



Anova's Young Heroes Programme



ANOVA
HEALTH INSTITUTE



// This is a great platform for the LGBT community. Where I grew up there was no one to empower me or give me words of wisdom about being gay. I grew up believing that there was something wrong with the way I felt. But now, with Young Heroes to educate not only gay people but straight people too, things are different. Their campaign is just amazing and it's not just about sexuality but anti-bullying in general too. # I AM WHAT I AM //
- Facebook user

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BACKGROUND

Young Men who have Sex with Men (YMSM) have a number of unique vulnerabilities that increase their risk of contracting HIV and STIs and put them at high risk for emotional distress, compromised relationships and academic failure. YMSM face challenges related to disclosing their sexual orientation or sexual behaviours within their families, among friends, and in healthcare settings. Coming out at a young age, either to parents or to peers, may be associated with internalised homophobia, harassment, rejection, victimisation and suicide.

Young MSM are also likely to have fluid sexual and gender identities, to not regard sexual practice as a primary social identity, and to have little connection to gay or MSM communities. Traditional HIV programmes neglect this group who do not outwardly identify as gay or MSM, are protective of their private lives, and may not socially engage with other MSM, leaving them potentially unreached by clinical services. The combined effect of these factors increases HIV risk for YMSM by limiting their access to support services and HIV prevention resources.

Young MSM have little access to information on sexuality, relationships, HIV and other health issues, and do not receive this from school-delivered sexual education. Young MSM not only require specific interventions to assist in reducing their risk of contracting HIV and other STIs; they are also some of the hardest to reach. They are frequently too embarrassed to ask for, or search for, information on HIV or sex. In this vacuum, pornography has become a common source where YMSM look for information on sex, while gay community-targeted websites are often the source for information on sexual orientation issues. While accurate and appropriate sexual education is crucial to assist YMSM in preventing HIV infection, there is a need to go further.

Programmes that address the needs of YMSM must provide both safe and appropriate comprehensive sexual education and create resilient YMSM, who are able to navigate complex issues associated with sexual orientation, sexuality, gender identity, coming out, self-esteem and bullying, assuring healthy young men. Supportive physical or virtual social environments can enable YMSM to harness protective factors, which promote healthy development and insulate against risk. It is fundamentally important for YMSM to contribute to the content and design of these programmes and to participate in directing these platforms.

YMSM IN SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa has a youthful population, with 41% being younger than 21 years. Despite South Africa's liberal legal environment, the broadly homophobic nature of South African society means that disclosure, or coming out as gay, is a potentially risky undertaking which may lead to withdrawal of support, and increased stigma, violence, and discrimination. This, in turn, may increase the likelihood of sexual risk-taking at a young age due to the association with anxiety and low self-esteem, and increase risk of HIV infection.

Little formal data is available about young MSM in the South African context. A study of YMSM at a South African university found relatively high levels of consistent condom use (70% reported always using condoms), but also noted the relative frequency of experiencing violence and abuse, as well as alcohol and drug use during sexual intercourse. Data from Anova's research shows that there are also differences between younger and older MSM in terms of their sexual identities and race. Younger MSM are more likely to be questioning their sexual identity, and stigma, discrimination and cultural values systems may limit their ability to express sexual identity and behaviours. Issues such as identity versus role confusion, trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus doubt, acutely apply to YMSM as they navigate their pathways into adulthood and identity development. In their search to resolve these dynamics, YMSM can be extremely vulnerable to HIV. Differences in sexual identity are associated with differences in HIV risk, and gay or transgender-identifying people in South Africa have higher odds of contracting HIV than those who identify as straight or bisexual.

HIV-related interventions specifically targeting YMSM specifically form an important part of the evolving response to the HIV epidemic in key populations in South Africa. By targeting YMSM as a group in their own right it will be possible to tailor interventions to address the specific needs and challenges faced by these individuals, which will have long-term effects on their HIV risk across their lifetimes.

41%
OF SOUTH
AFRICAN
YOUTH ARE
YOUNGER
THAN 21

THE YOUNG HEROES PROGRAMME

A formative demonstration project of an innovative group intervention addressing the psychosocial needs of South African YMSM

When Anova started the Young Heroes project, few programmes targeted YMSM, or engaged YMSM within adolescent spaces. To address this gap, the first phase of this project was to engage young MSM in a formative facilitated group process to identify and address their sexual and mental health needs. An expert Technical Working Group, consisting of four psychologists and a psychiatrist (all of whom specialised in sexual and gender identity issues) and three senior Anova staff, was established to guide and oversee the formative work.

We were mindful that parents and legal guardians may misunderstand the Project as an attempt to ‘recruit’ young men into inappropriate sexual behaviour, and that YMSM would not take part in research for fear of having to consult parents. We, therefore, decided to start by focusing on ‘young adults’ (16 – 24) rather than younger adolescents.

