



Streethearts

The Thelma and Louise of AIDS outreach

June 1, 1999 By Gabi Horn

*After two years of pounding the pavement in Camden, New Jersey, in search of HIV positive prostitutes and drug addicts, two outreach workers, **Sadia Sanchez**, 33, and **Angela Cocco**, 43, have forged a relationship with some of the most at-risk populations east of the Delaware. The duo's uncommon access to crack houses and brothels in one of the Garden State's poorest cities recently caught the media's eye. POZ peeked behind the scenes of this two-woman tour de force.*

You two depend on each other in dangerous situations. Have you always gotten along so well?

Sadia: No. It was real hard at first. We had different ways of thinking and we'd irritate each other.

Angela: I was sheltered growing up, and I wasn't as careful as I could have been. I trust everyone.

Sadia: And I trust no one. I'm Spanish—

Angela: And I'm Caucasian. We're definitely from opposite sides of the spectrum. But we complement each other: If one of us can't reach someone, the other usually can.

How did you reconcile your differences?

Angela: We went to a marriage counselor—our supervisor.

The Associated Press called you the Condom Ladies.

Angela: It's weird. Our real job is linking HIV positive people with services in the Southern New Jersey area.

Sadia: And we do a good job, too. We go into crack houses and abandominiums—

Abandominiums?

Angela: Abandoned buildings. People don't call their homes broken-down shacks, they call them abandominiums. And that's the ticket to our success, really—we refer to people's homes the same way they do. We respect.

Are you well received?

Angela: Now we are. In the beginning people thought we were undercover cops or from Child Protection Services.

What keeps you going when people turn their backs?

Sadia: Realizing that we'll see them again, that maybe next time they'll be more accepting.

Angela: We're like the Energizer bunnies: We just keep going.

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