

HIV WORK READY, PEERS TACKLING ISOLATION AND UNEMPLOYMENT

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Approach: Conservative estimates suggest that approximately 25% of people living with HIV (PLHIV) in NSW are currently unemployed yet potentially employable. PLHIV self-report social inequalities such as unemployment, isolation and poverty as issues that detrimentally affect their quality of life and ability to remain engaged with health services. Our aim is to build PLHIV capacity, increase social engagement and reduce welfare dependency by using a peer support approach.

Analysis: The project identifies and removes barriers for the participant and supports them to be self-directing. Desired outcomes described by the participants are grouped into four common themes: increasing income, re-skilling, pursuing more social connection/meaningful engagement or improved living conditions. Based on the participant's desired outcomes, an action plan is developed in consultation with the project officer. The participants leave their initial meeting with clear and achievable next steps so they can easily recognise progress made towards achieving their goals.

Outcome: The HIV Work Ready Program recruited, enrolled and processed 58 PLHIV over twelve months with 54% self-referred and 46% referred from HIV community outreach teams. The program has had success placing PLHIV in both paid (21%) and unpaid work (22%) as well as enrolled in vocational training qualifications (33%).

Conclusions: Increasingly PLHIV are being transitioned from specialist services into mainstream services that fail to adequately acknowledge and validate their lived experience and subsequently unsuccessfully meet the peers needs. Feedback received from community consultations and those of other partner agencies have consistently identified employment and social isolation as priority issues for PLHIV. Evidence from program outcomes supports the need for changes in service design and delivery for PLHIV across both health and social mainstream services. PLHIV who participate in the program develop new skills and confidence that allow them to be in control of their future opportunities.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The Positive Life NSW HIV Work Ready program is funded by ViiV Healthcare Positive Action community grant.

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