

Female Friendly Hours at Drop-in Centre in Mombasa

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Mainline, in partnership with Muslim Education and Welfare Association (MEWA), are undertaking a pilot project in Mombasa, Kenya. Based upon the findings of a female drug users' needs assessment conducted in 2015, which identified a need for low threshold access to harm reduction services, the objective of the pilot is to provide a safe space for females to easily access harm reduction services at the MEWA drop-in centre in the Kisauni region of Mombasa.

The pilot will run for six months beginning on 15 February 2017. Women who use drugs, and their children are provided one afternoon each week to access services such as HIV/TB testing and counselling, targeted SRHR information, harm reduction commodities and information in a female-friendly environment. The environment will promote experience sharing, address challenges and provide mentorship for parenting skills and socio-economic skills. Incentives such as having transport costs reimbursed, and refreshments served, are expected to lower the barrier to accessing services. IEC materials regarding WWUD and family planning are being developed and will be shared with the women visiting the DIC.

At the pilot project kick-off on Wednesday, 15 February, 42 female clients were welcomed by female counsellors and outreach workers. A brief introduction was made and the aims, objectives and outcomes of the pilot were shared with clients. A motivational talk was given and clients were urged to use the female friendly hours for their own benefits in terms of empowerment and skills building. A short focus group was held regarding the Family planning booklet with useful input from the women being used in the development of the material.

Other openly discussed topics included safer sex (including condom demonstration by the facilitators and peer educators) and personal safety. The atmosphere as experienced by the Mainline country manager was curious, upbeat, involved and relaxed. As an ice breaker, the women were encouraged to sing and dance which appeared to put the women at ease with each other and create a feeling of community and trust.

A possible outcome of the pilot would be that women who use drugs will have increased access to relevant information about HIV, sexual reproductive health services (SRHS), harm reduction and socio-reintegration, with an ultimate impact of reducing HIV and other blood borne viruses.