

Healthy Sexuality in The Community: Targeting Boys and Young Men

The Family Planning Association Cymru is piloting a Healthy Sexuality in the Community project targeting young men throughout Rhondda Cynon Taff and Merthyr Tydfil. The project sessions aim to help boys and young men to make informed choices about relationships, contraception and sexuality related issues. Simon Blake, the Project Officer at FPA Cymru describes the project as being "Sex positive, based on equality, non-discrimination and equal opportunity".

The project, which is delivered by volunteer tutors, was developed as a response to the lack of sex education for boys and young men. Simon believes that "Existing sex education is a case of too little, too late and too biological. It tends to concentrate on girls and preventing unwanted pregnancy and focus on biology and reproduction. It often fails to provide an opportunity for boys and young men to dis-

cuss their fears and anxieties with anyone".

He adds, "Pregnancy prevention has traditionally relied on the use of the female contraceptive pill, but this does not protect against the spread of STI's or the HIV virus. Today's need for condoms places some of the responsibility for contraception onto young men."

The project tutors deliver one-off or a series of sessions. The sessions explore a range of issues including sexual stereotypes and the culture of masculinity in which it is hard for men to ask for advice. Much of the work was done through role play, drama, and exercises which allow for greater discussion and participation. Attendance at the sessions is voluntary, but those who participate are first asked to agree some basic ground rules about respect for others, including no racist or sexist comments.

At the end of each session there is a review and evaluation to see what had been the most and least enjoyable. At the start of each subsequent session, the group is allowed time to discuss any unresolved or new issues from the previous week.

Tutors are male and female but in some instances, some of the young men find it more comfortable to work with a male tutor on certain issues. However, the ability of the tutors is of greater importance than their gender. Simon explained, "A sex educator, male or female, should

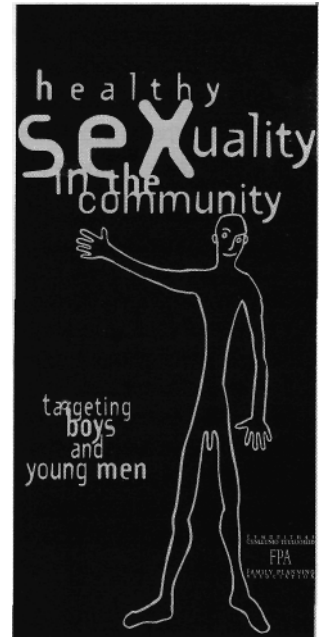
be someone who doesn't get embarrassed, who young men feel confident in and who is neutral. They need to know their stuff, have a sense of humour, and not ridicule or embarrass young men." It is vital for tutors to be trained properly and have the right positive attitude. In fact, having a male and female worker taking the sessions together can have a positive effect. It illustrates positive interaction to the young men and is an example of a relationship based on equality not on power or sexual relationship.

Simon explained, "To be successful you must have a positive starting point, if you think that young men are a problem that have to be dealt with, then you will be disappointed. The project does not seek to change the young men to meet some ideal social model; we aim to have open and frank discussions, and provide accurate information, explore attitudes and values and develop skills to help them make positive informed choices about their lives. We seek to provide an informal, relaxed and safe environment in which to do this.

"Perhaps the biggest problem is the constraint of time. Just when you are creating an environment in which the group feel safe to explore, the sessions finish. We are continuing the sessions with a group at Pen-y-waun to see how it progresses. Sometimes it is really hard work,

but it is extremely rewarding as the young men are beginning to develop and explore ideas that they bring to the sessions themselves."

FPA Cymru has just completed the training of its first group of volunteer tutors, validated by Greenwich University, and is about to begin the recruitment of eight additional volunteers to train as tutors. They hope to attract more men this time.



For further information about the project, becoming a volunteer, or sex education training, contact Simon Blake, FPA Cymru Tel 01222 342766/644034