

RAISING EMPLOYERS' AWARENESS (POSITIVE FUTURES1)

The Positive Futures DP, based in London, ran a number of seminars aimed at human resources personnel. The focus of many of the earlier seminars was on ensuring that employers understood the implications of the proposed changes in English and European employment laws and how these changes related to people with HIV in the workforce. These sessions were didactic in nature and the feedback suggested that they were rather dry and dull.

As a direct consequence, a new format was tested on World AIDS Day which aimed to engage employers in a different way. Rather than offering a formal 'dry' presentation about what they employers *should* do, the DP ran a session celebrating examples of good practice. This offered a chance for employers to share their own examples of good practice in challenging stigma and discrimination and to explain why it had been important for them and what the benefits of implementing HIV specific policies had been.

This 'peer support' approach received a far higher satisfaction rating from the audience who much preferred to hear how other companies had approached the issue rather than being told what they 'should' do. The 'carrot' proved a far more preferable motivation for change than the 'stick'.

The seminar was further augmented by presentations from people living with HIV who explained, in their own words, the challenges they had faced when attempting to enter/re-enter the workplace. This had the multiple impact of challenging employers' preconceived notions about people living with HIV, as well as being an extraordinarily empowering experience for the people involved, who could talk directly to employers about their needs.

One of the project's key messages was that it was not advocating separate 'HIV in the Workplace' policies. Rather, the DP encouraged employers to assess their current disability or equal opportunities policies to ensure that they were robust enough to cover long term fluctuating medical conditions such as HIV, and it stressed that:

- Sound policies should exist *before* they need to be used;
- Good policies that can be communicated to existing and potential employers will help a company become an *employer of choice*;
- Ensuring that members of staff are aware of good employment policies and practices will assist a company in *its retention of good employees* who will recognise that they may subsequently have need of these provisions;
- Policies should be *living documents*. New employees should be made aware of them as part of induction procedures and all managers should be trained in how to implement them.

Those employers who worked with the DP were given a copy of the "*Employers' Briefing Paper 16 – A practical guide to the adjustments for people with HIV*" This particular guide produced in partnership with Positive Futures, formed part of a series produced by the Employers' Forum on Disability for its members.

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