

Title: Meaningful engagement of schools and school-based advocates in promoting education on HIV and supporting adolescents living with HIV in Kenya

Authors: Ruria E, Muandale M, Odionyi J, et al

Background: Adolescents living with HIV (ALHIV) spend a significant proportion of their daily lives in schools. In 2016, with support from ViiV Healthcare, the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation implemented the innovative peer-designed fast-track linkage-to-care and early retention Red Carpet Program (RCP) throughout public health care facilities (HCFs) and schools in Kenya. RCP worked closely with the Ministry of Education (MOE) and Ministry of Health (MOH) to design and implement school-based interventions to promote HIV education and support for ALHIV. The aim of this analysis was to evaluate the implementation of RCP school-based interventions conducted in 2017.

Description: RCP conducted two main interventions in the Homa Bay County boarding schools: a) enhanced partnership between schools and 50 RCP HCFs; b) built capacity of adolescent health advocates (counselling teachers, school matrons, nurses and boarding in-charge managers). A sensitization meeting was held with 70 secondary boarding school in-charge managers, principals and MOE officials in August 2017. During August-September 2017, RCP conducted a two-day capacity building workshop for 90 school-based adolescent health advocates from 44 high volume local secondary boarding schools.

Lessons learned: By November 2017, 50 boarding schools in Homa Bay County developed key HIV strategies including: a) fostering direct linkages with HCFs; b) formation of School Health Committees (SHC); c) training of adolescent health advocates; and d) support of ALHIV. By December 2017, 50 SHC were formed and >3000 students (both HIV+ and HIV-) were reached with education on HIV, HIV stigma, antiretroviral treatment, pre-exposure prophylaxis, and sexual and reproductive health. Fifty schools implemented activities targeting ALHIV, parent representatives and linked RCP HCFs teams. All 50 schools implemented adherence counselling, confidential storage and access to HIV medications for ALHIV.

Conclusions: Schools provided daily support to ALHIV from accessing care, medications to retention in care. The uptake of the general HIV education and support services for ALHIV was high in schools of Homa Bay County, Kenya. Going forward, RCP works to expand collaboration between HCFs and schools with the goal to increase long-term retention in care and on treatment, and achieve high levels of virologic suppression among ALHIV.