



Positive Leadership Development Institute:

A summary of its development in Canada

Recognising the importance of leadership, the Ontario AIDS Network (OAN) began to provide a series of workshops in March 2006. The Leadership Development Program at the Ontario AIDS Network¹ seeks to empower transformative leaders who will bring about positive changes in the communities where they live. Three levels of the program have been developed: Level I - Who Am I As a Leader, Level II - Communications and Level III - Organisational Governance. These courses are successive and pre-requisite in structure.

To date there have been 3 provincial (state) reviews of the PLDI program in Ontario, Canada.

1. Learning to lead - May 2008²
2. Positive Change Makers - Jan. 2010³
3. Learning to Lead II - July 2012⁴

The lessons learnt from the Canadian experience forecasts what opportunities through the PLDI Australia initiative may exist, indicates potential barriers and pitfalls (both for the program model but additionally for the community based HIV sector response) and provides a concrete sense of the outcomes being experienced by graduates of the PLDI program.

The Canadian model and curricula is slightly different to the Australian version in the following ways.

- They offer three levels focused upon different skills sets - leadership is the first level and is currently the only level on offer through PLDI Australia.
- There is an open call to any PLHIV in the community to apply (although support for nominations is sought from a local HIV agency).
- There is no pre/post psychometric testing of participants (although the Canadian content/course evaluation structure is similar)
- They focus upon the notion of "getting PLHIV involved" - in community, HIV response etc. whereas (to date) the Australian version has been

¹ <http://pldi.ca/about-pldi/>

² http://www.pldi.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/243702867_Leadership-Evaluation-Report-May-2008.pdf

³ http://www.pldi.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/1202822391_Change-Makers-Leadership-Program-Impact-Evaluation-Report.pdf

⁴ <http://www.pldi.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/PLDI-Evaluation-report-2012docx.pdf>

more about 'extending/enhancing or revitalising' existing community work of participants

- All costs are covered by the OAN and neither participant nor any agency provides support to PLDI (OAN receives provincial grants to run the course).
- Their programs are bounded by region/province.

The 2008 evaluation showed that the workshops are able to provide lasting effects on people's ability to lead and their confidence in themselves. The positive comments from the participants demonstrate a credible program with the ability to inspire confidence and teach people the skills they need to be valuable leaders in their communities.

By the end of 2008, 130 PLHIV had gone through the courses offered through PLDI. The findings from each set of study participants were overwhelmingly positive. On an individual level, results showed that the Leadership Program is having a deep impact on the lives of graduates. The program improved participants' confidence about disclosing their HIV status. For some, increased confidence to disclose helped them to step into new leadership roles (such as public speaking) and combat feelings of internalised stigma. Many participants also reported that the program led them to pursue other development opportunities.

In 2009 the Pacific AIDS Network⁵ began offering the PLDI programs in Western Canada. Their approach was very similar to the OAN structure however they instituted a course fee for participants payable by the participant or the agency that supports their participation.

In 2010 a further review of the program was completed utilising the most recent 175 graduates of the program. The findings concluded

- Motivation to take the course was underpinned by an existing altruistic intent
- Has resulted in improved self-esteem and confidence
- Provided new techniques for resolving conflict
- Increased comfort in disclosure of HIV status
- Improved capacity to envision the future and set goals
- Improved motivation for volunteering and ongoing learning
- Created a "community of leader" enabling them to problem-solve, develop ideas, access support and encouragement, gather information, and identify ways to work together to create change.

This review also compared the course participants reported outcomes to impressions to HIV agency staff familiar with course graduates. Both groups reported an increase in volunteering inside and outside of the HIV sector. They also noted an increase in the development of their networks. Sixty

⁵ <http://pacificaidnetwork.org/programs-projects/positive-leadership-development-institute-pldi/>

percent or more of graduates reported they were taking on new leadership roles and seeking new skills as a result of the Leadership Program.

Further, the review found that the following system structure changes were necessary to ensure that PLDI graduates were able to apply and develop skills they had learnt.

- Expanding supportive and consultative structures where PLHIV play a meaningful role in change
- Clearly identified processes and opportunities whereby PLHIV are called upon to 'speak out', 'act up' and get involved
- Creating more volunteer and paid roles in agencies - consider a wider variety of participatory structures such as internships, placements with buddy staff, collaborative contracts and mentor programs
- Need for more personal support after training
- Greater acknowledgement of other types of accreditation and experience as valued assets in the community response
- Avoiding "tokenism" - a collateral effect of enabling and empowering leaders is a greater discernment of when PLHIV are being valued as opposed to used

This review highlighted the following programmatic features were instrumental to the success of the program.

- The program emphasizes a facilitative model of leadership, whereby leaders identify and draw upon their own strengths and capacities and that of others to take action.
- All participants indicated that Level I training (leadership development) with the focus on identifying core values and personal leadership capacities was an important-- and for many—transformational and empowering experience.
- The program is facilitation by PLHIV for PLHIV. Graduates noted that this structure helped to create an emotionally safe space for participants to share personal experiences and challenges and seek peer support.
- Facilitation is critical and the facilitators must be able to work across knowledge, attitude and behaviour exploration and development in situ (the second two being much more challenging aspects in adult education practice).

In 2012, the third review of the program was completed. By this time, more than 300 PLHIV had gone through the courses offered (approximately 100 having gone through all three levels) with a waiting list of over 260 PLHIV wanting to get into the courses.

Demand for the courses was now so high that program expansions needed to be considered however reliance upon single source funding (provincial/state) has prevented this occurring.

The report quantifies the significant outcomes the courses are having upon the PLHIV population.

- Identifying personal core values and living by them (83%),
- Meeting other people at the training (83%),
- Enhanced self- confidence (76%)
- Enhanced skills for volunteering (50%)
- Enhanced skills for obtaining paid work (28%) and
- Motivation to upgrade education (13%).

Ranked quantitative results reported:

- More volunteering with an HIV agency or with the PLHIV community;
- Improved skills at work (especially active listening, dealing with difficult situations and having better information about HIV issues);
- Greater confidence and personal effectiveness;
- Taking on leadership roles in an HIV agency;
- Getting involved in the community beyond the HIV sector;
- Enhanced life skills;
- Being a better role model; and
- Securing paid work as a result of training.

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