

HOLIDAY SOCIAL is a group level intervention that aims to alleviate the isolation of HIV+ individuals living in rural communities. The key characteristics of the Holiday Social are: the non-health related venue of the event; the connection individuals make with others living with HIV in their community; the creation of care support networks; and the opportunity for agency staff to strengthen its relationship with clients.

CURRENT ACTIVITY SETTING

*AIDS Service Organization,
Case Management*

- ✓ Directly links the client to medical care
- ✓ Gets the client in a conversation about starting medical care
- ✓ Brings the agency closer to where HIV+ people are so that the conversation can begin

I. DESCRIPTION

OBJECTIVES

- ▶▶ To help create a network of HIV+ individuals who can support one another when the case manager is not scheduled for a local visit
- ▶▶ To improve the relationship between case managers and their clients
- ▶▶ To break the emotional and physical isolation of clients who live in rural settings

POPULATION SERVED

- ▶▶ HIV+ clients with infrequent agency contact who reside in rural settings

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

Holiday Social provides regular opportunities for HIV+ individuals and service providers in rural areas to socialize and share health-related information and experiences in a festive environment. Through these social events, participants receive support in continuing or resuming utilization of health and social services.



QUICK NOTES:

Planning

Planning for Holiday Social includes the following steps:

- ▶▶ Set a budget for the event.
- ▶▶ Select a theme, which can be based on an approaching holiday.
- ▶▶ Develop an invitation list including current clients and clients who may have recently dropped out of agency services.
- ▶▶ Find an appropriate location for the event.
- ▶▶ Create an invitation letter that includes the time and place for the event, the theme, and the case manager’s contact information to RSVP.
- ▶▶ Mail invitation letters to clients.
- ▶▶ Follow up the invitation letter with a phone call to each client. Emphasize that the event will be held in a confidential location; repeat the event details. Encourage the client to bring a special dish or favorite CD. If the event is held around a holiday, encourage the client to bring a holiday appropriate gift or something they don’t need from around the house (books, videos, crafts, etc.).
- ▶▶ During the calls, ask about clients’ hobbies, passions, and special interests. Use this information to design group icebreaker games for the event.
- ▶▶ Ask if the client requires assistance with transportation. If not, ask if the client can offer a ride to another client to and from the event.
- ▶▶ Coordinate transportation with the help of client volunteers.
- ▶▶ Arrange for food and non-alcoholic beverages for the event.

The Day of the Event

- ▶▶ The case manager, who facilitates the event, outreach staff members, and client volunteers set up the space one to two hours before the start time. They arrange chairs, tables for food and, if the event or holiday calls for it, a gift table.
- ▶▶ The case manager also picks up the food order.
- ▶▶ As clients start to arrive, the case manager greets and offers them a beverage.
- ▶▶ Once most people have arrived, the case manager welcomes everyone and facilitates an icebreaker game to get clients comfortable and talking with one another. The game uses the information gathered during the follow-up calls. For example, each person may receive a piece of paper with a description of another person’s interests. Participants then mingle and try to guess whose interests have been written on their cards.
- ▶▶ Following the game, clients eat, listen to music, and talk with each other and agency staff.
- ▶▶ The staff introduces clients with shared interests and helps to stimulate conversation about doctors, medical appointments, and support groups they may be attending.
- ▶▶ The case manager and outreach workers talk with clients they may not have seen in a while, trying to reconnect and learn the reason they have not been in touch.
- ▶▶ Gifts and other items clients have brought are exchanged.
- ▶▶ Chairs are rearranged in a circle for a group conversation. The clients are asked to talk a little about who they are, how long they have been in the area, and about their families. This allows for further connections to be made among clients.
- ▶▶ The case manager closes the discussion by asking for feedback about the event such as the appropriateness of the location, whether they would attend similar events and, if so, how often. The case manager also asks what the clients enjoyed about the event and what could be improved.
- ▶▶ At the end of the event, staff prepares plates of leftover food for clients to take home. Clients exchange contact information with one another.
- ▶▶ Everyone helps clean up.

Follow-Up

- ▶ Agency staff who attended the event meets to discuss and evaluate it.
- ▶ Case manager follows up with each client who attended.

PROMOTION OF ACTIVITY

Agency clients are invited to the event through mailed invitations and a phone call from the case manager.

