A Curly Frost

At DiAna DiAna’s hair salon customers leave with the tips

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Hold the mousse, here comes the nonoxynol-9. DiAna DiAna is in session in her hair salon in Columbia, South Carolina, which doubles as an AIDS information center for the community. Since 1986 she has pioneered this unique weave of AIDS education and technology. “We’re trying to get more hairdressers, and more people in general, to do what we have done,” says DiAna. “People are reluctant to go to a health department or clinic to get AIDS information, but this is a more comfortable setting.”

Client and other visitors to the salon, DiAna’s Hair Ego, ride a permanent wave of AIDS information, condom distribution and safer sex videos. Those who can’t make it to the salon can relax: DiAna takes her safer sex message on the road. How has the response been in this notch of the Bible Belt? “The response has been great, especially in the black community. We’ve been so well received that patrons of the salon are constantly referring me to speak at their churches and schools,” says this diva of the hair waves.

DiAna is executive director of the not-for-profit South Carolina AIDS Education Network (SCAEN), which she founded in 1987. SCAEN, staffed and run by volunteers, sponsors the community-based programs that stem from DiAna’s vision. SCAEN’s funding is provided by donations of salon patrons and visitors looking for tips or a way to help. One of SCAEN’s programs brings safer sex information directly to Columbia’s youth through AIDS Busters, a programs DiAna also started. “All of the kids think this is cool,” she says. “Everyone wants to be a part of it.”

The newest extension of DiAna’s work is a program being developed to bring AIDS information directly to African-American males by their peers. “The best way for the black male community -- the hardest hit in Columbia -- to inform themselves about AIDS is by developing their own programs,” says DiAna. And, given the success of DiAna DiAna’s approach of delivering AIDS education within familiar and comfortable situations, that’s certainly no lie.

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