Sam the cat: making positive heterosexuals more visible

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Pozhet, a NSW state-wide service working with heterosexuals living with and at risk of HIV has a long established Consumer Group (PCG), with diverse representation.

Background

In Australia, the general community still perceives HIV to be contained within a few communities. There is a lack of awareness about:

- heterosexuals living with HIV
- advances in HIV treatment and knowledge
- general health and well-being of people living with HIV including relationships and having children

PCG members decided to develop a 90 second animated video to address the experiences of heterosexual people living with HIV (PLHIV).

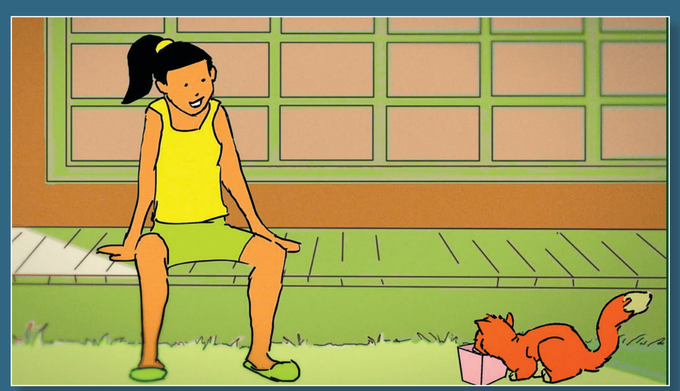
Approach

Members of the PCG brainstormed their ideas with the creative agency and decided to use humour and simple messages. A script and characters were developed involving four characters living with HIV who talk to their friend, Sam - a cat who wanders around the neighbourhood eating and listening to everyone's thoughts and worries.

Sam is a ginger cat who is the confidante of a small group of Heterosexuals living with HIV.

Sally is in her 40s - diagnosed for 5 years. She has just started thinking about relationships. She has met someone but is concerned about disclosing.

James the builder and Sam watch a baby in a stroller go past. James tells Sam that he and his wife can still have children as long as he takes his HIV medication.



Ayesha has been diagnosed for 12 years. She stays healthy and exercises regularly and feels a lot healthier than when first diagnosed.

Malik thinks he is the only heterosexual man in town with HIV. Sam says 'If I could talk to Malik, I'd tell him everything's going to be fine. There are great medications now and HIV can be really well managed! Of course he can have a girlfriend!'

There are key messages:

- **People with HIV on treatment can:**
- **Live long, healthy lives**
- **Have children**
- **Have sex without passing on HIV**

In Australia, 1 in 5 people diagnosed with HIV is heterosexual.

Outcomes

The PCG took proud ownership of the animation and distributed through its networks. It was also promoted through Facebook and stakeholders' networks across the state and is featured on the Pozhet website.

So far, the video has had a reach of over 36,000, more than 2,000 views and 2000 link clicks to Pozhet website. It's had positive feedback and engagement from both services and individuals on Facebook:

- *Well, that was informative.*
- *If I was in charge of making a health campaign this would be it!*
- *This is awesome!!!!!!!!*

A Social Media Toolkit was developed and circulated in October, 2018.

Conclusion

This project has worked to raise the visibility of heterosexual people living with HIV and normalise HIV in the general community. Working with PLHIV to co-design and develop this awareness raising video was an empowering process for all involved.

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