Keeping Track

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Gerardo L. Angulo has never lost track of his desire to help people and make a difference. His first job was working with mentally and physically handicapped children at a summer youth program in Arizona. In college, he studied human services, later earning a master's degree in counseling. He even volunteered at an HIV crisis hot line at the Mariposa Community Health Center in Nogales, Arizona, where he would answer calls about how the virus is contracted and how HIV differs from AIDS.

It turned out to be a perfect training ground for Angulo's current job. After 12 years of offering advice and help, he's a comprehensive risk counseling and services (CRCS) counselor for Track Change, a program in Phoenix that targets Native Americans, Latinos, African Americans and Asians. More specifically, Angulo counsels young men of color ages 14 to 24 who have sex with men (MSM) about HIV, their risks for other sexually transmitted infections (STI) and the importance of HIV prevention and healthy lifestyles.

The latest data show men between ages 13 and 29 account for an estimated 38 percent of new infections among gay and bisexual men, while young black MSM account for an estimated 52 percent of new infections.

"[It's really important to] me that I make a difference and empower [youth] to understand that there are healthy choices out there," says Angulo, adding that he hopes the young men take the information "and educate the public, their family and friends."

The Track Change program was given its name by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The name references the idea that by engaging in high-risk sexual behaviors, young MSM lose track of how to maintain or improve their sexual health and overall wellness.

In addition to offering one-on-one counseling, Track Change supplies condoms, HIV rapid testing and referrals. The services are available at Native Health, a nonprofit organization offering medical, dental and behavioral health services. Track Change also provides outreach throughout the community and at local high schools, especially those with Gay Straight Alliances or LGBT support groups.

What's been the youth response? "They feel they have an increased self-awareness about making

better choices," Angulo explains.

And by counseling those young men, Angulo continues his own track record of helping others and making a difference.

Call 602.577.0920 for more info about Track Change.

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