



**RURAL YOUTH
EDUCATION PROJECT**

**FINAL
INTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT**

Prepared by:

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Internal Evaluation Consultant

November 2006

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Submitted to

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EVALUATION HIGHLIGHTS

This is the final evaluation report of the In-House Evaluation of the Rural Youth Education Project (RYEP). The RYEP was a four and a half year project which included four school years from 2002-03 to 2005-06. The RYEP was offered in Antigonish and Guysborough Counties and delivered by the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre. The project was funded by Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada through the Crime Prevention Investment Fund (CPIF) of the National Crime Prevention Strategy.

The RYEP implemented a gender-based, violence prevention model intended to provide youth with the knowledge and skills to build and maintain healthy relationships. The core curriculum, consisting of 12 lessons, was delivered to students in Personal Development and Relationship (PDR) classes in Grades 7, 8, 9 and in Career Life Management (CLM) 11 classes. The two project schools are East Antigonish Education Centre in Antigonish County and Chedabucto Place in Guysborough. Adult Facilitators worked collaboratively with classroom teachers to deliver the curriculum. The program involved a team of Youth Facilitators from high school who assisted with the delivery of the classroom sessions.

The RYEP was approved by the Strait Regional School Board and supported by the Nova Scotia Department of Education. The curriculum was originally developed by the Saltspring Women Opposed to Violence and Abuse (SWOVA) Community Development and Research Society in British Columbia and was adapted for use in rural Nova Scotia. The project incorporated adaptations to enhance the SWOVA curriculum particularly in the area of diversity with the assistance of a Diversity Consultant. The student population in the two project schools is diverse, with a significant percentage of students coming from the African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq communities.

The Antigonish Women's Resource Centre has been responsible for administration and coordination of the program. The project was carried out with ongoing consultation with SWOVA and in partnership with the East Antigonish Education Centre and Chedabucto Place. An Advisory Committee to the project was made up of administrators from the two schools and the Women's Resource Centre, representatives from the African Nova Scotian organizations, the Paq'tnekek First Nation, and key community-based organizations.

The internal evaluation was intended to enhance the external evaluation being conducted by Auguste Solutions and Associates Inc. (ASA). Internal evaluation participants included students taking the program, Youth Facilitators, Adult Facilitators, teachers and school administrators, and Advisory Committee members.

This internal evaluation report covers the four school years of the RYEP program, 2002-03 to 2005-06. It reports on the evaluation findings in the following areas: (1) feminist understanding of violence and abuse; (2) a focus on gender and diversity; (3) strategies to enable people in rural and remote areas to access violence prevention programs; (4) safety strategies that enable women and girls to access services and give them options; (5) multi-dimensional, interactive approaches to intervention; and (6) impact on youth participants.

The following are highlights of the evaluation findings and recommendations.

1. STUDENT AND YOUTH FACILITATOR PARTICIPATION

- ♦ Sixty (60) classes with a total of 1277 students have received the 12 classroom sessions in the four school years that the RYEP program has been offered. This included 19 Grade 7 classes, 18 Grade 8 classes, 19 Grade 9 classes and 4 CLM 11 classes.
- ♦ There were 19 Youth Facilitators each year with for a total of 76 Youth Facilitators.

2. FEMINIST UNDERSTANDING OF VIOLENCE AND ABUSE:

- ♦ Strategies that worked well to address gender stereotypes involved: various classroom strategies; showing by example or role modelling by Youth and Adult Facilitators; delivery by a community-based organization with knowledge and experience in dealing with stereotypes; and policies and programs in the schools that support changes related to gender stereotypes.
- ♦ Challenges faced by Youth and Adult Facilitators in working toward changing attitudes about gender stereotypes fell into five general categories: it is a long and slow process; community factors; students' sense of control over gender stereotypes; resistance to new concepts and to change; and use of the term feminism.
- ♦ The long list of gender stereotypes identified by students taking the program and Youth Facilitators is a clear indicator that they recognize the stereotypes for both boys and girls. Similarly, students indicated that there is racism and homophobia and identified stereotypes related to race and sexual orientation.
- ♦ Students identified individual challenges they face at school or in their community related to gender stereotyping, racism, and homophobia. They named personal forms of violence that can occur against individuals as well as systemic forms of violence and why these forms of violence exist. This indicates their understanding of the complexities associated with creating change related to stereotypes and to addressing associated violence and abuse.
- ♦ Some students readily identified strategies they use for acting differently with respect to stereotypes as a result of the RYEP.

