

Healthy Relationships for Youth Program Evaluation Report 2008/2009

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***Healthy Relationships for Youth Program
Evaluation Report 2008/2009***

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The Healthy Relationships for Youth (HRY) Program

Introduction

The Healthy Relationships for Youth (HRY) Program is a school based violence prevention program which includes youth as peer educators in the classroom and throughout their schools. The HRY Program delivers a series of twelve cumulative sessions within the Grade 9 Health curriculum. The program is offered in all ten high schools in the Strait Regional School Board. The HRY curriculum focuses on facilitating youth learning about developing and maintaining healthy relationships. It has been approved by the Nova Scotia Department of Education.

The Healthy Relationship for Youth Program highlights the different forms of violence and focuses on violence prevention. Sexism, racism and homophobia are forms of oppression which contribute to violence. The HRY Program is based on the belief that through enhancing awareness of the social context of their lives and providing skill development to promote healthy interpersonal communication, youth can make positive decisions about their own behaviour and reduce violence.

Program Goal

The goal of the HRY Program is to reduce the risk of violence for youth through building skills and knowledge related to developing and maintaining healthy relationships.

Program Objectives

- to engage Grade 9 students in ten school sites within the Strait Regional School Board of Nova Scotia in a series of classroom sessions designed to promote healthy and respectful relationships
- to assist youth in developing the attitudes, values and skills they need to build and maintain healthy relationships
- to increase students' understanding of racial/cultural diversity specifically relating to the Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian communities
- to increase students' awareness of issues related to violence prevention and social inequities from a gender based perspective
- to foster youth development which includes: peer support, youth empowerment, youth-adult partnerships, meaningful contribution and experiential learning

Delivery of HRY Program

During this third year of funding through the Canadian Women's Foundation, the HRY Program has continued in the ten schools of the Strait Regional School District at the grade 9 level. The HRY Program fits well within the Grade 9 Health curriculum.

However, each school determines how to best incorporate the program. East Antigonish Academy chose to run the HRY Program within its grade 9 English periods. The number of PDR classes participating at J.H. Gillis Regional High expanded in 2008/2009 from 20% to include all grade 9 PDR students. This indicates a growing support for the HRY Program. This year, thirteen (13) teachers, three (3) community-based adult facilitators, and seventy-five (75) youth facilitators delivered the program to a total of 585 students.

HR Y Participation in Year Three (2008-2009)

Participating Schools	# of Grade 9 PDR Classes	# of Grade 9 PDR Students
Dr. John Hugh Gillis	6	184
East Antigonish Academy	2*	39
St. Mary's Academy	1	13
Canso Academy	1	16
Guysborough Academy	2	37
CBHA - Cape Breton Highlands Academy	2	35
Inverness Academy	1	15
Dalbrae Academy	3	70
Strait Area Recreation & Education Centre	4	80
Richmond Academy	6	96
Totals	28	585

* East Antigonish Academy delivered the HRY Program within the grade 9 English class.

Three training days were held in September 2008. The teachers and community-based facilitators were trained on September 10 at the Mulgrave Professional Development Centre. AWRC Rural Girls Project Co-ordinator, Wyanne Sandler, co-facilitated the adult training component. Mainland youth facilitators were trained on September 24 at

Chedabucto Place and Cape Breton youth facilitators were trained at Dalbrae Academy on September 25. The Teachers and community facilitators also attended the youth training in order to build the relationships necessary to work well together.

There were ten Healthy Relationships for Youth teams: one in each high school. Each HRY team is composed of the youth facilitators, the participating teacher, and where it is possible a community based worker as a second adult facilitator. This year Leaside was again able to support the HRY Program by providing a worker to co-facilitate the program at SAREC. The involvement of community workers as facilitators has continued to be a challenge as these rural areas tend to have fewer services, and those that exist are stretched quite thin. The HRY Program will continue to work closely with the Youth Health Centres.

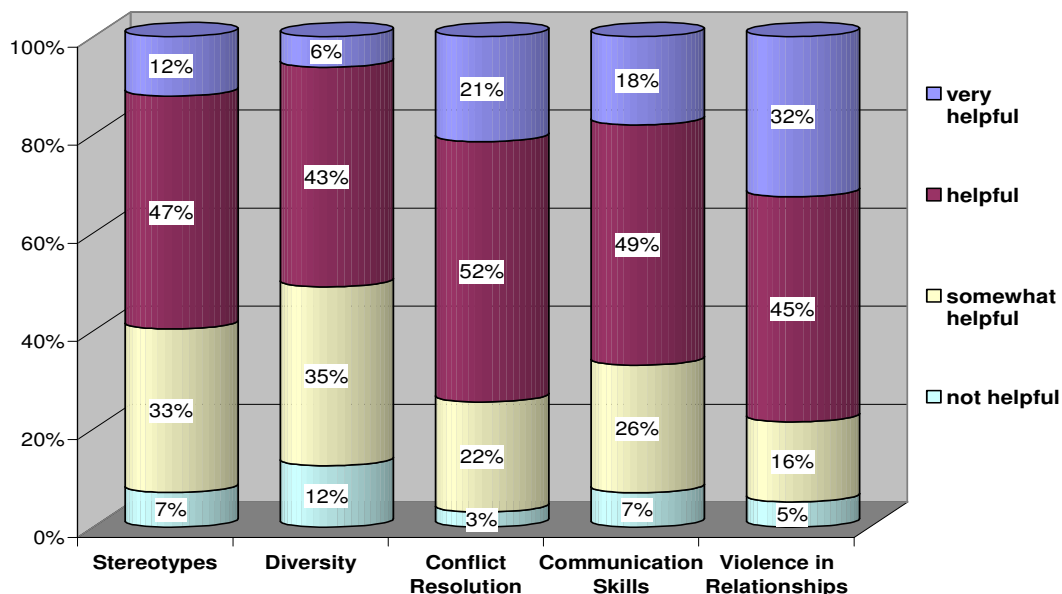
The HRY Program evaluates annually its three main components, namely: grade nine student participants, youth facilitators, and teachers/adult facilitators. With the help of the teachers, the participating grade 9 students completed student surveys. The youth facilitators participated in focus groups conducted by the program co-ordinator and the teachers completed a survey. These three evaluation components have been compiled to create "*The Healthy Relationships for Youth Evaluation Report for 2008/2009.*"