Thirty-four YMSM applied through an online process to participate in a one-week, residential, multi-faceted interactive programme, and 14, aged 17 – 21 years, were successfully enrolled in the project. Daily structured sessions included group discussion and didactic sessions, body mapping and opportunities for internal reflection, facilitated by two black gay-identified psychologists. During the process, two participants disclosed being HIV-positive.



Preliminary Advocacy & Insights Workshop (Johannesburg)
A seven-day intensive deep-dive, December 2015, 15 participants age 17-21



“I think we connected in ways we would not have connected outside, in clubs or other spaces. But because [Young Heroes] was so intimate we got to know each other deeply. That’s the kind of space that I’m wanting, rather than going to bars and clubs.” – Participant

Some prominent themes arose within the group process.

- There is an **absent masculine voice** during the development and self-acceptance of their sexual identity. Participants mostly spoke of their coming out experience in relation to patriarchal figures such as mothers, grandmothers and aunts
- Verbal and **physical violence** from close family members and the community was experienced by all the participants. This violence is not reported as they do not have confidence that the police will do anything about it
- **Alcohol** is used to reduce anxiety in social spaces and to relax so that sex is more pleasurable
- **School-based homophobia** was common both from teachers and pupils and conversations on sexual and gender diversity avoided
- YMSM are deeply resistant to fitting into clearly defined categories, preferring **more fluid and inclusive descriptors**
- **Religion and spirituality** challenge YMSM, who have difficulty integrating their sexual identity and spirituality
- The link between **material wealth and self-confidence**. This is uniquely linked to transactional sexual relationships with older MSM ("blessers"). Many YMSM believe that the acquisition of material wealth builds a more desirable physical image and boosts their self-confidence
- YMSM use **social media** to stay connected and as a means of self-reference, underlining the importance of using social media to communicate with YMSM

The workshop helped to build self-confidence and motivation to advocate for YMSM. The majority of YMSM who took part in the intervention developed a deep understanding of themselves as activists. They spoke of the importance of educating themselves and others on their rights and the need for safe spaces. The writing workshop in particular, played an important part in allowing participants to use creative tools to explore and feel confidence in their own sexual and gender identities. The YMSM expressed the need to see themselves in campaigns and on social media platforms, with several volunteering to be part of a photo shoot.

Building on the findings of this group, a focus group was conducted to decide on a campaign name that would be inclusive and affirmative for YMSM, resulting in **"The Young Heroes"** campaign.

A consultation on engagement with YMSM included representatives from the YMSM population, key academics, government stakeholders and opinion leaders from YMSM research programmes and services throughout South Africa. The group made several important recommendations for programme development.

"I've learned that it's okay to have problems, and not to know how to deal with them on your own. It's okay to trust someone and to allow them to show you things you've never encountered before. But also, be in charge of who you are and your choices... [and] to fight for your rights" - Participant



YMSM Photoshoot
2016

THE YOUNG HEROES CAMPAIGN

Based on the formative research, key campaign themes were identified:

- Building self-esteem and self-efficacy
- Exploring sexual identity
- Improving decision making skills
- Developing autonomy
- Linking to appropriate counselling and services
- Providing opportunities to engage with peers

To further refine our social media strategy, messaging themes and content, focus groups were conducted in Johannesburg and Cape Town to gain insight into YMSM communication behaviour, channel preferences and consumption of content.

As a result of these consultations, we elected to use Facebook as the primary social media platform to reach YMSM, linked to a Young Heroes website.



Johannesburg
Focus Group
2017

The Young Heroes campaign was launched on 16 June 2017 – South Africa’s National Youth Day. This gave us the perfect backdrop to elicit conversation around Young Heroes. We were able to piggy-back on events, radio shows and school activations.

Our launch communication mix included the following:

- Over 10,000 badges and flyers were dropped off at nine schools countrywide
- Participation in the Department of Health’s Youth Day Event in Johannesburg, where approximately 12,000 students enjoyed a day of music and entertainment and we handed out Young Heroes button badges, flyers and postcards
- Anova’s Outreach Teams in Gauteng, Kwazulu-Natal, Free State, North West and Limpopo provinces held events reaching over 500 YMSM
- Seven radio stations across the country broadcast interviews with our staff about the project. Discussions included bullying, peer pressure, dealing with disclosure in a family, recognizing depression, suicidal thoughts and better health outcomes
- Activation of Young Heroes at Mondeor High School (Johannesburg) with 1,680 learners reached. The launch included interviews with 15 learners on various issues they face and their perceptions regarding the LGBTI community

“Our Life Orientation teacher did include HIV but only as it related to heterosexuals. The only time we heard about sexual orientation was on a field trip to a clinic, where the nurse spoke about safe sex and she mentioned men having anal sex – but that was only in passing.”



