

Healthy Relationships for Youth Program

Evaluation Report 2012-2013



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Healthy Relationships for Youth Program *Evaluation Report 2012-2013*

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Program Overview

The Healthy Relationships for Youth (HRY) program is a school-based violence prevention program offered in partnership with the Strait Regional School Board by the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre and Sexual Assault Services Association. The school-board serves a predominantly rural area in Northern Nova Scotia. In a nutshell, HRY consists of a series of twelve cumulative sessions within the grade nine health curriculum that are delivered by trained youth facilitators. The interactive sessions are designed to reduce the risk of violence for youth through developing their skills and knowledge about creating and maintaining healthy relationships.

HRY has a diversity focus which helps students understand and make the links among issues related to different forms of oppression, exclusion and violence prevalence. It uses a strength-based approach which encourages students to develop a deeper understanding of diversity and to both recognize and challenge sexism, racism and homophobia as forms of violence that impact personal and social relationships. HRY has been cited as a best practice program for the way it involves youth as peer educators in the classroom, schools and communities.

The HRY program has been offered to local schools since 2006. Over the past seven years, HRY has reached 3550 grade nine students in ten schools and has trained 534 youth facilitators. For the 2012-2013 school year, HRY trained 98 youth facilitators in nine schools and delivered the program to 424 grade nine students.

The program follows the school year with variation in length of program depending on school course schedules, number of classes and teacher preference. Youth facilitators attend training sessions in the fall with ongoing support throughout the school year. Initial half day trainings took place at each participating school in September with two regional day long training sessions which took place in October. The series of twelve classroom sessions were delivered from October- May, with several schools continuing until the end of the school year in June. Evaluation focus groups and other evaluation activities were carried out from March until June.

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 positive youth development which includes: peer support, youth empowerment, youth-adult partnerships, meaningful contribution and experiential learning

Evaluation Methodology

All Antigonish Women Resource Centre programs are evaluated on a regular basis. The HRY Program gathers feedback throughout the school year for program evaluation and review. Formative evaluation information from teachers and youth facilitators is collected through quick written and oral comments during training and follow-up sessions on an on-going basis. Summative evaluation information is collected with youth facilitators, teachers and grade nine students through on-line surveys and focus groups. Both formative and summative information has been included in this report, with an emphasis on the later for quantitative data.

Teacher and administrator feedback

Teachers receive training, organize the schedule, meet with youth facilitators and the program coordinator and provide disciplinary intervention during the delivery of the program. For formal evaluation, they completed on-line surveys after the class had completed the twelve sessions (6 respondents). The on-line surveys contained open ended questions and a series of statements about methodologies used, skills gained by the students and changes in attitude or knowledge. Teachers *strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed or strongly disagreed* to the statements. Oral and text feedback was collected through conversations with teachers and administrators by e-mail or in person during school visits.

Grade nine feedback

Grade 9 students participate in the twelve HRY sessions delivered by the youth facilitators. The bulk of the evaluation information from grade nine students is collected through an online survey. The survey asks basic questions such as gender and school name that is used for a gendered analysis of the information. The survey asks participants for general highlights and comments. The grade nine students also read twenty-five positive learning statements about the HRY program and rate them with a choice of *agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree* and *disagree*. The twenty-five statements are drawn from the learning objectives of the twelve sessions in the program and broader program objectives. Seven of the statements ask for specific reactions to HRY program content (i.e. reaction to a movie or activity) and eighteen of the statements are affirmative comments about skills, knowledge and values learned in the HRY program. This year 229 (54%) of the 424 grade 9 HRY participants completed the survey.

In addition to the grade nine survey, a sample grade nine class (total of 23 students) from one of the nine participating schools participated in a focus group and other evaluation activities about their experience in the HRY program. This focus group consisted of a classroom carousel of four questions including: What did you like best about HRY? What did or did you not like about learning from peer facilitators? What are some suggestions or changes you would make for the HRY curriculum? What is something you learned from HRY? Students were provided with 4

post-it notes and were asked to write down their comments and post the note on the corresponding question. The carousel activity was accompanied by an open classroom discussion where students commented on sessions, activities, and topics that worked well or didn't work well for them. Answers and quotes from this focus group will be considered as part of the Grade 9 student feedback and included as part of the evaluation of the program.

Youth facilitator feedback

Youth facilitators attend training sessions and regular lunchtime meetings with the program coordinator. Each facilitator leads anywhere from two to twelve sessions depending on the school. For final evaluation, they provided written and oral feedback to a series of five questions during a focus group following the delivery of the program (71 out of 98 facilitators). They also had the option of completing an online survey (66 respondents). As the facilitators of the program, their input is a critical part of program review. Quotes from surveys and other written comments are used throughout the report.

Methodology notes

All the data collected from surveys, focus groups and other evaluation activities has been divided into subcategories and organized within the five program objectives. Many of the statistics and quotes cross beyond the divisions created for the organization of the report. However, the information is matched to the most pertinent category.

