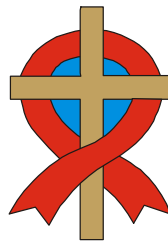


LoveMatters



A programme providing behaviour change education
to South African scholars
to help prevent the spread of HIV/Aids infection

Salesians carry out activities in many countries in Sub Saharan Africa that have been adversely impacted by HIV/Aids, with a focus on meeting the needs of orphaned children and training vulnerable youth. The presence of these Salesian youth centres offers a unique opportunity to link crucial HIV/Aids prevention efforts with the youth development activities for which Salesians are already well-known.

LoveMatters is a programme of lifestyle and sexuality education run for teenagers (13 – 19 years of age) by the Salesians of Don Bosco at Bosco Youth Centre, in Daleside, south of Johannesburg. It provides behaviour change education to South African scholars to help prevent the spread of HIV/Aids infection. The programme is based on sexuality teaching in the context of adult responsibility, a holistic education in human sexuality. Classroom teaching and individual counselling are included. The programme is currently offered to youth and peer group leaders who then return to their communities and act as behaviour change advocates. Personal development is promoted through communication, self-esteem and self-evaluation courses, setting short and long-term goals, and opportunities to make decisions.

Our programme content is continually improved and adapted to take into account advances in medical research as more becomes known about HIV/AIDs and other sexually transmitted diseases. We also take into account the comments of the participants during the post-programme evaluation which they complete – this enables us to continually update and improve our sessions and tailor them closely what the participants' need. Our programme has improved significantly since October 2001.

To date 5839 (2680 boys + 3159 girls) young people have participated in the LoveMatters programme since its conception in October 2001. Each year, we have seen an increase in numbers attending and our outreach has extended outside of Gauteng to the Free State, Western Cape, Eastern Cape and Swaziland.

LoveMatters needs R250 000 (Euros 26 997.84 at an exchange rate of 1Euro/9,26 Rand) which will enable us to expose another 2000 disadvantaged teenagers to the message of this **abstinence-based AIDS prevention** programme in 2007.

Background:

According to a 2006 report by the UNAIDS and the World Health Organization, Sub Saharan Africa is home to 60 percent of the world's HIV and AIDS patients. Twenty four percent of Botswana's adult population (ages 15 to 49) are HIV positive. More than 5 million people in South Africa are HIV positive, roughly 19 percent of its adult population.

LoveMatters has run for the past five years at Daleside south of Johannesburg. Communities such as Orange Farm, Soweto and Sharpville are all within a 30 km radius from here, and large school groups of about 80 students at a time (boys and girls) attend a residential five day workshop of behaviour change in order to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV/Aids. (Great emphasis is placed on other STDs as well, as these are often as severe and facilitate the spread of HIV.)

The programme stimulates extensive social dialogue on safer behaviours. Peer leaders take information they have learned at the seminars back to their communities, advocating behaviour change there. Parents are encouraged to attend seminars. Other educators and teachers are welcome to observe the programme out of sheer curiosity, but especially with a view to replicating whichever parts of it they find relevant in their own working with young people. Adapted LoveMatters programmes have evolved in Tzaneen and Rustenberg as a result of interested adults having participated in the behaviour change programme.

LoveMatters is registered as a South African Non-Profit Organisation.

Goals and Objectives:

The goal of this programme is to rescue at least 2000 young people per year from becoming statistics of HIV/AIDS infection. The programme provides behaviour change education to presumed healthy youth, although some may be already infected. The target group includes mainly scholars between the ages of 13 and 19, from schools of all denominations in the townships.

The approach is in line with the growing policy worldwide of promoting abstinence before and fidelity within marriage. The behaviour change sessions addresses cultural aspects within the context of five primary aspects of love and sexuality: emotional, spiritual, physical, intellectual and moral.

Even though only an initial 2000 young people will have been sponsored through this project, they will in turn have an impact, through their participation in the programme, on many more youth of the Gauteng region. From each group a certain number are invited to be peer ministers on future programmes. It is hoped, given adequate funding and resources, that the programme can be expanded to thousands more young people.

There is no doubt that the youth, who form about 40% of the population, constitute our future. (The National Youth Act of 1996 defines youth as the group aged 14 to 35 years. Youth are allowed to enter labour market at 15. The National Youth Development Framework, approved by Cabinet on 21 November 2001, defines young people as all those between the ages 15 and 28 to facilitate the implementation of youth programmes.) Every generation of youth faces its own unique set of challenges, which vary considerably between the urban and peri-urban areas of Johannesburg. HIV and AIDS are however very real challenges in our country, whether the setting is urban or rural. They are proving to be more difficult to come to terms with, because they involve science and morals.

In February 2005, the South African government and Statistics South Africa published the report "Mortality and causes of death in South Africa, 1997-2003". This large document contains lists of how many people died from each cause over a six year period, according to death notification forms.