Healthy Relationships for Youth Program Student Survey Report 2008/2009

The Antigonish Women’s Resource Centre evaluates all its programs. The HRY Program is evaluated by surveying the participating grade 9 students. The student surveys were delivered to all ten schools in January and February of 2009. The Program Coordinator reviewed the survey questions and process for administering the surveys with the participating teachers. There were 207 student surveys completed and returned to the HRY Program Co-ordinator. The student survey was four pages long, and composed of a series of multiple choice and short answer questions. The multiple choice questions asked students to rate a topic by circling a number from 1 to 4; 1=not helpful, 2=somewhat helpful, 3=helpful, 4=very helpful. Below each scale, students were given a few lines to write about what they learned as a result of the discussion.

Administering the surveys required about 30 minutes. Due to time pressures, not all participating classes were able to complete the student surveys. Efforts made by the teachers to have the student surveys completed and returned is greatly appreciated as it helps us demonstrate the effectiveness of the program, continue to improve the program, and learn from our experiences. The student survey report is a review and analyses of each of the nine survey questions.

Question 1: Please rate how useful it was to learn about the following topics and provide an example of what you learned.



The five key topics evaluated included: stereotypes affecting boys and girls, awareness of diversity in your school and community, conflict resolution, healthy communication skills, and violence in relationships

A) Stereotypes

Of the 207 completed student surveys, 59% percent of student felt it was *helpful* to *very helpful* to learn about stereotypes while only 7% expressed it was *not helpful*. There was only a slight difference in responses to the topic of gender stereotyping according to gender; 50% of girls found it *helpful*, while 45% of boys found it *helpful*, and 13% of girls found it *very helpful*, while 8% of boys did. The six gender-unspecified surveys were equally divided between *helpful* and *very helpful*.

Students identified as helpful learning the wide range of stereotypes relating to boys and girls as well as the harmful effects these stereotypes can have on attitudes about self and others.

- *“that most stereotypes the sexes thought about each other weren’t true”*
- *“that it affects both boys and girls opinions like how boys and girls look or act”*
- *“everyone has their own interests. Just because you’re a girl you don’t have to like shopping, just because you’re a boy you don’t have to like hunting”*
- *“that a lot of people are judged and not all of the people from the same group have the same characteristics”*

The media is identified as perpetuating these stereotypes, and students understand the importance of setting aside gender stereotypes in order to be open to seeing the person on their own terms. These learnings are expressed as:

- *“you have to get to know people and not fall into the trap of stereotypes”*
- *“that there are many companies stereotyping teenagers and making them think they have to look a certain way”*

B) Awareness of diversity in your school and community

The HRY Program is structured on the belief that increasing respect for diversity is one aspect of violence prevention among youth. Most students expressed that seeing diversity in your school and community was *helpful* (43%) to *somewhat helpful* (35%). Students reported the appreciation and awareness for diversity in their school and communities.

- *“that you need all kinds of races and cultures to make a community”*
- *“that there are a lot of different cultures, races , traditions in the school”*
- *“that there is more diversity in the community than you think”*
- *“that there are lots of different cultures in SAERC”*
- *“that diversity is essential”*

Judgements can be made about those groups or individuals seen as different. Students identify that judgement should not be made based on differences.

- *“I learned not to judge people because they are different”*

One student expressed that *“diversity at school and the community can cause loads of stress.”* This is an expression of the existence of racism and other forms of

discrimination. Where this stress comes from and what needs to be done to alleviate this stress needs to be examined further. It highlights the importance of discussing diversity.

C) Conflict resolution

In order to prevent violence, youth need to believe that conflict can be avoided and problems can be resolved peacefully. Students clearly identified this learning with statements like, I learned:

- *“how problems can be solved without conflict”*
- *“there is a peaceful way to solve stuff”*
- *“that how we respond influences the outcome”*
- *“how to solve a problem safely without getting into trouble”*

The majority (73%) of students surveyed rated the HRY Programs presentation of conflict resolution and problem solving to be *very helpful* (21%) to *helpful* (52%). Many students identified the specific conflict resolution skills they learned. Some of those skills include:

- *“to back off and tell someone if someone is trying to harm you”*
- *“stay calm relaxed, assertive”*
- *“how to calm down”*
- *“to talk it out and not to yell to get my point across”*

Being able to resolve conflicts was identified as a skill associated with being a leader. One student expressed learning, *“how to be a leader.”* Some youth shared that learning these conflict resolution skills have impacted their behaviour:

- *“how to not harm my brother when we are fighting”*
- *“instead of getting so annoyed that I snap at people, doesn’t happen anymore”*
- *“I learned to talk about the problems I’m having”*
- *“it helped me find different solutions to problems”*

Conflict resolution and problem solving skills as presented by the HRY Program can help youth feel more equipped to handle life. A more general sense of empowerment was expressed in the following statement: *“I felt like it will help life.”*

