

JUICE



Special 10th Anniversary Edition • Summer 2008

SMART Celebrates 10 Years

Organization salutes all the graduates, staff and board members and volunteers who have contributed to the success of its programs and services

It is hard to believe that in June 1998 SMART University held its first graduation! It was held at Metropolitan Hospital's Draper Hall in East Harlem where we held our first classes. As I look back on this momentous occasion, never in my wildest dreams would I think that I would be here 10 years later, let alone SMART still up and running! Our longevity is a true testament to the women who started SMART back then and the women who are part of SMART now. They are and have always been the foundation of SMART.

This is indeed a milestone event for an organization founded by, run by and for HIV positive women. Rebecca Denison started WORLD and the first HIV University in 1991, which became a replicable model for women in communities around the country. I remember her telling me, "You will never forget your first graduation," and she was so right!

Some of SMART University's first graduates played an important role in the growth, programming and development of SMART. Petra Berrios, Deputy Director of LTI, is a Founding Board member and worked with me for many years to keep SMART going. Two other Founding Board members, M.A. and A.R., also from our first graduating class, gave Petra and I the support and encouragement that we needed to continue SMART. They are still attending programs at SMART, giving input and guidance.

Many of our Advisory Board members have played important roles in mentoring, guiding and supporting SMART for this 10-year journey. John Falkenberg, who is being honored at our 10th graduation, has been an extraordinary friend, mentor and resource. Quite frankly, SMART (and probably me as well) would not be here today if not for him. Words cannot say enough in terms

of how much his exceptional knowledge, commitment and experience that he has given to SMART. Catherine Hanssens, Executive Director of the Center for HIV Law and Policy, has provided invaluable technical assistance and resources for SMART since we began.

So many of the providers on our Advisory Board have played an integral role over the years in providing SMART with expert advice, financial support and volunteering to instruct SMART University classes, which have helped SMART bridge the gap that exists between accessing the acceptable standard of treatment and care for women and youth

living with HIV/AIDS.

On this special 10th Anniversary celebration at the New York Academy of Medicine on June 27, SMART salutes all of our graduates and everyone who has been a part of making our vision become a reality. ♀

— Susan Rodriguez, SMART Founding Director



SMART Women displaying a work produced during a SMART University class.

Covering Treatment Education Basics

Students receive women-centered service and support at SMART University

This has been another exciting and amazing year at SMART University with new additions—like our brand new, operational Computer Resource Center—and continuing traditions—celebrating 10 years of SMART University’s classes.

The women’s programs at SMART continue in our mission to provide comprehensive, women-centered service and support in a safe and caring environment so they are able to live longer, healthier, more productive and empowered lives. Since fall 2007, over 50 participants have attended our classes on such important holistic treatment education topics such as “Stress management,” “Understanding your lab results,” and “Understanding Intimate Relationships.” In addition to our three sessions of eight classes each, we continued to host four SMART Forums in the interim time period between the winter and spring sessions on topics identified by SMART participants but outside of treatment and prevention topics, such as “Ticket to Work” and “Life Insurance for Women living with HIV.”

Along with SMART University classes, our adjunct classes saw a revival with many new and exciting innovations and experiences this year. We have formally incorporated all our adjunct classes together into the SMART A-B-Cs (Art, Body and Computer) so all participants come away from the year with a “smarter” life.

SMART Arts and Crafts morphed into SMART Art, an amazing program involving art history, appreciation, meditation and creative projects including sculpture and line drawing to realize each participant’s potential as a creative being in a supportive environment.

SMART Body exploded this year with attendance reaching 23 participants per class. Our kitchen could not hold the number of women seeking to learn new cooking techniques and vital nutritional information to lead healthier lives, and for the first time we had to cap the number of participants in this class in the spring!



SMART Art student makes a self-portrait out of clay in sculpture class.

With the help of our new computer instructor, SMART Computer embarked on a new idea of project-based activities for participants to learn about specific computer programs/software in the different sessions. In addition to growing our curriculum, SMART invested in a new Computer Resource Center and secured an additional eight computers and a server to support our expanded resources. The project was completed at the end of the spring 2008 session and in the fall we will be incorporating the new Center into all of our classes and have it available to participants outside of Tuesdays and Fridays, our program days. Participants were able to gather together for fun events outside of our traditional programming as well.

SMART hosted its annual Holiday Party and Women’s Celebration Day as well as worked with SMART Youth on a special World AIDS Day event to produce peace tiles in collaboration with women and youth all around the world. SMART was granted the special opportunity to have the guidance of world-renowned installation artist, Teresita Fernandez, to guide the vision and instruction on that day. The amazing results are now hanging proudly in SMART’s office. 🌍



SMART Body students cooking; A tile from the Peace Tile Project; A full class at SMART University; Two SMART Computer students.

Developing Leadership in our Youth

Prevention projects promoting condom use are the focus of a busy year for SMART Youth

This year has been another intense and motivating year for SMART Youth, our youth development and leadership program for youth (ages 13-22) living with and affected by HIV/AIDS.

We focused on several prevention projects to promote condom use in adolescents throughout the year, including: a condom distribution project over the summer, a public service announcement “Love Glove” in collaboration with Manhattan Neighborhood Network (MNN), attendance and tabling in several community and youth health fairs, and creating the second line of SYNC—message t-shirts designed by the youth.

The youth also had opportunities to have fun together and do special projects to enhance their own lives such as a six week project on yoga, learning about song writing from two professional singer/songwriters, and planning a Halloween party for over 150 youth over a six-week period in collaboration with Harlem Hospital’s Family Care Center. The party was an overwhelming success due to the hard work of 16 youth planners and amazing adult volunteers.

SMART Youth is still growing, and expanded to include an additional program day on Saturday afternoons giving the



The new flash-based homepage on the SMART Youth redesigned Web site.

youth an additional option for their busy schedules.

In addition to our projects, SMART Youth hosts workshops on important topics such as resume writing, healthy sexuality, and healthy relationships throughout the year. These workshops are open to any youth interested in attending. SMART Youth remains dedicated to having the youth participate in all levels, and they are involved in all decisions, from the topics chosen for the workshops to creating the flyers for the program. The youth remain motivated to promote safer sex and condom use to adolescents, and as a result, we host safer sex/sexual health workshops both at SMART’s office and at other community organizations throughout New York City.

This year, SMART Youth hosted a special event for National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day on March 10 at the Young Women’s Leadership School in East Harlem. The event was well received, and we hope to continue this tradition next year.

Our website, smartyouthnyc.org, has been recreated by SMART Youth alum, Samantha Rodriguez, and we invite you to visit the site for constant updates and information about SMART Youth in the up-coming year. 📍



A scene from SMART Youth and Manhattan Neighborhood Network’s “Love Glove” public service announcement.



SMART Youth raising awareness on World AIDS Day; SMART Youth at the SMART; SMART Youth at the annual Halloween Party.



The primary mission of SMART is to provide treatment education and support for women and youth living with HIV/AIDS to increase their self-confidence and self-esteem; help restore control in their lives; and empower and enable them to become informed participants in their treatment decision-making process so that they can be advocates for themselves, others and their communities.

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