The government's report reveals that the annual number of registered deaths rose by a massive 57% between 1997 and 2002. Among those aged 25-49 years, the rise was 116% in the same six year period. Part of the overall increase is due to population growth and more complete reporting of deaths. However, this does not explain the substantial rise in the

proportion of deaths occurring among persons aged 25 to 49 years. In 1997, people in this age group accounted for 23% of all deaths, but in 2003 they made up 34%.

Year of death	Age (years)					Total
	0-14	15-24	25-49	50+	Unspecified	
1997	40,495	19,831	92,479	159,731	5,571	318,287
1998	47,407	22,723	113,848	178,616	5,095	367,689
1999	46,534	24,629	129,383	178,637	2,719	381,902
2000	47,419	26,252	149,391	188,714	2,193	413,969
2001	48,954	28,026	171,942	201,127	1,887	451,936
2002	56,250	30,815	199,485	210,729	1,989	499,268
Increase 1997-2002	38.9%	55.4%	115.7%	31.9%	-35.7%	56.9%

"Social stigma associated with HIV/AIDS, tacitly perpetuated by the Government's reluctance to bring the crisis into the open and face it head on, prevents many from speaking out about the causes of illness and deaths of loved ones and leads doctors to record uncontroversial diagnoses on death certificates.... The South African Government needs to stop being defensive and show backbone and courage to acknowledge and seriously tackle the HIV/AIDS crisis of its people."

"South Africa needs to face the truth about HIV mortality ", the Lancet, Volume 365 Number 9459, 12-18 February 2005

We are all well aware in South Africa of the crippling impact of the disease and why behaviour change and prevention programmes are essential to our young people. It is clear and admitted by many parties that the loveLife¹ campaign which focused mainly on the distribution of condoms and promoted safe sex, has failed. The high rate of HIV infections in South Africa makes it essential to focus on youth. We are no longer hoping to avoid a disaster – that has clearly not happened, and the disaster is felt by everyone, with repercussions for the elderly who have to care for the Aids orphans of their children and for the economy.

The LoveMatters programme strives to accentuate spirituality and value systems, in addition to interaction with experts such as medical doctors, nurses, psychologists and young people who volunteered to facilitate the programmes. Sexuality is openly debated, in the context of other challenges experienced by young people – living in poverty, overcrowded conditions at home, unemployment, etc. LoveMatters work in partnership with any school or church in Gauteng. The programme is aimed at the most disadvantaged teenagers since they are the most exposed and vulnerable to HIV infection. Teenagers of any culture, creed, and race are welcome to participate in the programme. A team of local volunteers, who represent many of the country's language groups, enable us to offer some sessions in isiZulu or seSotho.

¹ Government sponsored HIV/AIDS campaign

As usual, we will draw on the local community for our team of volunteers (in the age group 18 – 25) to supplement our core ministry team of priests, sisters and brothers. Each of these volunteers spends a year with the Salesian community and then return to their own communities with the experience gained at Bosco Centre.

The LoveMatters programme is also regularly observed by adults, educators, teachers, parents, especially with a view to replicate whichever parts of it they find relevant in their own working with young people. It has been encouraging to see how the LoveMatters principles have spread like yeast through youth development projects, especially when it was realized that the government's loveLife campaign was not successful – behaviour change was much more difficult to achieve and had many delicate components.

LoveMatters is run at a fraction of the cost of the budgeted life skills programmes run by the loveLife campaign and the Department of Health.

Methodology:

The course includes testimonies by peers; worksheets; role plays; Question and Answer sessions; exercises - e.g. answering agony columns; audio/visual tapes & slides; handouts; and literature to read during quiet times. Input is through personal sharing (by committed peers, by married couples & by religious celibates) discussion sheets, current press articles, handouts, games and group dynamic activities, rather than by moralistic lecturing.

Participants learn how HIV/AIDS is contracted and the value of abstinence and monogamous relationships. Information about other sexually transmitted diseases, common myths, prevention, and cures is provided. Information about the risk of condom failure is given, and participants are encouraged to avoid AIDS, not by relying on condoms and so-called "safe-sex" practices, but through chaste behaviour. The area of relationship building is treated in detail and the myths and misconceptions in the field of sexuality and love are exploded.

All funds donated to the LoveMatters programme are utilized to subsidise participants. The minimum contribution from the participants was set at R200 and we do not intend to increase this. We do find that some participants are not even able to pay R200 and accordingly we have in the past further subsidised these individuals in order that no young person is prevented from being exposed to LoveMatters due to financial constraints.

Other funders of LoveMatters to date are Breadline Africa, the South African Catholic Bishop's Conference, National Lotteries Distribution Trust Fund and Salesians locally and internationally.