The HRY program adheres to a gender based perspective in that gender affects the lives of young people in different ways. The program evaluation analyzes responses from students in general but also examines the differences and similarities in responses by gender. The grade 9 students who filled out online surveys were asked to write in their gender (male, female, trans, other) rather than check just male or female. Gender analysis is used as a tool to better understand the impact of the HRY program on students. For the purpose of the gender analysis in this evaluation, only the information collected from the online surveys will be used as that is the only time students were asked to self identify their gender. Of the 227 students who completed the online surveys 119 (52%) identified as female, 93 (41%) as male, 6 (3%) as transgendered, and 9 (4%) as other. The gender comparison which occurs throughout the report is between males and females and not between trans or other because of the low statistical numbers in these categories. Other social, cultural and economic factors also influence how individuals participate in the program but these factors are beyond the scope of this evaluation.

In this section, focus group and survey information from grade 9 students, teachers and youth facilitators is used to evaluate each objective. Significant differences in responses by gender are mentioned to provide insight on the effects of the program.

Objective 1: To Engage Grade 9 students in 10 school sites within the Strait Regional School Board in a series of classroom sessions

This year the HRY Program was implemented in nine of the ten high schools within the Strait Regional School Board. The participating schools included 424 grade 9 students, 19 grade 9 classes, 12 classroom teachers and 98 youth facilitators from grades 10-12. Each of the 19 classes of students participated in twelve consecutive sessions and an evaluation component.

HRY Participation for 2012-2013

| Participating Schools | Total # of students per school | Number of grade nine classes | Number of Grade nine students | Number of Youth Facilitators |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Canso | 80 (9-12) | 1 | 15 | 8 |
| CBHA | 389 (P-12) | 1 | 27 | 13 |
| Dalbrae | 261 (9-12) | 4 | 81 | 14 |
| East Antigonish | 474 (P-12) | 1 | 30 | 8 |
| Guysborough | 304 (P-12) | 1 | 28 | 14 |
| Inverness | 281 (P-12) | 1 | 25 | 8 |
| Richmond | 153 (9-12) | 4 | 95 | 15 |
| St. Mary's | 155 (8-12) | 1 | 26 | 8 |
| SAERC | 377 (9-12) | 4 | 97 | 10 |
| Total | 2474 | 19 | 424 | 98 |

Objective 2: To assist youth in developing the attitudes, values and skills they need to build and maintain healthy relationships

The HRY program aims to help students identify and practice skills for making and maintaining healthy relationships. Students achieve this through practicing assertive communication, active listening, setting boundaries and conflict resolution skills in a variety of activities and discussions. For example, role plays are used several times throughout the program for illustrating and practicing skills. Seventy percent (70%) of grade 9 survey respondents *agreed* (33%) or *somewhat agreed* (37%) that the role-plays helped them practice communication and problem solving. Students also practice expressing their needs and expectations in a relationship and examine indicators for healthy and unhealthy relationships. All the teacher survey respondents *agreed* (83%) or *strongly agreed* (17%) that students practiced the following skills: assertive communication, active listening, and analysis of violence in community.

Developing communication, boundaries and conflict resolution

89% of grade 9 survey respondents *agreed* (56%) or *somewhat agreed* (33%) that they could give examples of **passive, assertive and aggressive communication**. The following comments from grade 9 HRY students illustrate how they learned the difference between types of communication and understood how to assertively say no:

- I learned that there are 3 different ways to approach a situation.
- I am more open about my thoughts.
- I learned good communication which really stands out for me.

63% of the youth facilitators who participated in the HRY program indicated that communication was one of the most important skills they developed while taking part in the HRY program. Some of their examples of this are as follows:

- I have developed a better speaking ability, and how to make the grade nines feel comfortable in speaking to and confiding in us as facilitators.
- After doing this I found it easier to talk aloud in front of groups.
- I have developed leadership skills and public speaking skills.

In terms of problem solving, 40 % of grade 9 HRY students *agreed* that they use **conflict resolution skills** to solve problems with people (45% *somewhat agreed*). Eight percent more females than males *agreed* to using conflict resolution skills suggesting that girls are putting into action the skills learned slightly more than boys. Some of the students comments about what they learned are:

- I learned different ways to deal with conflict.
- I learned how to work and cooperate with others. I learned how to take control of a situation, and treat people with respect.
- It helped me learn about healthy relationships and conflict solving.

In addition, 58% of grade 9 HRY students *agreed* that they practice **respecting personal boundaries** (31% *somewhat agreed*). Female students were 7% more likely to agree with this statement than boy students. When asked what was one thing they learned in HRY both boys and girls agreed that the session on boundaries was something they remembered. The following comments from grade 9 HRY students highlight personal boundaries:

- I learned about different important rules and boundaries people have for themselves and for others.
- I learned about different boundaries, and everyone's boundaries are different and we should respect that.
- I learned about personal space and where my boundaries are and the point where people will cross them.

Self expression

Over 77% of grade 9 HRY participants *agreed* or *somewhat agreed* that they were more comfortable sharing their opinion and experience because of the program (73% of females and 88% of males). This supports our findings in the 2011-2012 evaluation that the HRY program has a more significant impact on the comfort level, self expression and communication of boys who participate. In terms of particular forms of self-expression, the majority of grade 9 HRY participants indicated that they could express their needs and expectations for a relationship (59% *agreed* and 32% *somewhat agreed*). The grade 9 HRY students describe how self expression helped them:

- Everyone can say stuff and get listened to and you don't get judged.
- How to say no to peer pressure.
- I learned that it is ok to talk about my feelings to others and trust that they won't be told to other students around the school.

