The ABCs of HIV/Aids

Keep message simple or lose audience: Volunteer

USING loaded words like “abstinence” with young people could hinder rather than help in efforts to curb the spread of HIV and AIDS.

So, when he talks to the young, Action for AIDS volunteer Justin Ng speaks in simple terms.

“I need people who can speak to youths using language they understand,” said Mr Ng, 21, who replaces the word “abstinence” with “not having sex”.

And instead of packing 700 students into a hall for assembly talks where “the probability of them falling asleep or not paying attention is pretty high”, Mr Ng prefers to conduct presentations and discussions in smaller groups of out-of-school or at-risk teenagers.

“I address their questions, their fears, they tell me how they feel and it gets the message across better.”

For example, he plays a game with teens to emphasise the ABCs of preventing the spread of AIDS and HIV — with ABC standing for Abstinence, Be Faithful and Condom use.

In the game, each student is assigned a fictional character, an occupation and a sexual orientation. They then exchange stickers randomly, to signify sexual contact.

After identifying a few characters who have AIDS or are HIV positive, the youths begin to realise the impact of casual sex and its consequences when they see how widespread the virus becomes.

Mr Ng was one of four panellists addressing students of Singapore Management University (SMU) last week at a dialogue session on the growing concern over the AIDS and HIV epidemic.

The other three panellists were Ms Ho Lai Peng, a medical social worker from the Communicable Disease Centre (CDC), Prof Kivel Kazila Filmeridis, an SMU lecturer and Class 95 deejay Vernetta Lopez.