

GANGSTERS,  
GRAFITTI  
AND GLORY HOLES

An evaluation of HIV/AIDS outreach  
to men who have sex with men at beats.

Peter Kerans  
Project Officer

DRAFT  
ACON 1993

## INTRODUCTION TO BEATS

### 1: HIV/AIDS and Prevention

The global HIV/AIDS pandemic is dynamic, volatile and unstable, and threatens to spin out of control, a report from the Global AIDS Policy Coalition (GAPC) states. By early 1992, 12.9 million people had been infected with HIV. By the year 2000, between 38 and 110 million adults and over 10 million children will be infected.<sup>1</sup> Michael Merson, Director of the World Health Organisation (WHO) Global Program on AIDS, estimates that one person is infected with HIV every ten to 15 seconds.<sup>2</sup>

What of prevention efforts? A recent WHO review of prevention projects from around the world, including a review of Beats Outreach projects in Australia, confirmed that these prevention efforts had slowed the spread of HIV.<sup>3</sup> However, resources for prevention available to most of the world's population are inequitable and inadequate. Hundreds of millions of dollars are needed now; the cost of failing to prevent infections now could mount to "billions or even trillions" in treatment, care and lost productivity.

Both WHO and GAPC have identified the need for successful prevention programs to be adapted and applied in countries worldwide. "If they (prevention programs) are tailored to the local setting and allowed to operate in a favourable policy climate, they can help stem the rising tide of infections," said Merson. "True, we do not yet have all the answers about how to encourage safer behaviour in all settings and yes, human sexuality is a notoriously difficult and sensitive area. But it is unthinkable not to make maximum use of existing technologies and approaches."<sup>4,5</sup>

This report looks at several Beats-related prevention projects underway at the AIDS Council of New South Wales (ACON). They are metropolitan and rural outreach projects to men who have sex with men. Educators do face-to-face intervention at public sites - known in Australia as "beats" - where men go for sexual and social contact with other men who have sex with men.

Ongoing Beats Outreach Projects in three cities (Sydney, Newcastle, Wollongong) are evaluated. Beats Outreach work done in non-metropolitan areas by the Rural Outreach Project is included. Short-term and pilot projects, including a Bisexually Active Men's Outreach Project, and a western Sydney Community Attachment Project, are also considered [APPENDIX 1].

The three parts of the report together attempt to summarise the progress of these outreach programs, and assess their contribution to preventing the spread of HIV in NSW.

**PART A** begins with a wide focus of the HIV epidemic, talks about education and prevention in Australia, outlines some issues in evaluating outreach to men who have sex with men, and includes a literature review.

<sup>1</sup> 'AIDS in the World 1992: A Global Epidemic Out of Control?' *AIDS Weekly* 15 June.

<sup>2</sup> M. H. Merson (1992). 'Longitudinal Trends in the Epidemic,' *National AIDS Bulletin*, September. Speech delivered at the VIII International Conference on AIDS.

<sup>3</sup> WHO (1992), 'AIDS Prevention Does Work, Says World Health Organisation,' *WHO Press* 22 June.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathon Mann (1992), quoted in *AIDS Weekly* 15 June.

<sup>5</sup> Merson (1992).

An introduction to the culture of beats and men who have sex with men in NSW sets the context in which the interventions are taking place.

**PART B** considers beats in the wider social setting. It looks at how public sex between men at beats is portrayed in the media, and how surveillance by public authorities impacts beats.

**PART C** centres on the face-to-face interaction between the man on the beat (the beat user) and the educator (the beats worker). It looks at how the beats worker does the job day by day, and touches on issues relevant to the lives of beat users as HIV and safe sex affect them.

## 2: HIV and Gay Community

Australia's HIV epidemic first became apparent in the gay communities of cities like Sydney and Melbourne in the early 1980's. Gay community organisations were formed and led the way in responding to the epidemic, providing education, care and advocacy.

ACON was formed at a public meeting in Sydney in mid-1985.<sup>6</sup> At that time Sydney's gay community saw the majority of Australia's AIDS cases and HIV infections, and it is still so in 1992.<sup>7</sup> ACON grew quickly; bipartisan support at both federal and state government levels ensured funds were available early for education and care. By 1990 ACON had become a large organisation of over sixty employees, with a main office in Sydney and four branches across NSW.

'Safe sex' guidelines - a set of sexual practices designed to minimise HIV transmission - were developed and adopted as community practice through ongoing community-based education campaigns. The use of condoms for anal sex, by far the most risky practice for transmission of HIV in male-to-male sex, became the focus of early efforts. Each year, ACON's Summer Campaigns restated and reinvented the basic safe sex message for gay men. These campaigns were aimed primarily at gay identifying men in Sydney's inner and eastern suburbs, the hub of gay social life.

By the beginning of the 1990's it became clear that these campaigns had succeeded in slowing the rate of new HIV infections from sex between men, from a peak level of infection in 1983-84. Evidence for this decline comes from back-projection on the rate of new AIDS diagnoses, antibody testing of cohorts of gay and bisexual men, and a tenfold decline in other sexually transmissible diseases among men who have sex with men.<sup>8</sup>

[illustrations about here: recent summer campaigns eg 'our love', 'it's our right']

Campaigns that were explicit, pro-sex, and rooted in the culture of gay community were found to be the most effective in engaging gay men towards a *community* practice of safe sex.<sup>9</sup> They intervened at the

<sup>6</sup> For background on the gay community's response to AIDS, see Paul van Reyk (1992), 'Never Turning Back: Gay Men's Response to AIDS in Sydney,' *National AIDS Bulletin*, Vol 5 No 6, July.

<sup>7</sup> Cumulative to August 31 1992, NSW experienced 2050 of an Australian total of 3484 AIDS cases, and 11054 of an Australian total of 16441 HIV infections. Figures from National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research (1992), *Australian HIV Surveillance Report*, Volume 8 No.9, 30 September.

<sup>8</sup> John Kaldor (1992), 'Tracking the Course of AIDS,' *National AIDS Bulletin*, Vol 6 No 4, May.

<sup>9</sup> G W Dowssett (1990), 'Reaching Men Who have Sex with Men in Australia. An Overview of AIDS Education: Community Intervention and Community Attachment Strategies,' *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, Vol 25 No 3.

community level in gay media, celebrations and events such as the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. They spoke through the established culture of open and explicit talk about sex, using the visual language of gay culture.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, research among gay and bisexual men undertaken by ACON in collaboration with social researchers at Macquarie University began to yield insights into attachment to gay community and change to safe sex. The Social Aspects of the Prevention of AIDS (SAPA) project looked at attachment to gay community in three ways: sexual engagement, social engagement, and gay community involvement.

The notion of 'gay community' itself was too simple; gay community was heterogenous, a complex overlapping of different ways of being gay.

On attachment to gay community, SAPA concluded: "The sexually confident, well-educated gay men, who live in Sydney or Canberra, who are sexually and socially engaged with the gay community, and who are well informed about 'safe' and 'unsafe' sex are more likely to have changed their sexual behaviour than gay men who are not attached to gay community, who live in extra-metropolitan NSW, who have little contact with the epidemic and are unsure of what is 'safe'."<sup>11</sup>

'Gay community' implied a shared gay *identity*. A common confusion in mainstream HIV/AIDS prevention identified 'high risk groups' - gay men, intravenous drug users, blood product recipients - for HIV transmission, rather than the *practices* that put people at risk. This confusion persists; it still permeates media reporting of the AIDS epidemic. In this conception of AIDS as the 'gay plague,' gay sexual identity and the practice of male-to-male sex are assumed to be equivalent.

However, it is clear sexual identity and sexual practice are not the same<sup>12</sup>; a man who calls himself gay might not have sex with other men, while a man who does not identify as gay (or even bisexual) might have sex with men.<sup>13</sup> Some men who identify as gay may have sex with women.

There exists a large group of men who have sex with men (MSM) who do not identify as gay. These men seek sexual partners at clubs, bars, beats, cinemas, saunas, and through classified advertisements in a variety of publications. Most of the men questioned in a recent study in Western Sydney "never used a term to label themselves, and saw their sex with men purely in terms of activities they preferred to have."<sup>14</sup>

This report will focus, then, on those men who use beats who do not identify as gay, and on those gay-identifying men isolated from the gay community. It is these beat users who are least likely to have direct contact with the epidemic, with networks of other men who have sex with men, and with appropriate information on safe sex practices.

### 3: Beats and men who have sex with men

<sup>10</sup> An investigation of gay community representations and HIV/AIDS has recently been funded under the Commonwealth AIDS Research Grant (CARG) scheme.

<sup>11</sup> Susan Kippax, June Crawford, R. W. Connell, G. W. Dowsett, L. Watson, P. Rodden, D. Baxter, R. Berg (1990). *Social Aspects of the Prevention of AIDS Study A, Report No. 7. 'The Importance of Gay Community in the Prevention of HIV Transmission,'* AIDS Council of NSW/School of Behavioural Sciences, Macquarie University.

<sup>12</sup> Simon Watney (1992). 'Homosexual, Gay or Queer?' *Outrage*, April. Watney argues that the historical dualism (homosexual or heterosexual) has "little relation to the actual diversity of sexual desire as it is lived in the lives of individuals, or communities organised around shared sexual desires, or entire societies."

<sup>13</sup> Kippax et al. (1990).

<sup>14</sup> Chris O'Reilly (1992), 'The "Personals" and Men Who Have Sex With Men,' *National AIDS Bulletin*, March.

In early 1988, researchers in western Sydney interviewed a sample of 176 men who have sex with men. 114 of these were beat users; one quarter of this group named beats as their only outlet for sex with other men; 70% had a sexual preference for men, 8% for women, and 22% for partners of both sexes. Many of the men reported practices that put them at high risk for HIV transmission: 40% of the men had unprotected anal sex with partners at beats.<sup>15</sup> Other studies had also suggested a high level of dangerous practice at beats<sup>16</sup>. Gay community safe sex campaigns had not reached many of these men.<sup>17</sup>

Based on these findings, a pilot Beats Outreach Project was set up, with a team of two ACON workers visiting beats in western Sydney.

[Box: Aims and Objectives - Beats and Rural Projects].

At about the same time, the geographical isolation of rural gay men from the centres of the epidemic also began to be addressed by ACON. SAPA research had noted that rural gay men were less likely to have had appropriate safe sex information, and the peer support to adopt and sustain safe sex practices.

By 1990, the western Sydney Beats Outreach model had been adapted in two large provincial cities in NSW, Newcastle and Wollongong, administered through ACON branch offices. The individual natures of the developing gay communities in these cities, and differences in the working and function of beats, meant Beats Projects had to begin to develop their own directions. The western Sydney project expanded to two teams and went further afield to the southern suburbs, and more recently to beats on the North Shore. One team initiated a Community Attachment project in the western suburbs in association with the Western Sydney Area Health Service. This team now works from a newly opened office at Blacktown in Sydney's west, the site of a 1991 study of Bisexually active men and beats.<sup>18</sup>

The Rural Outreach Project explored the beats in rural areas, while liaising with and supporting the establishment of branch offices at Lismore on the north coast, and at Coffs Harbour on the mid-north coast. In 1991, a Beats worker was seconded to the rural project for a short exploratory tour of beats in the Coffs Harbour area. The 'Slip, Slop, Slap' tour, as it became known, concentrated on the many beats located at isolated beaches.<sup>19</sup> A pilot beats project was run in Lismore on the north coast in early 1992. Another study, founded by the Rural Project, began in August 1992 to research beats in the Northern Rivers and New England regions of NSW.

This report attempts an overview of these beats-related projects. It looks at the experiences of workers at beats in a variety of metropolitan and rural settings, discusses the social factors operating in different areas and different beat settings, and looks at the implications for outreach and education at beats across NSW.

<sup>15</sup> Garrett Bennett, Simon Chapman, Fiona Bray (1989a), 'Sexual practices and "beats": AIDS-related sexual practices in a sample of homosexual and bisexual men in the western area of Sydney,' *Medical Journal of Australia*, Vol 151, September 18.

<sup>16</sup> M. Davis, G. Dowsett, D. Baxter, R. Connell, L. Watson, S. Kippax, J. Crawford, R. Berg (1990), *CHAP Technical Paper No.2: Beats and Glory Holes*, Macquarie University/ACON. Unpublished paper.

<sup>17</sup> Garrett Bennett, Simon Chapman, Fiona Bray (1989b), 'A potential source for the transmission of the human immunodeficiency virus into the heterosexual population: bisexual men who frequent "beats",' *Medical Journal of Australia*, vol 151, September 18.

<sup>18</sup> M. D. Davis, U. Klemmer, G. W. Dowsett (1991), 'Bisexually Active Men and Beats: Theoretical and Educational Implications. The Bisexually Active Men's Outreach Project,' AIDS Council of NSW/National Centre for HIV Social Research, Macquarie University.

<sup>19</sup> 'Slip Slop Slap' owes its name to a long-running national education campaign on skin cancer. For a report on this project, see Nik Andronis (1992), 'Sex crimes in 'park' toilet block. A short study of male sexual expression in rural NSW,' *National AIDS Bulletin*, March.

#### 4: Beats in the Literature

Sex in public places, and beats in particular, have rarely been studied in depth, despite the apparent universal presence of public places which have become notorious as venues for sexual encounters. The 'literature' of beats resides mostly in police records, court depositions, and newspaper articles, reflecting the longstanding abrasive relationship between beat users and public authorities determined to stamp them out. Beats are discussed academically through the discourses of deviance<sup>20</sup>, criminology and law enforcement<sup>21</sup>; HIV/AIDS has recently begun to force the discussion out of these confines.<sup>22</sup>

*Tearoom Trade*, a sociological study of male-to-male sexual behaviour in public restrooms in one US city - 'tearooms' in the local argot - made an impact when it was first published in 1970. Laud Humphreys, its author, spent many years observing tearoom activity, and became accepted among tearoom users as a regular, non-sexual participant, warning users of the entry of others into the restroom. The book caused a minor furore in sociological circles over the ethics of some of Humphreys' research methods.<sup>23</sup> Another sociologist, Edward William Delph, studied tearoom activity in restrooms on New York's subway.<sup>24</sup>

In the era of HIV/AIDS, beat users were identified as one of the 'hard-to-reach' groups for education and prevention efforts. Apart from the NSW projects discussed here, Beats Outreach operates in all other Australian states and territories. A diverse range of outreach approaches has been developed by each of the state and territory AIDS Councils that deliver them.<sup>25</sup>

A number of projects are doing outreach work to men who have sex with men in other countries. Outreach to men who have sex with men at beats is underway in Wellington, New Zealand.

In the UK, the Sheffield AIDS Project began outreach in 1989 to two inner-city sites.<sup>26</sup> Greeting and giving out condoms to men who have sex with men at 'cottages' was the initial approach. Other UK projects for men who have sex with men have done some outreach work at cottages. More recently, other projects have begun: a 'Cottaging and Cruising' project operating from St. Mary's Hospital in London<sup>27</sup> drew media attention when police threatened to arrest workers giving out condoms at public sites.

---

<sup>20</sup> John F. Krol (1990), 'Restroom to Tearoom, A Cultural Conversion: A Note on Humphreys, Delph and Swidler,' *Deviant Behaviour*, Vol 11, pp273-280.