Many youth facilitators also commented on the increase in communication and comfort in expressing themselves:

- I have become more aware of how to comfort someone who is in need of somebody to talk to, how to identify a healthy/unhealthy relationships, how large or small someone's personal space is and how comfortable I am in talking to groups of people.
- Being helpful and a better listener.
- I have learned leadership, how to approach people about certain situations and public speaking.

Recognizing unhealthy relationships and preventing/reducing violence in relationships

Most grade 9 HRY participants responded that they could list signs of healthy and unhealthy relationships (68% *agreed* and 23% *somewhat agreed*). Girls who participated were 14% more likely to *agree* with this statement (76%) than males (62%). HRY students share their responses regarding healthy and unhealthy relationships:

- I learned in HRY to have healthy relationships with my family, peers and others.
- I learned that an unhealthy relationship has a cycle and you shouldn't get stuck in it.
- I have learned that people can be abused in a relationship, but act normal on the outside.

Youth facilitators also commented on the learning they observed with the grade nines and how they might impact their relationships:

- One time I saw the grade 9's realizing how unhealthy their relationship was, watching their faces as they realized that maybe their relationship wasn't as healthy as they thought.
- Some key learning moments were when we talked about violence in relationships, I really think they learned a lot about it!
- We made charts about things they want in a relationship and what they didn't want, being a facilitator I got to see how they think.

Over two thirds (68%) of the HRY participants *agreed* that they could explain different kinds of violence (23% *somewhat agreed*). This skill was more highly indicated by female respondents than male respondents. The students' comments on violence in relationships center primarily around abusive relationships and how to get help:

- One thing that I learned that stands out for me is that abuse isn't only physical and that it is more common than you may realise.
- I learned that people can be abused in a relationship, but act normal on the outside.
- I learned helpful and important ways to have a healthy relationship and how to get out of a bad one.

The students responded at a variety of different levels and expressed varying experiences in personal and dating relationships and with the issue of relationship violence. Some students suggest they are just beginning to think about dating and others have had a few years of experience. Therefore their understanding of and ability to explain relationships and violence are all at an individual level but the majority increased through participation in the program.

Summary

HRYP helps youth to develop some of the attitudes, values and skills they need to build and maintain healthy relationships. Students highlighted the topics of boundaries, communication styles, violence, and understanding healthy and unhealthy relationships as the ones which left a lasting impression and where they developed the most memorable skills. While female students consistently express a greater understanding and ability when it comes to these various topics, male students are not far behind and also show a developing ability and comfort with those same topics. The increased exposure to and familiarity with self expression, conflict resolution, communication styles and healthy relationships will remain in some form in the attitudes and values of those students as they build relationships throughout the coming years.

Objective 3: To increase students' understanding of racial/cultural diversity specifically relating to the Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian communities

The HRY program encourages youth to consider diversity in developing both empathy and a deeper social analysis. Throughout the program diversity is highlighted in several sessions and in a variety of forms, as well as examining personal diversity through self-identity. As Nova Scotia has a strong history of cultural diversity through Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian communities there is reference to them in various sessions. Students have opportunity to analyse stereotypes and discuss the connection with discrimination as a form of violence. In addition, students also learn about a continuum of gender identities and discuss terms and issues related to diverse sexual orientations. Finally, during the storytelling session, students learn about the importance of oral traditions (folklore and talking circles) and are invited to share their own stories.

In the following section responses relating to understanding of diversity from the Gr.9 students and the youth facilitators will be addressed.

Valuing diversity and understanding issues of stereotypes and discrimination

HRY students discuss various types of diversity to develop an increased awareness of themselves, their school and their communities. Eighty six percent (86%) of HRY students *agreed* (45%) or *somewhat agreed* (41%) that they could see diversity in themselves and in their communities. Female students were likely to *agree* (54%), while male students *somewhat agreed* (51%) with the statement. This suggests that while all both genders can recognize diversity, female students are more confident in expressing this knowledge and understanding. The following comments from grade 9 HRY students express some of what they learned about valuing diversity:

- One thing I learned was that you have to treat people the same as you would no matter who they like or what sex they are and that we are all different in our own ways.
- I learned how to act in a community.
- You should not make fun or put down on others for being a little different.

Most of the grade 9 HRY students responded that they valued local traditions and cultures other than their own (53% *agree*, 32% *somewhat agree*). More females agreed more strongly to the statement than males (67% compared to 40%). HRY students commented on acceptance of people unconditional of race or culture:

- I learned to accept everyone as one!
- I learned that everyone is a person not to treat them any different for anything they do.

In terms of understanding issues, half of grade 9 HRY respondents *agreed* (53%) that they could talk about stereotypes, how they reinforce discrimination and affect self-esteem. More than a quarter *somewhat agreed* (35%). Again girls were more likely to strongly *agree* with this statement whereas boys were evenly split between *agree* and *somewhat agree*. Many HRY students commented about stereotypes and the misconceptions around those stereotypes:

- I learned that there's different types of genders and fears that people have, a lot of kids see different types of things.
- That we are all unique! I also liked learning about "all blank are blank" and how this is used so often, and we all have probably done it at one point in our lives.
- One thing I learned is there is a lot of gender stereotypes that aren't true.

These comments suggest that while students are acknowledging that stereotypes exist and are often untrue, there is still a need to educate about these misconceptions as they might lead to poor self esteem or discrimination.

