

Appreciative Enquiry as a method for shifting towards an Asset Based Community Development paradigm

Background

The Raphael Support and Skills Development Organisation is a Civil Society Group based in Grahamstown, Eastern Cape, South Africa.

The past

Started in 1999 by community members, the Raphael Centre provided conventional HIV-related services

- HIV Counselling and Testing
- HIV and adherence education
- support group facilitation
- feeding schemes

and later,

- food and school uniform support for Orphans (whose parents had died from AIDS) and children who were vulnerable due to HIV infection within the family.

The results

- persistently high rate of new infections
- very few support group members used what was learned during support group sessions to live positively
- dependency on the Centre both for food and a place to call home
- staff exhaustion and burn out
- funder and community fatigue

Reflections

Due to internal staff changes, in 2013, the staff of the Centre paused to reflect.

- the widely applied ABC (Abstinence, Be faithful, Condomise) approach has failed and that HIV testing and counselling does not equal prevention
- risk taking behaviour which could lead to HIV infection is complex and telling people what they should do does not work
- HIV and AIDS are not simply medical and physical health issues
- interventions based on you as a person in need and me as a provider do not make a positive impact on people's lives but are patronising and disempowering
- needs-based interventions are not sustainable at any level

A new vision

Despite starting as an HIV and AIDS organisation, we realised that we wanted so much more than just an HIV free generation. We want to see:

People believing in themselves, working together to create healthy and caring communities.

We recognise health as a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing. Our **mission** is to strengthen healthy living people in Makana working together with community members and organisations. We believe this will enable citizens to protect themselves and others from HIV infection and inspire positive living and hope.



Development theory: ABCD

Instead of focusing on needs and problems, Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) focuses on the strengths and capacities communities already have and builds from there.

ABCD

- * Stimulates citizenship and spontaneity
- * Builds communities from the inside-out
- * Develops a self-conscious framework for understanding how change happens.

The purpose of this approach is to unlock and unblock skills, talents, resources and knowledge within communities so that people can drive their own development processes to build healthy and caring communities.

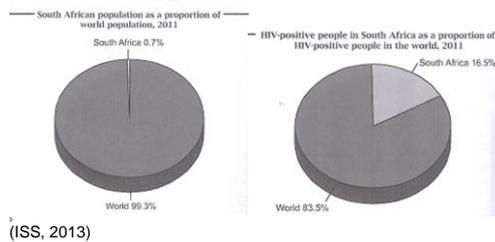


Sustainable development comes from within. Hope and resilience are two of the most important internal conditions to live a purposeful life. To believe that one's life has purpose is a necessary condition to protect oneself and others from HIV or HIV progression (treatment adherence).

"... you never change things by fighting existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete" (Buckminster Fuller, 1981).

HIV in context

International comparisons



HIV infection rates in South Africa are the highest in the world. We have the largest number of people infected with the virus and we have the fastest growing rate of new infections.

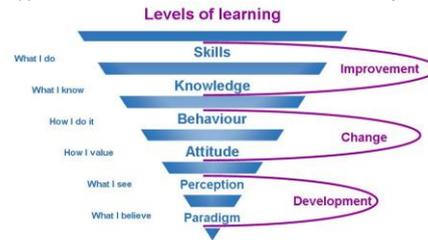
Although the number of new HIV infections has stabilised (i.e. is not increasing exponentially), this, it is argued, is largely due to the high number of people on anti-retroviral treatment. Effective treatment suppresses the virus making it almost impossible for an infected person on treatment to infect others.

Nevertheless, new infection rates are still very high and it is estimated that for every one person initiated on treatment, three new people become infected.

The Eastern Cape shares fourth place with Mpumalanga for the highest number of infections in the country. It takes third place third place for new infections.

Orientation

The use of an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) paradigm potentially provides an effective, sustainable response to the HIV crisis in South Africa. To prevent the spread of HIV, it is necessary to change behaviour (Kelly, 2009). Behaviour change is dependent on a system of beliefs and attitudes towards health and wellness. ABCD provides the opportunity for a paradigm shift that may inspire an holistic approach towards health and wellness that is internally motivated.



(<http://strobbeontwikkeling.nl/engels/index.html>)

Asset Based Development is both a paradigm and a practice.

Appreciative Inquiry (IA) is a tool to promote a paradigm shift towards Asset Based Community Development. It is also a tool to implement the practice of ABCD.

"... people cannot be developed; they can only develop themselves.

For a while: it is possible for an outsider to build a person's house, an outsider cannot give the person pride and self-confidence in themselves as human beings.

Those things people have to create for themselves by their own actions. They develop themselves by what they do; they develop themselves by making their own decisions, by increasing their own knowledge and ability and by their full participation – as equals – in the life of the community they live in..." (Nyerere, 1973).

Purpose

Exploration of Appreciative Inquiry tools for programme implementation within the context of an organisation that appreciates people's individual skills and social environments as fundamental to an effective HIV response.

Design, approach and method

ABCD facilitation work with ten households in two geographically defined locations will continue over a two-year period. Initiating paradigm shifting in learning partners (previously clients) is recognised as a fundamental starting point.

To strengthen paradigm shifting, household asset inventories rather than household assessments, are created using AI interview techniques. For example, what makes you proud of your family? Describe a highlight moment in your life? What is the best thing about your community?



Preliminary findings

The shift away from a needs-based paradigm challenges the thinking of learning partners, community partners, funders, and, most of all, staff. Shifting inquiries to constructive questions is, in practice, difficult and requires frequent personal reflection and an awareness of "living" as an ambassador of appreciation.

Reflection on the process has led to the learning:

- *Change takes time
- *Be open minded
- *Be humble
- *Be curious
- *Never make assumptions
- *Listen
- *Trust the process
- *Create space within programmes for new things to emerge

Authors

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References

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Further information

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