D) Healthy communication skills

Healthy communication skills are the building blocks for healthy relationships. They are required in order to be successful at resolving problems and conflicts. Most students found this skill development helpful in some way: 18% found it *very helpful*, 49% found it *helpful*, and 26% found it *somewhat helpful*. Students surveyed expressed the importance of healthy communication and were able to identify key elements of communications skills learned during the HRY Program sessions:

- *“that communication is one of the most important things you will use in your life”*
- *“how to properly control what and how I say things that affect my mood”*

- *“use eye, contact physical position, expressions”*
- *“how to communicate better with my peers”*
- *“how there are different ways of listening and I learned how to be an active listener”*

The following comments illustrate how learning these communication skills can help youth be safe, stay true to their values, and prevent violence:

- *“how to say no to something you don’t want to do”*
- *“to respect a person’s personal boundaries”*
- *“that you should be assertive when trying to get your point across”*
- *“I know I can talk about my problems now”*

E) Violence in relationships

Over three quarters (77%) of students surveyed responded that learning about violence in relationships was *very helpful* (32%) or *helpful* (45%). There is a gender difference when looking at those students who considered learning about dating violence *very helpful*; 42/104 or 40% of females and 22/94 or 23% of males. According to the survey, 17% more females considered it very helpful to learn about dating violence. Also, out of the five elements of the HRY Program whose helpfulness was measured: stereotypes, diversity, conflict resolution, communication, and violence in relationships; violence in relationships was identified by students as the most helpful. Student comments identify what they learned about violence in relationships:

- *“I learned about the danger signs”*
- *“about honeymoon stage, tension build-up, explosion”*
- *“about things I never knew was abuse”*
- *“how to help people in one and get myself out of one”*
- *“that you be who you are without being afraid of the one you love”*

Some comments show that students feel this information on violence in relationships is applicable to their own lives and is useful:

- *“I learned how to tell if I am in an abusive relationship”*
- *“what to do if I think I’m in danger in a relationship”*
- *“my friend is in an abusive relationship”*
- *“to watch my actions that way I don’t hurt my girlfriend (haven’t!)”*
- *“how to treat girls, and relationships”*

Question 2: Did you do anything differently after learning about these skills and topics?

When asked if they did anything differently after learning about these skills, about a third of students (31%) reported a change while over half (60%) of the youth said they didn’t

do anything differently. Examples of how the HRY Program influenced the behaviour of students can be grouped according to communication skills, conflict resolution, gender stereotyping and sexual orientation. Students reported a change in how they handle conflict:

- *“at home if my sister and I are fighting, I just try to solve it the right way”*
- *“I argued in a more mature way and used “I” statements”*
- *“I listen and wait til a person is done talking before I start. Talk it out now, not just get mad before I heard the other side of the story”*
- *“when I get in argument with someone, I don’t just walk away anymore, I talk it out with them”*

Students credit the HRY Program with improving their relationships with friends and family. Students report using healthy communication skills at home and among peers:

- *“I actually looked into people’s eyes while talking”*
- *“I gave people more respect and I listened to them more”*
- *“my relationship really opened up after learning these skills”*
- *“I talk more with family and friends”*

There is also a reported change in how students think about things like dating violence and sexual orientation.

- *“to be more open minded about people’s sexual orientation”*
- *“It changed my perspective on a lot of things like dating violence”*

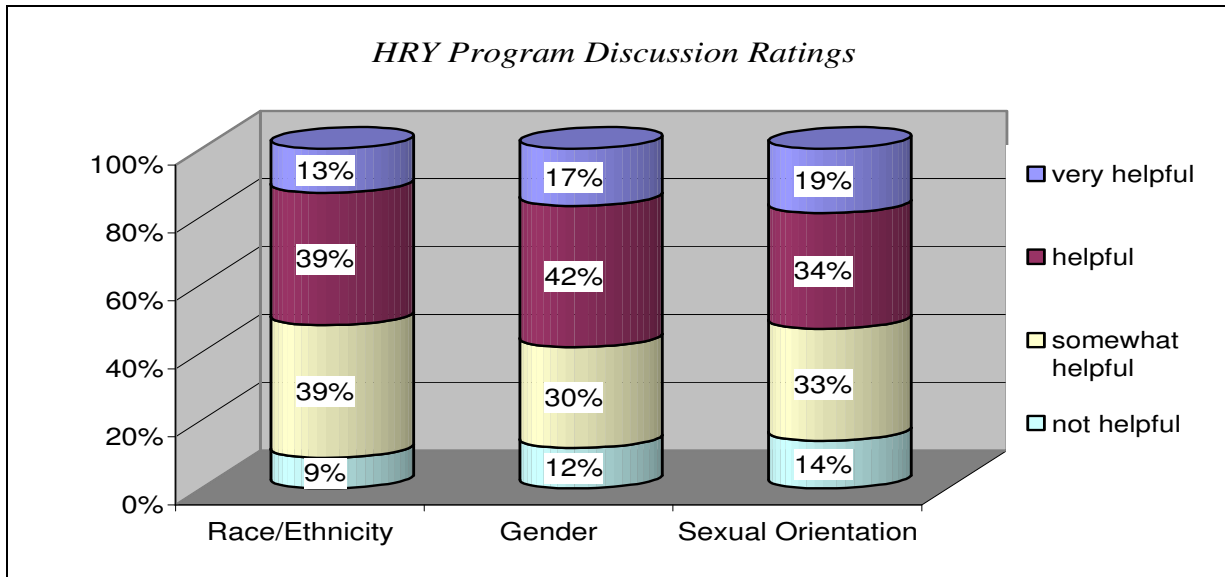
Students reported attempts to influence peer behaviour as well in order to reduce stereotyping:

- *“I didn’t stereotype boys and girls. And to speak up for myself”*
- *“I didn’t let people around me stereotype other people”*
- *“I stopped people from discriminating gays”*

Although many youth reported that they didn’t do anything differently, the information provided may not have been needed at this point in their lives. It may help youth cope with upcoming changes. One youth explained that these skills may influence future behaviour:

- *“I didn’t necessarily use the skills yet...but they are still there. The overall experience with the HRY Program affects your thoughts and learning, so someday I might use the information”*

Question 3: Please rate how useful it was to discuss the following topics.