Developing an understanding of diversity in gender identity and sexual orientation

When responding to the statement "I use and understand correct terms for gender identity and sexual orientation," 54% of HRY grade 9 students *agreed* and 38% *somewhat agreed*. Twenty percent more females *agreed* with the statement as compared to males. This suggests that female students are significantly more comfortable with terminology and language surrounding gender identity and sexual orientation. The following quotes from grade 9 HRY surveys show a sample of the varying comfort levels of learning and acceptance:

- I learned not to judge people bad if they like someone the same gender.
- I learned how many different sexual orientations there actually are.
- I loved learning different sexual orientations and that mine is fine.
- I've really enjoyed LGBT (Lesbians, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual) because I am Asexual meaning I share no sexual attraction towards anyone and I don't know what I stand for since Asexuality isn't a part of LGBT but I'm glad to be a part of it.

Summary

HRY helps to increase student's understanding of racial and cultural diversity as well as diversity of self, sexual orientation and gender identity. Both male and female students are developing a stronger understanding of stereotypes, discrimination and terminology. Although females show higher levels of agreement than males overall, the program is helping to address student understanding collectively across the board.

In terms of cultural content, as the program has developed over the year, there has been a shift towards including more content on sexual orientation and gender identity. The content specific to Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian people is not featured as specific topics and is not particularly reflected in the evaluation data. We have also received a request to include Acadian in the list of traditional cultures for Nova Scotia and plan to include them in the coming year.

Objective 4: To increase students' awareness of issues related to violence prevention and social inequities from a gender based perspective

Preventing violence involves an understanding of the underlying social inequities such as racism, sexism, and homophobia can lead to various forms of violence. Violence affects everyone differently depending on various social factors such as gender, socio-economic status, and religion. The HRY program uses a gender based perspective to explore issues and social inequities that are both a cause and a form of violence. This takes place through expanding students' understanding of gender and stereotypes as well as talking together about homophobia, racism and sexism and how to prevent or stop it.

Understanding gender and gender stereotypes

Most grade nine HRY respondents indicated that they could explain how gender affects their lives (55% *agreed* and 34% *somewhat agreed*). Both male and female students agreed at the almost the same percentage to this statement, revealing a particular area where the gap in comfort and confidence in a topic is not significantly higher in female students. 56% of males from the group *agreed* that they could explain how gender affects their lives as compared to 57% of female participants.

Students in the program list stereotypes of being male and female. Eighty-four percent (84%) of female grade 9 respondents and 65% of males *agreed* that they could identify stereotypes associated with being male and female. Overall 73% of students *agreed* with this statement. HRY students commented about some of the stereotyping and what they learned when they talked about gender stereotypes:

- I learned that guys and girls are even more different than I thought.
- I learned how to be with other boys and girls.
- One of the things that stood out most for me was how many different things are stereotypes about genders and they're roles. Ex) women should be at home wives.

Even the youth facilitators learned more about gender stereotypes. When asked what their most memorable experience with HRY had been one of the facilitators commented:

- When students have the realization that stereotypes can affect everyone.
- My most memorable experience would be seeing what each gender thought the other gender cared about, I think it opened a lot of minds.

Students also analyse magazine advertising to examine how gender stereotypes are portrayed and created. Overall Ninety-two percent (92%) of Gr. 9 student participants *agreed* or *somewhat agreed* that they understood how stereotypes were reinforced by media (magazine ads). In a

gender analysis 75% of female and 64% of male students *agreed* to the same statement. The following quote is a comment from a grade 9 HRY student:

- The thing that stood out for me most was the lesson on media.

A youth facilitator commented that one of their most memorable moments was:

- The slideshows when one girl really didn't understand the pictures.

As media permeates almost all aspects of daily life it is essential for the HRY program to encourage youth to be critical of the advertisements and information they are being inundated with. As so many of the students agreed or somewhat agreed that they understood how stereotypes were reinforced by media the HRY program is encouraging youth to be more critical and analytical about the media world that surrounds and influences them.

Awareness of underlying issues of homophobia, racism and sexism

In one of the sessions, students discuss correct terms for diversity of sexual orientation and gender identity. They also watch a movie about homophobia and a girl's journey of "coming out". Sixty-seven percent (67%) of HRY grade 9 respondents *agreed* and 25% *somewhat agreed* that they understood what homophobia is and how harmful it is. Significantly more females than males *agreed* (29% more) again supporting that the HRY program helps all students but especially girls to feel comfortable discussing difficult topics like gender and sexuality.

Students are also encouraged to make links between homophobia and other forms of oppression such as racism and sexism. Fifty-seven percent (57%) of grade 9 HRY students *agreed* that homophobia is connected to other forms of violence such as racism and sexism. Sixty-six percent (66%) of female students *agreed* to this statement as opposed to 52% of male students.

In terms of teaching methodology, overall the students expressed that the video on homophobia made them more aware of the feelings of others. However, there was a big difference between the females (76% *agreed*) and males (43% *agreed*). This may have to do with the fact that the two main characters in the film were female.

Some of the youth facilitators also commented on the impact of the video on homophobia made on them as well:

- My most memorable experience was probably during the session about sexual identity where we watched the movie with the two friends and one of them was a lesbian, and all the grade 9's were hoping the two girls would end up together.

In the surveys completed by the teachers, all *strongly agreed* (33%) or *agreed* (67%) that students expressed an understanding and empathy on the following topics: diversity, homophobia, racism, sexism, violence in relationship.

