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## Monterey County World AIDS Day-fundraiser and community gathering

Jacob Lesner-Buxton  
*California State University, Monterey Bay*

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Jacob Lesner-Buxton

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CHHS 400-B –Senior Capstone

Adrienne Saxton

*Monterey County World AIDS Day-Fundraiser and Community Gathering*

**Capstone Key Terms-** AIDS, Awareness, Monterey County, Fundraising, Event Planning, Donations, Remembrance, Stigma, Epidemic, Public Health

**Capstone Abstract**

World AIDS Day is observed in over twenty countries annually on December 1st. On that day, millions of people gather to raise awareness about AIDS. My capstone involves working with a local HIV/AIDS service provider, called John XXIII, to plan a fundraiser and community gathering, in observance of World AIDS Day. The goal of these events was to raise awareness and money for HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention services in Monterey County.

## **I. Executive Summary**

John XXIII serves people with HIV/AIDS and others, who are at risk of getting the disease in Monterey and San Benito Counties. It provides people with AIDS a variety of services including counseling, assistance with finding housing and paying for medicine. The agency also provides safe sex education, needle exchange programs and HIV testing to the general community.

In the current fiscal year, J7% cut in funding, meaning that their services will be trimmed or eliminated. These cutbacks are already hindering the ability of the agency to test an estimated 400 people who have had a sexual partner with the virus (Wilson 2008).

Lack of funding also affects the amount of resources that the agency can use to educate the public on HIV and AIDS prevention. According to a report on AIDS services in Monterey County, the money available for education and prevention services has been cut by 17% in the last four years (Ruby 2008). These cuts affect a variety of populations, notably high school students whom, according to data have a lack of knowledge about HIV/AIDS.

My capstone attempted to raise public awareness for the virus and tries to raise funds for John XXIII at the same time. John XXIII collaborated with two other local AIDS service providers to organize an event entitled Lights of Hope, which was an evening of words and music, to raise awareness about AIDS. About a hundred people attended the event, which was covered by four media outlets. However, the World AIDS Day fundraiser was not successful because there were no donations from restaurants

In the future my recommendations would be to continue holding the Lights of Hope event annually on world AIDS day. Another idea is to create a network of persons to speak about their experiences living with HIV/AIDS, at area schools, offices, churches, etc. I would advise that John XXIII try to solicit donations from restaurants in the summer months.

## **II. Description of the Agency**

John XXIII was founded in 1988 by Michael Pollock, who was a veteran that had contracted AIDS while in the military. After being discharged, he and the chaplain at the defense language institute Father Al Syslo, founded John XXIII to provide spiritual support for persons with AIDS (Fishkoff 1999). At that time most of the John XXIII clientele lived together in houses where they could be cared and supported in their final months of life.

In the 1990's, as people with AIDS started living longer, John XXIII's mission changed to provide ongoing emotional and financial support to persons with AIDS, as well as community education, prevention services and testing services, throughout Monterey and San Benito Counties. John XXIII now serves, 250 clients and their families (John XXII).

John XXIII staff and volunteers, work out of two centers in Salinas. Most of the volunteers work at the HIV Education, Prevention & Testing Center, where they dispense clean needles to IV drug users, administer HIV tests and hand out safe sex supplies. Much of the population who utilizes that center, are homeless or are sex workers. Also, outreach workers travel to different areas of the county handing out safe sex information.

Additionally, John XXIII has the Michael Center, which is where the staff that is in charge of the different departments of the agency works. There is an, education, housing and emotional support department witch, each have there own directors and

support staff, plus there are clinical assistants and other staff that serve all the departments. Katherine Thoeni is the executive director of the agency.

### **III. Define and describe the problem/challenge/issue to be addressed**

In Monterey County there are 926 reported cases of people living with HIV and AIDS (Monterey County Health Department 2008). Additionally there is estimated to be about 300 cases that are unreported and 400 people who have come into sexual contact with persons with HIV and AIDS that need to be tested for the disease (Wilson 2008). This data suggests that more information on safe sex and HIV testing is needed throughout the county.

