

The Problem –

The AIDS epidemic started in Paraguaçu Paulista in 1986; the first case was a hemophilic boy, and serious problems of discrimination and attempts to exclude the patient's right to attend school were identified. In 1988 the first deaths occurred. In 1990, 17 deaths were reported; they occurred mainly among young people of both sexes who were intravenous drug users. There is record of transfusional infections and many cases of vertical transmission. Nowadays, the disease happens in heterosexual relations without the use of condoms, including the elderly. There has been an inversion of the relation masculine/feminine and the disease is now more constant among the poor.

It was very difficult to negotiate the implementation of a health policy directed to prevention and education aimed at controlling STD/AIDS in a highly biased region. In partnership with the State Secretary of Health through the State Adolescent Program and CRT – Center of Reference in Training - the Agreement n. 345/93 was signed to develop a Project of Prevention and Control of STD/AIDS in the city. Due to constant altering of local government, and rotating of human resources, it was not possible to establish continuity in the actions needed for fighting the epidemic. This problem is now being reversed due to the existence of permanent actions.

In 1997 the service of assistance of the CS II (Center of Health II) was transformed into SAE (Service of Specialized Assistance). It now holds a multidisciplinary team to attend patients, provide medication, and collect every exam necessary to treatment and follow up. Moreover, the Brazilian National Program of STD/AIDS is the best in the world for its actions are directed in partnership with AIDS patients, HIV positive, and other users of the program. With such measurements it is possible to establish an effective negotiation table with the inclusion of authorities and decisionmakers, as well as to improve the network of assistance and prevention. Following this principle, AIDS patients and HIV positive receiving treatment in Paraguaçu, with collaboration of non-governmental organizations of neighboring cities, got together and founded the Organized Committee for Support and Prevention of Aids – COAPA on April 14, 2003. COAPA was considered of public utility by the City Ordinance n. 2.801/2003.

In 2003, the number of inhabitants in Paraguaçu Paulista was 41,377; of this population, 8,500 are adolescents between ages of 10 and 19 (SEADE). The situation of social vulnerability is high: 20,764 people (52,4% of the total) - (IBGE). It is also of significant concern the incidence of pregnancy in women under 20 years of age (33%) (SINASC, 2003), which requires intra- and inter-sectorial intervention regarding prevention.

Due to its geographic location, Paraguaçu is surrounded by roads that are direct routes to the Brazilian State of Mato Grosso; therefore, being situated right in the middle of the drug trafficking route. Epidemiological data shows the city suffers with high incidence of unsafe and improper use of drugs. This factor significantly increases the number of thefts, robberies, assaults and cases of violent deaths.

The regular implementation in the Brazilian public health system of anti-retroviral treatment in 1996 improved the life expectancy of the patients, increasing the social demand related to unemployment. Many patients are facing serious financial difficulties, living under unacceptable conditions. In order to minimize the impact of such social problems, COAPA asked the city

government for funds to pay the utilities of a building where it operates; COAPA has also recently managed to get funds from the local government to buy a machine to produce disposable diapers. The production of the diapers is a non-profit cooperative effort as prescribed in the Brazilian Plan of Goals and Actions (PAM); the money from the sales of the production is to be used to fund the fronts of the project described below, as well as to be shared among the people who work in the diapers production process in order to improve their limited family income, therefore, improving the quality of their lives.

The Project –

As a way to provide support to AIDS patients, HIV positive and their family members, as well as to develop permanent preventive actions to fight AIDS by means of disseminating modern and scientific concepts for fighting the AIDS epidemic, COAPA has implemented in partnership with the Service of Specialized Assistance – SAE –, a project of Damage Reduction Workshops.

The workshops are set to be carried out monthly, in a single day, with a total of 8 hours. The topics are to be presented in a Power Point format; after each topic, young participants are divided into 5 groups, in which various activities are carried out to help participants assimilate and memorize the acquired knowledge. Each group is supervised by 02 monitors who are previously selected amongst youngsters with leadership capacity, and AIDS patients who are members of the NGO.

With such methodology, we have been able to reach, so far, a population of 956 people. From a general standpoint, the prevention actions have been quite successful; they have been carried out every time funds and donations are acquired. We have progressed in developing partnerships with other institutions; we are in constant evaluation to improve and diffuse knowledge to other sectors.

The permanent contact with youngsters and adolescents in the city – be it by providing assistance or preventive efforts – has demonstrated the need for the establishment of a proper and specific place to where idle, unmotivated and improperly oriented youngsters can come to make good use of their time. Therefore, with the intention of combining efforts, sharing responsibilities and acquired knowledge, COAPA has decided to invest in a broader partnership, in order to search for ways to minimize the unfortunate reality of these people.