The above chart displays how students rated discussing a) race/ethnicity, b) gender and, c) sexual orientation.

A) Race/ethnicity

Racial diversity is present in all schools in the Strait Regional School Board. Part of respecting diversity is being aware of the social impact of intolerance. Intolerance of racial diversity is racism. In order to address racism we must be able to recognize how it is still a problem. This enables us to address racism. Ninety-one percent (91%) of students surveyed, expressed that discussing racism in the HRY Program was *very helpful to somewhat helpful*. Less than ten percent (9%) of students did not find discussing race and ethnicity helpful. Feedback from students reflects a vision of equality. Students said they learned:

- *“not to be racist and be aware of people around me”*
- *“that each race/ethnicity are all similar in some way”*
- *“that a lot of people are picked on because of their colour or culture”*
- *“about different races that we are all equal and should be treated that way”*
- *“do not judge people by their race or skin colour”*
- *“racism is still going on, but it can be stopped”*

B) Gender

The topic of gender was discussed throughout the HRY Program sessions. Two sessions give students the opportunity to explore how society can place expectations and pressures upon us based on our perceived gender. The majority of students surveyed found

discussion about gender *very helpful* (17%) to *helpful* (42%). Less than one third (30%) found these discussions *somewhat helpful*. Male and females were equally divided along the categories with a rating difference of only 1-2%. For example, 42% of females rated the discussions *helpful* while 40% of males gave the same rating. Of the six gender unspecified students surveys, half reported that the gender discussions were helpful.

The gender discussions helped students learn about themselves and others. Some were able to see the unique perspectives between genders.

- “*that genders have differences*”
- “*that boys and girls look at things in a different way*”
- “*about how different genders are treated differently sometimes*”
- “*it helped me understand who I am*”

This improved understanding leads to the development of empathy among the genders as some youth expressed. Discussing gender often leads youth to see the underlying similarities that exist in all of us

- “*guys look for the same respect as girls always look for*”
- “*boys have to deal with things too*”
- “*what they think of themselves, how they want to be seen and what they think of us*”
- “*stereotypes between them aren’t true*”

In some cases, discussing gender has increased the students’ abilities to recognize others’ autonomy. The following statements capture this learning:

- “*that it’s their choice what they want*”
- “*I know not to force girls into doing things they don’t want to*”

C) Sexual Orientation/LGBT

One HRY Program session presents information on LGBT terminology and seeks to normalise diversity of sexual orientation within the high school population and beyond. When asked to rate the usefulness of this discussion, students responded positively: 20% found it *very helpful*, 35% found it *helpful*, and 34% found it *somewhat helpful*.

Comparing differences in responses based on gender, 9% more females responded that the discussion on sexual orientation was *helpful*, 7% more females reported the discussion *somewhat helpful*. More males than females responded that discussion was *not helpful*, with a difference of 13%.

When asked what they learned from this discussion, many students reported more understanding of terminology.

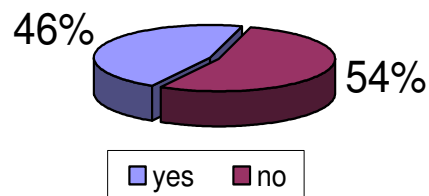
- “*what LGBT means*”
- “*about sexual orientation and LGBT*”
- “*the difference between transgender and trans-sexual*”

Other comments reflect respect for diversity of sexual orientation:

- *“anyone can be LGBT and to respect that”*
- *“it’s okay to be gay, and don’t judge people that are”*
- *“no matter what gender you like, people will like you for you”*
- *“that it is ok to be LGBT and people are scared to say it”*

4. Thinking about race, gender and sexual orientation, did any of these discussions affect how you think and feel about others?

Change in thoughts or feelings?



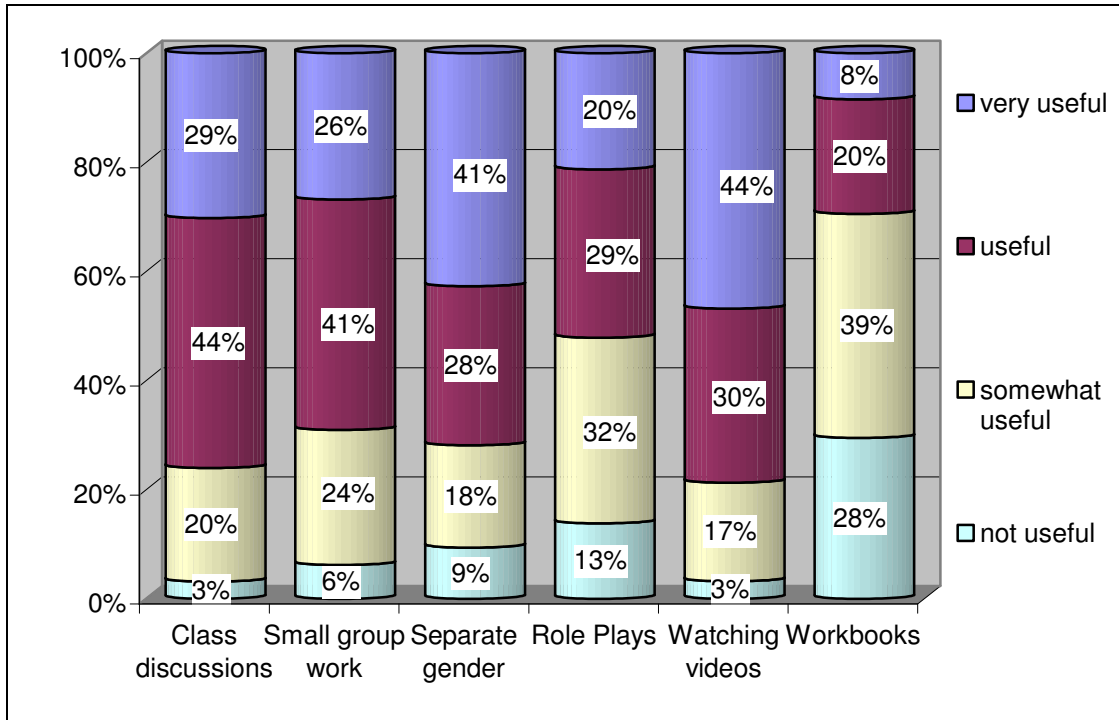
When asked if discussion about race, gender, and sexual orientation affected how you think or feel about others, 46% of students responded *yes*, and 54% responded *no*. Those who answered *yes* were asked to give an example of how it changed how they thought or felt. Examples were given which demonstrated positive changes in attitudes. The following comments were chosen to illustrate changes in thoughts and feelings in relation to race, gender, and sexual orientation:

