

## ➤ WHAT IS PEER EDUCATION?

Peer education is information passed from one person to another person of the same (or similar) social background. Sexual health peer education deals with topics such as HIV/AIDS, safer sex practices, healthy relationships, general well-being, and can answer many confusing health questions. There are many types of peer education. Some examples include:

- Speaker's bureau
- Telephone services
- Internet
- Theatre performances
- Informational posters
- Message boards
- Song contests
- Harm reduction
- Distribution of fliers
- Articles
- Pamphlets
- Newsletters
- Stickers
- Essay contests
- Conversations
- Benefit concerts
- School assemblies
- Buttons
- Art
- Workshops

## ➤ BENEFITS OF PEER EDUCATION

Peer educators are believed to be preferred sources of information because they may share similar interests, experiences and hobbies as the youth they are trying to reach.<sup>1</sup> Peer education gives youth the opportunity to learn about sexual health and ask questions from someone who is more likely to understand their issues and concerns.<sup>2</sup> In addition, youth are often more comfortable talking about sensitive topics such as sex with their peers. Peer educators benefit by gaining an increased knowledge of sexual health and learning valuable job skills. Some also report a decrease in their own risky behavior.<sup>3,4</sup>

## ➤ DRAWBACKS OF PEER EDUCATION

The level of knowledge and/or experience can be different between peer educators and health professionals. Some say that many peer educators do not get the training they need to do a good job of educating youth effectively.<sup>5</sup> Others argue that peer educators' personal experience can be more valuable than the training that professional health educators receive.<sup>1,2</sup> Additionally, as with many forms of education, there is the potential for power issues to arise in peer education because gender inequities and other forms of discrimination can be reinforced if anti-oppression training is not built into peer education training.<sup>6</sup>

## ➤ NEED FOR EVALUATION

Feedback from participants is very important for finding out what works with the program and what needs to be changed. Having proof that a program is effective can help to get funds to continue the program and improve program quality. Published evaluations can be used by other peer education programs so many people can learn from them!



## ➤ FEATURES OF PEER EDUCATION EVALUATION

There are typically two types of peer education evaluation: **process evaluation** and **outcome evaluation**. **Process evaluation** looks at factors such as where the program is presented, who delivers it, how the program was put together, and whether or not the program was delivered as planned. **Outcome evaluation** examines the impact of the program. For youth sexual health peer education, the impact of program is often measured in terms of non-behavioural (changes in knowledge, beliefs and attitudes) and behavioural effects (changes in condom use, sexually transmitted infection testing, etc).<sup>7</sup>

## ➤ WAYS TO EVALUATE PEER EDUCATION

Surveys and interviews are the most common forms of program evaluation. Surveys tend to gather quantitative data (numbers) from a large number of people. Interviews, which are usually recorded, produce more qualitative (people's comments) data. Although qualitative forms of evaluation typically involve a smaller group of people than quantitative forms of evaluation, they can produce more in depth information.<sup>7</sup> More up-to-date and youth-friendly evaluation tools could be made using the internet and arts.



## ➤ THINKING ABOUT EVALUATION

Peer education programs must make sure that the materials being used are culturally appropriate and available in all relevant languages. Religious and personal beliefs are also significant for peer education. Asking questions about sex and birth control is inappropriate in some cultures so cultural sensitivity is important. The creation of evaluation tools should involve members of the community, as well as cultural, religious, or political leaders.<sup>8</sup> Another issue is confidentiality, which is difficult to manage in small villages and communities. Gender differences must also be considered. In addition, the benefits to peer educators should also be part of the evaluation.

# SEXUAL HEALTH PEER EDUCATION EVALUATION 101

## ➤ WHY ISN'T THERE ENOUGH EVALUATION?

There is an incredible need for better evaluation of peer education sexual health programs.<sup>1 2 9 10</sup> However there are many different kinds of programs, which can make evaluation very difficult. Furthermore, evaluations can take a lot of time and energy and, after a program is put in place, there may be few resources left for program evaluation.

## ➤ SOME SUGGESTIONS

Improving peer education evaluation is important and can be done in many different ways.

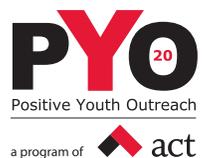
- Workshops on program evaluation could bring together members from many different groups who could contribute ideas about their specific programs. See if these are available in your area. If not, you can advocate for their development.
- “Toolkits” could be made for organizations to use for program evaluation. The toolkits could have surveys; open-ended questions; background information on process evaluation outcome evaluation, quantitative methodology and qualitative methodology; guidelines for data analysis; and ideas for making use of youth-friendly formats such as the internet and the arts. As a youth or service provider, you could get involved and help to make these “toolkits”.
- Another strategy is for community organizations and universities to work together. Through partnerships with universities, community workers could learn more about program evaluation methods and researchers could learn more about community organizations. Your organization may be able to contact the local university to develop partnerships.

These suggestions may help organizations create evaluation tools that address the unique goals and needs of their youth sexual health peer education programs. Most important, of course, is using the evaluations to make the program even better!

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## ➤ PROJECT PARTNERS



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