

A place free from discrimination

For many people in the FSW or MSM communities, the DICs represent a safe haven where they are always welcome, where they can find a sense of community and build friendships. Kyaw, a 25-year old MSM, says he has previously faced discrimination by health care personnel but with medical staff at the DIC, he feels he can be open and speak freely about health issues that are unique to the MSM community. He appreciates that the services are free of charge which makes them more easily accessible to him.

Raju, from the MSM community was introduced to the DIC through friends. He is thankful for being able to access ART without delay at the DIC clinic; "At the [health center] I was often told to come back in a few months, but here I can get the treatment I need right away. My partner is HIV negative", he explains, "so it is important to me to access treatment and always have condoms to protect him. [at the DIC] I do not have to be shy or feel ashamed, I have made new friends and benefitted from the recreational activities and dry food rations".

High levels of stigma and discrimination towards sex work and same gender sex is a barrier to accessing health services. Peer education and MSM/FSW-friendly drop in centers promotes contact and provides a platform to reach these vulnerable groups with the HIV, STI, health and psychosocial support services they desperately need.



FSW health education session

Reaching out to spread the word

Drop in centers are just one way that NGOs supported by the Global Fund provide comprehensive access to HIV and STI treatment care and support for MSM and FSW in Myanmar. Outreach work is another important means of reaching target communities with health messages and services, particularly for MSM and FSW who are harder to reach.

Peer outreach workers work in the field with target communities to inform them about the services provided at the DIC, distribute condoms, education materials and conduct community education sessions. The outreach workers are themselves members of the communities they seek to serve, and this gives them valuable knowledge of local 'hotspots' where FSW and/or MSM are likely to be.

Victoria: "I attend the DIC for medical treatment and really enjoy the social aspect and parties that we have on site. I go there every week."

Peer educators are responsible for recording the number of clients they reach during their outreach work, how many condoms are distributed and how many community education sessions they hold which contributes to overall project targets. In addition, peer educators conduct home visits and provide care to those who are sick and unable to visit the DIC. In 2012 alone, Global Fund partners reached 56,000 MSM and 38,000 FSW and distributed over 5,000,000 condoms and sold almost 10,000,000 condoms through social marketing in Myanmar.

The MDM DIC employs 23 peers who work as either outreach workers or at the drop in center. Victoria, a young woman visiting the center, tells the story of how she found out about the DIC through an outreach worker who approached her on the street while she was working. Now she is a regular visitor. "I attend the DIC for medical treatment and really enjoy the social aspect and parties that we have on site. I go there every week".

*All names have been changed to ensure confidentiality of peer educators and beneficiaries.

Reaching Out to Meet the Needs of Vulnerable Communities in Yangon

Nestled off on a small street that connects to a main road in downtown Yangon lays Population Services International's (PSI) Targeted Outreach Program (TOP) drop in-center (DIC). Visitors will find a warm and welcoming building that offers comprehensive STI and HIV services to men who have sex with men (MSM), and female sex workers (FSW) in the community.

Supported by the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, through Save the Children, PSI operates the DIC which is open from 9 to 5 every day of the week. The DIC provides a place for all members of the targeted communities to come and receive



Condom demonstration during a community education session

information and engage in educational activities, meet with their peers in support groups or to socialize in a safe place. Those who visit the DIC can stay for as long as they like and utilize the facilities for recreation and entertainment. It creates a safe space for MSM to interact with peers free from judgment and discrimination, and enables FSWs to get some rest and relaxation.

Not only does the center cater for their psychosocial needs, it also allows MSM and FSW to access much needed medical and health care services. They can receive counseling, testing and treatment for STIs, TB and HIV. At the DIC, newly diagnosed MSM or FSW are linked up with "buddies" - trained volunteers who are also living positively - who help them adjust to living with HIV by answering questions and providing care and support.

"... [At the DIC] I do not have to be shy or feel ashamed, I have made new friends and benefitted from the recreational activities and dry food rations" -Raju, Yangon

At another location in downtown Yangon lunch is being served to a group of MSM/FSW at the DIC run by Médecins du Monde (MDM), funded by the Global Fund. Lunch is provided daily to visitors as well as the opportunity to join the support groups

which covers a different topic each day (such as ART support, SW, MSM, nutrition). At this DIC, MDM works to reduce new HIV infections by providing access to testing, treatment and prevention services for MSM and FSW, many of whom are young.

From Tuesday to Thursday, as part of its micro-finance initiative, visitors can practice vocational skills such as sewing training, to help them develop skills that will enable them to earn alternate incomes. There is also a beauty salon on site where MSM and FSWs can practice beauty skills such as hair washing and styling and improve their personal hygiene.

The Global Fund has, since implementation in 2011, allocated over \$207 million USD to support efforts to control the HIV and AIDS epidemic in Myanmar. As a Principal Recipient of the Global Fund, Save the Children and its partners are providing prevention, care, support and treatment services, with a focus on key target populations – including sex workers, men who have sex with men, people who inject drugs and people living with HIV. Through 15 Sub-Recipients in 112 townships we reach out to vulnerable populations through a wide range of approaches to enable access to quality diagnosis and effective treatment and care.

The health clinic is staffed by 4 full time clinic staff and includes a dispensary where people can receive treatment and medication free of charge. The staff provides ART counseling and adherence support, and lab staff are able to process rapid HIV tests, TB smears, STI testing and CD4 counts on site.

By making services easily accessible at the DIC, PSI and MDM contribute to reducing HIV and STI transmission among MSM and FSW communities in Yangon while simultaneously making tailored services available to them. In 2012 alone, approximately 6,000 FSW and 7,000 MSM were tested for HIV. Increasing access to and uptake of HIV testing among these key affected populations is an important step to getting people on treatment, preventing transmission and helping those living with HIV to live long and healthy lives.

Ni Ni's story

Ni Ni, first learned about the DIC by a peer outreach worker who approached her on the street while working one night. She was happy to find the friendly services available there, to meet friends and to be able to rest during the day before working at night.

"Harassment and arrest is a major challenge in my work", she says, explaining the importance of the work PSI does with community sensitization. Clients who refuse to use condoms are also common, so negotiation skills taught by peer educators help empower her and her peers. "The money I make from my work helps me to provide for my family, and when I am sick I can't work" she says. "So being able to get free treatment [through the DIC] helps me to keep healthy so I can continue to work and support my family".

Sharing the knowledge

Yaminn, a transgender MSM in her late twenties, lives in Yangon and works as a peer outreach worker in PSI's MSM program. Every morning she packs her bag with penile models, condoms, pamphlets and other IEC materials and heads out to visit a number of beauty parlors and hair dressers in the city where friends and new clients hang out.

"I keep an eye out for new people that I haven't spoken to before", Yaminn says. "If I see a new person in the MSM community, I will tell them about the DIC and encourage them to visit for services like HIV, STI and TB testing". In addition to reaching out to new people, Yaminn regularly conducts two-hour community education sessions on a range of health topics such as TB, VCT and STI testing and treatment.

In a typical day, Yaminn visits two sites to conduct outreach before heading back to the office to report on the number of new and existing clients met, topics discussed, condoms and other materials distributed.

Yaminn has been working as a peer educator for six years. "The best part of my job is working with my friends and other people in the MSM community in a way that benefits them, such as being able to share knowledge. It's great that I get to make so many new friends".

For Further Information

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