



Championing healthy relationships
and sexual wellbeing

Salt and Light

November 2017

Welcome to the latest edition of Salt and Light

Your donations bring light and hope to the some of the most vulnerable in society. The stories in this issue of Salt and Light illustrate some of the projects which your help makes possible.

Amongst those benefitting from your support are young men in prison in Belarus; AIDS orphans and other vulnerable children in rural Nigeria; and, in the UK, young people struggling with mental health disorders, which make them susceptible to coercion, bullying and grooming.

On their behalf - thank you!

No more shame

ACET DRC's comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education work challenges the taboo that stops people talking about puberty, sex and relationships, and fights the erroneous cultural beliefs that are held about sex and sexual health.

Esther tells her story: "Before I came into contact with ACET DRC, I was ashamed to talk to adults. I had things I could not tell Mum, or Dad.

At the ACET DRC girls' club, the life education teacher talked to us about our bodies, respect for life, and relationships. I now understand why I have menstruation every month and how to manage it. I also help my friends because many parents do not talk about these things to their children. It's taboo here to talk about such things.

One day my teacher asked my classmate to go to the blackboard but when my friend got up, I noticed that her skirt was stained with blood. I asked her to answer without going to the board.

My friend had never heard of menstruation and was ashamed to talk to her parents. After this event, our class teacher sent all the girls in the class to participate in the ACET DRC girls' club.

Now I tell my parents the things that I learn. I am no longer ashamed."



13 year old Esther

Bringing hope to those in despair

Thanks to your support, each month around a 1000 patients access the medical care services provided by Nireekshana ACET. The community based medical clinic serves people living in the slums of Hyderabad, India. People who are vulnerable to HIV and other diseases exacerbated by poverty.

Nireekshana focuses on holistic care including HIV counselling, prevention and treatment of opportunistic infections, education, support for the most vulnerable, such as AIDS widows, and a sustained effort on preventing mother to child transmission of HIV. Their work is reflected in real life stories of transformation.

Recently, a pregnant woman and her husband came to the clinic, after both testing positive for HIV at a local government hospital. At the hospital, they were told that there was no hope for them or their unborn child. Receiving this tragic news was devastating for the couple: they decided that the best course of action was to



Nireekshana works to prevent the transmission of HIV from mother to child

commit suicide and save themselves, and their child, from years of pain to come.

Thankfully, the couple were convinced by a friend to visit Nireekshana. Reluctantly, they went along but it was here that they discovered that there was hope. With the support of the counsellors, doctors and pharmacists, the couple saw light at the end of a very dark tunnel. With Nireekshana's support, medication and nutritional supplements, the couple learnt that, not only could their child be born without HIV, it was possible for the whole family to live healthy, happy and fulfilling lives.

Training in Nigeria

ACET UK CEO, Sarah Smith, recently returned from Nigeria where she delivered training to our ACET Nigeria colleagues and visited some of their projects. Here she gives a report on the training.

"During our international leaders' gathering in September 2015, we showcased some of the activities we'd created to raise discussions with young people about pornography and sexting (sending naked pictures) through our Esteem programme. Sunday Musa, Director of ACET Nigeria, was so impressed with our approach, and could see the need for this education in Nigeria, that we started exploring the idea of delivering training to his team.

It took a great deal of planning due to the spread of ACET Nigeria's work across different parts of the country and the security issues that Nigeria faces, but two weeks ago I was able to successfully deliver the training in Abuja!

16 of our ACET Nigeria colleagues participated in the 5 day course which, as well as covering media and technology, helped them to delve deeper into topics such as self-esteem, relationships, STIs, HIV, teenage pregnancy (a huge issue in Nigeria due to the high volume of early marriages that take place for girls) and educational approaches.

