



PROFILE
SOCIAL MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS FOR HEALTH

Preventing Infection, Inspired by Faith

Religious Groups Help PSI Promote HIV Counseling and Testing in Africa

PSI's collaboration with religious leaders and faith-based organizations has taken many forms over the last 12 years. In Namibia and Zimbabwe, it is strengthening PSI's *New Start* voluntary HIV counseling and testing (VCT) networks, leading to greater knowledge about HIV/AIDS and fewer infections.

VCT is an effective and economical way of stopping the spread of the virus and motivating healthy behavior change whether clients test positive or negative. It also opens a critical gateway to care and support services. PSI implements VCT in 19 countries and, since 1999, its VCT centers have tested over a million clients. In 2004, it prevented over 2,500 HIV infections through counseling and testing.

PSI collaborates with a variety of organizations to increase its own health impact further. Whether these partnerships are with local non-governmental organizations or community- or faith-based organizations (FBOs), PSI recognizes that combining forces can lead to greater results. PSI has a history of enlisting religious organizations in its HIV/AIDS prevention efforts — Buddhist monks in Southeast Asia, Muslim imams in West Africa and Christian leaders throughout Africa — and building the capacity of these groups in order to sustain the health impact.

Namibia: FBOs Extend Reach of VCT Network

PSI's Namibian affiliate, Social Marketing Association (SMA), enlisted FBOs in its *New Start* VCT network from the onset of its VCT work in 2002, recognizing that the strong community links of FBOs make them ideal partners given the sensitive nature of HIV/AIDS counseling and testing.



The launch of a *New Start* voluntary HIV/AIDS counseling and testing center in Rehoboth, Namibia gives cause for celebration. The center is part of a partnership between PSI and faith-based organizations in Namibia.

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SMA, leveraging PSI's VCT expertise, inaugurated the first free-standing network¹ of VCT centers in Namibia in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Social Services in 2003. VCT services offered through a network like New Start ensure strong, recognized brands and messages that convey high quality. The average number of clients seen per month by the New Start network has increased from 260 to 2,100.

Catholic AIDS Action (CAA) and the Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN) were among the first partners chosen with funding from the European Community. Additional funding from the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief has allowed SMA to expand its FBO partnerships with the Evangelical Lutheran Church AIDS Programme (ELCAP) and Catholic Health Services (CHS).

In PSI's VCT model, sites share a common brand which symbolizes high-quality services. Sites also share standardized tools — training curricula, operational guidelines, counseling and testing protocols and monitoring and evaluation systems — to ensure consistent, confidential, and high-quality services. SMA monitors and evaluates the impact of the network in several ways — mystery clients to assess quality and SMA coordinators' visits to assess adherence to protocols. Partners must meet quality standards to remain in the network.

An important part of SMA's focus on quality is supporting the New Start counselors: SMA-trained site managers and counselors are required to conduct weekly supervision sessions and SMA coordinators and a psychologist — on call 24 hours per day — visit each site at least once every three months and provide on-the-spot training.

The testing fee (approximately USD \$1.70) is waived if it is evident that the client does not have the money. In addition, SMA has several free promotions per year and distributes thousands of free vouchers. In the New Start network, a referral system, based on locally available medical and non-medical services, directs clients to care and support where appropriate.

While SMA conducts national promotion, centers are encouraged and supported to carry out their own community-based mobilization. SMA marketing materials include print media, talk shows, radio spots, TV campaigns and a monthly cartoon magazine which appears monthly in the main English newspaper, *The Namibian*.

These FBO partnerships have been instrumental in scaling up services, increasing client flow and saving lives:

- CCN was providing VCT services only two mornings a week when it first teamed up with SMA. The SMA-

CCN partnership has led to CCN offering services six days a week and the CCN site is now New Start's busiest.

- Catholic AIDS Action's pre-existing services — including home-based care, support groups and orphans and voluntary children programs — are augmented by its association with New Start. Father Rick Bauer, the CAA CEO states: "Providing high quality services in resource scarce environments must continue to be a priority in the HIV pandemic. CAA's partnership with SMA has enabled us to accomplish this challenging task with the development of three VCT centers. SMA continues to be one of our most important partners in our work here in Namibia."
- Working with CHS has allowed SMA to reach more pregnant women via three hospital centers. These centers have high client traffic as well as a high percentage of HIV positive clients.
- ELCAP has a growing regional structure in Namibia and the SMA partnership has helped ease New Start's entry into three important towns via ELCAP's network of congregations and volunteers.

Zimbabwe: Building Church Leaders' Skills

In the country where it started its first VCT program in the world in 1999, PSI began collaborating with church leaders through its New Start VCT program in 2003 after recognizing the influential role that churches play in Zimbabwean society, especially in rural communities. PSI/Zimbabwe trains pastors on HIV counseling skills and psychosocial support for people living with HIV/AIDS and pastors, bishops and pastoral students on the benefits of VCT in promoting behavior change and the role of the church in mobilizing their congregations to fight HIV/AIDS and promote VCT. Since 2003, 400 church leaders have gone through PSI workshops on these subjects.

In April 2005, PSI/Zimbabwe became the first of 16 African countries to launch the "Delayed Debut" mass media campaign. The campaign encourages 13- to 19-year-olds to delay sexual relations and promotes abstinence until marriage. PSI/Zimbabwe recognized the importance of involving the FBO community in this effort as the church is one of the country's most influential institutions and had already been advocating abstinence for youth, pre-marital counseling and fidelity within marriage. The following month, PSI/Zimbabwe invited over 200 representatives from 30 FBOs and 11 youth groups to an event informing them of the campaign to gain their support and develop an interpersonal communications program (IPC) to support the mass media campaign at the community level.

¹ "Free-standing" centers are not integrated into existing public or private health facilities.

PSI's Core Values:

Bottom Line Health Impact • Private Sector Speed and Efficiency • Decentralization, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship • Long-term Commitment to the People We Serve