



**RURAL YOUTH  
EDUCATION PROJECT**

**HIGHLIGHTS  
INTERIM INTERNAL  
EVALUATION REPORT**

**Prepared by**

**Peggy Mahon B.A. M.Ad.Ed.  
Internal Evaluation Consultant**

**February 2005**

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**Submitted to**

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Thank you to everyone who participated and so willingly provided insights. Many perspectives are included in this report from students and Youth Facilitators, Adult Facilitators, teachers and school administrators, to Advisory Committee members.

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I wish to acknowledge **Nancy Peters** and **Jean Crosby**, who developed the original In-House Evaluation Framework (2003). Nancy Peters also conducted the PRISM RYEP Project research (2003) which has been used to provide the community context and background information in this report.

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Thank you to **Jean Crosby**, the RYEP Coordinator and **Jackie Jacques**, RYEP Office Administrator, who provided invaluable support throughout this portion of the internal evaluation.

*Peggy Mahon, Internal Evaluation Consultant*

### *About the Internal Evaluation Consultant*

Peggy Mahon has 25 years experience in community development and organization development, including program evaluation. She has conducted extensive research and worked in a community development capacity on issues related to violence against women since 1987. Formerly a staff member of the Extension Department StFX University for 15 years, Peggy has worked in her own community development consulting business since 2002.



## EVALUATION HIGHLIGHTS

This is an interim evaluation report of the In-House Evaluation of the Rural Youth Education Project (RYEP), a four-year project offered in Antigonish and Guysborough Counties and delivered by the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre. The project is funded by Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada through the Crime Prevention Investment Fund (CPIF) of the National Crime Prevention Strategy.

The RYEP implements 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, is 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 Antigonish East Education Centre in Antigonish County and Chedabucto Place in Guysborough. Two teams of Adult Facilitators work collaboratively with classroom teachers to deliver the curriculum. The program involves a team of Youth Facilitators from high school who assist with the delivery of the classroom sessions.

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

The Antigonish Women's Resource Centre administers and coordinates the program, with ongoing consultation with SWOVA, in partnership with the Antigonish East Education Centre and Chedabucto Place, and with support of an Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee is made up of administrators from the two schools and the Women's Resource Centre, representatives from the African Nova Scotian organizations, the Paq'tnkek First Nation, and key community-based organizations.

The In-House Evaluation is 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.

The interim evaluation report covers the first two school years of the RYEP (2002-03 and 2003-04) and is intended to provide insights into the progress related to the six evaluation themes which include the impact on youth and five features of Best Practices in Violence Prevention as follows: (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 is a summary of the evaluation findings. These are reported, along with suggestions for next steps, in the Conclusions and Suggestions for Next Steps section of the report.

## **1. FEMINIST UNDERSTANDING OF VIOLENCE AND ABUSE**

- ◆ Both the Youth and Adult Facilitators identified a number of strategies that worked well from their perspective in addressing gender stereotypes, as well as challenges.
- ◆ There were mixed results as to whether teaching gender stereotypes was having an immediate impact, with some feeling it was either too soon or too difficult to know what the impact would be, and others indicating that some impact had occurred or would eventually occur. The long list of stereotypes identified by the Youth Facilitators is a clear indicator that they Youth Facilitators recognize the stereotypes for both boys and girls. Also, their ability to identify both strategies and challenges indicates their understanding of the complexities associated with creating change related to gender stereotypes and to addressing associated violence and abuse.
- ◆ In the student survey, a few students indicated that what they appreciated about the course were some of the broader concepts such as gender, sexism, racism, and sexual harassment; most of those students were in CLM 11.

## **2. A FOCUS ON GENDER AND DIVERSITY**

- ◆ The RYEP program is making a conscious effort at every level of the program to model gender and diversity through multiple strategies. This is reinforced by the principle that diversity must be visible which was mentioned by teachers, Advisory Committee members and facilitators.
- ◆ By the start of the third year of the program, male and female, African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq are well represented on the youth team.
- ◆ While most defined the focus on gender and diversity as achieving a gender balance and cultural diversity among the adult and youth teams, it is clear that as the program evolves, other dimensions of diversity are being included such as age, sexuality, rural-urban (from here; come-from-away), and difference of perspectives and opinions.
- ◆ There have been difficulties in retaining adult male facilitators from year to year, and to recruit an Adult Facilitator from the African Nova Scotian community. Reasons given for this include: it is a part-time position with an erratic schedule that makes it difficult to complement with other work; the position is not well-paid; it is located in a rural community with a relatively small population and therefore fewer qualified people.

## **3. STRATEGIES TO ENABLE PEOPLE IN RURAL AREAS TO ACCESS VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAMS**

- ◆ Teachers, school administrators, Advisory Committee members and Adult Facilitators identified strategies that have been successful in supporting access by youth to various aspects of the RYEP program.
- ◆ Efforts have been made to ensure that the opportunity to become a Youth Facilitator is as accessible as possible to students in the schools. Part of this strategy was asking for *and* acting on youth input into how to make the position more accessible to students.
- ◆ The realities of offering programs in rural communities have been considered from an administrative and curriculum point of view including: practicalities of getting people together, the time and distance to travel for meetings and program activities, and

recognizing the uniqueness of different rural communities and schools particularly related to cultural diversity and geography and to adjust the curriculum accordingly.