When I talked to them about the changes to relationships and sex education that will be taking place in the UK from September 2019, and the fact that the government are finally moving to the term Relationships Education for primary schools and Relationships and Sex Education for secondary schools, my Nigerian colleagues felt that this is a great idea and something that the Nigerian government should also implement. They said that having the word 'sex' in the description can be a barrier when wanting to reach out to churches and schools, but that placing the emphasis on the word 'relationships' would be a big step forward.

Our Nigerian colleagues don't have access to the level of technology available to us in the UK in their churches, schools and youth clubs so, throughout the training, we devised ways of delivering the materials in a way that wouldn't be limited by power cuts or technical resources. There were many creative ideas, and using smartphones



Sarah with some of the ACET Nigeria team



(which are widely available) as a resource, the group often came up with solutions. For example, for playing music or to show examples of photoshopped photos when working with smaller groups.

On the last day of the training, the participants wrote action plans on how they were going to put their learning into practice and, just two days later, one of the participants, Christiana, was already delivering a session on self-esteem in the new Kids Club she is running in her church.

I was able to accompany another participant, John, to a church and school in a town called Akwanga where he has already started organising Esteem sessions for next month.

Next year, our Nigerian colleagues will be rolling out the training to other colleagues in the towns of Akwanga and Wannune to enable many young people to have access to the Esteem sessions. We look forward to updating you on this next year!"

"My name is Irumun and I am 11 years old. Before ACET Nigeria's Kids Club I did not know anything about HIV, how people get it, and how to protect myself from it. I used to pick up razor blades from the ground or around the house and just use them. I didn't know that I might be infected with HIV if another person who has HIV used the razor blade before. I now know that HIV does not show on the face and a person living with HIV may not know they have it and so could spread it to others.

I was also taught about personal hygiene and supported with my homework. They told us not to allow anyone to touch our bodies and if they do, that we should tell our parents.

Now I wash my clothes, cut my hair and nails, brush

my teeth, and bathe regularly. I am more serious about my class work and attend school regularly. Kids Club has helped me to respect my parents. I hope to grow in faith and health."



Kids Club members in Akwanga

Braille lessons at the House of Grace

The House of Grace is a home for children affected by HIV and AIDS, where they receive education, physical and medical care, a Christian upbringing and preparation for adulthood. 49 children are currently being cared for.

We are so thankful that at long last a teacher who is blind has been found. He comes to the House of Grace two to three days a week to teach Dae, who is 16 and blind. Date, 17, who is partially sighted due to HIV infection, also joins in the braille lessons. The picture shows them at their studies.



Prison support

This year, ACET Belarus has started working with male prisoners, supporting their rehabilitation process and promoting healthy lifestyles. This joint project with the Ministry of Internal Affairs focuses specifically on education to reduce HIV infection and drug addiction, as well as providing opportunities to form supportive relationships. Here's 32 year old Sergey's story.

"My father went to prison when I was 6; my mother had an alcohol problem and was disabled. By the time I turned 15, I was already in trouble with the police and, when I was 16, I served my first juvenile sentence. That was the start of it all. I have been in prison for most of my life ever since.

Lots of different people used to come and see us in prison, but it was Yuri from ACET Belarus that made an impression on me. He grew up without a father, like me. He isn't tall

and wasn't popular with the girls at school - just like me. I understood that his life was a bit like mine.

When Yuri started talking about HIV and how to avoid it, it was something I wanted to hear about. There was a whole group of people living with HIV in our prison, and everyone else treated them as if they were leprous. They were scared of them. Yuri showed a few videos, a cool cartoon and slides which were very clear and understandable.

The only thing I regret is that I didn't know about HIV earlier. I am HIV+ and I don't know how I got infected. I learned loads about how to live well with HIV from those meetings with Yuri. When I got out, I decided to pull myself together.

I live in Minsk now. I rent a flat and work for a private company. I've got a girlfriend who knows that I have HIV and have been in prison. She says we can get through everything together. We are even planning to get married. I thank Yuri for his help and for those meetings, for helping me break free from alcohol and drug addiction."

