

Joe Public rocks the HIV/AIDS crisis away one school at a time

Issued by [Joe Public](#)

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Johannesburg-based creative agency Joe Public initiated its Rock4AIDS foundation in 2004 to raise funds and awareness around HIV/AIDS and to educate the youth one high school at a time. It's five years later and the agency has made serious inroads in making behavioural differences to the educators and pupils at Forte High in Soweto.



"Besides holding successful Rock4AIDS concerts each year featuring top South African performers, Joe Public has made a commitment to Forte High because we realise that one-on-one communication with the schools and teachers has to be priority number one," says Executive Creative Director Pepe Marais. "Our country's schools are home to the few years where teenagers are old enough to make up their own minds, but also young enough to have their minds changed," he says.

Forte High in Dobsonville, Soweto, became the agency's first adopted school. Before it began working with the students, Joe Public targeted those who stand in front of the classroom every day - the school's 42 teachers, who have the power to influence 1300 kids, and inadvertently thousands more.

"As soon as we sat down with the staff of Forte High, we gained some valuable insights. It's not that they're unmotivated or uninterested," says Pepe. "They're just completely overwhelmed. There's no textbook to persuade teenage boys to have safe sex when their current role models are gang leaders whose status is determined by the amount of women they sleep with.

We started with a series of transformational workshops that specialise in unlocking human potential and raising general awareness. These workshops are extremely powerful, very effective and also very expensive. With the funds raised by our 2006 and 2007 Rock4AIDS events, we managed to send 16 of the 42 Forte teachers to attend the workshops during the course of 2008, and we plan to send the rest of the staff as soon as more funds become available."



Working side by side with the teachers, Joe Public and the staff of Forte High set measurable, individual goals for themselves. Challenges were identified, and each head of department was put in charge of a specific issue like drugs, interaction with parents, open discussion, respect for property and of course, HIV/AIDS.

With the help of a corporate sponsor, renovations are about to begin on the school's bathroom facilities and a full study bursary will be awarded to the top student of 2009, with five more learners benefiting next year.



"We meet with our school every two months to keep teachers motivated and offer our assistance with any problem they may encounter, in any way we can. Slowly but surely, we're starting to see results," he says.

To ensure the agency's top fundraiser, Rock4AIDS, stays top of mind, Joe Public strategise and create a unique direct mailer each year which is sent to potential corporate sponsors and to international and local bands to illicit support.

'Silent Guitar' and 'Sex Cymbals' were two initiatives which assisted in confirming both bands and sponsors to previous

events. This year, The Rock4AIDS direct mailer is in the form of what appears to be a giant box of Antiretrovirals. Every box contains a blister pack with a set of 28 unique plectrums, each bearing a single letter, which together spells out the sentence: *Treat the cause. Not the symptoms.*

Included in every pack is a leaflet styled to appear as a medical insert, with 28 pieces of information about HIV/AIDS and Rock4AIDS, corresponding to the images and letters on the plectrums.

About Joe Public and Rock4AIDS

Joe Public is a proudly South African, Johannesburg-based advertising agency with a deep-rooted love for our country. We are for people, by people, a philosophy that inspires us to stand for more than just funny commercials and clever print ads. We're passionate about the people of South Africa and believe that our diversity and resilience make us one of the most exceptional nations in the world. This passion motivated us to go beyond the workplace and tackle the one issue that is making our people suffer most. So, in 2004, Rock4AIDS was born. It is an annual benefit concert raising funds for the fight against HIV/AIDS, tackling the epidemic that is bringing our nation to its knees through one of the most powerful mediums in the world - music. Even though Rock4AIDS is still young, it isn't afraid to take on big issues.

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