- *“yes, I learned that being a girl is something to be proud of”*
- *“I don’t think I will feel weird around someone who is of a different race or LGBT”*
- *“I have a friend that is LGBT and I’ve learned how to treat him as a regular friend”*
- *“I don’t look at different races differently anymore”*

Some comments displayed more sensitivity for others in general.

- *“I used to tell bad jokes but I don’t so much anymore”*
- *“I’m more careful about how I treat people”*

5. Circle the number which best describes the usefulness of the following components.



The above chart displays the feedback from students on the usefulness of the six HRY Program components: class discussion: small group work, separate gender discussion, role plays, watching videos, and workbooks/handouts.

Class discussion is the foundation of the HRY Program, and over three quarters (76%) of the students who responded identified class discussion as *very useful* (30%) or *useful* (46%). And only 3-4% thought the discussions were *not useful*.

Small group work was rated highly as 69% of students rated it as *very useful* (27%). to *useful* (42%). Only 6% rated small group work as *not useful*.

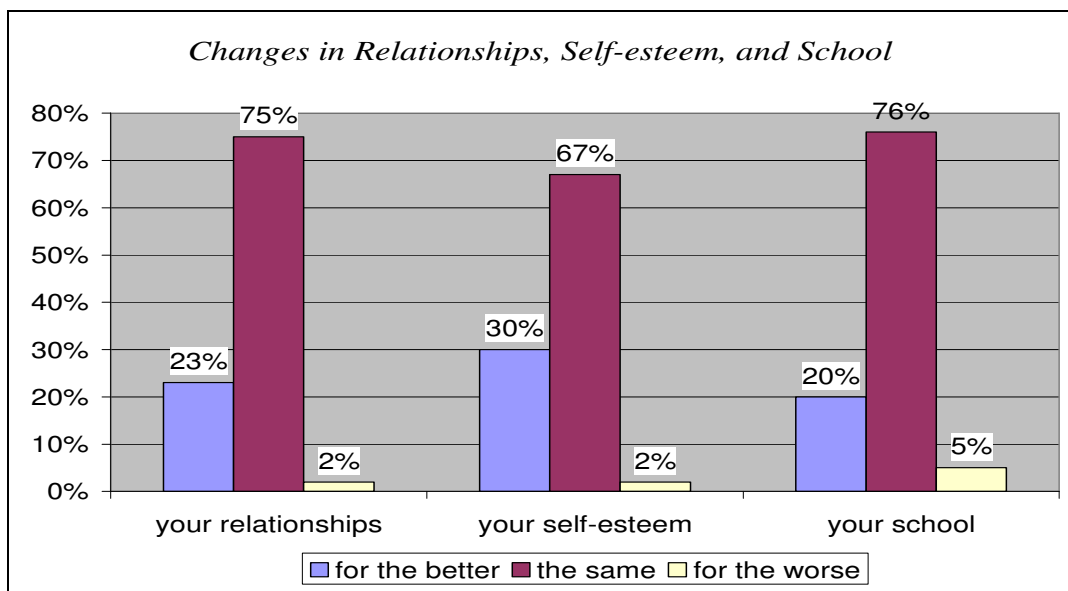
The two separate gender sessions in the HRY Program curriculum were viewed as positive; 42% rated them as *very useful* and 29% rated them as *useful*. Gender differences were observed between those who thought separate gender discussion was *very useful*. Although there was a high rating overall for separate gender discussion, 52% of girls reported finding it *very useful* while 32% of males did. This is a difference of 20%.

Role Plays are used in several HRY Program sessions including conflict resolution and communication styles. Just over half, or 52%, of the students surveyed rated the role plays as *very useful* to *useful*.

Two videos are used in the HRY Program curriculum. One video is about dating violence and the other is about homophobia. The highest ranked component was watching videos with 47% of students identified watching the HRY Program videos as *very useful*, 30% rated them as *useful*, 17% as *somewhat useful* and 3 % rated the videos as *not useful*.

The lowest rating of any component was the workbooks or handouts, with the large proportion of students (41%) rated the workbooks as *somewhat useful* and 30% of students responding that it was *not useful*.

Question 6: Please check the answer which best describes changes in the following:



Students were able to rate perceived changes in relationships, self-esteem, and school by ticking one of three boxes: for the better, the same, the worse. Students were also asked to explain their answers.

