

Magnet Theatre: Involving audiences and encouraging change

PATH's Magnet Theatre intervention is designed to not only entertain and educate, but to involve audience members in the action and encourage the kind of participation and reflection that is key to sustained behavior change. Magnet Theatre is a form of community theatre that typically takes place in outdoor, public spaces. The hour-long performances explore issues affecting a community and encourage discussion and problem solving with audience members. The actors perform a drama that presents a dilemma based on community issues. The audience participates by offering suggestions to the characters or by taking the place of an actor and acting out solutions to the dilemma. Magnet Theatre encourages audience members to discuss solutions and allows them to experiment in a safe environment, to encourage individual and community-wide change. Magnet Theatre is different from other forms of community theatre because it targets and attracts a specific and repeat audience, takes place at a regular time at a specific venue, and serves as a forum for magnification of behavior change. Magnet Theatre has produced some of PATH's most visible examples of behavior change.



Photo: PATH, Mike Wang

Members of Kwacha Afrika perform in Mombasa

PATH has used Magnet Theatre to encourage community dialogue around HIV and AIDS issues, consequences of early marriage, and TB prevention and treatment. Magnet Theatre often targets young people, but can involve the entire community as well. PATH has trained theatre troupes throughout Kenya in the Magnet Theatre process and HIV and AIDS technical content. FHI's IMPACT and Transport Corridor Initiative Projects, CARE, the Red Cross, PATH's Scouting for Solutions project, and Kenya's National Youth Service have all received training from PATH in Magnet Theatre. Staff from PATH's Kenya office have also facilitated Magnet Theatre training workshops in Eritrea, Uganda, and India.

PATH's Magnet Theatre has the following unique steps to ensure its effectiveness:

- Troupe identifies a problem in the community (through an open discussion with the audience, observation, or questions asked during performances), develops a relevant script and rehearses the drama.
- Troupe attracts the audience to the performance site.
- Performance is enacted and frozen at a key dramatic moment.
- Audience members actively participate by either: asking the character questions to better understand the dilemma, suggesting what the character should do, or physically taking the place of an actor and acting out the decision.
- An open discussion follows where solutions and suggestions continue to be explored. Audience members have the opportunity to share their views and experiences related to the issue being discussed.
- After the performance a guest speaker, performer, or person who has changed behavior can present to the audience.
- A post-performance discussion with a few audience members, the facilitator, and troupe members takes place. Future performance topics are identified based on participants' questions and comments.
- Theatre troupe members identify and support magnification candidates and people considering behavior change.

PATH improves the health of people around the world by advancing technologies, strengthening systems, and encouraging healthy behaviors.

For more information about Magnet Theatre, contact:

Oluoch Madiang'
Program Associate
omadiang@path.org

IMPACT project

During the IMPACT project, PATH used Magnet Theatre to prevent HIV infection among out-of-school youth. The PATH-supported theatre troupes created storylines, wrote scripts, used language, and selected venues and performance times that appealed to youth. Performances focused on issues related to HIV and AIDS, including abstinence, voluntary counseling and testing, high-risk behavior, sexual decision making, stigma, and care and support. Through IMPACT, PATH supported 3,408 performances that reached 649,947 youth in the Coast, Rift Valley, and Western provinces and trained 430 theatre troupe members in HIV and AIDS content and the Magnet Theatre process. PATH developed a 10-day training manual to facilitate these workshops. In addition, 51 representatives from PATH-affiliated theatre troupes were trained in Magnet Theatre facilitation skills using a five-day workshop Magnet Theatre Facilitation training manual. In addition to the training manuals, PATH developed materials to enable theatre troupes to better understand the Magnet Theatre process: the shorter, action-oriented *Magnet Theatre: A How to Guide for Theatre Troupes*, and the more comprehensive, *Magnet Theatre Manual*.

National Youth Service

In 2005, PATH received funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to train members of the National Youth Service (NYS) in Magnet Theatre and HIV and AIDS. The objective is to develop and implement Magnet Theatre within the NYS and establish linkages and synergies with other HIV and AIDS programs within the Coordinating Office for Uniformed Services HIV/AIDS Programs. To date, PATH has trained over 200 servicemen and servicewomen from the 22 NYS units throughout Kenya. Plans are underway to train an additional 50 servicemen and servicewomen. In addition, there will be a five-day Magnet Theatre Facilitators training for 60 NYS participants by December 2006. Since being trained, NYS servicemen and service women have been conducting Magnet Theatre performances. Anecdotal evidence indicates that the service uptake for HIV-related services especially voluntary counseling and testing has increased exponentially following the introduction of Magnet Theatre.

Married Adolescents

In October 2005, PATH, in collaboration with Population Council, began implementing a project in the rural areas of Rachuonyo District in Nyanza to bring awareness to the risks associated with early marriage, promote couples voluntary counseling and testing, and empower girls. To reach these objectives, PATH is utilizing Magnet Theatre among other interventions. In Rachuonyo, theatre groups were strategically selected based on population density, accessibility, and HIV prevalence in their divisions. PATH trained members of eight theatre troupes in Magnet Theatre, HIV and AIDS, and the risks of early marriage. Since the training in November 2005, these troupes have facilitated an average of nearly 50 theatre outreach activities each month. Theatre troupes are linked to VCT centres near their performance sites and provide referrals to audience members. An additional 10 youth groups from Homa Bay will be trained in Magnet Theatre by the end of 2006.

Kwacha Afrika

After participating in a PATH workshop in Mombasa in February 2000, several youth formed a community-based organization called Kwacha Afrika. They began by facilitating Magnet Theatre performances in Kisauni, a division in Mombasa. As they received more training from PATH they were able to expand their activities and receive funding from various donors. Today they have an office with a youth resource center and internet cafe that generate income to support their activities and they coordinate youth-focused HIV and AIDS activities throughout the province.

Although the focus of Kwacha Afrika is on HIV and AIDS and reproductive health, the overall purpose is to improve the quality of life of young people in their community. They have formed abstinence clubs, post-test clubs and a girls forum, as well as provide counseling and referrals for HIV, sexually transmitted infections, and reproductive health services. Magnet Theatre performances continue to be a key component of Kwacha Afrika's work.

Not only has PATH's training supported the creation and expansion of Kwacha Afrika, but it has contributed to individual behavior change among the members. Most of the members openly talk about their risky behavior in the past and how they have changed and become role models in their communities. Most members of Kwacha Afrika have gone for VCT and openly talk about their experiences with other young people. These frank and honest discussions appeal to young people and encourage them to reflect on and change their own high-risk behaviors.