II. LOGISTICS

STAFF REQUIRED

- ▶ Case manager to coordinate and facilitate the event
- ▶ Outreach worker
- ▶ Volunteers to help set up and provide transportation

TRAINING & SKILLS

- ▶ The case manager must be a good facilitator, personable, and have highly developed social skills.
- ▶ Good food preparation skills are a plus.

PLACE OF ACTIVITY

- ▶ The event takes place in a non-HIV related, "neutral" community meeting room or shopping mall conference room where confidentiality is maintained in order to protect anonymity of clients within the broader community.
- ▶ The space should be a large room, accessible to people with physical disabilities.
- ▶ It should include a kitchen facility, a bathroom with soap and running water, and chairs and tables.

FREQUENCY OF ACTIVITY

Four times a year (quarterly)

OUTSIDE CONSULTANTS

None

SUPPORT SERVICES

Volunteers drive clients who lack transportation.

CONDITIONS NECESSARY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- ▶ In order for clients to feel comfortable and "safe," the location of the event must not be identified with HIV, and confidentiality must be assured.
- ▶ The event must be free of alcohol and drugs.
- ▶ The location should be chosen so that no client must drive more than ten miles.

III. STRENGTHS AND DIFFICULTIES

STRENGTHS

- ▶▶ The compassionate, inclusive, caring nature of the intervention provides personal attention from a supportive staff.
- ▶▶ The case manager gets to know clients, and clients get to know the case manager and other staff socially in a comfortable environment.
- ▶▶ Clients see the staff put their paperwork down and show a desire to socialize and connect with them personally, not just professionally.
- ▶▶ The case manager gains increased trust from clients.

WEAKNESSES

None

DIFFICULTIES FOR CLIENTS

- ▶▶ Some clients may not have enough money to bring gifts or “dress up.”
- ▶▶ It is often a “leap of faith” to attend an event for HIV+ people. “Exposure” in the broader community would be difficult for many clients.

DIFFICULTIES FOR STAFF

- ▶▶ Not every client RSVPs or attends the event.
- ▶▶ The case manager’s time is limited, making it difficult to follow up with everyone who did not RSVP or attend.
- ▶▶ Out-of-date information for clients
- ▶▶ Staff would like to hold the event more frequently but lacks sufficient resources and time.

OBSTACLES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- ▶▶ Some clients lack of financial resources could affect their willingness to participate, especially if they think they are expected to do something that requires money.
- ▶▶ Lack of transportation in rural areas
- ▶▶ Fear of being associated with an HIV organization
- ▶▶ Literacy challenges: some clients are unable to read the invitation the case manager sends.

ACTIVITY NOT SUITED FOR

N/A

IV. OUTCOMES

EVALUATION

- ▶ The case manager and staff monitor success by observing client moods and behaviors at the event.
- ▶ Clients complete a post-event survey.
- ▶ The case manager and staff evaluate the activity based on the reactions they see and hear in follow-up conversations with the clients.
- ▶ The case manager monitors clients' utilization of agency services after this activity.

EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS

- ▶ The case manager and staff conclude that the activity is successful by observing clients' good humor, enjoyment, engagement in conversation with other clients, and the gratitude they express throughout the event.
- ▶ In client surveys, participants request future events of the same nature.
- ▶ Clients report connecting with others, sharing information and developing supportive bonds. Those without their own means of transportation discuss with others the possibility of ride-sharing to medical appointments.
- ▶ The case manager reports an increase in clients' utilization of agency services after participation in this activity.

UNANTICIPATED BENEFITS

- ▶ Staff members reconnect with clients who have drifted away.
- ▶ Agency staff becomes aware of the importance of creative interventions and social activities that bring together people who may have limited opportunities for connections with others in their rural communities.

"CONNECTING TO CARE" ELEMENTS OF ACTIVITY

- ▶ The case manager is able to establish or re-establish trust with clients.
- ▶ Having met socially with other people who share their HIV and health related experiences, clients are encouraged to network.
- ▶ Clients who have fallen out of touch often renew their engagement in health care services.
- ▶ Clients, who are often isolated, are able to socialize, even dress up, which is something that many of them don't have the chance to do very often.

KEEP IN MIND...

- ▶ Be aware of and respect the racial, social, and cultural realities of the clients you invite.
- ▶ Do not accidentally "blow the whistle" on your clients. Be mindful when choosing the location for the event: clients must feel comfortable and trust that their HIV status is not going to be disclosed.
- ▶ Remember, "the more diverse the crowd, the better!"