A) Your relationships:

Most students (75%) reported their relationships had not changed. Students who noticed a change for the better in their relationships (23%) expressed that they now had increased respect, understanding and improved communication in their relationships.

- *“learned how to respect”*
- *“I stand up for myself more”*
- *“since the program my relationships improved a lot with the people I love”*
- *“I’ve opened up with everyone (I trust people in my class more). I opened up my relationship by talking about everything with her”*
- *“respecting and listening to each others’ thoughts more”*

B) Your self-esteem:

Thirty percent (30%) of students reported a change for the better in their self-esteem. Students who reported an increase in self-esteem expressed that they felt more confident and had more self-respect. Some felt better about being different. The following are a selection of those comments:

- *“a session made me feel better about being different”*
- *“talking about women’s rights and how bad stereotypes were, made me feel better about myself”*
- *“I feel more confident when I talk around people”*
- *“I have more self respect”*
- *“believe more in myself”*

A change for the worse in self-esteem was reported by 5 students. Two expressed self-hatred and fear of what others thought. It is unclear if or how this may be related to the HRY Program as no further explanation was given.

C) Your School:

Twenty percent (20%) of students who answered this question said they thought there was a change for the better in their school after the HRY Program. Over half (67%) of the students identified that there was no change in their school. In this area, we see a small gender difference. Nine percent (9%) more females ($n=24/106$) than males ($n=14/97$) reported a change for the better in their school. Examples of changes in school climate for the better include:

- *“we are taking action against violence against women, discrimination and plastic bottles”*
- *“I learned what else there is that goes on in school”*
- *“my school has changed because people behave more”*
- *“more cautious about these problems”*
- *“people have changed the way they treat others”*

One student expressed that it was unlikely that a program of this size could impact the whole school.

- *“only two classes in my school take this at a time so there is no way my entire school could be affected”*

Question 7:

A) Did your PDR teacher sometimes have a guest facilitator?

Half (50%) of the 207 student surveys identified that they did not have guest facilitators. While 43% said they did have a guest facilitator.

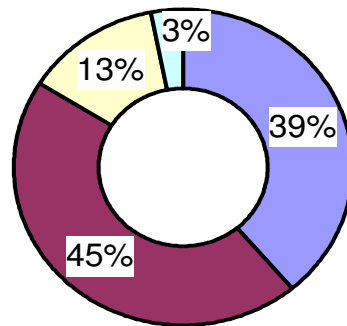
B) If yes, circle the number which describes how you would rate having a second adult.

Only 88 students reported having a guest facilitator in the previous question yet 166 rated the experience of having a second adult. This is a discrepancy of 78 students. Of the students who answered this question: 25% felt it was *very helpful*, 50% felt it was *helpful*, and 21% felt it was *somewhat helpful*.

C) How many youth facilitators would normally help deliver the HRY Program?

The student surveys revealed that 65% of students had 1-2 youth facilitators deliver the HRY sessions. A smaller section 18% had three youth facilitators deliver the session, while less than ten percent (8%) expressed having as many as 4 and 5

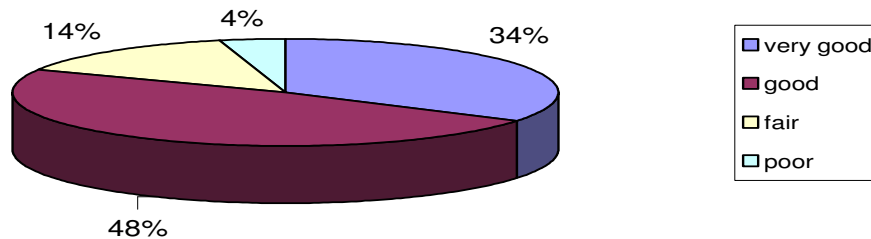
D) Circle the number which best describes how you rate having youth facilitators.



■ very helpful ■ helpful ■ somewhat helpful ■ not helpful

Youth facilitators are trained to present the HRY Program sessions with their teachers. This element of peer education is a best practice for youth violence prevention programs. The students surveyed rated having youth facilitators highly: 39% rated the youth facilitators as *very helpful*; 45% rated them *helpful*, 13% rated them *somewhat helpful*, and only 3% rated them as *not helpful*.

8. What is your overall impression of the Healthy Relationships for Youth Program?



Students were asked to rate their overall impression of the HRY Program by circling a number from 1 to 4; 1=poor, 2=fair, 3=good, 4=very good. The vast majority of students surveyed (82%) reported their overall impression of the HRY program to be either good to very good ($n=97$ good; $n=69$ very good). Fourteen percent (14%) rated the impression of the program as *fair*, and 4% rate it as *poor*.

Looking at gender; slightly more females than males rated the program as *very good* (difference of 8%) while slightly more males rated the program as *poor* (difference of 6%).

9. What is one thing that you learned or took away from the HRY Program?

Students responded to this question with a wide variety of responses. Final comments from students about the HRY Program can be categorized into the following groups: HRY Program process, information, communication skills, empathy, and self-esteem. Here is a selection of comments from the 207 surveys:

HRY Program Process

- “I liked the girls’ group and guy group separation”
- “how close I got to be with my teacher and my classmates”
- “I liked working in a circle with the class”
- “having fun”

Information

- “I learned the differences of violence, abuse, harassment”
- “I learned a lot about racism, and violent relationships”
- “that relationships aren’t always easy”

Communication Skills

- *“I learned a lot about different forms of communication, and how these forms can affect your life”*
- *“using my I’s instead of accusing people”*
- *“I’m more aware of space, talk and touch boundaries”*
- *“I got a better understanding of healthy relationships and what relationships and voicing your opinion is about”*
- *“to open up my communication life. Thank you for HRY”*

Empathy

- *“to be careful how you treat people”*
- *“I learned to be aware of the other people’s faith and do not insult them”*
- *“I got an inside look at how different people react to different situations”*
- *“how to think before you react and think how others feel”*

Self Esteem

- *“to be comfortable with who you are”*
- *“that it’s okay to be yourself”*
- *“accept everyone and know you deserve to be treated right”*
- *“better confidence”*

It is clear that the students surveyed felt they had learned something in relation to the development of healthy and respectful relationships from the series of twelve HRY sessions. The HRY Program can impact individuals differently and these answers demonstrate a range of ways it has affected the grade 9 students across the Strait Regional School Board district.

