



Building Positive Community

Increasing Social Support & Care Retention for PLWHA

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Introduction

PLWHA, both newly diagnosed and long term survivors, experience challenges of social isolation, lack of trusted support, and stigma, all of which damage health outcomes. The Family Center (TFC) created this project to address those factors. With support from NYCDOH, TFC offers an evidence-based, structured curriculum intervention, The Positive Life Workshop (TPLW) to improve self management and increase social support among PLWHA.

620 clients have now attended TPLW, 87% of them completing it (n= 539). In year 2, we launched the TPLW Alumni Series, to meet the needs of TPLW graduates, whose numbers grow each month.



Project Aims

To extend the benefits of the Workshop after completion in four ways:

- 1) Reduce social isolation among PLWHA
- 2) Promote engagement in and referral to care
- 3) Maximize program retention for the 90-day follow-up evaluation
- 4) Strengthen the community of trusted support built during the workshop

Methods

On TPLW graduation day, and at subsequent alumni events, clients receive a calendar with topic options, and are asked to indicate their interests, which staff record. This client input drives the choice of topics and events. At first, topics were more in-depth discussions of subjects drawn from the TPLW curriculum (e.g. heart health, aging with HIV, inflammation). Clients then asked for more experiential programs: mindfulness meditation, stress reduction, and creative arts. Clients suggested a financial wellness series to cover issues of savings, credit, fraud, taxes, benefits and end-of-life planning. And some events are primarily social opportunities (health and chocolate, holiday cookie baking).

We select presenters with specific expertise, including nutritionists, attorneys, nurses, social workers and pharmaceutical community partners. Financial workshops are led by professionals from TFC's Leadership Council and from TFC's corporate partner, BlackRock Financial Management.

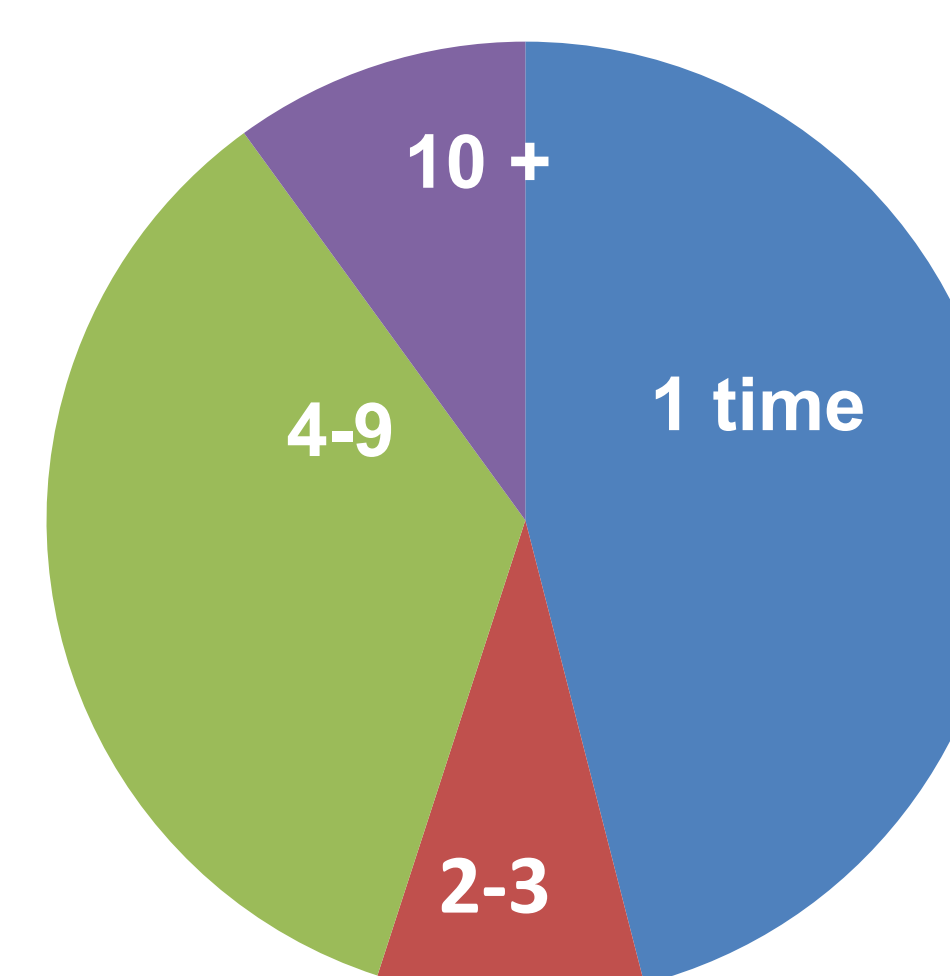


At each event, attendees complete anonymous evaluations to verify that sessions met learning objectives and response to the topic/presenter. This feedback informs future events.

Results

112 events have been held, and now occur several times monthly, attracting 6-20 clients. 216 (40%) of TPLW program graduates have attended at least one event. Of those, over half (53%) have attended two or more.

Alumni Event Attendance



- Analysis shows that almost half (45%, n=98) have attended four or more times, and 10% have attended ten events or more, suggesting that alumni groups are seen as a source of trusted support.
- At most events, clients request and receive service referrals, maintaining connection to care.
- TPLW now has a 90-day follow-up rate of 91%, indicating the groups are enhancing program retention.

In our clients' own words:

"This is the only place in my life I feel really safe talking about my HIV."
- AR, 41

"TPLW is my second family."- LB, 56

"Each time I learn something new, not just about my health but about me." - JW, 39

Lessons Learned

The TPLW Alumni Group program has met key goals of increasing social support and ongoing care engagement among NYC PLWHA.



The alumni group model has proven to be a cost-effective, low-barrier adjunct to the core TPLW model, and could easily be implemented in other program settings.



As new TPLW cycles graduate each month, the groups have come to benefit an ever-growing pool of NYC PLWHA.

The groups also leverage pre-existing channels, with trusted providers, to disseminate topical public health information (e.g. Zika, "U=U", flu shots) to hard-to-reach and at-risk populations.