khan, Professor Dr Adeeba and officials from the Ministry of Health, PDRM as well as Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) presented papers on related issues.

It is hoped that the two-day seminar would pave the way for not only more concerted efforts by government agencies and civil society, but also greater adoption of evidence-informed public health approaches, such as the Harm Reduction, that respect, protect and fulfill the rights of IDUs to access healthcare services without fear of discrimination.