<sup>21</sup> Frederick J. Desroches (1991), 'Tearoom Trade: A Law Enforcement Problem,' *Canadian Journal of Criminology*, January, pp 1-21.

<sup>22</sup> Mark Swivel (1991), 'Public Convenience, Public Nuisance: Criminological Perspectives on "the Beat",' *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*, Vol 3 No 2, November, pp237-249.

<sup>23</sup> Laud Humphreys (1970), *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places*, Aldine, Chicago. Later editions of the book included a retrospect on ethical issues (enlarged edition, Aldine, 1975).

<sup>24</sup> Edward William Delph (1978), *The Silent Community: Public Homosexual Encounters*. Beverly Hills, Sage.

<sup>25</sup> For a summary of these projects see Peter Kerans (1992), 'Coming Together: The First National Beats Outreach Workers Conference,' *National AIDS Bulletin*, June; also G.W. Dowsett and M.D. Davis (1992).

<sup>26</sup> Jeff Jones (1991), 'Street Health Work With Men Who Cottage,' In: *Outreach Work With Men Who Have Sex With Men. Report from a National Consultation on Outreach and Detached Work with Men Who Have Sex With Men*. Eds. Peter Aggleton, Simon Jordan, Patrick Stoakes, Tamsin Wilton. Bristol Polytechnic/Goldsmith's College, University of London.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Keogh, John Church, Simon Vearnals, John Green (1992), 'Investigation of Motivational and Behavioural factors influencing Men Who Have Sex With Men in Public Toilets (Cottaging),' Poster No. PoD 5187, VIII International Conference on AIDS, Amsterdam.

A Dutch community-based organisation, S.A.D. (Stichting Aanvullende Dienstverlening) began Beats outreach in four large cities in the Netherlands in 1989.<sup>28</sup> In each city, local teams of between four and ten volunteers are selected and trained to do the work. There are now projects operating in twelve regions across the country.<sup>29</sup> Zurich-based AIDS-HILFE Schweiz has recently moved to set up a Beats Outreach project in Switzerland.

Two projects begun in 1988 in Santa Cruz, California and Dallas, Texas may have been the first of their kind in the US.<sup>30,31</sup> The Santa Cruz project published a detailed Outreach and Training Manual in 1990.<sup>32</sup> Preliminary work has also begun in other North American cities.<sup>33,34</sup>

A recent report of a trial project in Morocco may be the first in a Muslim country.<sup>35</sup>

## 5: Evaluating Outreach to Men Who Have Sex With Men

*On the Beat*, a report on the pilot stage of ACON's Beats Outreach in western Sydney, made a first case for the effectiveness of the program.<sup>36</sup>

*On The Beat* assessed 'reach into the target population' of beat users - numbers of beats visited, number and duration of interactions (face-to-face discussions between a beats worker and a beat user), condoms, lubricant and pamphlets distributed, phone calls made to counselling lines - as measures of performance. These were mostly of limited use for evaluation purposes. However, workers' estimates of changes in safe knowledge and practice gave some indication that the project was working.

Evidence from statistics kept on the accuracy of beat users knowledge, combined with the experience of workers<sup>37</sup>, suggested that the project had "contributed to an improvement in knowledge of safe sexual

<sup>28</sup> Wim Zuilhof (1991), 'Educators are taking to the beat,' *Tijdschrift Gezondheidsvoorlichting*, Vol 8 No 5, pp3-5.

<sup>29</sup> Wim Zuilhof (1992), 'Talking about Safe Sex on Cruising Sites. (Initiating and supporting local projects on Cruising Sites.)' Poster No PoD 5136, VIII International Conference on AIDS, Amsterdam.

<sup>30</sup> M. Lerro, A. Freeman, J. Valentine (1989), 'Safer Sex Behaviour Reinforcement in Public Parks,' Poster No (?), V International Conference on AIDS, Montreal.

<sup>31</sup> David Beckstein and R. Gunn-Mota (1989), 'AIDS Prevention Through Outreach Education in Public Sex Environments,' Poster No W.E.P.7, V International Conference on AIDS, Montreal.

<sup>32</sup> David Loren Beckstein (1990), *AIDS Prevention in Public Sex Environments*, Santa Cruz AIDS Project.

<sup>33</sup> Bob Webster (1991), 'Men Engaging in Same Gender Sex in the Hamilton-Wentworth and Burlington Area Needs Assessment,' Hamilton AIDS Network for Dialogue and Support.

<sup>34</sup> C. Beeker, D. Thomas Rose, L. Ames (1991), 'Marginal men, mainstream risk,' Poster No. F.C.711, VII International Conference on AIDS, Florence.

<sup>35</sup> Richard B. Neal Jr. (1992), 'A Trial approach to Reaching Gay Men in a Muslim Country,' Poster No TuD 0542, VIII International Conference on AIDS, Amsterdam.

<sup>36</sup> Paul van Reyk (1990), 'On the Beat. A report on an Outreach Program of AIDS Preventative Education for Men Who Have Sex with Men.' AIDS Council of NSW.

<sup>37</sup> Phillip Keen (1990), 'The ACON Beats Project: AIDS prevention education amongst men who have sex with men at public sex sites,' *The Frontline View of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy: Selected papers from the 4th National Conference on HIV/AIDS*, Canberra. AIDS Council of NSW.

practices, and a decrease in the frequency of unsafe sexual practices among beat users."<sup>38</sup> An independent sample of men interviewed one year after the Beats Outreach Project began were familiar with the project and its workers, and their knowledge of HIV transmission was improved over a similar group interviewed prior to the project.<sup>39</sup> A paper presented to a recent WHO meeting on effective approaches to AIDS prevention also noted the effectiveness of Australian Beats Projects in reducing HIV transmission.<sup>40</sup>

*On the Beat* noted that evaluation which offered "the most immediate possibility for feedback and hence for program redesign and implementation" - a 'process evaluation' - was most appropriate for Beats Outreach.

Process evaluation often has as its focus the communication taking place between the educator and client.<sup>41</sup> In the case of outreach to men who have sex with men at beats, this means looking at the educational *interaction* between beats workers and beat users. What is going on? How is an effective one-on-one interaction between an outreach worker and a beat user achieved? What aspects of the beat environment help or hinder the process?

Community-based interventions targeted at 'hard-to-reach' populations - those groups who may not have been exposed to appropriate HIV/AIDS health promotion - are by nature innovative in recognising the need to move beyond existing models of health promotion. However, these interventions do not easily lend themselves to evaluation based on outcome measures. Outreach projects to men who have sex with men at beats share the aims of reducing HIV transmission, but it is not feasible to attempt to measure changes in HIV transmission: doing beats is a covert part of many men's lives, so outreach must be done in such a way that beat users do not fear exposure.

The Ottawa Charter for health promotion defines health promotion as "the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve their health." Enabling good health for all means "a secure foundation in a supportive environment, access to information, life skills and opportunities for making healthy choices."<sup>42</sup>

Action to bring about health promotion includes building healthy public policy, creating supportive environments, strengthening community action, developing personal skills, and reorienting health services. In evaluating outreach to men who have sex with men, it should be kept in mind that preventing HIV transmission, according to the Charter, means *creating the conditions* for people to make healthy choices in practicing safe sex and avoiding HIV infection.

In looking at the *process* of outreach interventions, 'qualitative' or 'ethnographic' methods can provide an "intricate knowledge of community setting and process functioning in order to understand the dynamics of change in outcomes and to provide supportive evidence of the effect of an intervention."<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Phillip Keen, Ulo Klemmer, Daniel Maddadu, Jeffrey Linich, Michael Lockhart (1991). "'Beats Project' Outreach: AIDS Prevention Education Among Men Who Have Sex With Men at Public Sites." Poster No [...], VII International Conference on AIDS.

<sup>39</sup> Garrett Prestage (1992). Western Sydney Beats Study Stage Two, unpublished report.

<sup>40</sup> G. W. Dowsett and M. D. Davis (1992). 'Transgression and Intervention: Homosexually Active Men and Beats. A review of an Australian HIV/AIDS Outreach Prevention Strategy,' National Centre for HIV Social Research, Macquarie University.

<sup>41</sup> Peter Aggleton and Diane Moody (1992), 'Monitoring and Evaluating HIV/AIDS Health Education and Health Promotion.' In: Peter Aggleton, Andrea Young, Diane Moody, Mukesh Kapila, Maryan Pye (eds), *Does It Work? Perspectives on the evaluation of HIV/AIDS health promotion*. London, Health Education Authority.

<sup>42</sup> World Health Organisation, Health and Welfare Canada, Canadian Public Health Association (1986), *Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion*.

<sup>43</sup> Tim Rhodes (1992). 'Community-based HIV Prevention,' *The AIDS Letter*, Feb/March pp 1-3.



This report relies on 'qualitative' data derived from outreach projects to examine the process of interactions on the beat. Semi-structured interviews and informal discussions with outreach workers, notes and words used by beat users taken by workers in the field, journal entries, along with various reports and published papers, make up the bulk of the qualitative material. Letters, newspaper reports and other media stories, minutes of meetings, and informal discussions with other stakeholders in the evaluation, are also used.

In writing this report, I have relied largely on reading both HIV specific and non-specific discussions of evaluation and its practice. Wadsworth's *Everyday Evaluation on the Run*<sup>44</sup> has been useful in opening up the possibilities of evaluation. Aggleton's formulation of four models of health education<sup>45</sup> has been useful in helping to generate evaluation questions that may need to be asked of outreach to men who have sex with men at beats. Some of these questions can be found in APPENDIX II. Also useful have been the London-based Health Education Authorities' books on evaluating HIV/AIDS health promotion.<sup>46</sup>

I would like to thank Diana McConachy, ACON's Evaluation officer, for guidance throughout the course of this project.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to all those who contributed to this evaluation: beat users; outreach workers; managers; and others who gave valuable advice.

Jo Alley, David Alpak, Nik Andronis, David Buchanan, Ian B [new surname], Peter [Wgg - surname?], Brett [New - surname], Nigel Carrington, Wayne Cook, Lindsay Daines, Ken Davis, Mark Davis, Gary Dowsett, Gary Ferguson, Peter Grogan, Rob Hicks, Phillip Keen, Ulo Klemmer, Jeff Linich, Michael Lockhart, Brent Mackie, Daniel Maddedu, Keith Marshall, Todd McCarthy, Fred Oberg, Kevin Paton, Garrett Prestage, John Trigg, Felicity Young, Paul van Reyk, Garry Wotherspoon.

---

<sup>44</sup> Yoland Wadsworth (1997), *Everyday Evaluation on the Run*, Action Research Issues Inc., Melbourne.

<sup>45</sup> Peter Aggleton (1989), 'Evaluating Health Education about AIDS,' In: *AIDS: Social Representations, Social Practices*, Eds. Peter Aggleton, Graham Hart, Peter Davies, The Falmer Press, London.

<sup>46</sup> Peter Aggleton, Diane Moody, Andrea Young (1992), *Evaluating HIV/AIDS Health Promotion*, Health Education Authority, London.

## 'DOING THE BEATS'

### 1: Beats are Everywhere

Public toilets. Baths, pools, parks, beaches and reserves. These are places - "beats"<sup>47</sup> - where men meet to have sex with other men. They have been around in Australia since the building of the first towns and cities. Similar sites occur all around the world; some have been recognised as beats for centuries.

Beats are everywhere: shopping malls in the centre of the most populous cities, public toilets and parks in small rural towns, isolated beaches.

Beats have a culture of their own. It is a culture based on sexual desire. Men meet other men for quick and anonymous sexual encounters. A non-verbal language of sex may be all that's needed: body posture, eye contact, a nod can affirm the liaison.

Men of all ages, classes, and ethnic origin use beats. Some of these are attached to gay subcultures, or identify as gay men. Many have wives and girlfriends; questions of sexual identity might be irrelevant to them. Using beats connects men to a private sexual outlet. Social sanctions against sexual behaviour between men, and against legitimate meeting places, means that men's sexual needs have to be filled covertly: at beats, sex shops, cinemas, clubs, or through classified advertisements.

Beats are zones of contention. Many of Australian society's fears and phobias converge here: sex in public, forbidden sex, deviancy. The advent of the HIV/AIDS epidemic has concentrated these fears. Men doing the beat have always had to contend with danger: surveillance and harassment by police, security guards, local councils; the threat of violence from 'poofter bashers'; fear and recrimination in the media; and now HIV. All this makes for an understandably contentious mix.

Talking about beats, studying them - writing reports like this one - raises immediate ethical questions. We are making public what is private: in a sense "outing" beats, what is owned by beat users. It may at first seem paradoxical to claim this. How can sex in a public place be 'private'? Western social structure sees sex as 'normal' if it's in the home, within the institution of marriage, and between a man and a woman. The choice to engage in sex as recreation, sex between men in a public place is an individual one, in this sense a private one.

In order not to identify particular beats this report will follow the general rule of not naming particular beats,

---

<sup>47</sup> Beats are known elsewhere as 'tearooms,' 'cottages,' 'cruising areas,' and 'public sex environments.'

except for those which have received recent publicity in the media, or have been the subject of continued surveillance and police harrassment. As Part B of this report notes, it is the skewed attentions of the media and public authorities that seriously impede the work of HIV/AIDS educators at beats.

## 2: Beats in NSW History

Histories of minorities and subcultures are often difficult to establish. Finding historical sources - written and printed materials (letters, documents, biographies) - is the first problem. There is often very little surviving evidence, so recovering history becomes a process of piecing together insights from sparse materials.

The largely hidden history of homosexual sex, public sex, and beats suffers from this lack of sources. Evidence for working beats in NSW is fragmentary. Historians have to rely on a few published sources (eg. newspaper reports), court records, police records, and oral testimonies of older beat-using men. These sources need to be carefully sifted for meaning.

It seems clear that existence of beats goes back to the nineteenth century in Australia.<sup>48</sup> Places for public sex could only happen where towns and cities, with their public spaces and utilities, came into being. Public parks and toilet blocks became venues for public sex, and not just for men looking for sex with other men. There is anecdotal evidence of women's beats in Sydney; at least one still operates.<sup>49</sup> A culture of sex between women and men also grew around certain public spaces - drive-in theatres, secluded parking places such as 'lovers lanes'. If every town had an equivalent of a lovers lane, it also had its own beat. The two were not necessarily located in discrete areas.

A beat was a place where you could meet other men for sex. You had a legitimate reason for being there (recreation in a public park; urination in a public toilet). You could easily and discreetly 'get off'. The Archibald Fountain in Hyde Park, Sydney, was a well-used beat until the 1960's. It was

**..in a park; it was a striking piece of architecture; it was floodlit at night. Thus it had all the reasons for people to be 'legitimately' there, casually loitering, either by day or night. And its subject matter, including several nude muscular men, added a nice homoerotic ambience to the setting.<sup>50</sup>**

According to one historian, the Domain "had a reputation as a (hetero) sexual playground" as far back as 1830. In one now notorious episode, one of two men caught having sex in Hyde Park in 1882 cconfessed to the police: "Don't do anything sir and i'll tell you the truth. This man took my trousers down, and put his thing in my behind and made me all wet."<sup>51</sup> Offenders often received heavy sentences of hard labour. Police surveillance and arrests were common.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Robert French (1992), 'Into the Woods,' *Sydney Star Observer*, 15 May.

