

Changing Lives

A resource for HIV positive heterosexuals, their partners and family members

Changing Lives is for heterosexual men and women, their partners and family members who are living with HIV/AIDS. About one in five people infected with HIV/AIDS in Australia see themselves as belonging to this group.

Changing Lives provides a comprehensive overview of the issues that positive heterosexuals deal with everyday. It is the first time in NSW that a resource has been produced that focuses on what it is like to live heterosexually with HIV/AIDS.

Heterosexual men and women experience HIV/AIDS differently from other groups in the community in a number of important ways. Heterosexual people do not have a culture and practice around testing that enables an early diagnosis. They are the majority of late presenters with an AIDS diagnosis. The partners of positive straight men and women and their family members share the burden of a stigmatising illness. HIV disclosure is very difficult and because of this positive men and women and their families suffer high levels of social isolation. They often do not access the services available to them.

Pozhet (Positive Heterosexuals) is a peer support and education program delivered by the Heterosexual HIV/AIDS Service based in Central Sydney Area Health. Pozhet provides HIV/AIDS education, information and support that reflect the experience of being straight and HIV positive. *Changing Lives* is part of the ongoing effort by Pozhet to interpret lifestyle and medical information in terms that we as positive and negative people can understand and that support us in our daily lives.

Changing Lives looks at life with HIV/AIDS from the perspective of a positive man, a positive woman and a partner or family member. You may be single or in a relationship or live with your family. You may be young or old, a mum, a dad or even have grandchildren. But you will share one thing in common—living with HIV/AIDS. *Changing Lives* is about you and the challenges you face.

Changing Lives was developed through discussions with Pozhet clients over a three-year period in a series of workshops and peer support settings in Sydney, Blacktown, Newcastle, Wollongong and country NSW. The PozNeg Serodiscordant Couples Conference held in 2002 gave important feedback on the ground to be covered in this resource. Issues such as HIV and safe sex, disclosing your status to a partner, managing HIV and family life, establishing your identity as a positive or negative person and the relationship between pregnancy and positivity were all top of the list. The conference was followed up with a statewide survey of clients to ensure that the content of *Changing Lives* truly reflected positive heterosexual life.

We hope that *Changing Lives* speaks with all our voices and gives all who read it ideas, information and a new perspective on living with HIV/AIDS. We also hope that the courage, stamina, skill and humour of positive and negative people shine through its pages!

Pozhet wishes to thank everyone involved in developing this much needed resource. In particular we would like to thank the NSW Department of Health for the grant that enabled us to complete this project.

We pay tribute to the many men and women who generously shared their experiences of HIV/AIDS with us. We say a special thank you to Wendy, Patricia, Margaret, Marie and Pat whose contributions as clients or volunteers made the development of this resource possible.

For further copies of this resource please call Pozhet Freecall (Aust) 1800 812 404 or go to www.pozhet.org.au.

An extensive literature review was undertaken in developing *Changing Lives*. The list of articles can be obtained by calling Pozhet.



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helping ourselves**