3. A FOCUS ON GENDER AND DIVERSITY

- ♦ Two key elements used to address diversity are the principle that diversity must be visible and program leaders need to recognize that diversity is both challenging and complex.
- ♦ Three key strategies for addressing diversity have been: program leadership, resources and training; modelling gender and diversity; and appropriate curriculum content and delivery.
- ♦ By the start of the third year of the program, males, females, African Nova Scotians and Mi'kmaq were well represented on the youth team. In the fourth year there was a shift in composition with no representation from the African

Nova Scotian community in one school and with twice as many females than males in the other school.

- ◆ Gender diversity was maintained on the adult team each year. There were difficulties in retaining Adult Facilitators from the Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian communities and to keep adult male facilitators for more than one year. Some reasons for these difficulties have been identified. The Women's Centre recognized these difficulties and suggested that these issues would need to be looked at when structuring staff positions in future projects in order to more consistently engage diverse communities and male facilitators.

4. STRATEGIES TO ENABLE PEOPLE IN RURAL AREAS TO ACCESS VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAMS

- ◆ Delivering as in in-school program meant that each student had the opportunity to participate and, therefore, no-one was left out due to transportation and other barriers they might face by living in a rural community.
- ◆ Strategies that enabled buy-in and trust to deliver the program were: overall management and coordination by a skilled Coordinator; positive working relationships between Adult Facilitators, teachers and administrators; the role of the Adult Facilitator as open, approachable, and not in an authority position; and the role of the Youth Facilitator as a role model for other students.
- ◆ Parents indicated that providing information to them about the program was important. They found regular articles in school newspapers the most useful way to learn about the program. Access to program contact information was important if further information was required.
- ◆ To ensure the Youth Facilitator position was accessible, the RYEP developed and used an open, transparent recruitment and selection process; provided opportunities for youth input into what would make the position accessible; and, made changes based on their suggestions.
- ◆ Youth Facilitators' suggestions to make the position more accessible affected the following: (a) the timing of youth team meetings; (b) recruiting and hiring sooner with more advertising; (c) finding the right forum for students to learn about the position; (d) being more proactive in recruitment of young men, youth from different cultural backgrounds and with different experiences; (e) opening the position to Grade 10 (RYEP started with Grades 11 and 12); and (f) hiring previous facilitators to provide consistency and support to new recruits.
- ◆ The RYEP considered realities of the rural communities served by the two schools by adjusting the curriculum to include elements of cultural diversity, by considering costs of time and distance to travel for facilitators and program coordination, as well as for getting people together for meetings and other program activities. It has been an ongoing challenge to bring people together for training, meetings and informal networking.
- ◆ An ongoing reality of the program has been to be sensitive to the fact that the program challenges attitudes and beliefs that may be held by some community members. This sensitivity was required in the classroom setting and in the support

of Youth Facilitators who may have faced additional pressures in their role in the school, at home, or in the community.

- ◆ Two kinds of relationships were helpful in supporting the program, the formal partnerships with the schools and the school board and the strengthened relationships with communities, community organizations, the Youth Health Centre and the Afrikan Canadian Heritage and Friendship Centre.
- ◆ The Advisory Committee played an effective advocacy and support role at critical points in the program's development, provided input and feedback on various reports and documents, assisted with recruitment and hiring of Adult and Youth Facilitators, and shared information within their organizations and communities.