Unfortunately, John XXIII will have less money to provide these services in the coming year; the agency is facing a cut of 37% in their budget. Recently, the agency had to lay off a staff member, who worked in the community doing HIV testing and education, because of the budget cutbacks. (S. Wilson, personal communication, November 4, 2008).

The laying off of an outreach worker comes at a time where funds available for AIDS education and prevention in Monterey County are on the decline. Between fiscal year 2003-2004 and 2006-2007, the county lost about 17% of state funds designed to go towards HIV education and prevention services (Ruby 2008). Also, the state is currently suspending re-imbursements to school districts to cover the cost of AIDS education. These classes about HIV and AIDS are mandated by California law to be included in middle and high school curriculums. (Ruby 2008)

Education about HIV and AIDS benefits students, according to the lobbying group Advocates For Youth. The group evaluated peer reviewed studies conducted on eleven comprehensive, sexual education programs across the United States and found that six of the programs were successful in raising condom use by teens, while eight were successful in getting teens to abstain from sex. (Advocates For Youth 2008) However, this report is biased, because it's created by a group whose objective is lobbying for comprehensive sex education in public schools.

A more objective federal government study of middle schools, points towards a need for greater teaching about HIV and AIDS in schools. 35% of students in schools where abstinence-only sexual education is taught, and 32% of students who didn't receive any sexual education, believed that condoms didn't prevent AIDS. However, in the year since the abstinence only programs were conducted, 51% of students in both groups have become sexually active. This study shows that abstinence-only sexual education does not have an effect on a student's sexual activity. The data also shows that teens need more education on the role of condoms in preventing HIV (Termholm 2007).

In Monterey County, the amount of AIDS education a student receives varies. For example, a student named Rachael, who graduated from Salinas High in 2003, said comprehensive sex education was offered at the school. (R. Edwards . personal communication, October 31, 2008) However, a freshman who went to Marina High said that she was exposed to abstinence-only education.(K. Mires, . personal communication, November 1, 2008) While in Greenfield, there is no sexual education curriculum.( M. Camarena. personal communication, November 5, 2008)

John XXIII has tried to bring AIDS education to local schools, but either another agency provides the classes or the institutions refuse their offer to conduct workshops. However, John XXIII has been successful with doing outreach at local juvenile halls.

The fact that John XXIII can not reach students unless they are incarcerated, suggests that there is a stigma attached to discussing AIDS in Monterey County. That stigma magnifies itself in local congregations who have asked HIV positive people to leave their church, drug stores that will not sell syringes to IV drug users and bars and nightclubs that discourage condom distribution.

The stigma that exists in the area has affected the way John XXIII interacts with the local community. For instance, outside John XXIII, there is an absence of a large sign bearing the name of agency. The decision, not to post a large sign, could be because many people do not want others to assume that they are receiving services from the agency. There is some debate between agency staff, over whether or not to hold up billboards promoting safe sex on street corners or to put a jar of condoms at an event. All of these outreach efforts can save lives, yet there is a justifiable fear that some people within the AIDS community have about being a target of outrage from the surrounding areas.

#### **IV. Project description**

One of the ways that John XIII supplements the lack of funding it receives from state and local governments are to hold annual events to raise money. The agency participates in the Big Sir Marathon, as well as holds fundraisers at Macys, and other local businesses. Additionally it holds a night of dinner and dancing in March called the

Crystal Ball. Beyond, rising money local media outlets cover these events. These reports help promote awareness for John XXIII's, programs and services in the community.

The person who oversees all of the events is Sara Wilson. Sara is the director of development at John XXIII, as well as my mentor. Every year she and the other staff members collaborate on an event in observance of World AIDS Day, which is on December 1<sup>st</sup>.

World AIDS Day was started in 1988, by representatives of the United Nations, World Health Organization and global HIV/AIDS advocates, to spread awareness of the disease. Millions of people in over twenty countries observe the day annually on December 1st by holding candlelight vigils, film screenings, educational festivals and workshops. The goal of World AIDS Day is to; educate the public about HIV/AIDS and to encourage political and social leaders to commit resources to HIV education, prevention & testing, supportive services, and research for finding a cure.

