

Increasing Access to Healthcare: The Way Forward

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In 2011, J-FLAG embarked on what would become one of its biggest and most successful programmatic endeavours to date. Having recognised existing gaps within the public health system around stigma and discrimination, J-FLAG implemented the pilot of a Public Health Worker Training Programme to build the capacity of healthcare workers to treat with men who have sex with men and the wider LGBT population.

The programme was implemented in partnership with the National HIV/STI Programme of the Ministry of Health and the National Family Planning Board (NFPB), and has now been implemented for six consecutive years. J-FLAG developed a ten-module training manual that covers areas such as Gender & Sexual Diversity, MSM Sexual Health, Values Clarification and Motivational Interviewing.

In the first year of the training, sixty (60) public health workers and six (6) persons from NFPB were trained around providing health services for gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men. To date, we have trained over six-hundred (600) healthcare professionals who use the information and experience they receive through the training to improve service provision and combat stigma and discrimination in their facilities.

There has been significant growth in the project over the years, and J-FLAG continues to use evidence to support its programmatic work. After the second round of training, for instance, J-FLAG recognised that to a significant degree, frontline staff such as security guards and customer service personnel, among others, perpetuated a lot of stigma and discrimination but did not need such an extensive training as medical providers. We sought and received funding to do an abridged version of the

training for frontline staff, and to date we have trained over two-hundred (200) of them across the island. Similarly, we began to sensitise service users as the evidence pointed to stigma and discrimination also happening with other clients who use the public health system and the need for interventions at various points. Over 1500 individuals across the country have been reached in this regard.

We have also ensured that the information we disseminate remains current. As such, we have updated the content of the training manual that we use to guide the programme. One of the major changes we have made is the increase in content and depth of exploration on mental health and transgender issues.

Of course, in order to measure and understand the impact of the programme, J-FLAG undertakes monitoring and evaluation each year. Through this process participants are visited at their health facilities where an assessment is done to gauge if and/or how the training enhance their work. They are observed in their work environment and are asked a series of questions to measure how they felt about the training and its impact on their day-to-day duties. The facilities are also assessed based on their effectiveness, including mission statements, client charter, etc being visibly displayed. Interviews are also conducted with service users who are chosen randomly and asked questions about their experiences in the facilities and whether they witness any form of discrimination while accessing healthcare.

The M&E portion of the project is the most rewarding for the team as we get feedback on the positive ways in which the programme is impacting on the lives of the healthcare workers and their clients. Hearing the stories of how participants move from being intolerant to being more accepting of LGBT people and understanding their needs is a significant achievement for the LGBT movement, and human rights more broadly. Many participants

also share that beyond their professional growth, the training has helped them in their personal lives to reignite or improve strained relationships with family members, friends, community members and colleagues who are members of the LGBT community.

Our successful implementation of the healthcare worker training programme has expanded beyond the shores of Jamaica. We have provided technical assistance to others in the region; helping to train healthcare workers and provide assistance and expertise in organising for advocacy with members of the LGBT community. We have done this in Haiti and Dominica, where we have trained seventy-two (72) healthcare workers in total between 2017 and 2018. We are especially proud of the assistance we have been able to provide for our Caribbean neighbours as we are not only interested in the improvement of LGBT lives in Jamaica, but of our counterparts in the region and beyond.

Some of the lessons and best practices we have seen over the years include:

- ⇒ The importance of the relationship and partnership we have built with successive ministers and technocrats at the Ministry of Health and its agencies.
- ⇒ Provision of a non-judgemental and open space for healthcare workers to share their true feelings so they can begin the process of unlearning and relearning.
- ⇒ A strong focus on monitoring and evaluation is significant to the success of the project.
- ⇒ Evidence-based approaches to the development and implementation of programmes is critical.
- ⇒ Sharing information with stakeholders so programmatic efforts across CSOs and government entities can be in sync.
- ⇒ The importance of adapting and including new information in our trainings as the need arises.

The team at J-FLAG is confident in the continued success and impact of the health programme, and is assured of the ways in which our advocacy and programme development continue to positively change the human rights landscape, especially as it relates to the lived realities of LGBT Jamaicans. Moving forward we will be further strengthening our relationship with the government and CSOs in the sector to ensure that there is a strategic and cohesive effort to improve the access and provision of healthcare services to members of the LGBT community.