5. SAFETY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

- ◆ Evidence indicates that various mechanisms and support procedures were effective in ensuring safety and confidentiality. Any issues related to confidentiality or disclosures were handled appropriately.
- ◆ Teachers and Adult Facilitators pointed to several classroom techniques that promoted safety such as developing community standards, opportunities to ask questions anonymously, addressing inappropriate comments directly, and using an open, horseshoe or circle format for discussion.
- ◆ The relationship between the students and facilitators, who are not authority figures, and separate gender sessions were important to enabling boys and girls to open up and talk more comfortably about issues. In addition, the separate gender sessions enabled better sharing in the mixed group. After the separate gender sessions, both boys and girls were more willing to share their ideas in the larger, mixed group.
- ◆ There was some indication that boys and girls might behave differently when feeling safe and that boys may initially tend to be aggressive when they are starting to feel safe, with the suggestion that, if followed through effectively, it could be turned into a positive learning experience.
- ◆ A number of students taking the program and Youth Facilitators were able to identify the need for self care and when to seek help.

6. MULTI-DIMENSIONAL, INTERACTIVE APPROACHES TO INTERVENTION

- ◆ The program curriculum was assessed and approved by the Nova Scotia Department of Education to be a fit with the PDR curriculum for Grades 7, 8, and 9.
- ◆ The majority of students in all grade in 2004-05 said the interactive techniques such as gender sessions, small groups, discussion and video were useful or very useful. For the most part students found role plays were less useful than the techniques just mentioned, but more useful than handouts and workbooks.
- ◆ When compared by gender (in 2004-05 and 2005-06), over 80% of the female students found separate gender sessions useful to very useful compared to about 65% of male students.

- ◆ The ideas that were hardest for students to accept were related to sexuality, dating violence, gender stereotypes, racism, bigger picture analysis, and that the small things you say (e.g. jokes, etc.) can affect people.
- ◆ Both the Youth and Adult Facilitators identified three key elements of the program that help to overcome resistance to change: (a) the Adult Facilitators putting the issues out there, willing to discuss the tough issues or raising awareness through videos; (b) a safe environment where students can say what they need to say; and (c) interactive techniques, particularly the separate gender groups, sharing stories, and information and support about where to get help.
- ◆ The Youth Facilitators and Advisory Committee members identified community and school factors that can support and that can challenge the curriculum.
- ◆ Strategies for an effective adult team include strong facilitation skills, understanding and comfort with the program content, teambuilding and cooperation, and working effectively with the youth team.
- ◆ The Adult Facilitators found working with the youth team to be both rewarding and challenging. They were continually working to strengthen the Youth Facilitator's role in the classroom and to improve the focus of youth team meetings.
- ◆ Youth involvement is an important dimension of the program and it has grown over the four years with Youth Facilitators taking a more active role in the classroom.
- ◆ An important lesson learned about youth engagement is, first, to give them a legitimate role in the program; and, secondly, to provide a variety of opportunities for students to have their voice heard in relation to their role. This has been demonstrated throughout the life of the project. Over the four years, the Youth Facilitators offered recommendations to improve their role in the classroom, training programs, and youth team meetings.
- ◆ Teachers and Advisory Committee members commented on the importance of having the youth team component to the program and its value to the students and to the leadership development of the youth themselves.
- ◆ The Youth Facilitators appreciated what they learned through working as a team. Most said that working in a team was a positive activity, although some pointed out that teamwork was not always easy.
- ◆ What works well in the Youth Facilitator recruitment process is using multiple strategies for recruitment; considering incentives for application; using work undertaken by youth as concrete examples of what being a Youth Facilitator involves; and having a well organized application and interview process.