HRY Program Youth Facilitator Evaluation Report 2008/2009

A youth facilitator's role requires facilitating one or more of the 12 cumulative HRY sessions in one or more classes, individual preparation time, meetings with the PDR teacher, and seven monthly HRY Team meetings with the Program Co-ordinator. The youth facilitators evaluated their experience with the HRY Program by participating in focus groups during the spring of 2009. The program coordinator conducted focus groups with eight of the HRY facilitation teams: Canso, Guysborough, Dr. J.H. Gillis, Richmond, SAERC, Inverness, and Cape Breton Highlands Academy. Two HRY teams, East Antigonish Academy and St. Mary's Academy, each participated in a focus group with the external evaluator, Leslie Tutty, and therefore were not asked to participate in another focus group with the program coordinator.

During the focus groups, youth facilitators were asked to evaluate their experiences as a youth facilitator in two parts. Part I: your own experience in the classroom and, Part II: your experience as a member of the HRY team. How are you working together/collectively? In each part, youth facilitators were asked to identify their strengths, weaknesses, challenges and opportunities for change.

Part I: Your own experiences in the classroom as a Youth Facilitator

Strengths (*What is working for you; what are you doing well?*)

Youth facilitators described many of their strengths by identifying behaviours and skills as well as the impact they made upon students in the class. Youth facilitators described their classroom experience in terms of their relationship with the students:

- *Students in the class really take to the youth facilitator & are more open with them than perhaps the teacher*
- *Students seem to respect the youth facilitators*
- *I feel my strength was breaking the ice with the students*
- *Very organized, can identify with others who are shy*

Preparation and organization are skills identified frequently by the youth facilitators as strengths. Here is a selection of those self identified skills:

- *My ability to relate to other students; my ability to think quickly on my feet*
- *I keep a level head and can talk to students about difficult topics*
- *I read and re-read the day plans to ensure I know what I am doing*
- *I feel I have the power to change people's feelings about how relationships could be*
- *Knowing the material, not having to look off the books*

Weaknesses (*What is not working for you, what you feel you could improve on?*)

Most of the weaknesses identified by the youth facilitators revolved around classroom management. Teachers are encouraged to allow youth to take a leadership role; however, the HRY Program recommends that youth are not responsible for addressing disruptive behaviour.

- *“we need kids to take the lessons more seriously”*
- *“some students just have trouble sharing certain things”*
- *“I can’t always keep the classes attention”*
- *“not yelling when people aren’t listening”*

What some youth facilitators are doing well, others identify as a skill they need to develop:

- *“lack of organization”*
- *“I am not confident in myself”*
- *“having patience with students who are younger than me”*

Funding is not provided for translation of the HRY Curriculum into French. This has been identified as a problem in two schools

- *“No French book for HRY”*

Challenges (*What is getting in the way of being the best facilitator you can be?*)

Challenges are in regard to facilitation skills and scheduling issues. Storm days were also identified as a challenge. Scheduling is a problem for some depending on what class they are missing in order to facilitate the HRY Program sessions.

- *“Class was always during Physics.”*

Opportunities (*Are there opportunities for change/something that could be changed to allow the HRY to work better for you as a youth facilitator*)

Youth facilitators made suggestions for improvements

- *more support from teacher to manage difficult behaviours in the classroom*
- *bonus points in recognition of time and effort for facilitating the HRY Program*
- *another youth facilitator in the class would be helpful*
- *session five needs another boundary activity*
- *the sexual orientation/ gender identity session is too long, and could be made into two sessions*

Teachers’ presence is seen as limiting for some youth facilitators, and others feel the teacher should be more directive.

Part II: Your experience as a member of the HRY team.

Strengths (*What is working for your team; what are you doing well collectively?*)

Youth facilitators are chosen from grades 10-12. This difference in age range of youth facilitators was identified as a strength. All youth facilitation teams felt they worked well together. Some youth described getting to know each other as a team strength. Many comments were similar to the one below:

- *“good co-operation; good teamwork; we all became closer”*
- *“Great instructor very flexible!”*
- *“Everyone seems to listen to everyone else”*
- *“We try our best to stay on task”*
- *“HRY [facilitator] optimism; HRY [facilitator] willingness to share and participate”*
- *“everyone is equal”*
- *“It was nice to welcome the grade 9s with strong and positive leaders”*

Weaknesses- (*What is not working for your team, identify areas of improvement*)

- *“we’re awesome ☺”*
- *“coordinating schedules so the facilitators do not miss too many of the same class”*
- *“Sometimes it’s hard for everyone to talk”*
- *“as a team our weakness is getting together as a group at one time”*

Challenges – (*What is getting in the way of your team being the best it can be?*)

Most of the challenges identified were around being informed of meetings, hearing announcements, and availability for meetings. Other challenges included:

- *“forgetfulness”*
- *“not enough communication”*
- *“the team members who have a lack of commitment”*

Opportunities – (*Are there opportunities for change/something that could be changed to allow the HRY Program to be delivered more effectively?*)

A recurring opportunity identified was the suggestion to have more team meetings. Other opportunities suggested were:

- *“more than one [youth facilitator] in classroom would be better”*
- *“more publicity within the school”*
- *“more meeting with other schools, that was really fun”*
- *“[youth facilitator training] camp really helped us”*

Healthy Relationships for Youth Program Teacher Survey Report 2008-2009

This year, 7 ($n=7$) out of 14 teachers completed and returned the HRY Teacher Survey. The survey was composed of two parts: **Part I** posed a series questions to gauge the level of engagement of the teacher. **Part II** asked the teachers describe what worked well, what did not work well and suggestions for recommendations for each of the HRY Program components: HRY Team, HRY Approach, and HRY curriculum.

