



STAFF REPORT INFORMATION ONLY

Toronto-Botswana HIV/AIDS Capacity Building Partnership

Date:	May 17 th , 2007
To:	Board of Health
From:	Medical Officer of Health
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

Botswana has one of the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence rates in the world (38%). With a population of 1.7 million, everyone in that country is either infected or affected by the pandemic. An HIV/AIDS capacity building partnership between the City of Toronto and South East District, Botswana, was established in 2002 after Stephen Lewis, the Special UN Envoy on HIV/AIDS, made a plea to Canadians to take up the HIV/AIDS challenge. Funded by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) the partnership has two areas of focus: i) palliative care and support; and ii) youth engagement.

Led by Toronto Public Health, the partnership has mobilized considerable additional resources by bringing in other partner organizations. For example, Casey House, a hospice and community care organization in Toronto, has played a mentoring and training role in integrating palliative care principles into SEDC's Home Based Care program. Commonwealth Games Canada (CGC) is a key partner in the youth engagement initiatives. The youth engagement component is primarily focused on establishing a sustainable Kicking AIDS Out (KAO) initiative through the South East District Youth Empowerment League (SEDYEL). The KAO approach integrates HIV/AIDS awareness, health promotion, life skills, sexual health and youth leadership development into the youth run soccer league which extends across the entire district. SEDYEL is a partnership between the City of Toronto, SEDC, Commonwealth Games Canada (CGC) and Mathare Youth Sports Association of Kenya (MYSA), with support from UK Sport.

The Toronto-SEDC Partnership was approved by City Council in May 2002 and is funded and supported through FCM.

Financial Impact

The City of Toronto – South East District Botswana HIV/AIDS capacity building partnership is funded by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) through the International Centre for Municipal Development. The City of Toronto, under the leadership of Toronto Public Health provides in kind support through staff time.

DECISION HISTORY

In 2001, Stephen Lewis, United Nations Special Envoy on HIV/AIDS in Africa, called for Canadians to become more involved in assisting Africa with the HIV/AIDS crisis. In response, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) approached the City of Toronto to establish an HIV/AIDS capacity building partnership (the partnership) between the City and a municipality in Botswana. The partnership was approved by City Council in May 2002, and is funded by FCM. This report provides an update after 5 years of operation and outlines the next steps to ensure sustainability and to use the skills and experience gained to foster an HIV/AIDS network regionally.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

With a population of 1.7 million, Botswana has one of the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence rates in the world. Thirty-eight percent of adults test positive for the virus. Twenty-seven percent of people aged 15-19 test positive, and for women aged 15-29, the rate can be as high as 50 percent. Everyone is either infected or affected.

The partnership fosters an exchange of skills and expertise between municipal staff in both countries in the two areas of focus: Palliative Care and Support and Youth Engagement. The City's Chief Administrator's Office administers the partnership and Toronto Public Health has the lead role in facilitating the project. At its May 28th, 2007 meeting the Executive Committee of Toronto City Council considered a report recommending the renewal of the FCM technical partnership between the City of Toronto and South East District, Botswana for the term 2007-2010, with the continued financial support of FCM (get web link).

COMMENTS

The overall goal of the partnership is to address HIV/AIDS issues in SEDC by improving the capacity to coordinate an effective local response to better meet the needs of people affected and infected by HIV and AIDS. It is also hoped that this partnership will be replicable in other municipalities in Botswana and possibly elsewhere in Africa.

Partnership Accomplishments:

The Toronto-SEDC Partnership has been established now for five years and has accomplished a great deal in both focus areas.

Palliative Care and Support:

The overall goal of integrating palliative care principles into the SEDC Home Based Care system has essentially been achieved. This has been accomplished through the facilitation of Toronto Public Health and the mentoring and support of Casey House, an HIV/AIDS hospice and community care centre in Toronto, and the leadership and vision of SEDC's Home Based Care coordinator. Many of the staff and volunteers have received Palliative Care training and support and SEDC has played a major role at the national level in the development and implementation of national palliative care guidelines. In addition, the Home Based Care coordinator will be trained as a "master trainer" for the roll out of the palliative care national guidelines. While there is still a long way to go for SEDC to achieve the full supports and resources it needs for a comprehensive Palliative Care and Support program, (given the scale of need in Botswana), the support that SEDC now requires is one of strategic advice on a "check-in" basis. The partnership will therefore focus primarily on youth engagement.

Youth Engagement through Kicking AIDS Out:

The youth engagement efforts are being concentrated on establishing a sustainable Kicking AIDS Out (KAO) initiative in SEDC through the youth-led South East District Youth Empowerment League (SEDYEL). Kicking AIDS Out is an approach used by an international network of organizations that uses the power of sport to fight the spread and stigma of HIV/AIDS. KAO recognizes the skills and capabilities of local youth and builds grassroots youth leadership capacity using a "youth for youth" peer approach.

