

# **Peer Sexuality Support Programme**

## **Aim**

To empower secondary school students to make decisions in the area of their own sexuality and sexual health by training and supporting selected students to promote and provide a healthy sexuality culture among their peers utilising information, support, and referral pathways for sexuality and sexual health services.

## **Background**

The Auckland Peer Sexuality Support Programme (PSSP) is now moving into its twentieth year in 2014. Twenty five schools will participate in the programme in 2014 Massey High School being one.

The Peer Sexuality Support Programme aims to formalise already existing peer networks by training selected students to work in a support role with other young people on sexuality issues. Research has provided increasing evidence (Wright & Vaughan, 1994; Sugahara, 1995; Johnson-Pitt & Jili, 1996; Walker, 1997) that advice and information given by peers is effective in influencing adolescent attitudes and behaviours. Young people have more knowledge of the culture, language, and the concerns of people their own age than adults do. They can act as a friend to another young person who wants/needs guidance or direction, as well as being a positive role model.

## **Administration**

The PSSP programme is administered by Auckland Sexual Health Services from their head office at Building 7, Level 3, Greenlane Clinical Centre, Private Bag 92024, Auckland, Telephone 64-9-630 9786. Facsimile 64-9-630 9785. Massey High School's Co-ordinator is the School Counsellor Mary Hammonds Phone: 831 0500 extension 529

Also involved are public health nurses, and other specialist youth workers and educators.

## **Funding**

Funding for the PSSP programme is provided by the Ministry of Health.

## **Training Programme**

The programme involves a residential training hui that concentrates on exploring the attitudes, behaviours, beliefs and values of participants and their peer groups. The workshops raise personal awareness about the participant's own sexual health as well as identifying the limits of their role as Peer Sexuality Support students. Students are up-skilled for this role and are provided with the information, resources and resource people required for carrying out the role. It is important to note that Peer Sexuality Support Students are not counsellors, and are trained to refer students with difficult issues to the appropriate school networks, or other agencies.

The training is presented from a bicultural perspective while acknowledging the multicultural nature of New Zealand society.

The training hui are spread over 3 days, are run from Wednesday through until Friday and contain a series of workshops run by team members and outside specialist facilitators.

The workshops are informative, interactive and experiential, and cover such topics as:

anatomy and physiology, contraception, STI's/HIV, relationships, gender issues, decision making, sexual abuse and coercion, alcohol and other drug issues, gay and lesbian issues, communication skills, cultural issues, teen pregnancy, and sexuality and disability issues.

The training hui is followed by a team building half-day where School Co-ordinators, PHN's, students trained in previous years, and newly trained students, undergo team building activities facilitated by Education Unit staff, as well as planning how the programme will be run in the school over the year.

### **Student responses to training**

- "I now realise how lucky I am to be who I am rather than wanting to be someone else now that I have all this knowledge."
- "It has enlightened me enough to think of others more deeply and to care for myself to a greater extent."
- "The knowledge I've gained has been used often to help others and myself. It changed my life."
- "It has made me a lot more caring and a wiser person."
- "It informed me of issues I wasn't really clear about and gave me a lot of confidence."
- "It was a wonderful experience and I was introduced to new and challenging ideas. The closeness achieved within the group was astounding, totally new to me then."
- "It helped me to deal with personal situations really well and helped me keep an open mind when facing sexuality situations."
- "I think a lot more 'openmindedly' now and I don't judge people the way I used to."
- "Only positive things came out of the training and people comment on how much I've changed - but only in good ways."

### **Student Support**

Students are supported in their work by fortnightly visits from Education Unit staff, as well as the School Co-ordinator.