PART I

Most teachers reported adopting the role of observer for most of the HRY Program sessions. They assumed a leadership role when youth facilitators were unable to attend or when an issue or situation was more demanding for the youth facilitators. One teacher identified his/her role in the classroom as a co-facilitator with the youth facilitators.

All teachers identified their various HRY Program tasks. All teachers coordinated session schedules. Two of the seven teachers identified preparing youth for sessions. All teachers who completed the survey reported maintaining contact with the HRY Co-ordinator. Other duties included photocopying of material, and arranging the classroom seating in a circle for the HRY Program session.

PART II

1. The HRY Team

The HRY Team consists of the participating teacher and youth facilitators in each HRY school as well as the HRY Program Coordinator. Did the roles and relationships of the HRY team members work effectively?

Three themes emerged from what worked well.

- 1) Organized youth facilitators who took responsibility and a leadership role
- 2) Regular meetings
- 3) Having an external community member for a liaison

Scheduling difficulties for planning meetings as well as classroom scheduling conflict for the youth facilitators were identified frequently as not always working well. One teacher did not have enough youth facilitators after the semester changed.

Teacher Recommendations: Three suggestions emerged for improving the HRY Team for next year:

- 1) Youth facilitators could be part of a co-op program
- 2) Fewer HRY Team meetings
- 3) Outside members help with lessons and bring in different perspectives

The HRY Approach

The HRY Program approach is meant to foster an open and communicative learning environment. Some key elements are: sitting in the circle, developing community standards, separate gender sessions, youth and adults facilitating together, and so on.

Most teachers remarked that the separate genders worked well. One teacher identified a list of what worked well: *“All these factors enhanced the delivery of the program: Circle sitting & separate genders & movies & youth facilitators.”*

There were very few complaints about the HRY Program approach. Three issues were identified: student participation, seating arrangement and age of the youth facilitators. Facilitating sessions where the students were unwilling to participate was identified as difficult. One teacher found the circular seating arrangement difficult this year. Another teacher thought some of the youth facilitators were too close in age to the grade 9 students.

Teacher Recommendations: Many teachers said they did not have any recommendations. One teacher expressed that, *“This year was the best because all students were committed to the program and its delivery.”* More separate gender sessions were suggested by another teacher.

The HRY Curriculum

The curriculum was designed to be presented in hour long sessions with a classroom size of about 20. Regarding the curriculum contents, several teachers noted the newly purchased DVD/video resources were a great addition and held the student’s attention. Separate gender sessions were also identified as working well.

A unique sharing moment was shared by a teacher:

There was a very special situation in one classroom. There is a student with Autism who is in the class. There were some days that she shared more than any of the others. This was a very new behaviour for this student. She felt so safe and respected that she was willing to share, especially in the Folklore and storytelling session. This was such an emotional experience, letting her ysf teacher know the change in her social behaviour. What a unique opportunity to be able to witness this growth in her.

It was noted that the sessions are not of equal length as some sessions can be done in less than an hour. The conflict resolution session was considered difficult to facilitate.

Teacher Recommendations: Overall the teachers reported being pleased with the program. Teachers identified that having good youth facilitators makes a big difference in the success of the program from one year to the next. Some improvements suggested were:

- to have a French version of the curriculum available
- more training with the youth on facilitation skills
- a guest speaker for the LGBT would be helpful

“Great program this year”

HRY Program Evaluation Conclusion

The HRY Program is achieving its program objectives based on the information gathered from participating grade 9 students, teachers, and youth facilitators. In the 2008/2009 school year, the majority of students (82%) rated the HRY Program as *good* to *very good*, 14% rated the program as *fair* and 4% rated it as *poor*. The most valued learnings commonly reported were in relation to information about healthy and unhealthy relationships, improved communication skills, increased empathy and self-esteem. Thirty percent (30%) of students surveyed reported an improvement in their self-esteem. Thirty-one percent (31%) of students surveyed reported a change in their behaviour as a result of the HRY Program. Furthermore, 89% of students surveyed expressed having an increased understanding of diversity and racism. This is a significant achievement.

As in previous years, youth facilitators, enjoy being leaders in the school and find meeting and preparing for sessions a challenge. More exercises to build facilitation skills and clarification of roles and responsibilities will be incorporated into the fall training. This will be achieved through a second day of training for the youth.

Teachers overall were very supportive of the HRY Program, its approach and the curriculum. They provided helpful suggestions for improvements: the session on boundaries needs to be longer and they requested more training for the session on gender identity and sexual orientation. They appreciated the new media resources purchased this year. These suggestions will be incorporated into teacher training for the upcoming year.

What stands out this year for the HRY Program is the unique role it plays in promoting understanding and acceptance of LGBT identified people in the schools, within families and communities as well as dating violence awareness and prevention. The video portrayals of homophobia and dating violence were rated highly by the students. Almost half (47%) of students surveys rated these movies as *very useful*. Appropriate resources can support discussions on these challenging issues.

The HRY Program thanks all those who have participated in the evaluation. With this feedback we are able to make improvements to next year’s HRY Program.