

The Men's Soul Food Project Feeds the Needs of SGL Men of African Descent

by Annabella Pulai

There is a greater awareness about the African American community crisis with HIV and AIDS, but the needs of HIV positive, same-gender loving people of African descent are not necessarily addressed with cultural awareness. In a small storefront on 33rd Street in Oak Park, the Men's Soul Food Project, (under Golden Rule Services), is set up to meet the specific needs of African American, Men who have Sex with Men (MSM).

According to Sacramento County Disease Control and Epidemiology, 36% of all reported AIDS cases within the Sacramento African-American community are gay and bisexual males

Understanding the importance of having a place for African-American MSM's to gather for HIV health concerns, Mr. Clarmundo Sullivan, founder and CEO of Golden Rule Services, developed a program for HIV/AIDS intervention for the African-American MSM community. "The Men's Soul Food Project is the only African American HIV prevention project in Sacramento for African-American MSM's, and the first since the mid-80s," said Mr. Sullivan.

The purpose of the Men's Soul Food Project is: 1) provide the most current and accurate information on HIV and AIDS; 2) share risk prevention strategies; and 3) provide a place for local African-American MSM's to gather and

socialize."

Currently, the Men's Soul Food Project is collecting data through the Black Men's Health Survey, to supply critical, analytical information about the health risks, attitude, and knowledge of African-American MSM's for a more culturally identified intervention project. "The goal of the needs assessment is to gather information that will assist the Men's Soul Food Project in developing HIV prevention by and for local African-American MSM's," said Mr. Sullivan.

The Black Men's Health Survey welcomes all African-American MSM Sacramento County residents, 18 to 45, to "complete a survey, and share thoughts and experiences about gender and cultural identity, support systems and health risk factors." In appreciation, participants will receive \$25 for their participation.

John Hylton, an HIV Outreach



worker with the Men's Soul Food Project, (also with the first men of color HIV prevention project in the 1980s). Hylton travels to areas where "men are out selling their bodies" in his outreach efforts, including parks, bookstores and clubs, but plans to soon include outreach to African-American MSM's in high schools, colleges and jails. Mr. Hylton predicts the Men's Soul Food Project will be "an avenue for other endeavors to come along (for the community), mental health issues for men of color, job placement, parenting," he adds, "it's just the tip of the iceberg."

Outreach to the youth community is important to the Men's Soul Food Project, and when Andre Vasques first became involved as a volunteer, he was only sixteen years old. "The Men's Soul Food Project is something that's been

needed a long time and I'm happy to be a part of it," comments Mr. Vasques. At 18, he received his certification as an HIV Outreach worker and looks forward to becoming the youth coordinator of the upcoming youth HIV prevention effort.

Contact the Men's Soul Food Project at 916-456-1133, and/or The Black Men's Health Survey at 916-308-1522.

[Mr. Clarmundo Sullivan is a native of Sacramento, and has been working with HIV/AIDS clients for 13 years. He graduated Magna Cum Laude from SFSU and worked with the Black Coalition on AIDS, the National Task Force on AIDS Prevention and with distinguished, nationally recognized HIV/AIDS and LGBT researchers such as Dr. Greg Herek at U.C. Berkeley and John Peterson.]



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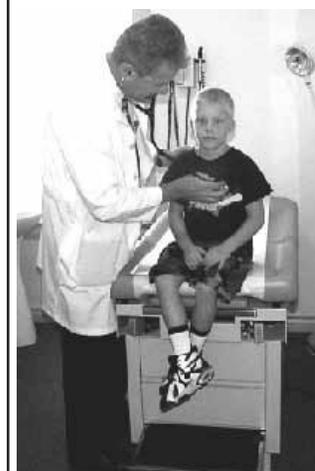
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