



## Sexual health peer education programs in the community youth sector: what works, what doesn't and what can they achieve?

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Sexual Health and Blood Borne Virus Program



## YACWA

- Peak body for the WA youth and community sector
- 250 organisational members
- Core business: policy and research, organisational development, advocacy, training, networking



## Overview of



### Rationale

- 2006 state-wide youth consultation
- International evidence base and theoretical support

### Participatory Action Research (PAR)

- Research support from WA Centre for Health Promotion Research



## Project goal

To establish an ongoing presence of sexual health, information and education, including STIs and BBVs, in the WA youth sector by development and implementation of effective and sustainable youth peer education strategies



## Project objectives

- **Capacity building** of agency, youth workers & young people
- Determine the key **enablers** and **barriers** for successful program delivery
- Investigate the **value** of peer based education for youth sexual health and BBV promotion (in out of school settings)

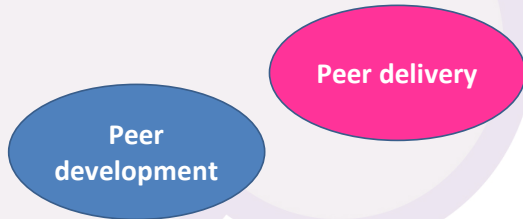


## Action Research Trials

- Six agencies and six trial SHBBV peer programs
- 13 youth workers, over 50 young people
- Youth worker training and monthly monitoring and reflection
- No set program curriculum – each program designed based on local needs and context
- Informal, creative, mixed-methods
- 3 months to 1.5 year duration



## Defining peer education



Shiner (1999)

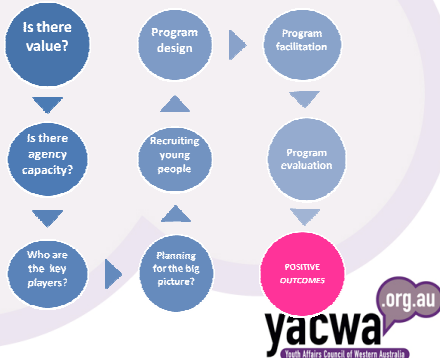


## Data collection

- My Peer Toolkit [www.mypeer.org.au](http://www.mypeer.org.au)
  - Predominantly qualitative methods
1. Youth worker observations and reflections
  2. Evaluation with young people (creative strategies, focus groups etc)



## Results



## Impact on young people

- Increased knowledge of STIs, BBVs and other SH topics
- Reduced stigma and increased comfort in talking about sexual health topics
- Increased self-confidence and self-identity
- Improved social and interpersonal skills, including coping with emotions and managing conflict
- Increased social connectedness – with peers, youth workers and youth agency
- Improved help-seeking attitudes and behaviours



## Impact on others

- Increased informal peer conversations (with accurate information)
- Formal or planned peer education strategies with other young people
- Agency service improvement and mobilisation



## Impact on youth workers

- Increased confidence and competence in planning, implementing and evaluating programs

*"I feel a lot more confident. [I had] a fear that if I didn't know it or get it right that it would be disastrous. I don't need to have all the answers. Young people are ok with this and forgiving of this"*

*"I guess our approach has probably changed dramatically from when we first started...you know it feels really easy and I guess very much driven by what the girls have said about"*



## Impact on youth workers

- Increased SHBBV-related conversations with young people

*"I think we bring it up a bit more now than we used to. About healthy relationships, not just sex. We have a problem with the way our males view females. They've always been like that but I think the gender and healthy relationships stuff learnt through the programs helps us with the boys."*

- Improved relationships with young people



## Challenges & gaps

- Minimal improvements to youth agency capacity, over and above the staff capacity - sustainability of programs linked to youth work capacity – vulnerable to staff turnover
- Not enough investment in working with management
- Limited data on engaging young males
- Limited data on impact on young people receiving the peer education



## Future directions

- 3-year service agreement with Department of Health, WA
- Focus is on:
  - Youth sector capacity building
  - Impact of YEP Crew program on young people
  - Improving YP access to SHBBV services
  - Longitudinal evaluation of peer programs



## Key messages

- Peer based programs can have a range of positive impacts on young people, youth workers and youth agency communities
- They create safe, supportive spaces for the conversations to happen
- Youth participation, flexibility and sustained engagement are essential when working with marginalised young people
- To be effective and sustained, programs need to be adequately resourced and youth workers need to be trained and supported



## References

Shiner, M. (1999). Defining Peer Education. *Journal of Adolescence*, 22 (4), 555 – 566.

Western Australian Centre for Health Promotion Research. (2010). *My-Peer Toolkit*, Retrieved from <http://www.mypeer.org.au/>



## Acknowledgements

- Department of Health, WA (SHBBVP)
- WA Centre for Health Promotion Research
- Reference Group
- Youth agency management
- Youth workers
- Young people



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