GMHC Goes for a Ride

Ad campaign stirs NYC subway controversy

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Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC), the nations oldest and largest AIDS organization, recently launched a no-holds barred, let's-rankle-the-religious right safer sex campaign on New York City subways targeting straight, gay, lesbian and bisexual teenagers. The campaign, as explained by GMHC's Daniel Chesmir, coordinator of the campaign's educational effort, is desperately needed to balance the playing field.

"Look at the thousands of magazines, movies and television programs out there and you'll see that young gays and lesbians are being left out of the picture," Chesmir says.

The New York Post, in typical understated manner, attacked GMHC's campaign in a series of articles by columnist Ray Kerrison. Under the banner headline, "Sleazy AIDS Ads Take the Gay Train," Kerrison rails against GMHC: "Anyway you read them, the [GMHC] posters endorse homosexuality, encourge promiscuity and promote the false and dangerous notion that condoms are safe and will protect users against AIDS."

An advocate of the campaign is New York City Department of Health Commissioner, Dr. Margaret A. Hamburg. "Until there's a cure, it's essential that accurate information about how to prevent AIDS is conveyed in a language and style that targets people known to engage in risky behavior. Adolescents, particularly, respond to the kind of bright, candid, explicit message communicated in the GMHC ads."

The signs -- in spite of Kerrison's objections -- are still informing the more than 1.5 million New York City daily subway commuters. Chalk one up for GMHC.

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