Speaking up against homophobia, racism and sexism

Recognizing homophobia, racism and sexism is the first step but speaking out against it requires significantly more action and courage. Forty six percent (46%) of HRY grade 9 respondents *agreed* and 42% *somewhat agreed* that they could challenge racism, homophobia and sexism when they see, hear or feel it. This indicates that 88% of HRY students would feel at least somewhat comfortable speaking out and challenging those inequalities. With this question, there

is a significant difference (30%) between male and female students who *agreed* that they could challenge racism, homophobia and sexism when they see, hear, or feel it. Male students are more likely to somewhat agree to this statement (52%) indicating a hesitancy in male students when it comes to taking action. The HRY program is essential in providing male students with skills and information to increase their comfort level and ability to challenge inequalities when they see, hear or feel them.

Violence prevention

Youth facilitators were asked how HRY helps prevent violence. In general, they commented on increased awareness and understanding of the types of violence, as well as how to prevent it and get help if need be. The following quotes from the online survey shows a sample of their comments:

- It helps show the grade nines how to protect themselves/others and helps show people how to refrain from using violence themselves.
- AWARENESS!
- It teaches the grade 9 students methods to tell people how they are feeling and dissipate their anger in a more positive way.
- It teaches the kids signs of abuse and how to deal with it. It informs them about different ways they can get help.
- It teaches the students to recognize all forms of violence that they might not have identified as violence before and how to report/deal with violence when they encounter it.

Summary

Through the HRY program students develop a deeper analysis of violence prevention, including its varying impact on different genders. Most of the HRY students could explain how gender affects their lives and can list stereotypes associated with males and females. While female students indicated higher levels of skill and confidence when it came to these issues, male students are also learning and developing these important skills and abilities. The greatest gap between male and female students occurred when asked about taking action and challenging homophobia, racism, and sexism. Female students clearly indicated a higher level of comfort speaking up against homophobia, racism, and sexism than the male students did. This indicates that it is essential to continue to provide programming like HRY where space, opportunity, and skill development allows boys to become more confident in taking action against violence and inequalities. Overall, the HRY participants showed an important shift in attitude and ability to challenge racism, sexism and homophobia.

Objective 5: To foster youth development: peer support, youth empowerment, youth adult partnerships, meaningful contribution and experiential learning

Youth development is fostered not only in the grade nine classrooms but also with the youth facilitators. Peer facilitation offers youth an opportunity to engage others and make a difference in topics that matter to them. Most of the evaluation on youth development takes place in focus groups and open-ended online survey questions where youth facilitators share their reflections on what the program means to them. This section analyzes some of the tools used to foster youth development but mainly focuses on the words and experience of the youth.

Peer support

Peer influence is a strong pressure for adolescents and can affect behaviour in positive and negative ways. The HRY program strives to create a supportive peer environment at two levels: youth facilitators as peer educators and methodologies that build trust between peers for respectful classroom participation.

Teachers, youth facilitators and grade 9 students all comment on the effectiveness of **peer education** for the HRY content. Eighty-three percent (83%) of grade 9 students *agreed* (48%) or *somewhat agreed* (35%) that they liked having other students teach the class. When asked what stands out from the program, many grade 9 students immediately comment on the youth facilitators. The following are some of their responses:

- They shared their own experiences with many of these topics.
- They were easier to connect with.
- They made the session interesting and more fun.
- It was easier to talk to them because they're close to our age.
- I learned it was easier to learn with a student teaching.

Teachers also reported that the grade 9 students responded well to the youth facilitators (60% *strongly agreed* and 40% *agreed*). The teachers' comments are similar to the grade 9 students in that the youth facilitators can better relate to the students. The following are some of their survey comments:

- Very valuable opportunity for students to learn and discuss life issues with their peers.
- I think that most students enjoyed learning from students who were close to their age and the grade 9's seemed to enjoy most of the topics and learned valuable information.

Again, youth facilitators echo the grade 9 students and the teachers. Here is a sample of their responses:

- Being taught by fellow students is more comfortable especially with these topics.
- Teaching grade 9's how to react to stuff as a teen instead of having an adult lecture them.
- Being able to get to know some grade 9's on a more personal level.
- Seeing the grade 9's get more comfortable around us and each other throughout each session.

- During the Jeopardy game no one knew the answer to one of the harder questions and one of the shyest, quietest girls in that grade knew the answer and her team cheered for her, she was so happy.

Many students comment on the importance of youth teaching youth, especially when it comes to the healthy relationship content. However, they also speak of some of the classroom management and discipline difficulties for them as peers. This is why support and cooperation is required from the classroom teachers.

One of the indicators of a **supportive peer environment** is students getting to know each other better. This means that students have a chance to express themselves and share in a way that is not necessarily possible in other classes. Overall, 35% of grade 9 students *agreed* that they got to know people in their class better. This is an important increase in rural schools, as many of these students have been in the same class for years. Several grade 9 students felt that learning about their classmates in a new way was the most important learning that took place. The following is a sample of their survey responses:

- You learn new things about each other.
- It helped me learn a bit about my classmates.
- I liked learning about how they felt about things, their thoughts. It was interesting because you would have never expected to hear some of the things they said.
- I enjoyed everything! I love learning more about people! And getting to know them better.