Locally, John XXIII has hosted panel discussions and has aired public service announcements on TV stations to mark the day. In the past, these events have been about raising awareness rather than money for HIV/AIDS. However, with a major budget cut looming, my mentor wanted to raise money for John XXIII, while at the same time spreading awareness of the disease in the local community. (S. Wilson, personal communication, November 11, 2008).

For my capstone, I helped to coordinate two events in the local community. The first event involves local eateries donating 10% of their earnings on December 1st to John XXIII. From this fundraiser, we were hoping to make about \$5,000. To entice the restaurants to sign up, we offered them free publicity for their business in the



advertisements that we created for the event. We planned to put these, advertisements on local TV stations, newspapers and also mail the info to the people who signed up to receive John XXIII's newsletters.

Working with my mentor, we put together a packet of info that included a cover letter, an information sheet about John XXIII and info on World AIDS Day. I then asked friends and visited the websites of restaurants to figure out which establishments would be amenable to donating a portion of their profits to John XXIII. As I found the restaurants, I entered their contact info in to a spreadsheet. My mentor and I sent out about 27 packets to different restaurants, informing them of our fundraiser. About a week and later, I sent follow ups to the restaurants and asked for their support of the, fundraiser

The second event was an inter-faith spiritual remembrance service entitled "Lights of Hope," which was held on December 1<sup>st</sup> at Epiphany Lutheran & Episcopal Church in Marina. The event featured reflections from people in the AIDS community, each representing different social identities, such as women, Latinos, youth, African Americans, and people from the LGBTQ and HIV positive communities. In between the speakers, there were performances by the Epiphany Choir.

This event was also the first time in many years that two other AIDS service providers in Monterey County joined forces. The agencies that collaborated on Lights of Hope were Monterey County AIDS Project and the African American HIV/AIDS Wellness Program. This collaboration originated at an AIDS Task Force planning meeting. When John XXIII talked about our ideas for World AIDS Day, the other agencies asked to collaborate on the service which was, amazing because our agencies have had a rocky relationship in the past.

## **V. Application of project to academic requirements**

In this project, I learned how to take leadership in coordinating two large events and working with John XXIII staff and community members to ensure it was a success. I also developed information management skills, by creating spreadsheets and cover letters and other material using MS office templates.

Personal communication, was a very important skill to have in planning these events because I needed to e-mail a variety of sources for information help planning this event.

Working in the AIDS community, I was exposed to a lot of information regarding the history, treatment of the disease, as well as the services that John XXIII provides. I then used this knowledge of health and human services and created World AIDS Day information packets for the media and restaurants.

As well as gaining knowledge, I also picked up collateral expectations, about the AIDS community. For example, I learned why it is so important to keep confidentiality regarding someone HIV status. While writing material, I would try to look for examples of how websites in the community addressed the issue to be culturally sensitive in the products I produced.

Lastly, I collaborated with many people on the project, such as local business owners, Epiphany Church staff and John XXIII employees. Establishing good working relationships with these community members was vital to the project success.

## **VI. Describe how the project reflected the CSUMB Vision**

A theme of the CSUMB vision statement is assisting unrepresented groups in community settings. In this project, I hopefully helped to raise awareness about AIDS, and the services that John XXIII provides. I also helped plan a fundraiser that contributed to needs of people who have or are at risk for AIDS in Monterey County.

Through the awareness event, I hopefully encouraged others to get tested or volunteer at John XXIII. I also helped to bring the issue of AIDS to the front of some peoples minds, helping motivate others to be socially aware is another theme of the vision statement.

Lastly being able to facilitate a relationship between CSUMB and John XXIII is also part of the vision statement. In my capstone, I was able to educate other students about World AIDS Day and the impact of the disease in Monterey County. Hopefully, more students will get tested or chose to volunteer at John XXIII.

