

## A modern AIDS epidemic

from page 1

the average number of sexual partners, according to an AP report.

"Who conducted the interviews? Who wrote up the results? If it was the same folks handing out the gift cards I wouldn't put much stock in those reported reductions in rates of unsafe sex and reductions numbers of sexual partners," Savage wrote in an Aug. 11 post at TheStranger.com's SLOG blog. "It's possible that the 300 men enrolled in the program were telling the gift-card-givers what they wanted to hear in order to keep the gift cards coming. Or, if the gift-card-givers had a stake in the success of the program, it's possible the gift-card-givers were inclined to read good results into inconclusive data."

Johnson told *Q-Notes* that MAP also gives gift cards to men who complete their risk reduction training sessions "as a way to compensate them for their time and energy," but he stressed that he believes the program is working.

"I think programs like D-UP! are effective," he said. "It is important for people to know as much as they can about how the virus is affecting our community. We are encouraging people to have conversations about HIV and risk reduction tools and techniques."

When people come into the trainings, Johnson said, many of them have no idea how to protect themselves against HIV. AIDS activists have long believed that education and frank discussion of the issues will dramati-

ly improve HIV-infection rates.

Johnson added that HIV testing is a major portion of MAP's and D-UP!'s programming and they provide free HIV testing at the gay nightclubs they visit in and around Charlotte. He also said that approximately 100 young men had been trained as popular opinion leaders in 2008 alone.

Greg Varnum, the acting executive director of the National Youth Advocacy Coalition, told *Q-Notes* that his organization "doesn't think the gift card program is that bad of an idea."

"The gift cards are a way of engaging young people and bringing them to the table," he said. "Social marketing campaigns are successful and they do work. Offering incentives for youth leaders to participate in them is not unusual and is a pretty common practice."

Only 25 years old himself, Varnum relates to a youth culture that never experienced the horrors of the first wave of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

"We have dialogue with younger people who've never experienced the original AIDS epidemic," he said, "but we also have a modern AIDS epidemic we are experiencing in a different way."

And like the risqué D-UP! "Prevention is Sexy" media campaigns, Varnum doesn't see a problem in using sex to sell prevention of a health crisis that is inextricably intertwined with sex.

"We can talk to any marketing expert today and they will tell you that sex sells," Varnum said.

"We may not like it but unfortunately we don't get to create the environment we work in. If we want to attract the interest of young people, we have to keep in mind that we're competing with multi-million dollar organizations who are using sex."

Akil Campbell, the executive director and founder of Raleigh's Men United for HIV/AIDS Awareness (MUFHA) also believes, like Varnum, that a more holistic approach needs to be taken when addressing education and prevention.

"The key to reaching these at-risk persons is determining where they are, their habits outside of sexual activities, and when they would be more likely to receive health information," Campbell told *Q-Notes*. That means taking outreach and prevention measures to schools, colleges, nightclubs, the internet and even retail stores.

Campbell's organization also believes incentives work to engage people who'd otherwise likely not care and completely miss any messages for how to keep themselves safe.

Varnum also thinks abstinence-only sex education needs to go. "Our stand is that abstinence-only sex education does not work," he said. "We believe it is harmful in regard to safe-sex practices and stopping the HIV/AIDS epidemic."

If education and prevention programs are going to be successful, Varnum explained, they'll need to be developed by the same young people they're meant to serve. "Programming not developed by young people, for young people doesn't work." ▽

Just Hardwoods  
Flooring &  
Design  
Center  
Sanding • Installation, Inc.



- Sand & Refinish
- Unfinished Hardwoods
- Pre-Finished
- Engineered
- Laminates
- Free Estimates



• Locally Owned • Locally Owned • Locally Owned • Locally Owned  
• Local Showroom • Exceptional Customer Service • Dust Containment System

LOCATED IN DOWNTOWN BELMONT  
17 South Main St. • Belmont, NC 28012

704.825.9985 • Toll Free: 877.825.9009

WWW.JUSTHARDWOODSFLOORING.COM

# IT'S OFFICIAL!



Stuart Williams, DDS  
and  
Joe Drake, DDS  
are now

**WILLIAMS & DRAKE**  
General and Cosmetic Dentistry

Accepting new patients  
Most insurances accepted.

**704.338.9797**

Kenilworth Commons  
1716 Kenilworth Avenue  
Charlotte, NC 28203

[www.williamsandrakedentistry.com](http://www.williamsandrakedentistry.com)