SEDYEL is a partnership between the City of Toronto, SEDC, Commonwealth Games Canada (CGC) and Mathare Youth Sports Association of Kenya (MYSA) with the support of UK Sport, with overall funding support through FCM.

The accomplishments of SEDYEL are nothing short of extraordinary. In less than two years the youth leaders, with the support of Commonwealth Games Canada and South East District staff, have been able to establish 80 soccer teams, 13 of which are girls' teams. SEDYEL engages about 2000 children and youth from all villages in the district. This is a first for Botswana where youth have organized such a venture on a "youth for youth" basis, with strong emphasis on girls' participation in all aspects of league organization, outreach and in the sport itself. Both female and male youth leaders have begun to develop self confidence and skills in organizing, outreach, HIV/AIDS and sexual health education and public speaking. SEDYEL has benefited enormously from the support of two leaders from the Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA) who are based in Botswana for a year, through the support of Commonwealth Games Canada.

It is clear that the very act of being engaged in an initiative that is both intellectually and physically challenging has already made a profound difference in many participants' lives. Anecdotal evidence also points to a reduction in crime in SED, attributed to the establishment of SEDYEL. In fact, a number of former youth gang members are active

SEDYEL participants. This is significant in the context of a country with very high HIV/AIDS prevalence, poverty and youth unemployment.

Another significant achievement is SEDC's recent acquisition of a 5 hectare plot of land for the youth engagement initiative. This represents significant progress for the project with enormous potential for developing a youth centre, including meeting and office space, an internet café and sports fields. Currently, South East District offers few, if any, facilities for young people so the acquisition of land, and the opportunities to develop it, are very exciting for the youth in the district and for South East District Council itself.

Sustainability challenges:

While SEDYEL is clearly a "youth for youth" initiative and must remain so to be successful, the ongoing support of adult mentors and senior staff from SEDC, as well as from national government, the community, business and sports sectors, is crucial for its ongoing success. While everyone is proud of the accomplishments to date, the peer leaders have only just begun to acquire the skills required to run such a large, district-wide "youth for youth" initiative. Ongoing project resources, including resources for training and development as well as monies to develop the youth centre, are essential to maintain the momentum and ensure stability. It is encouraging to note that CGC is able to commit to baseline project funding until 2011. This provides SEDYEL an opportunity to grow and stabilize. Discussions are currently underway to extend the contract of one of the MYSA coordinators for another year to get SEDYEL on a more solid footing. In addition the City of Toronto, CGC, and the Kicking AIDS Out Foundation are building stronger regional linkages to ensure SEDYEL can benefit from the experience of other similar initiatives in the region, as well as to share skills and experience with others who face similar issues and challenges.

The City of Toronto, under the leadership of Toronto Public Health, will continue to provide strategic advice and support to SEDC overall and specifically to SEDYEL, with particular emphasis on integrating sexual health education and skills development into the youth engagement process. TPH will play a key role in refining and integrating sexual health education into SEDYEL with a view to applying the lessons learned and any materials developed to the KAO network.

In addition TPH will facilitate the continuation of the partnership between SEDC and Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA), in collaboration with CGC and Schools Without Borders, in order to enable a strong foundation for SEDYEL. The partnership will continue to support the development of the SEDC youth centre including an internet café which has been identified as a priority need for the district.

Bringing Kicking AIDS to Toronto:

KAO provides a useful vehicle to look beyond our borders and to learn from innovative community practitioners in Africa and elsewhere. This was demonstrated during the XIV International AIDS Conference held in Toronto in August 2006, when eight KAO

youth leaders from 5 African countries shared their knowledge and experience through hands on activities with conference delegates and in the community with 85 young people from across the City. This was done through the City's Girls Unlimited Program and through Parks, Forestry and Recreation leadership camps. All participants found these activities engaging, fun and informative.

TPH is in the process of initiating a KAO pilot project in Toronto, in collaboration with CGC and Schools Without Borders. Master Trainers from Africa will come to the City to train young leaders and youth workers on how to creatively empower youth to make positive decisions regarding safer sexual health practices through sport and physical activity. While the focus in Africa has tended to be on soccer, in Toronto it will take on a number of different forms. It will be pilot tested through existing structures that are conducive to integrating sexual health and physical activity promotion. This collaborative initiative will be developed through partnerships between Toronto Public Health, Parks Forestry and Recreation, Toronto Community Housing and community agencies such as Schools Without Borders, the Grassroots Youth Collaborative and Concrete Hoops. It is intended that the initial training will occur in Fall 2007.

Future Directions:

The partnership has benefited enormously from partnerships with other organizations both in Toronto and in sub-Saharan Africa. In Africa, these regional linkages can leverage considerable additional resources and strengthen information and skills sharing in a cost effective manner. Countries in the region share many of the same issues and sharing best practices and strategies can be very helpful. The City of Toronto will therefore work with FCM to develop an HIV/AIDS networking approach through municipal government, using the Botswana partnership as the foundation. This approach is in accordance with the original goals of the partnership to share and apply the learnings elsewhere.

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