The youth facilitators also observed how the grade 9 students warmed up to them as older students and with each other over the course of the program. They commented on these changes in focus groups and surveys:

- Finally getting the student to talk and express themselves made me realize they were starting to get comfortable.
- Being able to interact positively with the grade nines.
- Having a lot of fun and seeing the grade nines enjoy their time in the class with us while learning.
- The students were very quiet and uncomfortable. Following separate gender sessions they felt more comfortable around us and the class felt more connected.

Various methodologies are used throughout the program to build trust, participation and community within the classroom: check-ins, circle discussions, separate gender sessions and community standards. The following chart shows teacher responses to the effectiveness of the various methodologies.

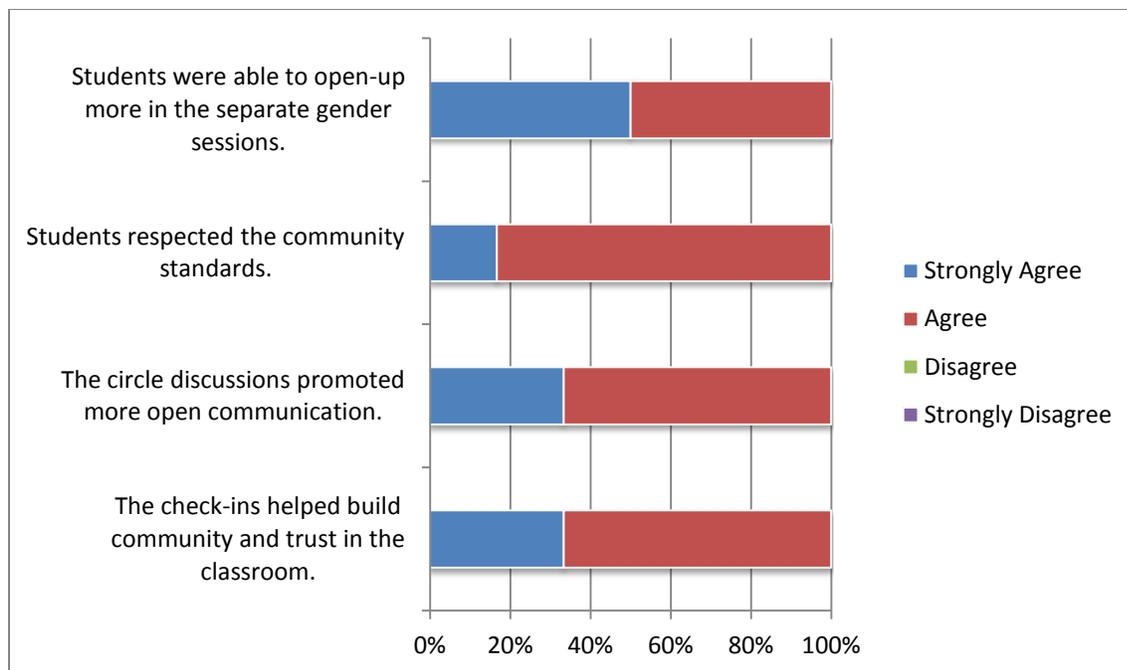


Figure 1: Teacher opinions on methodologies for peer support

A methodology that stands out the most for teachers, youth facilitators and grade nine students is the **separate gender sessions**. Fifty percent (50%) of the teachers *strongly agreed* and 50% *agreed* that students were able to open up more in the separate gender sessions. During three of the twelve sessions, students have discussions in groups of all guys and all girls then come together and share highlights anonymously. Separate gender topics include: gender stereotypes, media analysis and relationship needs and expectations. The separate gender sessions provide a different space for participation around issues that affect both males and females but may affect them differently.

Grade 9 student participation and comfort levels in the separate gender sessions varied considerably by gender. When asked to respond to the statement “I talked more during the separate gender sessions,” 49% of females *agreed* (32% *somewhat agreed*) and 38% of males *agreed* (31% *somewhat agreed*). However, during the focus groups with the grade nine students both male and female students mentioned how breaking into separate gender groups allowed them to learn and participate differently. Some examples of what grade nine students said during focus groups include:

- I liked the part we broke up into boys and girls groups and expressed what makes boys and girls unique or what we like about each other.
- Some things are very interesting but I must say I liked the parts when the boys and girls split up into different groups.
- More boy/girl groups!

Youth facilitators also observed that more students participated when they were divided into groups of all guys and all girls. In meetings, we often discussed the benefits and risks of dividing

the class into two separate gender groups. The following comments represent some of their thought around separate gender groups:

- The students were very quiet and uncomfortable. Following separate gender sessions they felt comfortable around us and the class felt more connected.
- Splitting into genders is a good way to separate the kids and let them feel more comfortable with just their same gender.
- The girls had so many things to say about the separate gender session. They all participated and share so many great ideas.
- Separate genders made them realize respect they should have for others.

In the program curriculum, facilitators are encouraged to provide three groups for students to join in an attempt to be more considerate and safe for students who do not feel comfortable identifying in binary male and female groups. During training facilitators were engaged in a discussion about separate gender sessions and why they are useful and why three groups might be needed. Youth facilitators and teachers could all agree why three group options were important during separate gender sessions. Teachers and facilitators are left to decide if they will split the class into two (male and female) or three (male, female, and open). Nine out of nine schools who participated in the HRY chose to divide the class into two binary groups. While students are told they can go into whichever group they feel most comfortable with this binary gender choice may have negative effects for gender queer, questioning or transgender youth. By dividing into groups of male and female, the HRY program conforms to a binary gender view. Although a continuum of gender identity is discussed during the session on sexual orientation and gender identity, physically dividing the class does not provide a safe or comfortable environment for everyone. We will continue to encourage youth facilitators and teachers to create an environment as safe as possible for all students, as well as emphasize the importance of inclusion and option in the separate gender sessions during training and check-in.