<sup>49</sup> [ref]

<sup>50</sup> Garry Wotherspoon (1997), City of the Plain.

<sup>51</sup> Robert French (1992a).

<sup>52</sup> Robert French (1992b), 'Pounding the Beat,' *Sydney Star Observer*, 2 October.

Public toilets were a preferred site for sex, with their parks and environs providing the 'cruising' and pick-up places. It was easy to meet and have sex with other men in an around them. They were

designed in the nineteenth century as a public solution to what had hitherto been a (largely) private matter. The introduction of rows of urinals was an imaginative solution to the problem of mass male urination - but they also happened to be very conducive to the casual glance, the discreet eye contact, the wordless, covert pick-up operation.<sup>53</sup>

Working of beats must also have depended on access to new transportation technology.<sup>54</sup> Public transport allowed men to travel long distances from their homes, to visit beats other than those in their local area. It allowed greater anonymity on the beat, and the opportunity to meet a greater variety of men. Owning your own vehicle gave you greater freedom to explore the beat world - you could travel from one beat to another, and search for new ones. Two men caught in the act by police at St. Leonards Park in 1934 - two years after the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge - both resided in suburbs on the other side of the harbour.<sup>55</sup>

What of beats elsewhere in NSW? In smaller cities and towns away from the coast, the available public places might be limited. In coastal towns beaches make popular beats. Some beats are likely to have been around for some time, with intermittent changes in the level of activity. Particular beats have certainly operated for many years in cities like Newcastle and Wollongong. There is a lot of work for historians here.

### 3: Beats Working

Doing the beat can have many attractions for men seeking sex with other men: beats are plentiful, accessible, and easy to identify for the experienced user; they are anonymous, semi-private and the sex is free.<sup>56</sup>

Beat users develop individual patterns of use. This may depend on what free time they have away from work and home commitments, and whether they have access to transport.

*A road worker visits a park beat at dusk on the way home from work. He meets another man and follows him to a private spot for sex.*

*A security guard drops in to a beat on his rounds late at night for quick oral sex.*

*A married man living on a farm in a rural community does the beat during a regular trip to town.*

*An office worker does the beat, a public toilet in a shopping centre, during his lunch hour, or while waiting for a bus. Sex occurs under the cubicle divider.*

---

<sup>53</sup> John Lee (1992), 'Male Homosexual Identity and Subculture in Adelaide Before World War II,' In: *Gay Perspectives. Essays in Australian Gay Culture.* Eds. Robert Aldritch and Garry Wotherspoon, Dept. of Economic History, University of Sydney.

<sup>54</sup> See Graham Carberry's essay in *Gay Perspectives.*

<sup>55</sup> Robert French (1992b).

<sup>56</sup> Graham Carberry (1992).

Familiarity with a beat involves knowing the busiest times (when the most men are doing the beat), the patterns of cruising and best spots for sex, and how to recognise and avoid trouble from bashers and authorities. Beats can be a way of life, with some men travelling long distances, following a circuit of familiar beats and hunting for new ones:

**Does not work. Spends his days bushwalking, doing the beats up and down the coast.<sup>57</sup>**

Beats can be a *social* way of life. Outside of inner-city areas catering to gay subcultures, beats may be the only point of contact for some men. They can be a point of entry into wider social circles; a regular place to socialise with other men who have sex with men.

*A married man and a gay man meet at a beat every weekday during lunch hour. They have an ongoing friendly competition to get the best 'trade'.*

*A small group of men from a minority ethnic background meet and socialise at a local beat.*

*Gay men in a country town meet and in a park at night. There are no other venues in the town where they can socialise. They know most of the beat users and the cars they drive.*

For some men who are not gay-identified, the need for social contact becomes magnified, particularly in isolated or rural areas:

**The men who have sex with men who do not identify as homosexual or gay tend to be very isolated. They cannot discuss their sexual desires and other activities with other men except the ones they meet and develop enough trust with to talk to at the beat.<sup>58</sup>**

It is clear that beats are sites for an overlapping of different men's sexual and social lives. Many men may have their first sexual experiences at beats, and still be doing them many years later.

---

<sup>57</sup> ACDN Beats Project field notes, [?date]

<sup>58</sup> Nik Andronis (1992).

## BEATS, MEDIA AND SURVEILLANCE

### 1: 'Park Infested with Gays'

The above headline appeared in a Sydney newspaper in May 1992. The accompanying story concerned activities at a beat in Deepwater Park in western Sydney. In many ways the piece represents a classic of the 'genre' of media coverage of beats. It begins by reminding us of the moral virtue of families and children:

"A park used by families and schoolchildren in Sydney's south-west has become a haunt for homosexuals."<sup>1</sup> Invoking a moral panic - something like 'the threat to families and children posed by predatory homosexuals' - the story goes on to quote at length a local police sergeant and council spokesperson. The recently-built park, itself virtuous in having won a prestigious State Government award, has become "riddled with little tracks and infested with homosexuals", according to the police officer. The toilet block in the park has been closed by the council during the week "because it was being used as a meeting place by gays and drug addicts."

The fears of moral pollution, the metaphor of disease embodied in this use of language, tend to obscure the truths of beats, who uses them and why. It amounts to a denial that may ironically contribute to the spread of an actual epidemic: HIV/AIDS.

A recent report on Police, Beats and Homophobia notes that

**Although public attitudes have changed...there remains an undeniable social reality that many people still find the idea of men having sex in public places (and even the presence of 'homosexual meeting places') offensive...this is evidenced by newspaper articles, primarily in suburban newspapers, which offer sympathetic accounts of the complaints of private citizens (and councils and politicians) about the existence of beats and the men who visit them. Despite the falsehoods which underlie the specific complaints about beats, and, conversely, the fact that many citizens including police officers do beats themselves, it is essential to recognise the persistence of this social sentiment.<sup>2</sup>**

In setting up a project to reach men using beats in western Sydney, Beats outreach workers initially approached Police to enlist their co-operation in preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS in the area. Educating Police about beats was seen as a key strategy in achieving success:

**Police have had an unfortunate history of harrassment, raids, and entrapment associated with the beats...workers have raised issues of the sexual identity of these men, of their wider family and social lives, of the effect of police harrassment, all of which may lead to changes in police perceptions and hence practices.<sup>3</sup>**

By mid-1991, the situation in western Sydney had deteriorated for men at beats. Outreach workers spoke to beat users who reported an increasing level of harrassment and arrests at beats. A letter documenting these

---

<sup>1</sup> *Sun-Herald*, May 17 1992.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Swivel (1993). 'Police, Beats and Homophobia' report.

<sup>3</sup> Paul van Reyk (1990).

incidents, sent to the Commissioner of Police, received a reply that there was no official police policy behind the apparent escalation of police activity.

Outreach workers began to see the direct impacts the police activity was having on their work:

*"[At first] we went and spoke to the Area Commander. We phoned local stations, set up appointments to see them and explain what we were doing...I was optimistic at the beginning...i'm a bit disillusioned now. It was time-consuming stuff, we didn't feel we had time to do it."*

*"It was just that when you'd spoken to Police, at least they recognised you, and avoided having to explain why you were there at the beat. Generally it was probably not worth the time. When they said they wanted to co-operate I believed them."*

*"In Sydney we invested all this time, and after six to twelve months we came across Police who had never heard of us, even though we had visited their station and spent a lot of time on them."*

Much of the workers' time at beats was spent discussing the times and locations of police activity with beat users and passing this information on to others. Beat users often spoke of witnessing arrests, harrassment, and the use of undercover officers at beats. There are many examples in the outreach field notes:

***While talking with two beat users outside, two uniformed police entered the beat with batons drawn, striking and kicking the toilet doors.***

***Claims police raided [...] one week ago. Several people put into wagon. Police officers making bold use of batons.***

***Talked about police and bashers.***

***Beat was raided two weeks after Christmas - plain clothes and uniformed police. All men in and around the beat handcuffed.***

***Noticed Police patrolling Deepwater.***

***Nervous. Three<sup>\*</sup> guys he thought were police at the beat earlier today.***

***He enjoys telling police to 'get fucked' when they hassle him. Police activity here in the last three months. Entrapment of a friend. Cops 'hitting faggots hard'.***

Outreach workers in western Sydney reflected on the frustrations of police interference at beats, and the effects it had on their work.

*"We didn't sit down and say 'okay, no more police stuff.' It just happened naturally. Our interest was the guys at the beats...because we didn't keep going in there and reinforcing and reminding them, it almost legitimised the backlash."*

*"It's hard to tell what effect police have on beats. It could be operating in subtle ways, not just beat users being fearful of going to a beat. It seems that people are having less sex at beats - people are more into*

*meeting someone at a beat and going somewhere else."*

*"As a worker knowing how thinly we are spread, you can rationalise away dealing with the police...if you have a problem in southern Sydney, you know you've got all the rest of Sydney to go and work in. Ultimately, it's not a solution."*

*"The cops are there doing it [harrasing beat users]. I don't think they're going to stop doing it. They're connected to local councils and the media, they've got avenues to tap into...a change in homophobia is going to take generations..."*

The Beats Outreach project in Newcastle appears to have been much more successful in negotiating and gaining co-operation from Police. The strategy used was to negotiate through a key contact in one police region. When the project expanded to other regions, negotiation with police from that area would happen through the key contact.

*"When we had our first meeting with Police...we began to develop mutual respect and trust with the Police. If there is trouble on the beat the Police will contact us. People are beginning to report beat assaults. We've had some trouble with Police harrasing ACON workers - the heirarchy knew about us, but not the foot patrol Police. At first they thought we were doing their job, rather than AIDS prevention."*

*"Police used to raid the beats; people were arrested, harrassed; in the last two years they've backed off. Harrassment has not stopped, but we haven't had any reports for quite a while. The community is not as fearful of the Police now."*

*"The Police are aware of us, they know to give us space. They go out to do their job, but they'll contact us first."*

The appointment of a Police Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officer in the Illawarra area helped Wollongong Beats workers needs by providing a key contact person. The workers reported that Police knew their car and would not interfere with the beats when they were present. However, the police work at beats continued.

*"People are more stand-offish here...they're always wondering if you're a cop. Police activity is more concentrated. It's a small community, everyone knows everyone else."*

*"At the moment we are going through a stage with the Police...they're harrasing people down at [...]. We make sure we keep up our education, but a lot of the conversation is about Police. The guy I spoke to earlier...it was just about Police."*

*"Police asked us to tell [beat users] to move to other beats. The guy I was speaking to before said 'well, where do we go? We don't have clubs, venues, saunas - the beats are the meeting places.' You can't tell people to move on - that's not our job. We can only tell them if the Police are more active than usual. We tell them to watch what's happening, plain clothed police could be around."*

*"At night times in summer, you might bring drinks down, sit around and chat. You get the Police coming around and saying 'you're all a buch of poofs doing perverse things, piss off.' The straight couples are having sex up in the car park, at least the guys go into the bushes. We haven't heard of straight couples being harrassed, having their car searched or their licence number taken down. It seems to be just the guys - the police will do*



*all their cars."*

In rural towns, the Police are busy too:

*"Often the people who are using the beat are the people in power...we're trying to educate people that beats are in the country and do get used, the police are aware, they turn a blind eye on a formal level, but people in the lower ranks are still doing vigilante work at beats."*

## **2: 'Policeman offered sex in beach purge'**

The Wollongong newspaper *Illawarra Mercury* has achieved some notoriety for its coverage issues related to men who have sex with men. Outreach workers remarked on the 'extreme undercurrent of homophobia' in the area. The *Mercury's* standard of reportage no doubt reflects these attitudes.

An undercover Police operation at Windang beach in January 1992 - 'Operation Sandfly' - involved 10 undercover police dressed in "shorts, caps and casual t-shirts". Four men were arrested for offensive behaviour. "The officers collected used condoms and a range of pornographic material, and found a number of 'love nests' in the sand dunes," reported the *Mercury*. Pornography, according to the accompanying photograph and caption, was a copy of the *Sydney Star Observer*, a gay community newspaper. "The crackdown started in December when local residents alleged nudists were masturbating on the beach and scaring off young families."<sup>4</sup>

We should wonder whether a police operation of this scale truly reflects the size of the perceived problem, whether this level of expenditure of public resources is justifiable. Police operations are often justified as responses to 'public complaints.' It is interesting to note the comments of one ex-policeman from the UK:

**To begin with, there aren't actually many complaints made to the police by the public about homosexual approaches. Usually there's one, and the local gay-hater among the brass - and there always is one - decides to set up an importuning squad on the strength of 'the public outcry.' Further to this, there is frequent over-reaction, sometimes to a positively absurd extent.<sup>5</sup>**

Overzealous policing of beats in NSW has frequently led to absurd extremes. Reports of Police use of helicopters in western Sydney and beaches in northern NSW may be the extreme, but other large-scale surveillance operations are not uncommon.

A large-scale police operation at a multistorey carpark at Parramatta in western Sydney was conducted in March 1992. The particular beat was part of a circuit of beats in the area. ACON outreach workers were conducting a pilot Community Attachment project in the area when the operation took place.

**On commencement of the project we were dismayed at the interactions we were having...the men were few and far between, timid and hard to reach...after a few weeks of frustration we heard that Police had instituted a major operation just prior to our commencement at this particular beat...undercover.**

<sup>4</sup> 'Policeman offered sex in beach purge,' *Illawarra Mercury*, 20 January 1992.

<sup>5</sup> Mike Seabrook (1992). 'Homosexuality and the Police,' *New Law Journal*, 6 March, pp 325-326.

This resulted in over 70 men being harrassed and spoken to...<sup>6</sup>

*"[After the Police Operation] you started to see people at the surrounding beats, those beats started to operate more..."*

The police operation enlisted the use of a vacant storefront opposite the entrance to the toilets where much of the beat activity took place. It had the effect of dispersing the beat users to other less active beats in the surrounding area. It was much more difficult to establish contact with some men. Establishing contact with men on the beat who did not identify as gay became virtually impossible; what trust had been established with some of these men in the Attachment project evaporated.

*"People at the beat know it's going to happen, they know how to get themselves out of it, or go along with it. They take it on board as part of the beat. Where police activity fucks up one beat, another starts up. Trying to find out the next beat where everyone is now going does waste a lot of time..."*

*"Every beat, if there's [Police] action and it dies down, it doesn't take long before it picks up again. It might be a long period of time, but I think it will always go back to what it was, especially if the beat was operating so well before."*

*"Some of the beats really are obvious, do get busy and outrageous...I don't know what 'too far' is...you've got homophobia operating there already. Someone might see two or three men go into a toilet together and be outraged, without even seeing anything. There's two sides to that coin. You don't really have to do much to trigger it off."*

The Outreach worker believed that surveillance in all its forms hampered sex education in the beats, obstructing access to certain areas, disallowing certain forms of education, heightening fears, and shifting the emphasis in men's minds from protecting themselves in terms of AIDS to protecting their livelihoods and preventing physical attack.<sup>7</sup>

*"[...] in Cronulla...Police did a sustained campaign and things really dropped off. You think guys are going to go to other beats close by, but no, you start thinking 'where is everybody in the area going?' You get frustrated - do you keep going to the beat and hope people are going to turn up? I remember sitting at that beat just not knowing what to do. Sometimes I would go to great lengths just to prove to the beat users that I am not an undercover cop..."*

Undercover Police may also practice 'entrapment' of beat users, typically by proffering a sexual invitation to a man at a beat, and making an arrest if the man responds to the advance. This practice is widely documented in Australia and overseas<sup>8</sup>, as are vague laws covering beat activity that provide for broad interpretation by Police. One ACON outreach worker made contact with an undercover officer in western Sydney:

<sup>6</sup> Ulo Klemmer (1992). Unpublished report.