Mondeor
High School
2017



In May 2017, Anova partnered with Arepp Theatre for Life for a period of three months. Arepp develop educational theatre for schools targeting learners from Grades 8-12. The scripts were jointly created with us to address issues of abuse, adolescent sexuality, eating disorders, gender roles and equality, HIV/AIDS, homosexuality, negotiating peer relationships and parent relationships, peer pressures, self-image, substance abuse and teen suicide.

Discussion groups were held after each show and identified three core themes of interest: relationships, identity, sex and sexuality. The insights from these discussions were developed into online content for our platforms.

Communication focus groups were held in Johannesburg and Cape Town in the last quarter of 2017, where we focussed on YMSM media consumption, social places, connecting with peers and digital behaviour.

We continually test ideas, obtain feedback and source community-generated content for the social media platforms.

"I'm very scared of HIV, I know how they treat people with HIV in the community"



Arepp Theatre Roadshow
May - August 2016



OTHER COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

To complement our primary online channels, we engage with YMSM to link them to Young Heroes through:

- Radio advertisements
- Radio interviews on selected stations
- Print & Press
- Young Heroes promotional materials in clinics
- Distribution of IEC materials at events and schools including “Stuff about Sex” booklets
- Condom & Lubricant “EDU pouches” distribution
- Young Heroes promotional collateral (t-shirts, bags etc.)

Content Creation for online channels

In April 2017, we held a workshop with 15 YMSM on ‘how to develop a narrative’ in order to create testimonial online videos. Core issues were identified amongst the participants, ranging from psychosocial issues to sexual health. After workshoping the narratives and teaching them how to construct their story, the participants were then given the opportunity to share their experiences on camera. This resulted in 14 Young Hero testimonial videos, of which 10 are already on our YouTube platform.



Visit the Young Heroes soundcloud channel: <https://soundcloud.com/user-236770002-42056685>



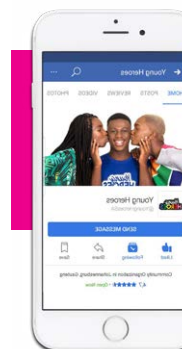
Visit the Young Heroes YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL62lhoUaBBR8C3BB-VZGehQ1xwkB2uxvB>

Results from our primary marketing channels

Facebook and our website remain our primary communication channels for Young Heroes. Our YouTube channel hosts our testimonial videos and we have recently started creating content for Instagram.

Facebook

Results based on the reporting period: November 2016 – December 2017



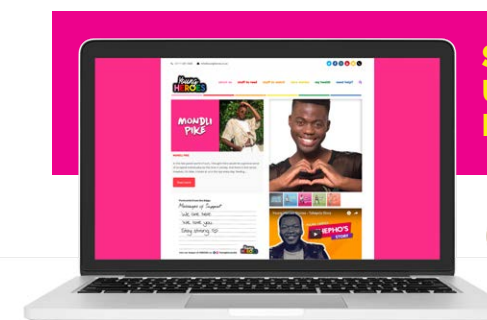
Total Fans 6384
Impressions 4,330,951
Engagements 93,486
Clicks 62,920



Visit the Young Heroes facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/YoungHeroesSA>

Paid media proves to be a major contributing driver for our online collateral, close to 89% of Facebook Page Likes. Facebook impressions are also dependent on paid media as a driver and account for nearly 86% of all impressions. Paid media does have an effect on engagement too, however, the creative/messaging can affect engagement rates more. Content needs to be relatable for it to work.

Website



Sessions 52,240
Users 442,432
Page views 71,753



Visit the Young Heroes webpage: <https://youngheroes.co.za>

Paid and social media have been key in driving traffic to the site where YMSM have been able to consume our content. Our Hero Stories have been very popular and they are our most consumed posts to date.

Mobile is our most widely used device to access the site (90.5% of sessions are through mobile) and is generally accessed between 6am to 10pm. There is a fair assumption that YMSM are consuming our content in a “hit and run” fashion (being channelled through various funnels and then returning back to their source i.e. Facebook). 81.2% of our visitors are returning visitors.