Youth empowerment

Youth empowerment ties together all the objectives of the program. Therefore, examples and indicators that contribute to youth empowerment are throughout the various sections of this report. This particular section focuses on youth responses to the survey statement “HRY influenced the way I think, feel and act for the better.” Seventy nine (79%) of **youth facilitators** *agreed* and 20% *somewhat agreed* to this statement. Thirty seven percent(37%) of **grade 9 students** *agreed* and 42% *somewhat agreed*. Overall, the majority of youth facilitating or participating in the program believe that HRY influenced the way they think, feel and act for the better. Some comments from the grade 9 students were:

- It influenced me because you got to be you.
- I learned more about people and choices.
- I'm not in a relationships but it gives me a better idea.
- I learned to think in ways more positively and that your not the only one going through things.
- It made me think about the topics we discussed and what to do if I had to deal with it in real life.

Youth adult partnerships

By working with youth facilitators, teachers can get to know the grade 9 students and the youth facilitators better. Teachers support the leadership skill development of the youth facilitators and can take a step back from the front of the classroom and observe how the grade 9 students learn from other youth. Teachers most often observed the sessions and intervened when discipline or motivation was necessary. They played a leadership role in coordinating the session schedules, assisting youth facilitators and communicating with the program coordinator. The following comments from teacher surveys describe their positive relationships with students:

- I learned a lot about my students, and their opinions on certain issues, topics.
- I felt that the program motivated the students which helped increase the level of respect in the classroom. My good rapport with students was also maintained throughout the program.
- It opened up dialogue.

The youth facilitators expressed increased empathy towards the teachers as they too faced challenges of working with a large group of grade 9 students. The experience of teaching left a lasting impression that helped create a new understanding of what being a teacher is like.

The youth facilitators also work in partnership with the program coordinator who provides support through training, regular in-school meetings and check-ins and sharing other youth development opportunities. Youth give formal and informal feedback to the coordinator in helping to problem solve and shape program review.

Experiential learning

Through the act of facilitating sessions for the grade nines, the youth facilitators are actively developing skills in leadership, public-speaking, communication, organization, social analysis and empathy as well as reviewing the content of the program. Youth use these skills to help inform their personal, social and educational choices. These skills are part of the initial training and follow-up sessions with the coordinator. The support helps youth to reflect and solidify what they are learning in their leadership roles.

One of the biggest changes that youth facilitators talk about in focus groups is their ability and confidence **speaking in front of a large group**. Each facilitator teaches anywhere from two to twelve sessions, giving them plenty of practice in public speaking. While facilitating sessions, students speak from prepared notes and more spontaneously. The following quotes from youth facilitators speak to the skills they gained:

- I developed leadership skills, how to approach people about certain situations, public speaking.
- I have developed better public speaking ability, and how to make the grades feel comfortable speaking to and confiding in us as facilitators.
- Public speaking has become a lot easier.

Along with public speaking skills, youth facilitators gain experience working with a large group of people. They facilitate sessions to maximize participation by everyone and manage time

between content and group discussions. The following quotes represent the **organizational, facilitation and leadership skills** gained:

- I have learned patience, adapting, listening, evaluating.
- I have developed leadership/teaching skills. I also learned a lot from the programs and the kids.
- Facilitating and carrying a discussion.
- How to improve and think on the spot better, how to deliver my message or lesson in a better way.
- Learning how to control/engage a group, grab their attention, give them instructions, speak up.

Each session is led by a pair of youth facilitators. Students get the opportunity to plan and deliver sessions with people they may not spend time with socially. During training and meetings, the group gets to know one another and develop friendships. HRY helps develop **social and teamwork skills**:

- I have developed the skills to help others and better myself.
- I have become more aware of how to comfort someone who is in need of somebody to talk to, how to identify a healthy/unhealthy relationships, how large or small someone's personal space is and how comfortable I am in talking to groups of people.

In working with other facilitators and with the grade 9 students, youth gain a **better understanding of others**. They learn about diversity and how it relates to a social analysis of forms of violence. This knowledge reminds students to learn about others as well as to question their own assumptions and judgements. The HRY youth facilitators invite grade 9 students to share their experiences with the goal of self-expression and social analysis, not for judgement. This storytelling helps develop empathy within the classroom and the youth facilitators. The following quotes represent some of the youth facilitator's thoughts on understanding and caring about the younger students:

- Skills that I developed are that you have to realize not everyone is the same.
- I learned patience with younger students.
- Being able to know the grade 9's on a more personal level.
- Seeing the grade 9's get more comfortable with their classmates.
- Being a role model.

Aside from practicing and acquiring skills, the youth facilitators- like the grade 9 students- learn information that contributes to their **personal growth and development**. For youth facilitators, sometimes that growth is in the form of newfound confidence and other times it is the direct application of information they are teaching to their own personal lives. Youth facilitators go through the program as grade 9 students themselves but the information really sinks in when they are reviewing and teaching it in subsequent years. Youth facilitators made the following comments about the personal affect on their lives:

- It has influenced me to be smarter with word choices and be more mindful of the language I use in my school and home.
- It may influence facilitators to have healthier relationships.

