



Supporting Youth Power Centers in Almaty and Bishkek



Photos from formal opening ceremony of the CYPC in Rabozhii Poslok in Almaty on 26 January 2006. (Photo: CAPACITY/Almaty Office)

With HIV spreading rapidly among injection drug users and sex workers in Central Asia, it is becoming increasingly important to build the skills necessary for youth to make choices that will prevent them from injecting drugs or engaging in unsafe sex, including sex for payment. One way to work with youth is to create places for meetings that are attractive, friendly and safe with the right mix of education, skills building, and fun.

With the aim of arranging for such a meeting place for youth, the CAPACITY Project modified a concept developed under the USAID-funded Drug Demand Reduction Project and created two CAPACITY Youth Power Centers (CYPC). One of these CYPCs started working on November 1, 2005 and is located in the downtown district of Almaty, Rabochii Poselok. To determine if the CYPC is more than simply a place for youth to hang out and have fun (though it is certainly this too), CAPACITY conducts multiple tracking surveys to measure knowledge and attitudes about HIV, as well as risky behaviors.

The first base line survey was completed in May 2006. The main findings of this survey showed a high level of sexual activity among young people in the district surrounding the CYPC, including: (1) about 90% of the persons interviewed reported to have sex active, similar for males and females; (2) reported condom use at last sex with any partner ranged between 40% and 55%, again similar for males and females; (3) some youth (3%-4%) engaged in sexual contacts with commercial partners; and (4) about 25% personally knew someone who has ever injected heroin, opiates, or any other drugs.

During the first year of implementation, the CYPC team staff, volunteers, and outreach workers made contact with 4,759 young people. They were contacted during 219 trainings sessions (45 minutes on HIV prevention) and at 1,247 mini-sessions (15 minutes on risk evaluation), and at the consultation sessions with a psychologist and a gynecologist, as well as fun, alternative activities run at the Centre, such as language or music lessons and dancing.

CAPACITY plans to conduct a second tracking survey in the summer of 2007. The results of the first and second surveys will be compared to indicate how well the Centre helps youth avoid or reduce HIV-related risks. In the meantime, CAPACITY is working with the City Anti-Drug Campaign, which is interested in providing funding for the CYPC after the period of its work under the CAPACITY funds. Once agreements are in place, this will be an excellent example of ensuring sustainability and continuity of the project funded alternatively by different sources.

The CAPACITY Project is supporting Youth Power Centers in Almaty, Kazakhstan and Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

