



Kency Bang, at his home in the Black Sands community, in Port Vila, Vanuatu. Kency and his brother Jean Paul attended a HIV and AIDS awareness workshop run by peer educators from Wan Smolbag Theatre. Photo: Andrew Read/OxfamAUS.

Opposite: Peer educator, Smith Wuwut from Wan Smolbag Theatre's Kam Pussum Hed Clinic in Port Vila, Vanuatu, leads a workshop for local youth about HIV and AIDS. Photo: Andrew Read/OxfamAUS.

A brighter future



Vanuatu's young people are learning how to build brighter, healthier and more secure futures for themselves.

Kency Bang, 18 has just returned from a HIV and AIDS workshop run by peer educators at Wan Smolbag Theatre's youth centre in Port Vila, Vanuatu, and he's eager to share what he's learned.

"We learned what HIV and AIDS are, how to prevent AIDS and how we can help those who are victims of AIDS," Kency says animatedly. "It helped my knowledge to understand how AIDS causes harm to human lives and also makes people have to face many problems in their lives."

Kency lives in Black Sands — a poor but vibrant urban community on the outskirts of Port Vila. Black Sands is a tough place to live. Many young people are unemployed; they get into crime and drugs, contract sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or experience teenage pregnancies. Now, there are growing concerns about HIV and AIDS.

It's a common story in Vanuatu where 64% of the population is less than 24 years old.

However in three areas of Vanuatu — Port Vila, Santos and Pentecost Island — we are supporting Wan Smolbag Theatre to address these issues through youth drop-in centres, health clinics and peer education programs.

The youth centres act as hubs for young people to come together, take part in leisure activities, training and workshops, and access free sexual health services through clinics run by specialist nurses.



The clinics offer counselling and family planning services, distribute condoms, and provide testing for HIV and STIs.

Each clinic has a team of trained peer educators who go on daily "walkabouts" to meet with young people in the community, tell them about the clinic's services and raise awareness about HIV, STIs, teenage pregnancies, safer sex and drugs. Among their target groups are sex workers and prisoners.

Elise Binneld, 24, works as a peer educator at the Kam Pussum Hed clinic in Port Vila. "I find when I go to talk to the young people they say, 'I'm too shy to go to the nurse to talk about a problem or sickness'. And I say you can talk to me, and I talk to the nurse. They respect me and they understand what I'm talking about."

Fellow peer educator Smith Wuwut, 21, says the project has had a big impact on young people. "Most of the people come back to us and say 'thank you, if you were not there, maybe I'd be infected more than the first day you met me'."


"We talk and talk and the next day ... most people come to the clinic and it proves the impact. In the past it was maybe five to six [clients] per day, but now it's gone up to 30 to 40 clients per day, so it proves there is something going on out there."

Kency says that Wan Smolbag has given many young people in his community reason to hope for the future.

"It's a very great help. When [young people] have nothing to do ... they spend their time there doing things, useful things that may help them in the future. Most of the youths here in Black Sands, they go to Smolbag."

"I'm attending school... but I think [when I finish] it would be good to be a health worker or something like the guys at Smolbag because we face a lot of problems in the rural areas. So it encourages me that I could become like one of those people at Smolbag; they give awareness to others."

Story by Communications Editor Melanie Scaife, based on interviews collected by former Oxfam Australia Marketing Coordinator Alice Walter.

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