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Truck and gym bag supporting community Testing – Germany "Testhelden" at CSDs and street festivals

With a project named "Testhelden" (test heroes), the campaign "Ich weiss was ich tu" (IWWIT, "I'm in control of what I do") tries to promote greater HIV test awareness – predominantly online. In summer though, the 'heroes' are drawn outdoors. During Pride season, the project's role models will reach their target group face to face.

From 18 June to 3 September, the project "Testhelden" took part in numerous Pride events. Team members and role models travelled from Berlin to places all over Germany. They were part of the CSDs in Essen (West), Stuttgart (South) and Hamburg (North). IWWIT, the umbrella campaign of the project, rented a booth, a van or their own parade truck, depending on the size and nature of the event. In most cities, they shared vehicles or booths with other organisations.

Attention guaranteed

As in other countries, most CSD events in Germany feature a parade. As an alternative or addition, gay/lesbian street festivals are organised in places like Berlin and Cologne. No matter where, test heroes were keen to mix with the crowd. They carried gym bags in a bright orange or a saturated green. The colours of the project raised attention, but even more so the slogan printed on them. It read "Von Helden getragen" and is a play on the German word "tragen". The claim can be read as "carried by heroes" or "borne by heroes", depending on context. "As soon as our boys were out there, click counts on the website "testhelden.info" soared, says a happy Tim Schomann, head of IWWIT.

A gym bag as bait? Works!

Another effect: the test heroes were frequently approached because Pride participants wanted to know where they could get such a gym bag. "Those interested then came straight to us and we were able to talk to them in an open manner, no strings attached", says Schomann. "Testhelden" identify gay men between ages 20 and 29 as their target group. The goal is to make them aware of how important regular HIV testing is. According to the German think tank Robert-Koch-Institut, this target group is especially averse to testing. The gym bags distributed contained:

- cruising packs consisting of a condom and 4 mL of a lubricant
- "Testhelden" postcards calling for regular HIV testing
- fold-out flyers informing about HIV and other venereal diseases

18 tonnes for HIV prevention

A particularly high number of queers can be reached by organisations like IWWIT at the CSD in Berlin. Each year, more than one million LGBT attend this parade. The street festival an hour later is visited by half a million people. It comes as no surprise that IWWIT and the "Testhelden" project are especially keen to show their presence here. This is why on 23 July 2016, an 18 tonne-truck sporting the logos of both campaigns rolled through the city. The team shared the CSD vehicle with the gay counselling charity manCHECK and the "Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence" who have also

committed themselves to HIV prevention.

Bottom line

"Our Pride season 2016 has been extremely successful" Tim Schomann sums up. "Testhelden" team members had hundreds of conversations and were able to increase click counts on the website. But there is one thing the project manager is especially happy about: "Even months later, I see young men in Berlin and other towns carry our gym bags".

The website is available at <https://www.testhelden.info/>