An army of volunteers

Over 200 ACET Ukraine volunteers work across 75 cities. They are all Christians who have received a call to become salt and light: a source of love and acceptance for young people who find themselves in bleak circumstances.

There are several serious threats impacting the health and wellbeing of young people in Ukraine. 50% of marriages in Ukraine end in divorce, which means that every third child is being brought up in a single parent household. Alcohol consumption by children and young people is the highest in the world with 40% of children aged 14 - 18 systematically using alcohol. 70% of teenage pregnancies end in abortion. Suicides are the second leading cause of death among young people.

The development of the socio-economic crisis, and military action in the east of the country, have changed the political and economic priorities of the country. This has led to cuts in funding for education and health including combating HIV, even though Ukraine has an HIV

prevalence second only to Russia, among Eastern European and Central Asian countries.

Without education about relationships and sex, young people do not have the knowledge, skills and resilience to protect themselves from HIV, violent relationships, addiction, prostitution, and poor mental health.

ACET Ukraine volunteers reach out to vulnerable young people within their nation with the interactive 'Healthy University' education programme, and act as good role models through running a range of youth clubs, showing them that they can have healthy, happy, fulfilled lives.



ACET Ukraine volunteers gathered recently in Zhytomyr for a weekend of training and fellowship

Supporting young people with mental health disorders

During the last academic year, in collaboration with the educational and clinical staff of a tier 4 mental health unit, we ran a bespoke relationships and sex education programme to meet the needs of a group of young people with mental health disorders.

We covered a range of topics including self-esteem, emotional literacy, friendship, romantic/sexual relationships, contraceptives, body image and distortions of the media, love languages (different expressions of love), and online photo sharing.

Sam is one of the young people who benefitted from the programme. Living with anxiety and depression, Sam often struggles to make connections with people. He has some autistic traits and finds personal interactions, particularly reading body language and facial expressions, difficult. Consequentially Sam struggles with isolation and finds it difficult to make friends and build relationships.

During our sessions, Sam was given specific examples where facial expressions and body language were used to convey emotion. He also explored the use of facial expressions and corresponding emojis. These activities helped Sam to increase his emotional literacy and his empathy towards others. Sam was also given examples of discussion starter questions which were modelled by the project leader.

Learning these valuable social skills has helped Sam build better connections with his peers and with adults. These connections will help support Sam's recovery while he is living in the unit and strengthen his ability to form healthy, long term relationships in the future.

"In terms of why it is so important to have relationships and sex education in this setting I guess mostly it is around the vulnerability of the pupils. Almost all have emotional difficulties which impact on their relationships with adults and peers. Our pupils are vulnerable to coercion, bullying and grooming so need this space to evaluate their situations and develop skills of assertiveness to keep themselves safe.

Because of their mental health and often the stigma associated with it, many of our pupils are very isolated and spend a lot of time on social media. This can give them a skewed view of the world and often leaves them open to unsafe relationships online. Within our cohort at any one time there are always pupils with autism spectrum condition who are particularly vulnerable to isolation and exploitation. These pupils need SRE presented to them in a very specific way."

- Member of the unit education staff team



Tactile objects like these emojis and stickers help the young people recognise and express emotions which they struggle to verbalise

'All the areas were brilliantly presented and had info that I found new, useful and interesting.'

'Good balance of teaching ideas, classroom practise, and relationships and sex education information and content.'

'I feel more confident and knowledgeable with ideas for activities and follow-up questions.'

'stimulating, challenging and educational'

Training courses

Our intensive 4 day training course equips participants to deliver relationships and sex education to young people.

After training, participants become members of the Esteem network.

Our next courses:

5th, 6th, 22nd & 23rd February,
at the Church of the Good Shepherd,
Carshalton, Surrey

6th, 7th, 20th & 21st March,
at Vicars Cross URC, Chester

For more info and to book visit
www.acet-uk.com/training



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