What’s worked on social media:

- Sexual health and relationships posts on social media attract the most attention
- Hero Stories
- Posts about popular culture, celebrities and music (Role models)
- Sharing photographs about events
- Motivational quotes
- Clinic information



KEY LEARNINGS

Sex & Health Education

- YMSM are only exposed to very basic education on heterosexual sex and pregnancy and have no access to sexual health information
- Learning about sex by watching porn is very common. The ‘guy in the group’ who has data, downloads the video and then shares it with his friends
- Fear of being judged and discriminated against when accessing health services
- Fear of talking to medical professionals about their health and sexuality

Condoms & Lube

- Limited access to condoms, even though they know where to buy them, they don’t due to fear of being seen to be sexually active. Current access is through clinics, some public toilets and supermarkets, if they have money
- Condom use is alarmingly low and often the first sexual experience is with someone older and without a condom
- Most YMSM do not know how to put on a condom
- Limited knowledge of the use of lubrication

“I don’t ask for a condom when we have sex ‘cause it kills the passion”

Clinic Poster 2018

KEY LEARNINGS

Sex & YMSM

- Sexual debut occurs early for these YMSM: commonly between 13 and 15 years of age
- Increasing numbers of YMSM are reporting having multiple sexual partners
- Transactional sex is common, in exchange for gifts or money is common
- YMSM fear contracting HIV, but not much thought is given to the risk of other STIs
- Several YMSM have described consuming alcohol before having sex to reduce anxiety and make sex more pleasurable. There is a high use of alcohol and binge drinking in social spaces from a young age

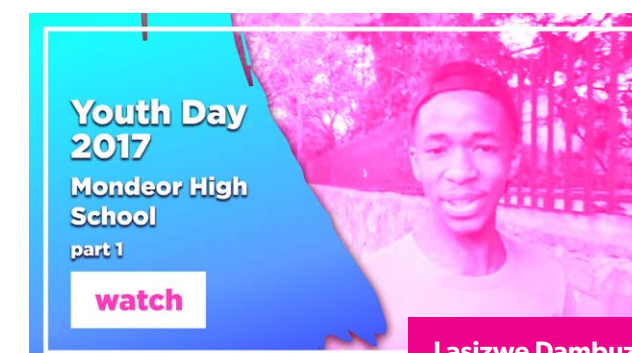
Psychosocial

- Fear of coming out is common due to most having experienced some form of verbal or physical violence against them as result of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. The adverse impact of violence results in challenges with low self-esteem, depression and self-harm or suicide
- Lack of visible role models in the media and their community
- Bullying is very prevalent not only in schools but also in the broader community
- High rate of nuclear family conflict pertaining to being gay. Violence experienced from the father figure and often other family members is common
- In cases where the father is absent due to death or abandoning the family, there seem to be more acceptance from the mother figure and hence the family
- Problems and conflict with homosexuality regarding church and/or religious beliefs is a common thread. Internalised homophobia
- School-based homophobia by teachers and learners is experienced by most YMSM. This often results in feelings of isolation and low self-esteem, which in turn result in negative health consequences

Communication

- Testimonials are the most powerful forms of content. For YMSM by YMSM
- There is a huge demand for education on sexuality and other gender expressions
- Launching with Lasizwe Dambuza as an ambassador and keeping him on as our 'voice' for Young Heroes, has been a great hit. He has a large social media following (230k), which has helped us spread awareness of Young Heroes
- Half way through the campaign we realised, through insights from the community, that we needed to appear more 'grown up'. As a result we made some creative changes to our campaign look 'n feel
- Online bullying and trolling very prevalent and something we need to be hypervigilant of
- Our community is not familiar with the term 'MSM' or 'YMSM' so we try to keep our communication 'peer conversational'

"If a guy tell me he is with HIV I will run"



Lasizwe Dambuza
Video Sketches
2017

WAY FORWARD

We have come a long way since the inception of this project. Young Heroes has managed to earn the trust of YMSM in South Africa. We are their voice and their guide in a social environment where they primarily experience violence, shame, fear and rejection.

It is time to take Young Heroes to the next level. We now know how to effectively reach YMSM, start a conversation, keep them engaged and ultimately empower and change behaviour.

The way forward for Young Heroes has a strong online and offline component. Interesting, effective content creation is critical to remain relevant to YMSM.

However, we need to commit resources to paid online media in order for us to be seen: there is no point in having great content if we are not actively pushing our audience to it.

Online will still remain our primary communication channel, however, we do need a physical presence in their lives too. We need to be seen in clinics and in the communities. Our EDU pouches, “Stuff About Sex” booklets and other branded collateral needs to get into the hands of our YMSM. Therefore, we want to truly expand nationally by taking Young Heroes ‘on the road’ by offering ‘edutainment’ at schools and social spaces.

YMSM in South Africa need Young Heroes. We are the only hope they have.

DIGITAL PLATFORM LINKS



<https://soundcloud.com/user-236770002-42056685>



<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL62lhoUaBBR8C3BB-VZGehQ1xwkB2uxvB>



<https://www.facebook.com/YoungHeroesSA>



<https://twitter.com/YoungHeroesSA>



<https://www.instagram.com/youngheroesza>



<https://youngheroes.co.za>

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