<sup>7</sup> M. D. Davis *et al* (1991).

<sup>8</sup> Evan Wolfson and Brad Sears (1991), 'Public Lewdness Cases: fighting Entrapment and Stereotypes,' *The Lambda Update*, Vol. 8 (2), pp 22-23.

## WORKING THE BEATS

### 1: Approaching Beats Outreach

. Interviews with outreach workers revealed common grounds of interest in doing the work. Many of the workers were beat users themselves; some were living with HIV; they knew the beats in their area, knew the local conditions and had a sense of how much unsafe sex was going on.

*"I read the ad [for the Beats Outreach job] in the paper and I thought: this is me. I knew the area [western Sydney], knew the beats, done them for years. Knowing the area I knew there wasn't any HIV stuff for gay men and men who have sex with men and I knew there was quite a bit of unsafe sex happening."*

*"I knew the local beats. I've been a beat user for many years. I thought I could go in there, understanding what goes on at beats."*

*"[As a beat user] I didn't realise there were alternatives to having unsafe sex...I decided I wanted to become an Outreach worker. I thought if I could stop people making the mistakes that I had made it was worth it."*

. One worker, recruited at the beginning of the Beats Outreach project, described the process of starting the work this way:

*"The very first thing we did was put a whole lot of condoms and pamphlets in the car. We drove around to all the beats, talked about how we would do it, what we thought was possible, what was not possible, but while we were there at each different beat we'd leave pamphlets in the toilets, under windscreens, we made our presence known without talking to anybody. We developed a sticker [the 'Beat It' sticker] and we went and plastered all the beats we knew with stickers. We were making lists of beats...that's when we started talking to people. There was some kind of awareness of us before we actually started to talk."*

. Workers were encouraged to reflect on their first interaction with a beat user on the job. Doing outreach for the first time unsettled even those most familiar with the particular beats they were working at.

*"When I was doing beats as a beat user, my whole intention was to get off with someone. Now I have the intention of talking. I have to approach these guys [I knew as a beat user] as a Beats worker and safe sex educator. I think that was really hard."*

*"I found it difficult. My own inhibitions got in the way. I knew how to cruise and get sex. But I didn't know how to stop and talk about something serious like AIDS. I had never bowled up to someone in a beat and started a serious conversation. The big part was 'how do I actually start talking?'"*

*"When I first started to make contact I was apprehensive - it was scary but I felt confident in what I was saying to these people in terms of HIV, and the importance of the work."*

*"It was scary. I went to a beat I'd never been to before. I spoke to two people [the first day]. I had hardly ever talked at beats. Not having a great knowledge of HIV/AIDS yet I was hoping [the first] guy wouldn't ask any big questions I couldn't answer."*

*"The first week I couldn't talk to anybody. All I could do was go into toilet blocks and parks, stand around to get a feel for the place. All of a sudden I was a worker, not a user. Instead of being there playing the game, wanting sex, I had to get their attention without giving them a come on."*

. For new workers, drawing on the experience of other workers made first interactions with beat users easier to do. Most workers were able to clearly recall the circumstances of their first interaction.

*"The first time I went out they took me on a tour of the beats...we would get out and check out the physical layout of the beat. It put me greatly at ease when I went back to those beats to work there - you knew where people would come from, bashers...I remember the guy [from my first interaction], his car. I see him occasionally. He was 55 years old, he was dismissive of the need for safe sex - he was saying that people his age didn't have to worry [about HIV] but most particularly he was saying [we] didn't have to wear condoms out west."*

*I remember feeling surprised at how easy and comfortable it felt. I think I had built up a lot of fear about it. The fear went quickly."*

*"At first I had mixed feelings going into the beats. The other workers said 'take your time, do it as you feel comfortable to.' [The first time I did an interaction] I walked up to this guy who was very open and relaxed. I tensed up, nervous; I was eager; at the moment I had him I thought: what do I do now? He was gay-identifying, had condoms and lube on him and practiced safe sex."*

*"The first interaction I did - I was so nervous, I talked fast and loud. I'm not sure I was too sensitive to the guy. I sort of bailed him up and didn't let him go."*

. Many workers, familiar with beats from personal use, found their personal way of doing the beats a useful starting point for doing outreach. 'Cruising' men in order to get to speak to them about safe sex and HIV is a common method of initiating contacts.

*"I'm a voyeur. I go to a beat myself because I'm bored and want to be stimulated, not necessarily for sex. I might sit in the car and watch for a few hours, walk my dog...the voyeuristic stuff was how I got into working at the beats. [You] sit around, not feeling like you have to go and talk to people all the time. Sometimes I do a bit of cruising, I've always done talking at beats..."*

*"I didn't know whether to use the cruising. How to actually begin. The very first guy I spoke to - I walked into a beat and he was there, he was a really hot man, I didn't want to talk, I wanted to do it with him, so I had to make up my mind fast. He cruised me and I cruised him, and we got to talk like that, so it showed the cruising technique does work - he wasn't offended by it."*

*"The way you make contact with people is the same way you make contact if you are doing the beat normally, except you are not having sex with the person."*

*"That's not to say you don't cruise and make eye contact. You do use your sexuality to engage someone for a chat, but you don't lead them on, touching your crotch or flopping out your dick. You don't promise something and not deliver. Cruising someone, using the codes works sometimes."*

. Some workers tend to rely less on 'cruising' to initiate interactions after a period of time doing outreach. Each worker learns to make contacts in a way that is comfortable for him. This may involve elements of cruising; it may mean restricting himself to certain parts of the beat, or not lingering or interfering when sex is happening.

*"If it's a toilet beat, i'll get out of the car and go in so that they can see me going in. I'll smile and say hello, it puts people at ease. If they go into a [toilet] cubicle i'll make it clear i've gone outside - they can hear me going out. If they follow me out i'll walk up and say hello."*

*"I did a lot of walking up to people straight off. It worked for some, others clammed up, others walked away. As I progressed I picked up on subtle differences...sometimes there might be six or seven guys standing around in the toilet checking each other out. I'd come in and put up stickers, smile, hand out condoms, say 'have fun', then stand outside later. When they came out I would give them a wave or a smile or a nod or something. Some would come up and talk, some would walk away, some I would go up to."*

*"I've slowed down...I don't interfere with how a beat works [now]. I know how the beat works and I know if somebody is cruising somebody else, if their mind is zeroing in on getting sex - you couldn't talk to them if you tried, so you don't try. Your own intuition tells you who you can talk to, how you can talk to them without the cruising. I don't go into the beat much now, [although] some beats you just have to. You write notes, call them out from under a cubicle or through a glory hole, but cruising is pretty much out now."*

*"You have to use sex to sell in a lot of cases to get to talk to someone at the beat. It's important to keep out of the sex environs as much as possible. When we go to a beat we'll first go and check grafitti to see if it's active. We might leave some leaflets. If there are men using the cubicles or cruising we don't interrupt. You don't want to encroach on them or intimidate them. You have to draw a line in the way you sell sex to get an interaction going."*

Outreach workers were highly sensitive to the culture of beats; as they gained experience in making contact, their understanding of the dynamics of particular beats developed. Each person had an individual approach and acknowledged the validity of others methods. A desire and practice of ensuring minimal interruption to the beat activity was evident. One worker summed it up this way:

*"It was like learning how to get a conversation going without interfering. The big thing is not to fuck up what people are actually there for. If we started that we would have had quite a bit of opposition."*

## **2: Sustaining an Interaction**

. Speaking directly and immediately about safe sex and HIV to a beat user can often lead to a 'block' - a refusal to engage in any further conversation with a worker. Safe Paks (condoms and lubricant in one satchel) and pamphlets may also be offered and refused.

*"If you approach people straight off, they might say to you 'no, it doesn't affect me mate, go find someone else, I'm not a poofter'...[you] talk first about everyday things, get a conversation going, before you bring up the topic of sex. If you go in head on, they will just have their barriers up."*

*"I tried hitting them straight away with safe sex and AIDS, 'hi, i'm from the AIDS Council,' [but] guys in the western suburbs don't want to know about it, I feel they prefer to find out who I am and what I am. [Safe sex] comes later on in the interaction."*

*"You get to know the eye contact, the movements, the games when you're a beat user. I try to first make sure [they are doing the beat]. Just by saying 'is there much happening', people will give me the full story - 'it's pretty quiet', or 'there's this hunk over there' or something like that."*

*"It was like [using] tricks or tools to make it easier for them to talk about HIV. There were times I would tell them I was from ACON, times when I wouldn't, when I was just someone doing the beat, times I was waiting while my mate was doing the beat..."*

. Establishing contact on a peer level was seen as essential by Beats workers.

*"I say 'yeah, I fuck with men like you do', I let them know I do the same as them, they relax more. I use the words they use, cruise, be part of the culture, admire them and be there."*

*"I try to educate, inform, support on a peer level. I approach it as another man who has sex with men. That's what I am, that's what they are, that's where the bond is."*

. Each beat interaction is recorded on a data sheet. The data are intended to reflect what occurred during the interaction; over a period of time, the information collected is useful for monitoring trends in the projects. During any one interaction a worker may discuss any number of issues with the beat user. Some interactions are recorded as 'non-verbal'.

*"Often, if I notice someone is doing the beat, I put a pamphlet under the [cubicle] wall. That's useful for two reasons: if I don't get to speak to them, they may not have seen a pamphlet before. But it also alerts them that there is someone there about HIV, so it's not such a surprise when we lob up and say 'hey, do you want to talk.'"*

. A wide variety of men use beats. No one approach works for every beat user. Each has to be approached as an individual, and dealt with on a person-to-person level. In one day or at one particular beat, a worker may do a number of very different interactions.

*"On the beats you're going into their territory, there's safety issues, a lot of issues. People might be there with just the one idea of getting off on that day. They don't want to talk with you. Others might want to talk and talk - but not about HIV, they want to talk about genital warts or whatever is going on."*

*"What I think you gotta understand is you have to tap into the variety of people out here, adjust your education to them, not to what you think it should be. The bottom line is the same - HIV education. But how you do it and get to the people is the important part - you have to relate to the variety."*

*"I haven't developed a style so much as adjusting to the situation, being intuitive to the person's needs, that will be a guideline to what language or words you use."*

. In some areas - particularly rural ones - beats can draw much hostility from local communities. Some men doing the beats are very discreet and wary. The beats worker needs patience and sensitivity to build trust with these men. The beats worker is often the first person with whom many men have discussed their sex with other men.

*"I've talked to people sometimes on the beats here (Wollongong), talked for a couple of hours, and he's said 'you're the first person I've ever talked to about this,' and sat there and cried. [He's] talked about his wife and kids, doing the beat, having unsafe sex, and I've been the first avenue of contact for him."*

*"[In a rural community] it's a homophobic environment. Any utterance to do with HIV is like danger!, not only in the general community but in the formal and informal gay networks. To get people comfortable with that stuff they have to develop a sense of trust [with us], we're there to help them and work together; they need to trust that we're not going to expose them at any time..."*

*"If they're married, for example, they may have a lot of fear about opening up and trusting you. Once they start to talk and get trust, and they realise what they say won't get around, they relax a bit and talk more."*

. Getting a conversation going with a beat user, talking safe sex and HIV, means workers need to be receptive to the tensions and flow of activity at the beat. A worker's conversational repertoire cannot be limited to HIV and safe sex. Some beat users may openly discuss their sexual lives, while others may open up only after repeated contacts with a familiar worker.

*"If you start with HIV and they back off, you forget about it and go back to chit-chat. That's where the repeat interactions need to come from. Later on, a couple of interactions down the track, they might want to talk to you. If you have it set in your mind that you have to talk about safe sex and AIDS, then that shuts them off totally. But if you play along with what they're doing and let them know that you're not any threat, then later on you will have the chance to interact and talk about safe sex."*

Outreach workers learned to sustain interactions with different beat users by responding to each as an individual, sensing what their need was, and tailoring the interaction to that need. By not always insisting on discussing HIV and safe sex, while being alert to opportunities to introduce HIV issues into conversations, they gave beat users choices appropriate to their need.

*"You established rapport; they accepted you as part of the beat. You weren't barging in there telling them what to do. You listened and they listened."*

### **3: Community and Attachment**

. Beats Outreach was conceived as a form of peer education, where men who have sex with men were employed to do one-on-one education with other men who have sex with men in the context in which sex

was sought - the beat. One team of two outreach workers was employed to cover the many beats in the western suburbs of Sydney.

*"It [covering the whole western Sydney area] was daunting then and it is daunting now. We felt we had to saturate the area. It was huge - 80 beats at that stage. We felt we had at least achieved something with that saturation. then we had to settle down and stay at particular beats...where we thought we could work the best and be interfered with the least."*

. Choosing which sites to work at presented the workers with dilemmas:

*"...do you go to a beat that's isolated, where you might get to talk to one or two people in a day, but [they] are people isolated from everything, or do go to one where you can talk to ten or twelve people, where most of them might have good knowledge already? How do you choose, with only two of us?"*

. In 1991, the Bisexually Active Men's Outreach Project (BOP) was conducted at two beat 'circuits' in western Sydney. The study aimed to examine closely the social and sexual lives of Bisexually Active men on the beat:

**We intended to develop an approach to outreach and education in the beats setting, letting the beat worker directly pursue a relationship of trust over time...we wished to investigate the possibility of a more dense and detailed exchange, one which allowed the beat worker, and researchers, access to the dynamics of sexual encounters between these men and other such men.<sup>1</sup>**

BOP allowed the beats worker to concentrate his activity at a small number of beats in a particular area, and get to know beat users through repeated contacts. By 1992, two teams of workers were operating in western Sydney. Following the logic of BOP, one team trialed a Community Attachment project at a circuit of beats in the Parramatta area:

*"It kind of evolved. I didn't really get into it until I started the Bisexual stuff [BOP] at Blacktown, then it really hit home, you can't avoid doing that, that's the way they do the beats here...the more you got to talk to [the beat users], the more they opened up, and it changed my whole way of thinking."*

*"The whole idea was repeat interactions, getting to know guys. Being a beat user in the area for many years, I knew a lot of those guys [faces]...you have to remember the person's name, what you spoke about last time. You have to let them know that you're taking an interest in them."*

. The Community Attachment team attempted to extend Beats Outreach work beyond the beat itself, by bringing together small groups of men contacted on the beats for social gatherings. Organising these gatherings required a long period of sensitive work at the beats, getting to know a number of beat users of similar age and background. These men were often missing social contact with other men who have sex with men to whom they could comfortably relate.

*"[At the beats] they tell each other what's happening at this beat, at that beat, where the cops are, but rarely does AIDS stuff come into it...that's what we're doing: putting the HIV into that, making it part of the culture. It's really them doing it - we organise it but once that's done, it's up to them..."*

---

<sup>1</sup> M. D. Davis *et al.* (1991).



