

Living with HIV/AIDS:
Development of a Community Awareness Event

Abstract

The rate of HIV/AIDS has dramatically decreased since its emergence in the 1980's, but today it still impacts millions around the world. In a collaborative partnership between the University of Florida and Florida Agricultural and Mechanical (A&M) University, the Rural South Public Health Training Center established a community-based project developed in response to a needs assessment of medically underserved areas in Florida. The project, a community awareness event was aimed at raising HIV/AIDS awareness in Gadsden County, a rural county in north Florida. The planning and development of the community awareness event was guided by community mobilization strategies and community-based participatory research. Redeemed Inc., a community-based organization participating in outreach efforts for those at risk or living with HIV/AIDS partnered with researchers on the project. Other key partners included the director of the HIV/AIDS program in Gadsden County from the Gadsden County Health Department, the executive director of the Gadsden Art Center, and a faculty member at Florida A&M University. Through shared discussions, community partners and researchers outlined the strategies for developing the awareness event. Throughout the two month planning process the community awareness event for HIV/AIDS in Gadsden County was developed with collaboration among community partners and researchers. Leaders and decision-makers in Gadsden County were invited to the event and photo display titled, Living with HIV/AIDS: A Community Perspective. The display honors the community's voice and aims to bring awareness and understanding to the Gadsden County community of the challenges of living with HIV/AIDS and the realities of family members of people living with HIV/AIDS. The awareness event at the Gadsden Art Center also provides a platform for displaying the work and accomplishments of the community's participation in the project. Through this entire project researchers and the community partners involved hope to build growing support and buy-in from members of Gadsden County.