- ◆ There has been recognition of the need for sensitivity to traditionally held attitudes and values that may be held by student's family or community members, and sensitivity to safety and confidentiality for students and Youth Facilitators.
- ◆ Both the Adult and Youth Facilitators have worked toward establishing a trust relationship with students in the classroom.
- ◆ Positive working relationships have been established between Adult Facilitators and teachers and between Adult Facilitators and other in-school programs.
- ◆ Both Adult Facilitators and teachers acknowledged the need for more clarity of the teacher's role in the classroom.
- ◆ Program partners, many of whom are also Advisory Committee members, have played a role in supporting and advocating for the program with the School Board, in the schools, in the community, and with parents.
- ◆ There needs to be more work on building relationships between the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre and the African Nova Scotian communities to strengthen understanding of the Women's Centre's role in this initiative and its broader work with youth.
- ◆ The Advisory Committee members wanted more role clarity, to strengthen the diversity component, and a different way to involve committee members.

### **3. SAFETY AND CONFIDENTIALITY**

- ◆ Evidence indicates that various mechanisms and support procedures are in place to address safety and confidentiality for the students, Youth Facilitators, and Adult Facilitators.
- ◆ Both teachers and Adult Facilitators agreed that the relationship between the students and facilitators, who are not authority figures, and separate gender sessions were important to safety, particularly in enabling students to open up and talk more comfortably.
- ◆ There were some indications 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.
- ◆ In the student survey, some students identified that they had learned ways to deal with or cope with violence or to prevent violence. Other students identified increased self esteem, differences in ways of behaving in their relationships or at the school that they were looking after themselves more.

### **4. MULTI-DIMENSIONAL, INTERACTIVE APPROACHES TO INTERVENTION**

- ◆ The RYEP program fits with the PDR curriculum and it enhances the current curriculum by adding an element of being current and relevant for the students.
- ◆ By its association with PDR, the students may not treat the program seriously. The school system does not treat PDR as a serious subject and it is often relegated to

whenever it can fit into the program, which creates scheduling difficulties for the RYEP. There are also challenges with scheduling the RYEP into Grade 11 classes. There is a fit with the CLM 11 curriculum; however, due to the need to focus on required academic courses in Grade 11, Grade 10 students make up the majority of students in CLM classes.

- ◆ The program is currently not an integral part of the curriculum, although many of those interviewed stated the program should be sustained and should continue because of the benefits to the students and to the Youth Facilitators.
- ◆ The majority of students in the program preferred interactive techniques such as discussion, small groups, role play, and separate gender sessions over written materials and workbooks. This was supported by the observation of the Youth Facilitators and Advisory Committee members.
- ◆ Youth Facilitators identified the need to improve and energize some curriculum activities. Teachers indicated that the success of interactive techniques varied to the degree to which the facilitators were able to engage 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 Adult Facilitators play a pivotal role in program delivery through modelling their relationship related to gender and diversity; in gaining buy-in and trust to deliver the program from students, Youth Facilitators, teachers, school administrators, and other in-school programs; and in ensuring safety and confidentiality policies and procedures are followed. In the classroom the Adult Facilitators work as a team and with the Youth Facilitators to deliver the curriculum. They also debrief with Youth Facilitators who are teaching in the classroom, and facilitate youth team meetings.
- ◆ Adult Facilitators report that working with the youth team is both rewarding and challenging. They are continually working to improve the youth team, to strengthen the Youth Facilitator's role in the classroom, and to improve the focus of youth team meetings. They asked for training in how to run a youth group, particularly how to make it more engaging.
- ◆ Youth involvement is an important dimension of the program and it has grown. Youth Facilitators are taking a more active role in the classroom. They requested more involvement in training and for youth team meetings to be used in a more focused way to plan classroom sessions, improve their facilitation skills, and to plan other activities such as presentations for the Youth Health Fair, the program display board, etc. They would like to be more involved in a mini youth team in the classroom setting.
- ◆ 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.

## 6. IMPACT ON YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

- ◆ The *Youth Facilitators* have expanded their knowledge, developed new skills, changed their attitudes, and “improved their values” by acting differently than they did before as follows:
  - Youth Facilitators are more open to difference and diversity through understanding difference, accepting others, valuing and respecting difference, and being more respectful of others.
  - Youth Facilitators are changing their behaviour and making conscious choices to act differently. This was particularly noted related to decreasing violent behaviour.
  - Youth Facilitators stated they have increased confidence in public speaking and communication skills. They are more open to talk about personal experiences, with some students able to address their own healing through this avenue.
  - Youth Facilitators find working with new people to be a positive experience.
  - Youth Facilitators said that teaching is both a positive and challenging experience, as is being looked up to as a role model.
  - Youth Facilitators reported helping to influence change outside the classroom and having a positive impact on the students overall made them feel positive about their role in the program.
  
- ◆ The program is having an impact on *the students*, judging from their own comments and the comments made by the Youth Facilitators, by teachers, Adult Facilitators, and Advisory Committee members who work in the school or live in the community.
  - The majority of the students or 57% said that they found the program helpful, fun or interesting overall. In 2003-04, when asked what they appreciated most or what stood out to them, 83% offered positive comments about the program, commenting both on the various methods used to engage students as well as the content.
  - When asked what they had learned about violence, 68% of those surveyed in 2002-03 and 2003-04 offered positive comments about what they had learned. Of those about 80% said they had learned more about violence (different types, etc) while 20% said they learned strategies for dealing with violence or to prevent it.
  - With respect to self esteem, the Grade 7 classes experienced the greatest increase in self esteem.
  - Between 30 and 40% of the students in three grades - 7, 8, and CLM 11 – said that there are differences in their relationships, with some mentioning having learned how to deal with problems or about people, and others noting different ways they are behaving with others in relationships.
  - With respect to differences in the school, students in Grade 7 noticed a change, which could be due to their increased awareness of what constitutes violence. Those who offered comments on changes indicated either changes in their own behaviour or changes they were observing in others.