## **VI . Evaluation of Lights of Hope Event**

Overall, the “Lights of Hope” event was a success. About ninety people came to the event on December 1<sup>st</sup> at Epiphany Church. At the event, there were camera crews from four television stations. The press did an outstanding job covering the event, with one highlight, being an anchorwoman explaining how an HIV test is administered. Her comments were important since there is a big misconception that getting tested is a long and difficult process.

Another touching moment of media coverage happened during the event itself, where a woman was speaking in Spanish about ending stigmas of HIV in the Latino

community. At the moment she started, a Spanish language television crew happened to walk in to the event and begin filming. Had they come five minutes later, they would have missed capturing this important message that was directed at the Latino community.

While she was speaking the camera was able to capture the amount of diversity in the audience. At the event there were attendees that represented many races, and cultures. Also, the people who attended the event, came from a wide variety of political, ideological, economic backgrounds, and educational levels. I was able to gauge these characteristics, because I knew many of the attendees from previous events.

Some of these attendees included Bruce Delgado, who is the mayor elect of Marina. After the Lights of Hope event, he commented that he learned a great deal about AIDS from the program. Other people echoed Bruce's sentiments when discussing the event.

Helping Bruce and others gain knowledge about HIV/AIDS was the purpose of the event. Speaker after speaker, urged the audience, to pass on what they learnt from the events to other that were not in attendance. By far one of the most powerful statements was from the youth speaker who developed a short message about the importance of providing comprehensive sex education in local high schools.

While this young person's pleas for education were powerful, the power of the event was also evident during the planning stages. I had expected that the Lights of Hope event would be difficult to plan based on past history between the agencies. However everyone was prompt in communication and willing to compromise.

The way the program was developed for the Lights of Hope event showed strength in the relationships between the agencies. Each of the sponsoring organizations

recruited two speakers for the event. All the agencies decided on a time limit of three minutes per speaker.

Once we settled on an order of speakers, The African American Wellness Program announced that they wanted to include another two musical selections and two poems. While my mentor and I were worried that the programs would become too long, we wanted to respect the contributions of other agencies to the program, especially since The African American Wellness Program had already paid the musician.

Fortunately the addition of the poems and the musicians did not make the event too long. Instead, our event was shorter than expected, which made the program more effective. None of the attendees walked out before the program had ended.

In planning the Light of Hope event I faced two challenges, which I could not meet. The first was I had trouble managing volunteers who signed up for the event. When the volunteers arrived, I did not have a clear concept of the tasks I wanted them to accomplish. Fortunately, my mentor helped me in delegating tasks. However, I felt embarrassed not having a clear grasp of some of the tasks, such as how the food should be set up and the role of the usher.

Ironically, I delegated too much when it came to inviting local dignitaries to the Lights of Hope event. I had arranged with a local activist, who is familiar with the local community, to contact politicians to invite them to the program. This person did a great job but my mentor and other agencies wanted me to get the contact info of the leaders, instead of relying on her to do the work. They wanted the chance to send formal invitations.

Despite those two areas, the event ran smoothly and everyone seemed delighted with the response. Through this process, I was inspired to learn new skills like formatting programs, making actions plans and creating flyers, because I saw the amount of effort my mentors and the other parties were putting into the event. With simple direction from my mentor, combined with being diligent with my work, I was able to overcome a lot of my spelling and editing problems, and turn in material that was professional and did not require a lot of extra editing from my mentor.

## **VII. Evaluation of World AIDS Day Fundraiser**

In short, John XXIII did not get any restaurants to donate a piece of their profits to World AIDS Day. There are multiple reasons why this project failed.

In recent months the economy has taken a nose dive. The financial meltdown of 2008 has most likely made businesses less willing to give back money to the community. Also, some owners of businesses might feel uncomfortable with supporting an agency that hands out condoms and needles.

However, we can not know how the business owners viewed our agency because my mentor and I did not talk to the managers of restaurants. The reason why we did not follow up was that the service at the church was bigger then expected.