As the preceding quote mentions, HRY helps the youth facilitators make **better choices in their personal relationships** (friendships and dating). Although the content is directed at the grade 9 students, the youth facilitators apply the program personally to create healthy relationships and reduce unhealthy relationships. In focus groups, youth facilitators commented on the effect HRY had on their personal relationships:

- It taught me to be more responsible, more aware of types of relationships around me.
- I have become a better person because of HRY, realizing what is healthy and what is not.
- I developed my communication skills mainly, as well as my ability to think critically about relationships.

The leadership experience gives youth an opportunity to explore different interests and skills linked to a variety of **future education or career choices**. Some youth facilitators become passionate about the topics and decide to pursue careers related to social justice or youth social services. Others really enjoy the classroom leadership component and look towards the field of education. Others mentioned benefitting from particular skills that can help them as their future choices. All the youth facilitators agreed that at the very least, HRY was an excellent experience for their resumes and post-secondary education applications. The following quotes demonstrate a sample of the variety of ways HRY influenced youth facilitator's career and education choices:

- I have really enjoyed being a facilitator for the past three years and hopefully it will help with future endeavors.
- Being a facilitator over the past 3 years has had multiple benefits and I have developed many skills.
- It made me want to be a teacher more than ever now.

Youth facilitators teach the grade 9 students valuable skills and information and in doing so they are actively learning as well. The experiential learning influences young facilitator's skill development, self-worth, social views and future aspirations. Their learning is a crucial piece to the success of the HRY program.

Meaningful experience

Youth Facilitators like HRY because they feel they are making a difference in the lives of the younger students. Throughout the program, they share exciting learning moments that happen for the grade 9 students such as sharing new vocabulary terms or making space for people to talk who don't usually speak in class. These moments are what keep the youth facilitators motivated and engaged. In focus groups, they commented directly on these meaningful experiences:

- I like being able to help others.
- I liked knowing I was able to educate other students on healthy relationships.
- Being able to help grade 9's get more comfortable with each other throughout each session.
- Better understanding of terms.
- One of the benefits of being a facilitator was getting to teach about personal things.
- I think it helped them understand new things about lifestyle situations.
- Having students teach them showed school involvement.

Youth facilitators care about the topics they teach and about the future of youth in their communities. The HRY program provides an opportunity to get engaged and take action.

Summary

Youth development is one of the biggest strengths of the HRY program because of the tiered peer education approach. On one level, the grade 9 students are feeling more confident in being themselves with their peers and are gaining valuable skills. And on another level, the youth facilitators are putting their knowledge into action as they practice and gain further skills of leadership, public speaking and social justice through the meaningful experience of supporting each other and the grade nine students.

The two most effective methodologies used for youth development are youth facilitators and separate gender sessions. Both of these strategies change the way students relate to each other and participate in the classroom.

Conclusions

This year 424 grade nine students, 98 youth facilitators, 12 teachers and 9 high schools participated directly in the HRY program. The knowledge shared and skills gained will help all the participants to prevent violence in their lives, their schools and their communities.

For the grade 9 students, the topics that stood out the most to them ranged from communication and self-respect to signs of unhealthy and abusive relationships. Overall, the peer-facilitated approach combined with several separate gender sessions and regular check-ins helped students feel more comfortable with one another and increased participation. Students gained skills for creating and maintaining healthy relationships such as self-expression, assertive communication, personal boundaries, conflict resolution and self-esteem. They also gained a better understanding of the symptoms and root causes of violence such as homophobia, racism and sexism. Through this diversity lens, students broadened their social analysis and increased their capacity to challenge violence.

When examining the responses from the grade 9 HRY participants using gender analysis, it would appear that female students have a better understanding of the topics compared to the males as they were more likely to *agree* to the evaluation statements. Therefore there could be the assumption that females benefited more than males from the program. Yet the data also indicates that if the responses for *agree* and *somewhat agree* are combined the gap between male and female students closes to less than 5% and in several cases the combined percentage was higher for males. These cases were in response to questions relating to understanding how gender affects their lives, comfort in sharing opinions and experience, benefiting from role play, and finding the video on dating violence helpful. This suggests that male students are less likely to strongly agree to statements than female students, but are more likely to somewhat agree indicating a hesitation but not a disagreement in their responses to the statements. This means that while supporting students of all genders, HRY reaches male and female students at various

levels of comfort and expression but overall they agree that the program is helping them express themselves, understand healthy relationships and relate to one another.

For the youth facilitators, the highlight was in the meaningful experience of working with the grade 9 students to develop skills and knowledge. The leadership opportunity gave them more confidence, public-speaking experience and the awareness that they could make a difference. Facilitating the sessions allowed students to review information they had learned in previous years and to hear new perspectives on issues. The training workshops were successful in that they prepared students for their roles and also allowed them to get to know other young people from different communities. The training workshops also provided the facilitators with an opportunity to deepen their understanding of various topics like hypersexualization, gender and sexual identity and healthy relationships.

The evaluation process is important for identifying the successes and gaps in meeting the program objectives. Even more crucial was the youth voice and participation in the process. The HRY program greatly appreciates all the participants who make the program happen and who provide feedback so that the program can grow and adapt to best fit the needs and interests of youth.

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