

## The Evaluation of F:S

### Report Abstract for the London Gay Men's HIV Prevention Partnership

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This report abstract has been produced to summarise the evaluation of F:S. The full Summary Document is available at <http://www.mba4consultancy.co.uk>

**F:S** is one of eight distinct interventions offered as part of the London Gay Men's HIV Prevention Partnership (LGMHPP). This is a free subscription and, from 2003, a scene-distributed magazine produced by GMFA, with scene-distribution by the Healthy Gay Living Service and CLASH. Prior to funding from LGMHPP, GMFA produced the magazine/newsletter in a number of formats from 1993. It is a health promotion tool for all gay men that aims to be: "*sexy, informative, empowering and entertaining*".

#### The Process

The research was undertaken from Autumn 2003 through to the Spring of 2004. Key fieldwork with subscribers and readers in venues and was undertaken to coincide with the publication of F:S issue number 80.

The complete GMFA subscriber base was surveyed. In total 2,484 surveys were posted to subscribers and 403 surveys were returned within the response time and analysed (16% response rate).

In addition, 917 people were approached in 24 venues reflecting the range of "scene" based distribution points. 39% had seen the magazine and of these 70% had read it. A total of 213 surveys were completed with those who had seen and read the magazine and 55 surveys were completed with those that had seen but not read F:S before. The sample was tested against the demographic profile of gay men identified in data from the Gay Men's Sex Survey for London (GMSS).

This research was supplemented by a range of one-to-one interviews with service providers and other stake-holders and a community consultation event.

#### The Profile of Readers

F:S aims to be a resource for all gay men, but the intervention also seeks to post issues that will reach HIV+ men and target young gay men (through scene distribution) men with lower levels of further education (LLFE) and men with high numbers of partners. Key characteristics of the readership are:

- There are differences in the age profiles of the subscriber and scene-distributed readership with the average in venues at 34 and the subscriber base at 40 years old. 35% of readership in venues is under 30 (higher than GMSS) and compared to only 11% of subscribers. Scene distribution has successfully brought a younger readership.
- Readers tend to be highly educated consistent with the GMSS findings. However both the scene-distributed readership and (18.5%) and the subscribers (19.5%) represent a higher proportion of LLFE men than the GMSS indicates for London (16.8%).
- Scene distributed readers who were tested as HIV+ were in line with GMSS at 13%, however for the subscriber base the figure was double this at 26% indicating subscriptions as an important means of reaching HIV+ gay men.
- Both scene distributed readers and subscribers were marginally more likely to have had more than 30 sexual partners in the past 12 months than GMSS figures at a little under 20%.
- Unlike a number of other LGMHPP interventions F:S is not required to target black gay men, although it is required to produce ethnically diverse images. 87% of its readership through both means of distribution are white. However, black gay men were as likely to say that the magazine was “written for them” as white readers and there were no significant differences in satisfaction levels between different ethnic groups.

Respondents were asked to identify a range of activities, awareness and concerns:

- The subscriber base is twice as likely to have worked or volunteered in an HIV/sexual health organisation (49%) as scene-distributed readership (25%).
- However, there is no significant difference in awareness of health and sexual health issues between the two sets with around 80% identifying as “aware”.
- There were high levels of concern in both sets about a number of issues (addressed in F:S editorial) in particular the HIV consequences of own actions, unsafe sex, STIs and condom failure.
- Mental health was an area of concern for 50% subscribers (43% of scene-distributed readership).
- There were drugs and alcohol related concerns for around 1/3 of all respondents.

**F:S** aims to empower its readers:

- Two thirds of readers in venues were always confident in discussing sexual choices with sexual partners and GUM services
- Subscribers are marginally less confident with partners
- 37% of readers in venues and 43% of subscribers were not at all confident with GPs.

The readership held very positive views of F:S:

- 64% of scene-distributed readers take the magazine home to read
- Half of all readers had read more than one issue & 90% would like to read it again
- 75% (venues) and 90% (subscribers) read more than half of F:S
- 75% of all readers thought that it was written for them with no difference between ages, ethnicity etc.
- More than 50% of venue readers & 75% of subscribers had learned something new
- Other description included: “sexy (57%), informative (80%) & entertaining (67%)” & Easy to understand (92%) & credible (75%)

### **Conclusion**

From this research and the interviews with stake-holders the evaluators concluded that:

- Readers are very positive about **F:S**
- The publication strikes a good balance between being fun, interesting and informative
- It has a distinctive style and well-judged content
- The new method of scene-based distribution is working and assisting in meeting target groups
- It effectively reinforces HIV prevention and sexual health messages: gay men pick up and read F:S when not specifically looking for sexual health information (e.g. leaflets)
- Subscriptions still serve a real purpose – in particular in meeting the needs of HIV+ men

Finally, the role of F:S as brokered tool in work with vulnerable young people was highly valued by a number of stake-holders and may provide significant opportunities for development.

Detailed recommendations arising from this evaluation are contained in the full summary report (see <http://www.mba4consultancy.co.uk>).