Originally, we planned to concentrate primarily on the World AIDS Day Fundraiser, and have a small church remembrance service, that night. However, as more people and agencies heard about our remembrance service, it sparked interest in the community. Seeing the support building, my mentor and I wanted to share our vision for

the Lights of Hope event. Therefore, we turned our attention away from planning a fundraiser and towards organizing a large scale community gathering.

Still, there was a possibility that we could have held a World AIDS day fundraiser and the Lights of Hope Event. I talked to my friend Mark, who is an expert in getting charitable donations from business. He told me, that the best way to solicit donations is to establish personal relationships with people who work in management at the businesses.

Through colleagues and friends, my mentor and I were able to get personal contacts, however, we sent them the same generic solution letters that we sent to businesses where we had no contacts. In hindsight we should have had our friends and colleagues speak to their friends about making, a donation to John XXIII.

## **VX. Recommendations/ Conclusion**

First and foremost I believe that a Lights of Hope event should happen annually and continue to be collaboration between the three agencies. HIV awareness needs to be ongoing and the major event is the perfect way to highlight the cause.

At the next Lights of Hope Event, I would like to see a place where people could donate money for a good or service, that will benefit the local AIDS agencies. I felt that people who attended the event would have been up for donating a small amount of money. Our agencies could come up with a need such as hiring, a web designer or setting up a food pantry for clients of our agencies.

The money could also be spent on creating a network of local people with HIV and AIDS who wish to speak about, living with the disease to businesses, schools and community groups. These presentations will reach people that do not watch TV news or

go to the Light of Hopes Event. These presentations might inspire more donations towards the local AIDS agency.

Another way to raise money is to try soliciting donations from restaurants in June and July. John XXIII typically has a lapse of large fundraising in the summer, and therefore could devote more time in planning the event. Also having this fundraiser, in June would create another opportunity to raise awareness of the AIDS epidemic. Plus, having an event in the summer could tap in to the tourist dollar.

No matter the time of year, it is vital that John XXIII, along with other AIDS service providers, keep trying to raise awareness of the disease. Simply teaching children to abstain from having sex will not bring an end to AIDS. Instead, community leaders, AIDS agencies and others, have to find the courage to talk about solutions to these epidemics that are often uncomfortable for some people to digest.

One thing the community needs to understand is that many people do not chose to be HIV positive. Too often laws, which are meant to stop acts which contribute to the spread of HIV, are set up by leaders who often do not understand the complex dynamics that lead people to break these laws to survive.

Rose is a teenager who breaks the law daily to survive. At eighteen she left home, to avoid, constant physical and sexual abuse from her family. To survive, she becomes a sex worker, but often gets drunk so she can do her job. Since she is drunk, she sometimes does not know if her clients use a condom.

Across town a man named Jim is digging for needles in the trash. He uses these needles to inject heroin. The heroin helps him forget about his wife's murder. Each time he use a dirty needle he risks getting AIDS.



However, there is hope for Jim and Rose, if they saw the Lights of Hope Event or read about it in the paper. Maybe they will find the courage to travel to drop into the center and get HIV testing and clean needles. Also, they can find people to talk to about their problems and maybe find long term treatment. Although their problems will not be solved overnight, through assistance from John XXIII they can begin to make positive changes in their lives.

Maybe Rose and Jim do not reach out to John XXIII; there is still the hope that someone decides to give some extra money upon seeing the media coverage of the Lights of Hope Event, which causes the agency to hire extra outreach worker. These extra workers could bring support to more people like Jim and Rose. Also, a politician could see the media coverage and feel inspired to write a law that legalizes sex work or drug use, meaning that people may feel more comfortable seeking support.

Viewing Jim and Rose as victims of tough circumstances rather than law breakers will have a tremendous impact in the fight against AIDS in Monterey County. Society must be willing to offer compassion, rather than condemnation to people who deal with pain in ways which are unhealthy. Organizing an event like Lights of Hope is a critical step in creating the ideological change needed to address the issue of HIV and AIDS in Monterey County.

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