VOICE OF TEENS: HEALTH EDUCATION PROJECT

BACKGROUND

The Adolescent Health Project has been operating since April 1991 on a one year Health Promotion Grant from Health and Welfare Canada, with the support of the Antigonish Women's Association as its sponsoring organization. The primary goal of the project is to explore the health needs of adolescents in the Antigonish town and county by engaging them in a community based needs assessment. We are using the World Health Organization's definition of health as state of SOCIAL, PHYSICAL & EMOTIONAL well-being. The project has had the intensive involvement of over 40 local teenagers in its development and planning. It has a consultative Adolescent Advisory Committee of 11 members who are responsible for helping to direct and oversee the project overall. In addition, the project has a Community Advisory Committee, consisting of 6 community representatives and 2 members of the Adolescent Advisory Committee.

The Adolescent Advisory Committee is comprised of a reasonably representative cross-section of male and female adolescents from both the Antigonish town and county. One of the primary tasks undertaken by this committee was the development of a Teen Health Survey. This 14 page questionnaire, covering areas ranging from substance use and abuse, to mental health, to relationships and sexuality, was administered during the months of July through October 1991, by 10 specially trained adolescent research assistants to over 400 teenagers in Antigonish town and county. We are presently involved in data analysis around these surveys. The preliminary data from the Teen Health Survey has allowed us to begin to identify the key health concerns of local adolescents which we intend to address in the "Voice of Teens" project.

In addition to the Teen Health Survey, project staff have been interviewing and meeting with individuals and groups in Antigonish to collect community impressions around local teen health issues. We have found our community contacts to be highly receptive to this process and their input have enriched and further developed our insights into community adolescent health needs.

Our final report will be completed by the end of February 1992, with a strong focus on the descriptive/personal element of the adolescent health experience in our community. We have been asked by a number of individuals and community groups to provide opportunities for discussion and dialogue around the results of the needs assessment research. The Adolescent Research Assistants who administered the Teen Health Survey, and the members of the Adolescent Advisory Committee have indicated a strong interest by community teenagers about the survey findings, as well as a desire to process and discuss these in more detail. As our mandate and funding for the Adolescent Health Project ends April 8, 1992, we will have neither the time nor resources to provide the community with these opportunities on anything but a preliminary level. With a desire to communicate their insights, concerns, and needs around teen health issues to other teens and the community, the Adolescent Advisory Committee has developed the "Voice of Teens: Community Health Education Project."

VOICE OF TEENS: COMMUNITY HEALTH EDUCATION PROJECT
(A working draft of a proposal for CHPF)

1. PROJECT SUMMARY

The "Voice of Teens" will enable adolescents in Antigonish town and county to engage in a health information and education project with a goal towards increasing awareness in both the adolescent and adult community around the major health issues facing our teenagers today. This project has been designed to provide adolescents with the information and skills necessary to effectively analyze and communicate around some of the fundamental health concerns in their lives. The "Voice of Teens" will specifically address those health issues which the adolescents of our community have cited as crucial concerns, i.e., drug/alcohol use and abuse; mental health issues/ depression/ suicide; reproductive health issues/S.T.D./sexuality/teen pregnancy; body image. These health needs have been identified through a needs assessment survey which was developed and implemented by adolescents working on the Adolescent Health Project.

The Voice of Teens Project will provide training for 8 - 10 adolescents, (male/female ages 15 - 18) in self-awareness, community/social analysis, health information, and communication to enable them to describe and inform other adolescents and the community around teen health issues; utilizing the Adolescent Health Project report as a primary resource. Having been so trained, these teen health educators will have an opportunity to positively impact and communicate their health concerns to their peers and the community at large. Through effective, structured dialogue and discussion, the Voice of Teens Project hopes to provide potential for energizing and focusing the community to begin to think, analyze and appropriately respond to adolescent health issues in a manner that is sensitive to our unique cultural and social make-up, as well as constructive in producing health promotion responses and activities that address these health concerns.

Our many and varied contacts with teenagers, professionals, and groups in the past year have indicated to us that there is a strong desire on the part of the Antigonish community to begin to better understand and address adolescent health issues. Through the process of information sharing, and informed, positive interactions, there will be an increased likelihood that our adolescents and larger community may work together to better respond to some of our adolescents' most compelling and urgent health needs.

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3. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

3.1 Goals

1. To enable adolescents to develop awareness of their health care needs, thereby allowing them to take more responsibility for their health.

2. To provide information to the community around adolescent health concerns to empower us to effectively assist adolescents with their health care needs.

3. To create opportunities for adolescents and the community to dialogue together on a range of health issues within an environment that is informative, constructive and pro-active.

3.2 Objectives

1. The Voice of Teens Project will ensure that adolescent involvement takes place throughout the project through the maintenance of an Adolescent Advisory Committee.

2. The adolescent involvement in the project will include decision making, planning, and evaluation of all aspects of the project's work.

3. We will encourage thoughtful exploration of personal values and how they influence behaviour in the course of training adolescents for community presentations.

4. In the training of adolescent educators we will encourage and offer opportunities for social analysis to allow for better insight into the many faceted nature of our community and its social/cultural/economic influences and how they relate to health issues.

5. We will address the issues of healthy and unhealthy behaviours and encourage awareness of the social/cultural/economic factors that influence these in the training of our adolescent educators.

6. We will encourage and develop effective communication skills in the training of adolescent educators.

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Objectives (cont'd)

7. Through consultation with, and involvement in training by community professionals (including, educators, clergy, psychologist, community and health care workers), adolescent educators will have an opportunity for interaction and dialogue with a range of community membership allowing them to develop a deeper analysis and understanding of their health concerns.

8. With the development of understanding and analysis around their health issues, combined with training in communication and presentation skills, adolescent educators will provide opportunities for the community to gain insight into the self-identified health needs of adolescents.

9. Presentations to both the adolescent and adult community will be planned and facilitated by adolescents successfully completing the 12 session training program.

10. Project staff and the adolescent educators will explore ways to creatively present their health concerns in their presentations to the community.

11. We will provide a minimum of 4 - 5 opportunities for adolescents 13 - 18 in Antigonish town and county to attend a Voice of Teens presentation on the subject of adolescent health issues in our community.

12. We will provide a minimum of 4 - 5 opportunities for community members and groups in Antigonish town and county to attend a Voice of Teens presentation on the subject of adolescent health issues in our community.

13. We will conduct ongoing evaluation of the adolescent educators training sessions, and all community presentations to ensure they remain relevant and effective.

15. Through participation in training, planning and implementing the Voice of Teens Project teen educators will have the opportunity to gain skills, group work experience, and undergo involvement in community and organizational process that will enhance their opportunities to engage in future health promotion activities on both a personal and collective level.