. One gathering organised and attended by the beats worker happened this way:

*"These young guys were all from 'the wrong side of the tracks', they didn't fit in...they were intimidated by [other gay and bisexual social groups], some of them can't read or write, but they're still out on the beats having sex with other guys...they all felt comfortable talking about their lives, their HIV status, how they dealt with things...I'd talked to all of them at beats before, talked to them for months. They all said they were having safe sex, then one said he'd done it [had unsafe sex] and it was like a domino...'I did too!' The most extraordinary thing was how little I had to do..."*

. Other beats workers spoke of 'falling naturally' into longer, sustained interactions at beats, repeat contacts, and getting to know some beat users over a period of time. In smaller cities like Wollongong and Newcastle, with fewer users, fewer beats and less anonymity, beats workers were more visible. They became well known by beat users.

[A car goes past and the driver waves.] *"That's an example, since we've been talking two guys have gone past and waved. I can walk up to them, ask how the beats have been, has there been much police activity, any bashings - they keep me up to date. Because they're here i'll give them condoms and pamphlets to give out to other people. We're doing Community Attachment as well."*

*"As beats workers we have to respect the beat users; if we see them out [shopping] we don't acknowledge them unless they acknowledge us first."*

*"You know the regulars; they can tell you who is having unsafe sex..."*

. Unlike the Beats Outreach project, the Rural Outreach project consciously works within a Community Development model to reach gay men and other men who have sex with men in rural areas. Beats in rural areas are essential contact points for men who have sex with men; they may be the only venue for social interaction with other men.

*"The culture of rural gay lifestyles, the male sexual landscape in the country, is heavily associated with the beats...education in that sort of culture has to take in the beats in a big way."*

. With rural workers thinly spread, operating in communities that are extremely hostile to beats and male-to-male sexual activity, a more gradual process of working the beats is essential:

*"I usually deal with it stage by stage. I'll say to myself 'I'll see them again, so this time i'll just chat,' so I've made contact. Seeing them again I'll go further; if not, that's okay. If I talk to them and they relax a bit I'll bring in HIV stuff. If they don't relax I'm happy to have made the contact. It could be counterproductive to bring in HIV stuff if it's uncomfortable [for them]. We're not there to score points. Sometimes I'll say 'I'm going now' or 'I won't be needing this' and hand them a safe pak."*

. The Rural Project's CD strategy encourages gay men from rural areas to work within their own communities. It gives these workers wide scope to choose the manner in which to do this - by starting

social groups, or taking HIV issues to beats in their area. A 'ripple-out' into social networks is intended, to reach men who have sex with men who do not regard themselves as gay.

*"Our work is multilayered; we do beats [outreach] when we're out in the country, but we also try to get local people to take it on, to be beats educators on all sorts of levels - if they use the beat, to take on an attitude of 'I've learned some information [about HIV], so I'll pass it on to the person I'm having sex with or someone I'm talking to, or write some grafitti up.' Or they can be a lot more formal about it and identify themselves as the local peer educator, liaise with the local health authorities, be the troubleshooter for that area - it depends on them."*

. The 'Slip Slop Slap' tour of rural beats and beaches in the mid-north coast region of NSW investigated the 'informed social networks' which were operating around the beats. Most gay identifying beat users had other gay men with whom to socialise, and wanted more social contact or were willing to join a social group. What of the beat users who didn't call themselves gay?

**Men who have sex with men also developed their own informal networks, but this was a long term process that developed with peer observation and mutual trust. The informal grapevine is alive and well, mostly broadcasting sexual exploits with others to known identities within the sub-groups.<sup>2</sup>**

#### **4: Beats across NSW**

. Rural outreach workers summed up beats in rural NSW this way:

*"Country beats are much more full on [with glory holes and grafitti]...[apart from the main town beats] most towns have shopping centres where there is usually a beat, but these are more furtive. The beach beats are more relaxed, it's easier to talk to people there. Out west there can also be a river beat culture similar to the beaches."*

. Rural beats are often very active. Regular beat users get to know the patterns of activity. Beat users may visit the beat more than once during the day or night.

*"[The town beats] become more social at night...in the daytime they're more furtive, and lots of people come and go. They don't hang around if there's no one there. People will occasionally connect. People will come and go, because they're local. If you sit there all day you might see [the same person] coming and going many times. They're difficult places to do education because they're often in an exposed location, and people don't always go to have sex - it's a turn on just going...to get away from the daily grind you go and do a beat. It's your own little secret."*

. Rural beats have an important social function for men who have sex with men.

---

<sup>2</sup> Nik Andronis (1992).

Due to the lack of other venues, beats and beaches in the country are used for more than sexual contact. They also serve as meeting places for gay men and other men who have sex with men who would otherwise be socially isolated...there is a loose network of local beat users within a given area. They generally tend to know of each other and over time develop a social relationship which includes discussion about aspects of their lives that would not be discussed elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

Many of the men who have sex with men are married and live family-oriented lives. Some men may travel to beats in other towns, or go to beaches on the coast where openly gay men are more likely to go. Men often find the best strategy for fitting the beats into their lives, while avoiding as much as possible the potential consequences of exposure.

*"[Doing the beat] depends on the level of comfortability they have going to the beat, what the beats are like in their location, how active in entrapment the cops are, how dangerous they are. Often people don't have a choice - this is where the beats work in their area. Particularly the married men who have sex with men."*

*"If they live a lifestyle where it's impossible to be out in any way...the more that's the case, the more careful they'll be."*

*"Guys develop and incorporate into their lifestyle a coping way of doing the beat that's quite safe...the more risks the guy takes, the more he thinks he can get away with, so they're quite open about it sometimes...sometimes their wife might know. Wives often don't want to acknowledge it, it would destroy any fabric of life for them."*

Beats are also highly social in the regional cities of Wollongong and Newcastle, although these cities have developing gay communities, and may have one or two regular venues where men can socialise with other men who have sex with men. Beat use patterns can vary seasonally.

*"In Wollongong there are about 30 beats. In winter this number diminishes to about half a dozen that are active. In summer the beaches get busy. Really, any beach that you walk around on...if there's guys on their own, it's usually a beat...in summer the number of people we talk to increases, we get people coming from down the coast, from Canberra and Sydney...we get a swell of people (to use that phrase)...our work varies in volume from winter to summer. In winter it's more repeat interactions, that enables you to talk and progress in your relationship with them."*

Of the two, Wollongong has the smaller community, and the beats are very social. The local community is highly intolerant of gay men and other men who have sex with men. Even formal gay groups may regard beats as undesirable.

*"A lot of older married men will socialise...it depends what beat, what time of day or night. It's mixed, the socialising, not just one group...a lot of the gay guys don't want to socialise [at the beat], it's mostly the married men, and the single straight men. They go for sex and to talk. They know they can talk and not be*

---

<sup>3</sup> Nik Andronis (1992).

*looked down upon because they have sex with other men. They won't talk to anyone else in their circle of family and friends...they'll do it down at the beat."*

*"Wollongong is very homophobic. People don't get a chance to talk about [having sex with other men], it's taboo. Men who don't identify as gay here mostly have a poor image of themselves. About 40% of the men we talk to are bisexual. About 90% of these have a female partner. Some call themselves bisexual, some call themselves gay...some say they're straight and just 'fiddle around' with men."*

. Newcastle has a larger gay community and a small number of regular venues. Many of the non-gay identifying men who use beats are not interested in meeting the gay men who frequent these venues. These men find beats the best venue for their interest in sex and socialising with other men.

*"A lot of the beat users are married. The beats are active; the beats are social...people do beat circuits, 'beat-hopping'...we follow the circuits."*

*"The beats are low-key in Newcastle...some of the major beats have been going for many years, others are transient. But even after two years we can't pick where people will go...more glory holes are appearing [now], and a lot of new toilets are becoming beats."*

*"In country areas, men that do beats usually have no other outlet as there are no gay venues, or they do not see themselves as gay or bisexual...the majority of beat users do not associate with the gay scene...some men use beats as a meeting place just to talk and make friends..."*

. In western Sydney, the lack of venues also means that beats perform a social function. There are large numbers of beats in shopping centres, carparks, libraries, reserves, and parks. Beats provide much greater anonymity than in rural communities or the smaller cities.

*"The biggest thing out here is the isolation and loneliness. [Beat users] really don't talk too much - part of the attraction of the beat is the anonymity."*

. Working at a variety of beats demands different strategies for doing interactions. Some workers feel more comfortable approaching and initiating contacts at particular beats, where others might be less comfortable working.

*"At [a large shopping centre] in Parramatta...I guess we can all spot another dorothy from miles away, and if I can interact with that person outside the toilet I would rather do that...[because] inside the toilet it is very busy, and hard to cruise and pick up guys in there...there's a lot of people walking in and out, young kids, people using the piss trough, and it's a pretty straight, rough sort of place."*

*"In western Sydney [the other worker] worked wonderfully - he would just sit in the car, look around, light a cigarette, then walk up to another car and start talking [with the occupant]. There are beats where you just couldn't do that. One time in western Sydney I felt like I was holding court - people would just come up, two or three, the regular beat users would wave people over, 'meet the guy from the beats project'. We'd talk from there."*

. Rotating between projects in different areas is one way of exposing outreach workers to the variety of beats. In the early stages of setting up the beats project in Wollongong, some rotation of workers between Wollongong and western Sydney occurred. Working the beats in Wollongong after a stint in the western suburbs of Sydney proved a challenging experience for one worker:

*"When I first started [in Wollongong] the project here didn't exist...we came down from Sydney. I think at that time I did it incorrectly - or not as sensitively as [the workers now] would do it - or not as tuned in...we looked very Sydney walking onto Windang beach in docs and ripped jeans..."*

*"One drawback [of worker rotation] is this: i'm not sure that 'losing continuity' is it, but when you work in one area all the time you get to learn more about it, the culture, you build up rapport with the beat users...as I rotated I would lose in my mind some of the issues for the area, find myself feeling like I was starting again..."*

. Beach beats are common along the coast of NSW. Projects in Newcastle and Wollongong do much of their work at beaches. Some workers were more comfortable with the mix of beat, beach and sometimes nudist cultures operating at beaches.

*"In the summer when the beach is busy i'll go down there nude, but not everyone's comfortable that way..."*

*"I found I had to be more tentative and sit down on the beach...[some of the other workers] were suited to the beach culture - they'd walk around in shorts or cossie, they would kind of fit in with what's happening, then engage people from there...others could walk through the tracks [in the bushes behind the beach] with ease..."*

## 5: Doing Outreach

. Beats Outreach in Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong was established using teams of two outreach workers, with one vehicle for each team. This model is still used. Outreach workers spend much of their time together in the vehicle, punctuated by often stressful periods at the beats.

*"As a team we share personal things, work, disagreements. If we have a problem we take time out and sort it out because neither of us can work to the best of our ability. Most of the time we just talk about it. We exchange stuff about ourselves. When you work with someone eight or nine hours a day, you need humour..."*

*"You get to know your partner's moods. We swap writing and driving jobs. If i've gone in to check the beat this time, [the other worker] will go in next time. If we have differences of opinion...they often arise...we try and look at a logical answer. We'll go to our manager if we cannot resolve it."*

*"Conflict has serious detrimental effects on not just the people involved but on all workers...when you get conflicting views on the way things should be done, it can become paralysing."*

. Outreach work at beats constantly requires the worker to deal with stressful issues associated with the beat itself - police activity and its effects, the possibility of violence. Talking about safe sex and HIV issues with beat users means putting these into the context of their lives, making it a reality for them, helping to sort through emotional issues and sexuality issues first.

*"It should be recognised it is a difficult job. Going out there and engaging someone into an educational encounter when they're looking for sex or to meet people...you have to tread a very fine line...there's a lot of issues to deal with out on the beats."*

*"We're doing a dangerous job, we're on the front lines, we're doing night work. A lot of the beats we go to, you would not catch me there [as a beat user] at night, it's too dangerous."*

*"We're putting our bodies on the line...we're out on the coal face, giving a unique form of education, getting out and talking to people. We're seeing that someone is illiterate, we're dealing with it, we're seeing that someone's mentally disabled, we're dealing with it, we're seeing that someone has a problem with their sexuality, we're dealing with it. And giving the safe sex message..."*

. Doing Outreach work at beats often intrudes into the worker's private life, especially if the work involves Community Attachment activity. Giving someone a contact number after hours if they need to talk is sometimes necessary, but can lead to an increasing burden on the worker's personal time.

*"The work always comes into your private life - jealousy issues with your partner, privacy issues...people stop me to talk outside of work hours..."*

*"Your social life is very much your work life. People are aware that when i'm in my own vehicle, i'm not working."*

. Day-to-day management of beats outreach requires an acute sensitivity to issues that constantly arise from the beats themselves and from the stress and pressure of the work. Beats workers out in the field sometimes perceive among other ACON staff a stigma attached to outreach work at beats, and a lack of understanding and recognition of the nature and scope of their work at management level.

*"The nature of the work, in the way beats [outreach] involves potentially dangerous work, with police and councils the stakes can be fairly high, [and] HIV workers are at a disadvantage in the negotiation...this places demands on managers and leads to a general feeling about beats...managers start to avoid doing things, and workers get more insistent."*

*"ACON has to be more sensitive to the issues of outreach workers. Not take on the philosophy of 'out of sight, out of mind.' Be more sensitive to the community development/peer work that we do. There's no point having a boss that's not sensitive to the kind of culture and work that we do."*

*"Any outreach worker that works in a hostile environment needs recognition and support. You need supervision, debriefing, awareness of the frustrations and difficulties of what you're doing."*

. Beats outreach workers operate day-to-day from ACON branches (Newcastle and Wollongong) that are relatively small and close-knit. Adequately serving beat users in their areas poses logistical problems.

*"[In Wollongong] we can't do enough as part-time workers. A lot needs to be done here."*

*"Beats workers [here] don't get full-time funding. Going down to Nowra...there's so much unprotected sex going on at the beats, we need a worker down there...we've been trying for two years for extra funding. We deserve more money."*

*"Initially we did Newcastle, Lake Macquarie...we've now extended our area to Scone, Muswellbrook, practically the entire Hunter valley...we have to travel enormous distances, eleven hour shifts to do those areas, a lot of driving involved and the beats a long distance apart."*

. In Newcastle, strict accountability procedures have allowed project workers to go further afield within limited budgets. The appointment of a new manager, more in tune with the culture of men who have sex with men, helped to stabilise the project, although an experienced worker was lost. Lack of adequate training and support in the early stages of setting up the Newcastle project may have impeded the project's development.

*"Since the new manager [started in the Newcastle branch] we've been developing [a set of] guidelines for our work, stresses have dropped. The branch is far more participatory, like a family...we know what's happening in the project at any time with log books [for the outreach vehicle] and the like...accountability. [We're] a lot more at ease."*

. In 1991 and 1992, the Sydney-based project suffered from a high rate of worker and manager turnover at a time of fundamental changes in organisational structure. A number of 'fill-in' workers were employed intermittently, some new, some with past experience in outreach at beats.

