

## Success Stories Profile

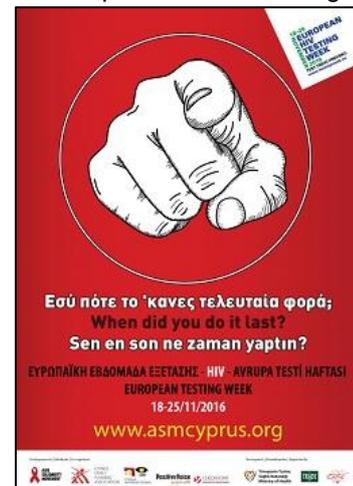
### AIDS Solidarity Movement (ASM), Cyprus



#### HIV in Cyprus

Cyprus is considered a low HIV prevalence country.<sup>1</sup> Despite the low prevalence, HIV/AIDS has been considered a public health priority for the Government of Cyprus.<sup>2</sup> The first National AIDS programme was developed in the 1980s with aims to respond to the epidemic with a strategic plan to prevent the transmission of the virus and alleviate the personal and social impact of the epidemic. HIV testing is free of charge and partner notification is not mandatory.

The AIDS Solidarity Movement (ASM) was established in 1989 and serves as a non-profit and non-governmental organisation that supports people living with HIV (PLHIV), people whose lives have been affected by HIV/AIDS, and their friends and families.<sup>3</sup> ASM promotes HIV awareness and education and stands against stigma and discrimination against HIV. All of the services provided by ASM are completely free. ASM provides psychological support programs for PLHIV and their friends and family, a support hotline in English, Greek and Spanish, free outreach rapid HIV testing, awareness campaigns on social media and a guide on safer sex practices.



#### European Testing Week 2016

The European Testing Week was organised by ASM, in collaboration with the Cyprus Family Planning Association, the Cyprus Antidrug Council, the Greek Association of People Living with HIV "Positive Voice," the Checkpoint in Greece, and was supported by the Cyprus Ministry of Health. ASM provided rapid HIV and Syphilis testing in various venues, including gay-clubs and at central points in the old cities of Nicosia, Limassol and Paphos. Additionally, ASM collaborated with harm-reduction centres for Drug Users, where testing was conducted, including Hep B & Hep C.

Campaign poster for Testing Week 2016 with slogan tag line, "When did you do it last?"

ASM promoted the activities through social networking pages, mobile applications for MSM, TV Channels, flyers, posters, newspapers and radio spots.



<sup>1</sup> WHO, UNAIDS, UNICEF. Monitoring and reporting on the health sector response to HIV/AIDS; Cyprus country report 2013. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> UNAIDS. Country progress report – 2012. Geneva, UNAIDS, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> AIDS Solidarity Movement, 2017. <http://asmcyprus.org>

Screenshot from one of the many TV  
appearances made by ASM

### Innovation during European Testing Week

Cyprus is a conservative community; both in regards of HIV/AIDS and other sexual transmitted infections, as well as in LGBTQI related issues. Discrimination in the formal healthcare system has been a barrier for at-risk groups but through use of mobile applications for MSM (Grindr, Planet Romeo, Scruff) information was easily accessible to people of the local LGBTQI community and helped ASM reach their targeted group directly.

Additionally, rapid testing is not available in any other organisation, governmental hospital or centre in Cyprus and the feedback acquired from the participants was largely positive. From the methodology, implementation and results; the test was well-received.

Cyprus also deals with language barriers as a daily and challenging obstacle in providing care. However, by campaigning in 3 languages (Greek, Turkish and English), ASM was able to reach all people living on the island. Their slogan, “*When did you do it last?*” was especially catchy.



Nicosia Commissioner for  
Volunteering and Non-Governmental  
Organisations, Mr. Yiannis Yiannaki

### Impact of European Testing Week

ASM aims to locate those who are at risk and offers free and anonymous HIV rapid testing every year this time, since 2015. ASM’s goal is to create cultural change towards routine testing as being part of sexual wellbeing and has started offering a reminder service for re-testing, through the volunteer collection of contact details (so far 20% of those tested). ASM expects this number to increase in their future as more outreach activities are planned, in order to have a notable list of “returning clients”.

ASM reduce gaps in mainstream provision of testing. A gap exists between HIV and infectious disease testing centres because of the limited accessibility to examination centres, the procedures accompanying the examination, the lack of flexibility and restricted working hours of the governmental sector and the respective fee for the exam in the private sector. These gaps will be alleviated by the continuous work that ASM implements in the Cyprus community.

**ASM provides an unparalleled service in Cyprus that supports PLHIV and takes an active role in the community to create awareness to end HIV stigma and discrimination.**