7. IMPACT ON YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

Impact on Youth Facilitators

In the two years that the Appreciative Inquiry process (2003-04 and 2005-06) was used to gather information from the Youth Facilitators, there were similarities in what Youth Facilitators said they gained with respect to knowledge, skills and attitudes. Because these represent ½ of all the Youth Facilitators over the four years, it can be concluded that these findings represent what most Youth Facilitators would have experienced through this program.

- ♦ The Youth Facilitators expanded their knowledge and increased their confidence and skills, particularly public speaking and communication skills.
- ♦ The Youth Facilitators are more open to difference and diversity through understanding difference, accepting others, valuing and respecting difference, and being more respectful of others.
- ♦ They are more open to talking about personal experiences, with some being able to address their own healing through this avenue.
- ♦ The Youth Facilitators have benefited from working with and meeting new people.
- ♦ Youth Facilitators found teaching and being looked up to as a role model to be a positive experience. They appreciated working together on creative projects for presentation to the classroom.
- ♦ Youth Facilitators reported changing their behaviour and making conscious choices to act differently; for example, decreasing violent behaviour or ‘thinking before they act or speak.’
- ♦ Youth Facilitators reported helping to influence change outside the classroom.
- ♦ Having a positive impact on the students overall made them feel positive about their role in the program.
- ♦ They identified and appreciated the positive support from the Adult Facilitators.
- ♦ Youth Facilitators learned about and appreciated working in a team and acknowledged both the positive aspects and the need to work through challenges associated with teamwork.

Impact on the Students Taking the Program

The program has had a positive impact on the majority of students judging from their responses to the survey and their participation in student focus groups (2005-06).

- ♦ When asked what they appreciated most, from 2003-04 to 2005-06 between 81% and 83% offered positive comments about the program.
- ♦ Of those who offered positive comments, between 70% and 81% over the four years said they appreciated the course content, interactive activities and separate gender groups.
- ♦ In the last two years a few students mentioned they appreciated the process – opportunities to talk about what is important to them – and the outcomes – increased understanding and respect for each other.

- ◆ Although there were some variations from grade to grade and between genders, it is evident that students generally found learning about stereotypes, understanding differences, conflict resolution/problem solving and communication skills to be helpful. Girls tended to find the topics slightly more helpful to them than the boys.
- ◆ Students said what they learned about how African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq communities contribute to diversity less helpful than the other topics, although still generally helpful. This fits with the Adult Facilitator's comments that, while there is one session that focuses on diversity, another session that focuses on 'culture' and specifically different local cultures would be an asset to the program.
- ◆ When asked what they had learned about violence, $\frac{3}{4}$ or 75% of the students in 2005-06 and 2004-05 offered positive comments about what they had learned. This is a small increase over the response in 2003-04 which was 68%.
- ◆ Of those who they had learned more about violence an increasing number of students said they were learning to prevent violence or were learning strategies to deal with violence (from 20% in 2003-04 to 35% in 2005-06).
- ◆ The majority of students in all grades said that things "stayed the same" with respect to differences in their self esteem, their relationships, and in the school. The percentage of students indicating things stayed the same tended to increase as the grades went up from Grade 7 to CLM11.
- ◆ When compared to other grades, the Grade 7 students reported the largest increase in self esteem (just under 40%), in positive change in their relationships (about 30%), and that things had changed for the better at school (between 22% and 33.8%).
- ◆ An average of 57% of the students over the four years said the program was helpful, fun or interesting overall. When looking at individual years, the percentages were fairly consistent ranging from 52% and 53% in 2003-04 and 2005-06 respectively to 62% and 61% in 2002-03 and 2004-05 respectively.
- ◆ It is evident from the student focus groups (2005-06) that students had developed knowledge and skills in areas directly related to the curriculum topics such as understanding difference, stereotypes, abuse and violence, sexual harassment, relationships, boundaries, assertiveness, communication skills, problem solving, and conflict resolution. Furthermore, it is evident that students were acting on what they had learned by transferring it to their everyday experiences in their relationships at school and at home.
- ◆ In the focus groups, the students self reported that they had more consideration for others, particularly more respect for others, thinking more before they speak or act, treating others better, and getting along better with others. Some said they were helping others with their problems or were challenging others if they were treating others badly, hurting others or hurting themselves.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the recommendations for future healthy relationships programs based on the experience and lessons learned from the RYEP program.