*"[When I first worked in the project] I felt like part of the beat culture...filling in [now] makes me feel like a visitor doing time..."*

. Wollongong workers often found it difficult to justify trips to Sydney or Newcastle for meetings when time and resources for outreach were limited enough. Even outreach workers in Sydney were reluctant to allot time to meetings when they could be doing outreach. This illustrates a common tension in Beats Outreach Projects between doing outreach itself and the organisational part of the work.

. Rural outreach workers spend less time on the ground at beats; their work is more multilayered, using a slow, grass-roots approach. With only two workers covering the bulk of rural NSW, this approach is essential. A plan for expansion of the project includes a media strategy, a toll-free telephone number, and a newsletter to be circulated to key 'community educators' from rural areas. Prioritising work, and establishing the project slowly were seen as essential to the success of the Community Development model.

*"I would like to see it made clear the complexities of the work...we also do bureaucratic/policy work, we have to deal with health workers, branches, deal with all kinds of people, try to establish good relationships with people at all levels."*

*"I don't do beats every day in my work, it's a section of my ongoing work. The beats workers here, going out every day and talking to people - it would be difficult keeping that sense of doing your job and being in tune..."*

. Many workers remarked on the frustrations of doing outreach at beats over a long period of time. Doing *ad hoc* training courses (communication with differently-abled people on the beat, first aid and self-defense) and rotating workers between projects were generally seen as useful, but took valuable time away from outreach.

*"Recently i've been having a resurgence of uneasiness about approaching people [at beats]...I don't know whether it is because the beat users know us and are less willing to engage in long conversations or if it is me losing my knack."*

*"It's easy to fall into a rut as a beats worker...after a while you become less sensitive to beat users as individuals. Sometimes I wondered whether I was genuinely listening to each individual beat user..."*

*"A certain level of fear and trepidation is helpful...it's an indication that you're not numbing out, that you're sensitive to and aware of the types of people there. I don't want to get numb to it."*

*"Different strategies are needed at different times. You need change to keep the message fresh."*



## BEAT USERS, SAFE SEX AND HIV

### 1: Identity and Practice

***Lives in a de facto relationship with his girlfriend but he liked to get off with guys occasionally - 'they give good head jobs.'***

. The above extract from field notes shows a man leading a heterosexual lifestyle who likes to use a beat to look for sex with other men. He's looking for sexual pleasure of a particular sort: he likes getting a 'good head job' (oral sex), and he knows he can get it from other men at a beat.

BOP notes that "the beat setting is an arena of sex play open to more than just gay men, and for many men may be an opportunity for physical and pleasurable release." Men may be interested in sex, regardless of sexual identity.<sup>1</sup> Sex with other men might not be regarded as 'real' sex at all.

***Married man with long history of sex with men. Has wife and two kids. Only has oral sex ('playing around') on the beat.***

. The sexual ambience generated at beats can be exciting for many men. A toilet cubicle with abundant graffiti - explicit drawings, erotic stories, 'make-a-date' notices - becomes a pleasure zone. Graffiti generates more graffiti. As one outreach worker noted:

*"I think beats with glory holes, holes in the walls, beats at good locations...beat users remember those sorts of things. I think for a start a beat has to have some sort of okay location. Guys just write graffiti on the walls, drill holes through the walls, others notice it, one person turns into two people, they tell their friends."*

. Many of the men who have sex with men at beats also enjoy sex with women. BOP contacted a variety of such men. Sexual identity and sexual behaviour were 'contradictory': "men who described themselves as gay had girlfriends; married men adopted the label 'bisexual' in a way that signalled the diversity of their sexual interest, not a lifestyle; non-gay men disregarded advice about safe sex since they were not 'faggots', 'queens' or 'poofers.'"

***He led me into the bushes. Kept looking back to see if I was following. I said hello and identified myself. He said he was just out for a walk after a fight with his girlfriend, he didn't know it was a beat. Then he asked me if I knew where any other beats were.***

***He was wearing a wedding ring. He seemed very embarrassed about doing the beat and kept on apologising. At the same time he would place his hand behind my head and pull me towards him.***

***Verbally abusive. He clenched his fist. Claimed he was married and suggested I concentrate on***

<sup>1</sup> M.D. Davis *et al.*, (1991).

***'poofers'. He has been seen doing the beat many times.***

. For many men on the beat, the notion of a sexual identity is irrelevant to seeking fulfillment of sexual desire with other men.

***'I suppose you'd call me gay.' He was married and now has sex with men...used to do all things, but now only wanks.***

***Straight. Since his wife died he does the beat. Prefers to be insertive partner but being receptive makes him feel less lonely - safe or unsafe.***

. Beat users who also have sex with women and do not choose a gay identity are sometimes reluctant to discuss their sex with women with outreach workers. This was noted by BOP: "Most men preferred not to discuss the sex they were having on the beat and there were definite barriers to discussing sex with women. The men in the beats setting were committed to keeping their two sexual lives separate, and therefore believed they were not at risk of infection."

***Just lets other guys suck him off. Doesn't fuck with guys. Doesn't use condoms with women.***

***Said he was married and therefore we didn't need to talk to him.***

***Although he uses condoms with women he didn't know that the virus could pass from a woman to a man.***

***He only looks and jerks off. Even though he very rarely jerks off other guys (he has done this about four times in his entire life), according to his definition he has sex with women (his wife) only. We spoke of HIV transmission not in terms of specific acts but in terms of sharing fluids (blood, cum, etc). His knowledge was very good, but he stressed it was of no concern for him because he was monogamous and has always been so...he only became aware of his attraction to other men later in life. Has never been interested in other women bar his wife. His manner of doing the beat was timid and very subtle.***

. Men having sex at beats outside a primary relationship with a woman often practice what they think to be safe sex to maintain the separation of their two sexual lives. Their partners may not know of their sex with men; protecting the primary relationship and keeping a family together may make it 'safer' to only have safe sex at beats. Some men might have safe sex with their wife and female partners, but practice unsafe sex with men at beats. Others might have unsafe sex with both male and female partners.

***Identified as a gay man, Italian in origin, with a wife. Has been having unprotected anal intercourse with men but has been using condoms with women and his wife. He has good knowledge but does not always practice safe sex.***

***Reported having unsafe anal sex. Southern European man who has sex with men and women - also reported having unsafe vaginal sex.***

## 2: Safe Sex: Knowledge and Practice

*"Beats work, with the scope it has for...intensive one-on-one contact, is a good way to deal with sensitive issues, such as those around sexuality...intervening on site gives HIV education immediacy and flexibility, and for non-attached men who do not identify as gay, I believe it is the best way of making the possibility of HIV infection a personal reality."<sup>2</sup>*

. Assessment of beat users' safe sex knowledge and practice is an essential part of outreach work. After an interaction an outreach worker will assess good or poor knowledge and practice of safe sex and HIV transmission for a range of sex practices. Part of the encounter is for the worker to help 'fill in the gaps' in knowledge, and challenge misconceptions about HIV and how it is transmitted.

*He didn't know about smoothing air bubbles out of a condom.*

*He didn't know the virus could be transmitted from male to female.*

*Knowledge fine but doesn't trust condoms enough to fuck.*

*Thought insertive anal and vaginal sex safe - used no condoms.*

*Thought oral sex OK all the time. Had severe chafing on his cock - mutual masturbation a possible risk if cum is used as lube.*

. It is clear that there is no simple relation between a person's knowledge of safe sex and how they apply this in practice. Good knowledge does not mean a beat user will always practice safe sex. A variety of factors operating in the beat setting may preclude beat users from negotiating safe sex. Avoiding the consequences of surveillance may be uppermost in some men's minds. Anonymity, the desire for a quick sexual encounter, may make it difficult to stick to decisions about safe practice.

*He had unprotected sex with a woman and a man - he thought this to be safe though he 'knew' it wasn't.*

*He has good knowledge but he has had unsafe sex recently because he 'gets carried away.' He had unsafe insertive and receptive sex in a beat even though he had a safe pak in his car.*

*Does not use condoms because he figures he might as easily be run over, and besides, he only chooses healthy looking guys.*

*I asked him: if a spunk asked him 'could you fuck me?' and he had no condom, what would he do? Said he'd probably fuck the guy.*

. Outreach workers stressed of the *personal* factors in men's lives that make behaviour change difficult:

---

<sup>2</sup> Phillip Keen (1992). Presentation on Beats Outreach, V National Conference on AIDS, Sydney.

*"Issues of self-esteem, self-acceptance need to be addressed...people's private lives have an impact on the way they practice safe sex. It's naive to think we're going to change behaviour simply by giving information - it doesn't work. It may work with some people, but if you want to get behaviour change you need to address a whole lot of issues."*

*"We're faced with more immediate problems for these people than HIV: they don't want to know about that if they're caught in a major family crisis or their self-esteem is so shot they don't care."*

. While self-esteem and emotional factors make it more difficult for some men to choose to practice safe sex, even if they have good knowledge, this is not always so. Consider the case of one young beat user, first contacted by BOP:

*"Tim' is 16 years old...he has a girlfriend who was shopping while he was doing the beat. He was very comfortable talking to the outreach worker about sex and was not ashamed of what he was doing or had any other strongly negative emotions attached to his homosexual practice...[he] has heard of AIDS but has no safe sex knowledge...although he has wide experience of male-to-male sex including receptive anal sex, he has never used a condom for anal penetration."<sup>3</sup>*

. Tim was later contacted by Community Attachment workers in western Sydney:

*"This project has reunited with 'Tim' and our rapport is blossoming. Our concern for Tim now is that (even though he has good knowledge) because of his youth, inexperience and lack of negotiating skills he is easily influenced into unsafe sex. His attachment to this project seems to be the only way in which any help can be offered to him."<sup>4</sup>*

. Very young men doing the beat often have poor knowledge of safe sex and HIV. Doing beats may be seen as part of sexual exploration and discovery.

*"Patrick was born in Thailand, but for the last three or four years has lived in Australia. When I first saw Patrick...he was 'doing the beat' with a great deal of enthusiasm..."*

***Very Young (14 or so). Denied doing the beat, but undoubtedly was. We discussd everything but he kept denying.***

*The next time I saw him, things were a lot easier...*

***Second time I have spoken to this boy. First time he denied doing the beat. Never spoken to anyone else about sex with men. Confused about whether he wants to do beats. Wants to meet again.***

*Patrick had been having sex at this beat for a few months, but he had no idea about how to have safe sex. Patrick had never fucked with another man, but only because 'he hadn't felt like trying that yet.' Patrick has a girlfriend, who he has never had sex with. he does not call himself bisexual or gay. In his own words, he's*

---

<sup>3</sup> M. D. Davis *et al.* (1991).

<sup>4</sup> Ulo Klemmer (1992). Unpublished report.

*just 'playing around.'*<sup>5</sup>

. Poor knowledge does not always mean poor practice of safe sex. Men might practice 'safely' based on misunderstandings of HIV and transmission. Some men on the beat develop strategies for avoiding HIV based on assumptions or personal theories that are 'wrong.' This is often complicated by the kinds of messages - what is safe, what is unsafe, what amount a risk a particular practice entails - coming from different sources. The safety and practice of unprotected oral sex is one case.

***Uses condoms for oral sex - we may need to distinguish between poor knowledge leading to risky practice and that leading to over-reaction.***

. On first approach, many beat users tend to disclose only a limited picture of their sexual practice on beats, or to claim good knowledge of safe sex.

*"...some people will open up to you five minutes after you've come up to them, they'll tell you the most intimate things about themselves, you'll refer them [to services]...I generally don't believe what I hear the first few times, I don't expect to either - if I was in the same situation, what would I tell people that I did at the beat? Why should I tell him the truth? I don't know him, I don't trust him, I'll sling him anything and get out of there."*

***Northern Territory number plate. Very butch. 'I know it all, mate.'***

***'I don't need to know more about it so you can go and talk to some poor bastard who is more mixed up.'***

*"'Just here for a wank' is an automatic reaction - later in the conversation they might say they occasionally get screwed."*

***His knowledge of safe sex seemed good, but I'm not sure about his practice. He said that he did not have anal sex with men but I later found out that he did and I wondered why he didn't feel comfortable discussing this.***

. While many men claim good knowledge, further discussion often reveals gaps and inaccuracies. Oral sex, use of lubricants with condoms, the importance of using water-based rather than oil-based lubricant are common areas for confusion.

***Thought oral to be high risk. Sometimes lets guys come in his mouth.***

***Pretty new to the world of M+M sex. Had pretty good knowledge but was unsure about pre-cum and oral sex.***

---

<sup>5</sup> Phillip Keen (1992).

***Was unsure about oral so he avoided cum in his mouth.***

***Didn't know about cuts or sores in the mouth.***

***Used spit and cum as lube - didn't know about water-based lube.***

. Confusion about oral sex, in particular, seems widespread at the beats. One outreach worker negotiated such confusion this way:

*"What about suckin off? It's pretty risky, eh?" You can tell it's the first time they've asked anybody. 'Well I only come down here, I only get sucked off, I don't get fucked up the arse or nothing.' I said well it's alright you know (to be fucked) if you use a condom and lube properly. They'll say 'oh yeah, yeah, but suckin' is still risky, eh?' I'll say no, it's not really very risky, but if you've got cuts or sores in your mouth, bleeding gums or an ulcer, its a place where the virus can get into your bloodstream. Don't let a guy come in your mouth. Go ahead and do it, you shouldn't have any problems - if you want to be extra sure you can make him wear a condom as well. 'Oh, so it's not so risky?' You're the first person to tell them 'what you've been thinking in the past isn't totally correct, so stop worrying about it and follow these guidelines and enjoy yourself.'"*

Compare this to the written information on oral sex in *Safe Sex and HIV*, the primary English-language pamphlet passed to men at beats:

"Although other sexually transmitted diseases can be passed on through oral sex, oral sex is low risk for HIV. There are no recorded cases of HIV passing from the mouth of one person to the penis or vagina of another.

There are a small number of cases recorded in other countries of people getting HIV through taking semen or vaginal fluids (and possibly menstrual blood) into their mouths. In general it seems that it is not easy for HIV to enter the bloodstream via the mouth or throat. If there is any bleeding, gum disease or other infections in the mouth, you should take extra care.

To make oral sex even safer for HIV, and to guard against other sexually transmitted diseases, you can use barriers such as condoms for fellatio, or latex 'dental dams' or plastic cling wrap for cunnilingus. Take care to avoid tears if using thin plastic film."<sup>6</sup>

. Oral sex and the use of lubricants are specific subjects of a new series of stickers to be placed in some beats, developed by the Sydney Beats project. The stickers were focus tested among a number of beat users.

[ new beats stickers about here]

. A report from the 'Slip Slop Slap' tour of rural beats noted similar gaps in knowledge or oral sex and lubricants. "Repeatedly, men at beats said they knew about HIV and safe sex but further discussion revealed inaccuracy and confusion...men who have sex with men may have felt it was wrong to say they have very little information because they may think they should have all the facts. They may not want to be seen as being more vulnerable than they already are."

<sup>6</sup> Education Unit, AIDS Council of NSW (1992). *Safe Sex and HIV*, (Pamphlet).

