BROTHAZ CONNEXION

A HEALTH PROMOTION PROGRAM

# Who is Brothaz Connexion?

**Brothaz Connexion** consists of African American men representing a range of gender expressions and sexual identities. Each member’s multitude of skills and strengths are utilized to support of fellow community members in sustaining their health and well-being. We believe in “being” the change we wish to see in the world!

***OUR MISSION*** is to educate, empower and lead local communities towards positive health outcomes.

Brothaz Connexion, is a locally adapted version of *Many Men, Many Voices*, a multi-session behavioral intervention for “high risk” HIV-positive and “high risk” HIV-negative African American MSM and gay/bi-sexual men (18+) residing in Alameda County, California. In efforts to provide ongoing support for intervention participants, Brothaz Connexion evolved into a weekly (structured and semi-structured) drop-in intervention/support group.

What we found is that this improved retention and gave participants options, with regards to how they experience a behavioral intervention. Rather than restrict participant engagement to a set number of sessions that address very specific aspects of health, participants can participate in a supportive, learning environment on their terms, and address a broader range of issues that impact men’s health. In addition, Brothaz Connexion provides a space for participants to build community.

## What is Brothaz Connexion?

Brothaz Connexion began as a weekly evening drop-in opportunity for African American MSM and gay/bi-sexual men who seek ongoing support with regards to HIV/STI, substance use prevention and risk/harm reduction strategies. It has become a collective of men who are committed to affecting positive change within urban communities of color. Brothaz participants wish to see an end to health disparities among African Americans.

Brothaz Connexion is an open group; however, membership has its privileges. Members are required to complete a number of counseling sessions with certified counselors at APEB, encouraged to hold leadership positions and are eligible for various incentives as a reward for their commitment.

## Where does Brothaz Connexion meet?

Brothaz Connexion meets each Thursday from 7p-9p at APEB’s main office in downtown Oakland. Brothaz Connexion’s quarterly committee meetings have been held at Allen Temple Manor Community Room, in East Oakland. Some members take advantage of the other off-site meetings/activities including:

* Fitness Connexion – various East Bay – members engage in light to moderate fitness activity on Sunday afternoons
* Fruits of Our Labor –City Slicker Farms, Oakland – members access information regarding the importance of local food security and access urban farming volunteer opportunities-bi-weekly on Saturday afternoons
* Brothaz@TheParkway – Parkway Theatre, Oakland – members take advantage of Sundays at the Parkway Theatre where an LGBT produced indie film is featured each Sunday afternoon. We choose one Sunday a month for this activity.

## How does Brothaz Connexion meet its goal/purpose?

For those who become members, there are requirements which allow us to create a profile for each member. They must complete a minimum of hours of personalized counseling and encouraged to participate in trainings, workshops, seminars, community health outreach, local activism and speaking engagements that address health equity and the wellness of Black MSM and gay/bi-sexual men in the East Bay.

The process is monitored and evaluated by public health professionals and informed by community advisory board members to ensure that Brothaz Connexion is reaching its intended goals and maintains the fidelity of its purpose.

Brothaz Connexion is currently being evaluated by UCSF to determine its appropriateness for curriculum development and replication, nationally

## When do you meet?

Brothaz Connexion discussion group meets each Thursday evening from 7p-9p. Winter 2015, Brothaz Connexion will expand its Thursday evening meetings to offer additional services including: learning lab (for GED prep, resume building and computer literacy courses), health screenings (rapid HIV, rapid HEP C and other STI screenings), a game & arts room, barbershop nights…and more)