Best Practices and Ongoing Challenges

Ideally, future programs would incorporate the best practices from the RYEP program and would be prepared for the ongoing challenges related to delivering a curriculum that ensures diversity in all aspects of the program and is sensitive to realities of rural communities.

Future programs would consider the best practices and challenges in five areas: (1) feminist understanding of violence and abuse; (2) a focus on gender and diversity; (3) strategies to enable people in rural and remote areas to access violence prevention programs; (4) safety strategies that enable women and girls to access services and give them options; (5) multi-dimensional, interactive approaches to intervention.

Overall Program Approach

To be most effective, future programs must include these components:

- ♦ A community-based organization with experience and knowledge with these issues should deliver the program and/or provide ongoing coordination, training, and consultation in the delivery of the program. This will ensure consistency in curriculum delivery and will enable the trust that is required for students to fully participate in this program.
- ♦ The composition of the adult and youth teams should reflect the diversity of the communities that the school serves.
- ♦ Adult Facilitator teams should be female and male teams, preferably from diverse cultural backgrounds and external to the schools. Adult Facilitators must have an excellent knowledge of the topics and comfort level with delivering all aspects of the curriculum.
- ♦ The adult team works with a Youth Facilitator team in each school to deliver the curriculum. The youth team should have a designated role in curriculum delivery and should participate in developing interactive techniques to deliver their portion of the curriculum. This can be accomplished during training and youth team meetings.

Adult Facilitator Team

- ♦ The Adult Facilitators should work as a team to model curriculum messages with respect to gender and diversity.
- ♦ The Adult Facilitator team should develop positive relationships with the respective classroom teachers and school administration.
- ♦ Ideally, the Adult Facilitators should have a designated space in the schools, preferably with computer and telephone access, where they can work together and

with Youth Facilitators to prepare for and provide follow-up to classes. This space or another designated space could be used for youth team meetings.

- ◆ If future programs include male staff working out of the Women's Centre, the Women's Centre should find ways to be more proactive in supporting and including male staff. This could include providing meeting space, office space, and resources that can be accessed freely by male staff which would not infringe on Women's Centre direct service space and would respect policies and procedures that support direct services to women.

Youth Involvement

- ◆ An important component of youth involvement is the youth role in the classroom and in other activities that can help to promote and reinforce the curriculum messages, such as youth health fairs, Mi'kmaq Heritage month, Black History month, and December 6 remembrance of the Montreal Massacre.
- ◆ Ensure opportunities for the Youth Facilitators to all meet together regularly, to continue to develop their knowledge and skills related to curriculum topics and program delivery.
- ◆ Ensure accessibility of youth to the Youth Facilitator position through similar strategies used for this program; and, most importantly, by consulting with youth and acting on their recommendations for ensuring access.

Training Programs

Adult and Youth Facilitator training programs should include:

- ◆ At least one annual training event that strengthens and supports the adult and youth facilitator teams.
- ◆ Discussion and analysis of critical issues such as feminism, racism, and men's role in helping gender roles become more balanced; diversity training, curriculum topics, facilitation skills, strategies in handling different aspects of resistance to change, and teambuilding.

Interactive Teaching Techniques

- ◆ The program must incorporate interactive techniques that engage the students and interest them in the topics.
- ◆ The program should incorporate separate gender sessions where girls and boys can open up to discussion of important issues, and then share their insights with each other.
- ◆ The program should incorporate strategies that enable students to overcome resistance to new ideas and change through the three components identified in this project: Adult Facilitators putting the issues out for discussion; provision of a safe environment to enable students to express their opinions and ideas; and interactive techniques to facilitate active involvement by students.