Many of the men noted they had got most of their HIV information from mainstream (local) media. Some of the confusion and inaccuracy may be attributable to the often inaccurate or incomplete information available in mainstream media. "Men wanted clear, simple formulae to digest."<sup>7</sup>

### 3: The Beat, the 'Bedroom', the 'Office'

. The nature of particular beats may determine not only the kind of outreach education that can be achieved, but the ways a safe sex culture among beat users might operate. Beats in exposed locations are often more amenable to quick sexual contact such as oral sex or mutual masturbation. Anal sex is more likely to occur at beats with a more relaxed dynamic, such as beach beats.

"Each beach has a private sex spot that most users know of. This area is private and not easily accessed and has a name... 'the penthouse', 'paradise' etc. This is where anal-oriented sex would occur, we were told. Given the amount of condoms seen in and around these locations, I would say that this would be a good indication of safe sex knowledge and activity. These private places seem to work towards developing a safe sex culture simply by existing."<sup>8</sup>

. Local beat cultures, formed by interlacing social networks of beat users and other men who have sex with men, develop local languages-of-the-beat that reflect the beat geography, times of use and variety of men who use the beat. In Wollongong, 'gangsters' (beat users) visit the 'Office' (the beat).

"...there are a number of reasons why men go to meet other men at beats. This could be for a sexual encounter, social encounter, someone to talk to for support or simply to be in an environment in which they feel accepted by others in regards to their sexuality. ACON Illawarra has found it extremely helpful in establishing ongoing contact with regular and semi-regular users of beats. They in turn assist ACON in distributing safe sex information in the form of pamphlets and the provision of condoms and lube to their peers at beats."<sup>9</sup>

"Some men use the beat as a meeting place just to talk and make friends. In the country this is very common. These social groups are sometimes the only contact that some gay and non-gay identified men have with each other. These groups can help in the fight against AIDS as they are like 'peer support' groups and can help reinforce safe sex practices with bisexual/married men."<sup>10</sup>

. Outreach workers visiting a beat will often gauge the level of activity of the beat by reading the graffiti written and drawn by beat users, usually on the walls and doors inside toilet cubicles. It is common to see holes - 'peepholes' and 'glory holes' - drilled or gouged through the walls or doors of cubicles, allowing visual or sexual

<sup>7</sup> Nik Andronis (1992).

<sup>8</sup> Nik Andronis (1992).

<sup>9</sup> David Alpak (1992). 'Profile of Beat users in the Illawarra,' Unpublished report.

<sup>10</sup> ACON Hunter Branch Beats Project (1992). Unpublished report.

contact.

*"[Grafitti, glory holes]...it's part of ownership, trying to develop a sense of culture, 'this is our space.' It's where people meet and pass messages to each other. Appointments are made. People like to tell stories. People go to get turned on, either by having sex, writing stuff up, looking through the holes, or just being around."*

***Grafitti: 'if you want a shine that will blow your mind, give me a call and i'll suck your balls.'***

***Newly found beat. Lots of grafitti, cannot be locked. This must be the place.***

. Outreach workers have often experimented with writing grafitti at beats themselves, although this has been relatively *ad hoc*. BOP recommended that this potential avenue of outreach education be explored further: "...utilising *organic* education that already occurs in the beats setting, for example, grafitti promoting safe sex, is recommended."

[illustration - grafitti]

. Repeat interactions with beat users can be fruitful in gauging the extent of a local safe sex culture, as well as helping the individual achieve more of a sense of belonging or attachment. Concentrated work at one particular beat in western Sydney established rapport with a number of frequent users of the beat:

*"I first met 'Alex' in March/April at the [...] beat...he is a young Asian man of 21 years and extremely shy...he does not identify as being a gay man, but as bisexual or even straight. He has a hard time dealing with the fact that he is attracted to other men (because of his ethnic background, and because his friends and family are always putting down gay people)..."*

*We talked about safe sex and if he thought he had partaken in what he understood as being unsafe. He said no but then started asking questions about sex... his knowledge was good, he was unsure about lube and mosquitos...he said he got his information from friends...and occasionally from men he has sex with at beats, most if not all these men insisting on safe sex practices.*

*On the second or third interaction we were discussing what 'Alex' would like to do about his sexuality...he had a few friends he could talk to but it was never about his sexuality or the problems he was having dealing with having sex with men or the possible relationships he could have with these men...we discussed the possibility of going to a support group (ACON's Fun and Esteem group) ...*

*After these interactions he was not seen again for some time...then one day while coming out of the beat I ran into him...he wanted to talk to me...he had something on his mind...he [wanted to] talk about going to the group..."<sup>11</sup>*

. 'Community educators' from rural communities are trained and resourced by the Sydney-based Rural Outreach Project. They are encouraged to work within local groups and through existing or developing networks of gay

<sup>11</sup> Rob Hicks (1993). Unpublished report.



men and other men who have sex with men. The process is painstaking, and successes incremental.

*"What we try to do is get an initiative [going] that is self-sufficient in its own area. Our local boy [community educator] will tap into the health services that are available. The married men who have sex with men who won't go to social groups...the local guy is an informal peer, his place is a drop-in centre, they can ring him, come over for lunch or a drink or a chat, or get a group thing going with a health worker...that's a difficult one, I don't think it's happened for non gay-identified men; there has been informal stuff, but with two or three people and not an ongoing group thing."*

*"Part of our project is to keep the groups going, resource them, [keep them] excited about themselves and other groups starting up down the road, linking people up, dealing with issues, stigma, discrimination, get a sense of culture going - that happens anyway, we just try to thread it."*

***He was very discreet - he has a rule never to use beat users' real names, and did not give me his. He is very experienced at beat use and seems casual about it but he is careful and discreet. Drives to all the beats and (local beach). I gave him safe paks and information to hand out.***

. Beats Outreach workers can become well known and accepted on local beats - whether this is due to the location of the project in a small city such as Wollongong, or a conscious decision to concentrate work in a particular area.

*"That ice-breaking stuff doesn't need to be done, because the workers are so well known everyone comes straight up to them."*

*"Because we're there so often...if they read or hear something they will phone us up and ask us...it could be the samillest thing like 'why use a water-based lubricant - it's all lube, isn't it?' If they ask us and we give them the right info, their attitude and behaviour start to change, they tell other people about it and it goes on from there...I think a lot of beat users talk to each other."*

. Some of the men contacted by Beats projects express a desire to be involved in bringing safe sex into the beats, and may be potential 'community educators'.<sup>12</sup> Beats projects have barely begun to look into the possibilities of working with these people.

***Long chat. This was [...], the wheelchair boy. Sounded him out re secondary education. He could be good as he says he usually discusses with partners and he does sex education for people who've recently become quadruplegic. He said many 'quads' don't use condoms as they can't come.***

#### 4: Living with HIV

*"It's changed significantly now...I can't remember anyone saying anything like 'there's no HIV in western Sydney'*

<sup>12</sup> Other writers have used terms like 'volunteer educators' or 'barefoot educators' to refer to these people.

*for quite a while, and that may be due to us."*

*His lover died three months ago, and three close friends had died in the past two years.*

*He wasn't doing the beat but was looking out for a friend who is HIV positive.*

*Wanted to know what somebody with AIDS looked like. Didn't know the difference between being HIV positive and having AIDS.*

*Had unsafe sex in the last three years and is going to be tested. His lover recently tested HIV positive.*

*"It's changed quite a bit. I don't think anyone's now denying HIV is here, although there's still a few men who have no idea...they've heard the word, but they don't know what safe sex is, they're doing the beat and having unsafe sex with guys..."*

*"A lot of guys still do not see themselves at risk."*

*Openly HIV+. Knew all re safe sex.*

*Said he knew most if not all about HIV/AIDS. He has a friend that is in Stage IV and very sick.*

*Has had unsafe receptive anal sex. Said he didn't have condoms, just didn't think about it. He said he has been doing this for years and still feels healthy. Thinks AIDS is media hype.*

*"[It's possible] there's been a lot of change in beat use [with the advent of HIV]. Older beat users say similar stuff; how much busier, less inhibited beats were in the past, how there were lots of younger guys [that are not there now]...I do know from personal experience of doing beats that things aren't as rosy as they used to be, and I don't know whether that's just due to HIV."*

*Very young - in school uniform. Asked how old he replied 'Doesn't matter. I'm as old as I want to be.'*

*Older guy, says he can't really get the old fella up anymore, mainly wanks, watches, wishes he was younger.*

In the mainstream media, some commentators questioned the wisdom of the law in relation to public sex and beats:

"For years, nocturnal encounters in this or that park...have led to a sad succession of men appearing in court, to face humiliation over something of monumental inconsequentiality. Sometimes a career is destroyed, sometimes a marriage, because someone yields, perhaps for the first time, to temptation. To an invitation kindly extended by a policeman."<sup>15</sup>

"The use of undercover police for entrapment may be justifiable in procuring arrests for serious crimes but is repugnant and open to abuse and corruption when adopted to counter soliciting for prostitution and homosexual purposes not in themselves illegal."<sup>16</sup>

Media stories on Beats Outreach and HIV/AIDS also began appearing in the mainstream press and in the electronic media. Many of these were factual and addressed the issues around beats and beats outreach openly, without resorting to the moralising and hysteria commonly passing for journalism in these media.<sup>17</sup> A television current affairs show, *Sunday*, did a story on Beats Outreach which included secret footage taken inside a beat from a hidden camera, intercut with footage and voiceovers by outreach workers.<sup>18</sup> The implication was that outreach workers had condoned the use of the hidden camera. In response to a stiffly-worded complaint, the station aired a rétraction.

*"[We] can play an important part in challenging the myths of sex in rural locations. Occasionally you'll get thing in the paper, someone carries on about a beat being used, they lump paedophiles and homosexuals together. We encourage people to contact us, we'll make a formal complaint or write an article for the paper to formally challenge the myths, and get others to write in too. [The local papers] will publish our letters and want to do follow-ups..."*

---

<sup>15</sup> Phillip Adams (1992), 'Time to take the cop out of copulation,' *Weekend Australian*, 25-26 July 1992.

<sup>16</sup> Claude Forell (1992), 'Why do we need a law against sex-soliciting?' *The Age*, 15 April.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, 'Gay beats: our most shameful sexual secret?', *The Eastern Herald*, 18 June 1992; 'Project to halt HIV spreading,' *Penrith Press*, 14 May 1991; 'ACON prevention campaign targets region's 'occasional gays', *Illawarra Mercury*, 20 June 1990; 'Life of Hunter gays not easy,' *Newcastle Herald*, 15 Feb. 1991.

<sup>18</sup> Channel 9, *Sunday*, 26 July 1992.



## SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Knowledge and Experience of Outreach

ACON has operated outreach projects targeting men who have sex with men at beats for over four and a half years. It is clear that outreach workers have been successful in contacting and engaging a variety of men who frequent beats; in responding to beat users on a peer level; and in working sensitively within local beat cultures.

ACON's pool of outreach workers has accumulated substantial knowledge and experience of working beats in different geographical areas, and of using a variety of outreach strategies to bring HIV and safe sex issues to the men who use them.

**Recommendation:** ACON continue to utilise the skills and experience of its outreach workers, to effectively foster a process of moving HIV and safe sex issues into the beats arena.

### 2: Monitoring and Evaluation

Systematic evaluation of projects has not always been a part of the organisational culture of ACON. This has been true in outreach projects to men who have sex with men. Outreach workers have become much more aware of the need to evaluate their work, although some confusion exists over how to evaluate beats outreach.

Many strategies have been used by beats workers at different times to approach and sustain interactions with beat users. Some of these strategies - which ones 'work', which ones 'don't work' - are passed between workers in formal settings (such as quarterly meetings of workers from different projects) and informally. In this way strategies that 'work' are shared: an unwritten form of day-to-day evaluation.

However, ways of engaging beat users that 'work' found by one beats worker may not always be made available to other workers in practice; meetings and report writing are time consuming. Because of this, opportunities may be lost to compare what 'works' and focus on key common elements of 'quality' interactions.

It may be possible to develop simple 'process indicators' that can be used to evaluate the 'quality' of beats interactions. It should be clear that these indicators are distinct from the day-to-day data gathering carried out by beats outreach workers, which may be thought of as useful for *monitoring*, rather than evaluation. 'Process indicators' might be most useful for evaluating Community Attachment work at beats, where multiple contacts between the outreach worker and the beat user occur over a period of time.

This report has used a qualitative approach to illuminate the process of face-to-face contact between beats workers and beat users. It has looked at *phases* of the beats interaction: approaching, sustaining, repeat contacts and attachment. A similar breakdown into phases could be used to establish a format for developing process indicators. This has been done in at least one project, but not formally adopted.<sup>1</sup>

Developing simple indicators of performance should be seen as part of building within outreach project a culture of evaluation. It is not incompatible with demands on workers time to do outreach. It should be seen as an

---

<sup>1</sup> Western Sydney Beats Project. Evaluation of Interaction with Clients, 3 April 1990.

essential and everyday part of the job.

**Recommendation: ACON encourage outreach workers to develop simple ways of evaluating their work on a regular, ongoing basis. This could be a series of small evaluations aimed at opening up beats interactions - how they happened, where the worker thought he went right or wrong.**

BOP proposes a detailed framework for data collection<sup>2</sup>, in line with recommendations for longer, more sustained interactions with clients, in order to gain access to more ethnographic detail for bisexually active men on the beat. This framework approaches beats interactions by looking at the interaction in its context: the beat, phases of the interaction, impressions and reflecting. It could be adapted for *evaluating* interactions with all men using beats. It could be useful for developing small, regular evaluations proposed above.

Collecting data for day-to-day monitoring of the project requires a system that is clear and can be achieved quickly. It should not be cumbersome, restricting the worker's time doing interactions.

However, data collection currently used for monitoring the projects may need to be reviewed. At present the data forms, by their design, restrict the amount of information, particularly of the qualitative sort, that is written down by the Outreach workers. A system of writing down longer or significant interactions in journals has largely not worked - often the necessity to write a journal entry may be noted on the data form but not followed up.

The data forms themselves, collapsing up to twelve interactions per page, may need to be redesigned. A more logical design would have one interaction to a page. This may encourage outreach workers to include more qualitative material simply by providing more room on the page. It would allow other aspects of the data collection to be organised in logical units, and provide an easier format for entry into databases. The extra qualitative material may be used to augment the regular evaluations.

**Recommendation: ACON redesign data collection forms for monitoring outreach work on a one interaction/one page basis. This should be logically integrated with the proposed regular evaluation periods.**

### 3: Outreach and ACON's Culture

This evaluation uses qualitative material to examine the process of outreach work at beats. Its scope and design does not allow for a detailed look at organisational processes and management practices. However, it may be useful to flag some issues for managers and for ACON arising from the evaluation process.

Outreach work with men who have sex with men at beats is by nature a slow process. It has many features that are not common to other projects run by ACON. Some of these features may be salient to the nature of the manager / outreach worker 'contract' and may need to be examined in depth.

Public sex between men at beats carries a great deal of stigma in the wider culture. This stigma is clearly

---

<sup>2</sup> See M. D. Davis et al. (1991), p. 22, 'Diary of interaction in the field.'

reflected in the beat culture itself, and its effects confront the outreach worker on the beat every working day. The stresses on the outreach worker can be both emotional and physical. The authentically lived experience of many different beat users is often painful for the beat users themselves and emotionally draining for the worker, since it is precisely these issues which workers must negotiate and hear before meaningful discussions of safe sex and HIV are possible.