Implementing effective actions of primordial prevention help youngsters acquire critical judgment that enables them to opt for factors of protection instead of factors of risk in order to create a more equal society. Therefore, our goal is to establish a communitarian partnership with the aim of developing integrated actions aimed at improving quality of life for AIDS patients, HIV positive, and youngsters in order to create an environment with orientation and follow-up, canalizing the creative and idle energy of this group of people that demonstrate serious social problems, and end up using drugs and resorting to criminal activities to escape the cruel reality of lack of jobs and social misery. Moreover, for the abovementioned reasons, there is urgent need for increasing the number of actions with greater emphasis on the unsafe and improper use of drugs.

The present Project “Getting on With Life” is aimed at creating an autonomous place where actions to educate the community about STD/AIDS prevention, improve the quality of the lives of AIDS patients, HIV positive and their family members, as well as of young people who face unemployment and discrimination by an uninformed and biased community can be hosted and developed. It is aimed at enabling the civil society and its members to acquire freedom from want and fear while exercising democratic principles. The project will enable this group of people at risk to engage in social work in broad partnership with governmental and non-governmental institutions. Therefore, its main purpose is the creation of a space where ideals of citizenship are exercised in democratic and creative ways, providing the youth with the opportunity to exercise their citizenship, revindicate the necessary means for this aim, at the same time as they participate in the construction and implementation of the democratic process.

The project is divided into 4 separate, though interconnected and equally important, fronts: 1) Damage Reduction Workshops; 2) Labortherapy, which enables participants to work with handcrafts while interacting with other people, therefore, gaining the psychosocial support necessary to cope with the trauma of unemployment and discrimination; 3) Income generating activity through the production and sales of disposable diapers; 4) Preventive Activities during Celebration days.

Benefits to the Community –

Since the work of prevention will be permanent through “Damage Reduction Workshops”, motivating young people to participate actively in the combat of STD/HIV/AIDS and abusive use of drugs, it shall be of excellent social and pedagogical value. It will work as a connection between family and community, transferring the knowledge acquired in the program to the community, therefore, raising interest in safe sex with the use of condoms, all of which contributes to promoting greater effectiveness in the results. The main objective of the program is to result in a change of behavior, with reduction of contamination and incidence of unwanted pregnancy.

With the diffusion of modern and scientific concepts about the importance of safe sex as means of avoiding STD/AIDS transmission, valuing and motivating prevention, better quality of life and social relations shall be established, eliminating prejudice, valuing group activities, respect, peaceful living and fraternity for the community. Moreover, the activities during “Celebration Dates” such as “December 1st – World AIDS Day” among others, in consonance with social movements for prevention, shall be a guarantee of actions following universal standards.

Social living in a working environment has been proved to improve self-esteem and shall promote improvement in the quality of life of AIDS patients, HIV positive, and their family members.

From what has been described, we submit the present matching grants project, in order to get funds to create a specific place with material resources for young leaders to act and motivate communitarian actions of disease prevention, cultural production such as theater activities and production of handcrafts, recycling paper for the production of artcrafts of paper maché, cards, folders, among other things.

Funding for this project is needed so that we can get autonomy to continue carrying on our work, respecting the partnerships and areas of work of each participating institution.

After funds have been fully granted and applied in temporarily paying for the rent, purchasing the material resources needed, as well as providing contribution for the short term trainers to be hired in the first 9 workshops, we expect the project to be self-sufficient after 1 year.

As abovementioned, the production of disposable diapers will be conducted through a cooperative effort, and the sale of the produced material shall be applied to fund the other three fronts of the present project before it is divided among the members of the workforce in order to help the family income and promote better conditions of life.

Since the machine to manufacture disposable diapers was acquired, a contract for sale of the production (1,900 diapers/months) has already been signed with the public nursing home in the city. An additional agreement has been signed with the local government for a single purchase of 720 diapers to be donated by the city government to poor mothers.

Moreover, once the two finalizing machines are bought, COAPA will be able to sign a new contract with the city government to produce and sell about 3,500 diapers monthly.

With time and the improvement of production and consume, along with the supervision and advise of the Rotary Club of Paraguaçu Paulista, there is great likelihood that the market for the diapers will expand, and COAPA will be able to take responsibility for the expenses of rent, as well as for the purchase of inputs and raw materials for diapers production, labortherapy and workshops. With the purchase of the two new finalizing machines, the production and sales of diapers is expected to become self-sufficient and reach autonomy in the next 12 months.