The outreach worker's job involves sexually defusing an encounter, and transforming it into an educational encounter in which sex and sexuality must be opened up between the outreach worker and the beat user for the meanings of safe and unsafe sexual practice to be made clear. It should not be denied that a worker's own sexuality and sexual body constitute some of the meanings in the encounter.

Outreach work is best able to serve the needs of its clients when it is flexible to the changing circumstances faced by them. Beats are not static; outreach workers need to move with changes to patterns of use and activity of a variety of beats. Scope for diverse approaches to outreach intervention, responding to rapid change at beats - for example, immediately after a police operation - should be maintained in the projects.

Managers may need to trust outreach workers and accept the limits of their ability to scrutinise outreach work. Workers may need to trust that their manager listen carefully to their needs and advocate for issues that arise.

**Recommendation: ACON's Organisational Development Team develop strategies for encouraging a better understanding of issues for outreach workers within the organisation, and bringing these understandings into the organisational culture.**

#### 4: Training and Support

The training and support needs of outreach workers should be reassessed. For new workers in outreach projects, training in the practicalities of doing outreach, in strategies for making contact, sustaining interactions, and bringing HIV and safe sex into interactions is essential. New workers should learn much of this from experienced workers, but this does not always happen in practice. For many outreach workers there was a strong feeling of having been 'thrown in the deep end' with inadequate training.

Outreach projects in other Australian states and in other countries often stress the need for adequate training and support for outreach workers contacting men in the public environment. In particular, regular 'debriefings' are emphasised - times for outreach workers to review their work, share experiences and strategies, and validate their own and others' work. Such sessions go hand-in-hand with building within projects a culture of evaluation, and providing feedback on workers' needs to their organisations.

ACON may have some weaknesses in providing outreach workers with adequate opportunity and support for putting training and debriefing structures into place.

The Newcastle project has independently developed a training and support manual to address workers' needs. This may be adapted for use by other projects.

**Recommendation: ACON allocate resources to investigate the training and support needs of outreach workers.**

## 5: Community-Development, Community Attachment

This report attempts an overview of outreach to men who have sex with men at beats across a number of projects. It looks mostly at the interaction between the beat user and the beats worker. The purpose of this report is not to evaluate each project as a distinct entity, and make recommendations for each. It is beyond the scope of this report, for example, to make specific recommendations for redesigning individual projects.

Emerging themes from the various projects point to the need for research into the social networks operating at beats in different areas. While Beats Outreach projects in Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong operate on a model which is markedly different from the Community Development model used by the Rural Outreach project, the directions of their work appear to converge here: uncovering the social networks and attempting to bring HIV issues into the culture via these networks.

Short-term, 'crossover' and collaborative projects such as BOP and the 'Slip Slop Slap' tour have been successful in illuminating social networks among bisexually active men in western Sydney and non-attached men who have sex with men in the mid-north coast region of NSW. A recent research project (not covered in this report) has begun looking at beats, men who have sex with men and access to health services in the Northern Rivers and New England regions of NSW.

The pilot Community Attachment project in western Sydney in 1992 showed that at least some of the men who use beats are interested in forming social groups, and these groups may present avenues for bringing HIV and safe sex issues into the beat culture. Some momentum in Community Attachment has been achieved in Blacktown and Parramatta. Wollongong workers saw Community Attachment as integral to the kind of work they do; in Newcastle there was an acknowledgement that approaches similar to BOP should be followed.

**Recommendation: ACON undertake further research into the social networks operating around beats in urban and rural settings. This should be linked with a process of more formally bringing Community Development and Community Attachment strategies into the Beats Outreach Projects.**

## 6. Resources and Education Strategies

The development of specific-issue stickers by the Sydney Beats project, and the production of a newsletter for rural 'community educators' by the Rural Project should both be seen as important steps in moving these projects forward: the first because it directly addresses major HIV transmission issues for men at beats that have been identified by outreach workers, testing 'theories' of the broad information needs of beat users; the second because it begins to integrate the experiences of 'community educators' in their areas, allowing a sharing of ideas and control of the resource by the educators themselves, in line with the project's Community Development strategy. For these reasons, it is essential that both these endeavours are thoughtfully evaluated.

Stickers can be easily adapted into community languages, to help address the needs of non-english speaking beat users. Explicit graphical images can be used on stickers to complement or even replace written messages, although careful focus work should be carried out first.

Safe paks with specific, local messages printed on them have been used by the Newcastle and Wollongong projects, and may be an opportunity other projects have not yet taken up to build an ongoing dialogue with beat users.



It has already been noted that Outreach workers have occasionally used graffiti messages at beats. This and other strategies have barely been explored, let alone planned and evaluated. Small formal investigations of how, say, graffiti might be used as an intervention could easily come within the compass of outreach projects, and their evaluation could work comfortably alongside the interaction evaluations already suggested.

**Recommendation: New resources and intervention strategies should be planned and evaluated, to allow maximum feedback into project designs.**

## APPENDIX I

*SUMMARY OF PROJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT*


---

PROJECT	PERIOD	REGION/AREA COVERED
Rural Outreach Project	1988 (Pilot) 1989 - ongoing	Non-metroplitan NSW
Sydney Beats Outreach Project	1988 (Pilot) 1989 - ongoing	Western Sydney, Inner-west, southern and northern suburbs
Illawarra Beats Outreach Project.	1990 - ongoing	Wollongong, Port Kembla, Nowra
Hunter Beats Outreach Project	1990 - ongoing	Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Gosford, Upper Hunter
Bisexually Active Mens Outreach Project	1991 - 4.5 mths	Beat Circuits in Blacktown and Castle Hill, Western Sydney
Western Sydney Community Attachment Project**	1992 - 10 mths	Beats in Parramatta
'Slip Slap Slap' Tour	October 1991	NSW mid-north coast

---

\* ACON project in collaboration with Macquarie University AIDS Research Unit, School of Behavioural Sciences. (A Unit of the National Centre for HIV Social Research).

\*\* ACON project in collaboration with Western Sydney Area Health Service, Westmead.

## APPENDIX II

## SOME EVALUATION QUESTIONS [BASED ON AGGLETON (1989)]

EDUCATION MODEL	TRANSACTION		
	Outreach Worker/Beat user	Beat user/Social networks	Beat user/HIV and safe sex
Information-giving	Do outreach workers negotiate interactions with minimal interruption to beat use?	How is specific information on HIV/safe sex spread through beat users' social networks?	Is the information relevant to beat users' needs?  Is the source credible?
	Do outreach workers approach interactions with an appropriate understanding of beat culture?		
Self-empowerment	Does the interaction emphasise what choices can be made by the beat user?	What operates within beat culture to sustain or support individual users' choices?	What language or pitch best engage beat users to make safe choices?
	Is the interaction reflexive in responding to the needs of the individual beat user?		
Community-oriented	Do outreach workers reinforce beat culture and work within the social dynamics of beats?	Have social networks at beats scattered or dispersed?	In what ways have HIV issues sunk into beat culture? What made this happen?
	Are workers successful in mobilising HIV issues in beats social networks?		
Socially-transformatory	How far have attitudes to beats changed within service organisations?	What kinds of new social networks have formed around beats?	Have HIV issues started protective initiatives from beat users?

## REFERENCES

Aggleton, Peter (1989). 'Evaluating Health Education about AIDS,' In: Peter Aggleton, Graham Hart, Peter Davies (eds), *AIDS: Social Representations, Social Practices*. The Falmer Press, London.

Aggleton, Peter; Moody, Diane (1992). 'Monitoring and Evaluating HIV/AIDS Health Education and Health Promotion,' In: Peter Aggleton, Andrea Young, Diane Moody, Mukesh Kapila, Maryan Pye (eds), *Does It Work? Perspectives on the evaluation of HIV/AIDS health promotion*. Health Education Authority, London.

Aggleton, Peter; Moody, Diane; Young, Andrea (1992). *Evaluating HIV/AIDS Health Promotion*. Health Education Authority, London.

Andronis, Nik (1992). 'Sex crimes in 'park' toilet block. A short study of male sexual expression in rural NSW,' *National AIDS Bulletin*, March.

Beckstein, David; Gunn-Mota, R. (1989), 'AIDS Prevention Through Outreach Education in Public Sex Environments,' Poster No. W.E.P.7, V International Conference on AIDS, Montreal.

Beckstein, David Loren (1990), *AIDS Prevention in Public Sex Environments*, Santa Cruz AIDS Project.

Becker, C.; Rose, D. Thomas; Ames, L. (1991), 'Marginal Men, Mainstream Risk,' Poster No. F.C.711, VII International Conference on AIDS, Florence.

Bennett, Garrett; Chapman, Simon; Bray, Fiona (1989a). 'Sexual practices and "beats": AIDS-related sexual practices in a sample of homosexual and bisexual men in the western area of Sydney,' *Medical Journal of Australia*, 151, 18 September.

\_\_\_\_\_, (1989b). 'A potential source for the transmission of the human immunodeficiency virus into the heterosexual population: bisexual men who frequent "beats",' *Medical Journal of Australia*, 151, 18 September.

Carberry, Graham (1992). [title] In: Robert Aldritch, Garry Wotherspoon, *Gay Perspectives: Essays in Australian Gay Culture*. Department of Economic History, University of Sydney.

Davis, M.D., Dowsett, G., Baxter, D., Connell, R., Watson, L., Kippax, S., Crawford, J., Berg, R. (1990). *CHAP Technical Paper No. 2: Beats and Glory Holes*, School of Behavioural Sciences, Macquarie University/AIDS Council of NSW.

Davis, M.D.; Klemmer, U.; Dowsett, G.W. (1991). *Bisexually Active Men and Beats: Theoretical and Educational Implications. The Bisexually Active Men's Outreach Project*. AIDS Council of NSW/National Centre for HIV Social Research, Macquarie University.

Delph, Edward William (1978). *The Silent Community: Public Homosexual Encounters*. Beverly Hills, Sage.

Desroches, Frederick J. (1991). 'Tearoom Trade: A Law Enforcement Problem.' *Canadian Journal of Criminology*, January, pp 1-21.

Dowsett, G.W. (1990). 'Reaching Men Who Have Sex With Men in Australia. An Overview of AIDS Education: Community Intervention and Community Attachment Strategies,' *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 25 (3).

Dowsett, G.W.; Davis, M.D. (1992). *Transgression and Intervention: Homosexually Active Men and Beats. A Review of an Australian HIV/AIDS Outreach Prevention Strategy*, National Centre for HIV Social Research, Macquarie University.

French, Robert (1992a). 'Into the Woods,' *Sydney Star Observer*, 15 May.

French, Robert (1992b). 'Pounding the Beat,' *Sydney Star Observer*, 2 October.

Humphreys, Laud (1970). *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places*, Aldine, Chicago.

Jones, Jeff (1991), 'Street Health Work With Men Who Cottage,' In: Peter Aggleton, Simon Jordan, Patrick Stoakes, Tamsin Wilton (eds). *Outreach Work With Men Who Have Sex With Men. Report From a National Consultation on Outreach and Detached Work with Men Who Have Sex With Men*. Bristol Polytechnic/Goldsmith's College, University of London.

Kaldor, John (1992). 'Tracking the course of AIDS,' *National AIDS Bulletin*, 6 (4), May.

Keen, Phillip (1990). 'The ACON Beats Project: AIDS prevention education amongst men who have sex with men at public sites,' *The Frontline View of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy: Selected Papers from the 4th National Conference on AIDS*, Canberra. AIDS Council of NSW.

Keen, Phillip; Klemmer, Ulo; Maddedu, Daniel; Linich, Jeffrey; Lockhart, Michael (1991). "'Beats Project" Outreach: AIDS Prevention Education Among Men Who Have Sex With Men at Public Sites.' Poster No. [??], VII International Conference on AIDS.

Keogh, Peter; Church, John; Vearnals, Simon; Green, John (1992), 'Investigation of Motivational and Behavioural Factors Influencing Men Who Have Sex With Men in Public Toilets (Cottaging).' Poster No. PoD 5187, VIII International Conference On AIDS, Amsterdam.

Kerans, Peter (1992). 'Coming Together: The First National Beats Outreach Workers Conference.' *National AIDS Bulletin*, June.

Kippax, Susan; Crawford, June; Connell, R. W.; Dowsett, G. W.; Watson, L.; Rodden, P.; Baxter, D.; Berg, R. (1990). 'The Importance of Gay Community in the Prevention of HIV Transmission.' *Social Aspects of the Prevention of AIDS Study A, Report No.7*. School of Behavioural Sciences, Macquarie University/AIDS Council of NSW.

Krol, John F. (1990). 'Restroom to Tearoom, A Cultural Conversion: A Note on Humphreys, Delph and Swidler,' *Deviant Behaviour*, 11, pp273-280.

Lee, John (1992). 'Male Homosexual Identity and Subculture in Adelaide before World War II,' In: Robert Aldritch, Garry Wotherspoon, *Gay Perspectives: Essays in Australian Gay Culture*. Department of Economic History, University of Sydney.

Lerro, M.; Freeman, A.; Valentine, J. (1989), 'Safer Sex Behaviour Reinforcement in Public Parks,' Poster No. [??], V International Conference on AIDS, Montreal.

Merson, M.H. (1992). 'Longitudinal trends in the epidemic,' *National AIDS Bulletin*, September.

NCHECR (1992). *Australian HIV Surveillance Report*, 8 (9), 30 September.

Neal Jr., Richard B. (1992), 'A Trial Approach to Reaching Gay Men in a Muslim Country,' Poster No. TuD 0542, VIII International Conference on AIDS, Amsterdam.

O'Reilly, Chris (1992), 'The "Personals" and Men Who Have Sex With Men,' *National AIDS Bulletin*, March.

Prestage, Garrett (1992). *Western Sydney Beats Study Stage Two*. Unpublished Report.

Swivel, Mark (1991). 'Public Convenience, Public Nuisance: Criminological Perspectives on "the Beat",' *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*, 3 (2), pp237-249.

van Reyk, Paul (1990). *On the Beat. A report on an Outreach Program of AIDS Preventative Education for Men Who Have Sex With Men*. AIDS Council of NSW.

van Reyk, Paul (1992). 'Never Turning Back: Gay Men's Response to AIDS in Sydney,' *National AIDS Bulletin*, 5 (6), July.

Wadsworth, Yoland (199?). *Everyday Evaluation on the Run*. Action Research Issues Inc., Melbourne.

Watney, Simon (1992). 'Homosexual, Gay or Queer?' *Outrage*, April.

Webster, Bob (1991), *Men Engaging in Same Gender Sex in the Hamilton-Wentowrth and Burlington Area Needs Assessment*, Hamilton AIDS Network for Dialogue and Support.

World Health Organisation (1992), 'AIDS Prevention Does Work, Says World Health Organisation,' *WHO Press*, 22 June.

World Health Organisation; Health and Welfare Canada; Canadian Public Health Association (1986). *Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion*.

Wotherspoon, Garry (198?). *City of the Plain*. Hale and Iremonger, Sydney.

Zuilhof, Wim (1991), 'Educators are Taking to the Beat,' *Tijdschrift Gezondheidsvoorlichting*, 8 (5), pp 3-5.

Zuilhof, Wim (1992), 'Talking about Safe Sex on Cruising Sites. (Initiating and