



How to
Build
Partnerships
with Youth

...The Best Start Experience

One of a series of
“How to...” resources developed by
Best Start: Community Action For Healthy Babies

The “How To” Series

The Best Start “How To” resources were developed to help you work with specific audiences. Participation from the audience you want to reach is critical in creating effective initiatives. Young mothers, small business owners, students, physicians and other community members have unique and important skills. However, they are often busy people and their time needs to be respected and input valued. There are many commonalities when working with different audiences. However there are also considerations and challenges specific to each. The “How To” series will help you involve different groups and individuals in your work.

July 2000

HOW TO . . . *Build Partnerships with Youth*

Why work with Youth?

If you want to change risk behaviour and improve the health of youth, involve them in planning and implementation. It takes time to involve youth, however asking youth about their concerns and ideas can lead to effective approaches and creative solutions. If you try to reduce youth risk factors without the participation of youth, you are guessing at both the problems and solutions.

There are other benefits to working with youth. You can help improve their skills and increase their self-esteem and confidence. Their work with you may help them build a better resume or perhaps even obtain meaningful work later on. It will also give them insight into the type of activities and work that they enjoy doing, are good at and may help them decide which activities they would choose not to do again. Youth also bring us a fresh perspective, energy, creativity, skills and insights.

Youth like to learn from other youth, as we have seen from a variety of peer education programs. They can act as agents of change, actively participate in the process and be a part of the solution. When youth interview or focus test materials with other young people, the discussion is more relaxed and open than with an adult. When youth write a series of newspaper articles, the language and style is more likely to appeal to youth. In many ways, with our support, youth are more effective than adults in working with young people.

The youth audience is an important focus for initiatives for a variety of reasons. They are often amenable to behaviour change. Most will be parents someday. It is cost effective to focus on prevention. By encouraging youth to start with good health habits early, they are more likely to lead healthy lives and to raise healthy children later on.

Youth Culture

Teens are risk takers. This is part of their normal behavior, and is an important part of maturing. They can be immediate and impulsive. Many believe, "it won't happen to me". Most like different things than adults. Peers are a substantial influence, and a credible source of information. Youth want to see change happen quickly and want to be a part of a group. We need to consider the strengths and limitations of young people. They need short-term goals, and specific projects; the work has to feel worthwhile to them. Also, data about youth is outdated. Current studies of young people often contain data that is several years old, and the youth involved have since graduated from high school. Teen culture changes quickly, and gathering information about youth and recruitment of youth should be seen as an ongoing process.

We need to carefully analyze our own power and control over issues when working with youth. We need to set up an environment where we can meet with them as equals, with respect for their ideas and needs and giving support where it is truly needed.

Best Start and Youth

Best Start worked with youth on a number of initiatives. Committees that included youth addressed the prevention of teen pregnancy, support for pregnant teens, body image awareness and teen smoking rates. Youth were involved in focus testing materials, interviewing other youth, writing newspaper articles, designing posters, creating graphics, reviewing curricula, starting up a resource centre, and making a video. They provided input on short term campaigns and long term plans. Surveys of youth helped define their needs. Youth were an integral part of planning and implementing any initiative that had an impact on youth.

WAYS TO INVOLVE YOUTH

- Ask youth about community gaps and needs
- Ask youth what would make a difference for them
- Involve young people in pre-testing, designing and reviewing resources
- Train youth to run focus groups or to interview other young people
- Have youth write newspaper articles
- Ask youth to sit on a committee that deals with teen issues
- Find a young person to present to other youth
- Let them participate in decision making
- Listen to youth

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THE BEST START EXPERIENCE

The following section is a series of stories about the work Best Start accomplished with youth. For each story, key lessons are highlighted. Although Best Start's work was limited to maternal newborn issues, the stories have much in common with work on other risk factor areas.

ASKING FOR IDEAS

Focus Testing for Body Image Campaign

We planned to develop and implement a health communication campaign for youth on healthy body weights. We brainstormed an upbeat campaign that would catch the attention of local youth. We then organized a couple of focus groups to test our ideas.

We arrived at the focus groups armed with our best ideas, posters to choose from, and of course pizza and pop. We were sure they would just love us and our ideas. A rapport was quickly developed as we chatted informally and munched on what is sure to be teens' ideal lunch. Then we got around to discussing the business at hand.

We asked them what they thought about placing booths in their schools. They all thought that was a cool idea at first. Further questioning proved this to be not so ideal. For instance, when asked if they would visit the booth before morning classes, during lunch or spares or after school they answered NO. In the end



they decided that a booth at school was not a good idea unless they could get out of a class to visit it. Then they thought they would visit a booth in the community, but they soon realized that they would not go out of their way to do that either.

When asked what newspaper they read they said they did not read the paper. Then the youth were asked about radio. This was a medium students enjoyed and related to. They thought contests were a good idea.

It was not until we talked about a television program that they really began to get animated. The youth started talking about the possibilities at a rate that could barely be recorded. The teenage community was clearly adopting what started off as a Best Start initiative. We left that focus meeting feeling very excited and with clear direction. The youth indicated that they wanted a half hour program that involved young people they knew. It had to be up beat and fun to watch as well as educational. They insisted

that there not be any long-winded lecturing professionals telling youth what they should or should not do.

It took the next 18 months to complete the program. When the tape was ready it was well advertised on a local teen friendly radio station. The television program turned into an educational video and was mass produced. It has been widely distributed, and is used by teachers and youth leaders across the province.

Insight

By asking youth what would appeal to them, helping them think about and further define their responses, the committee determined what would most interest youth. Because the committee chose an initiative that youth were excited about, it was not difficult to get volunteers for challenging tasks such as writing the script, being featured on the video and editing the video. The video has been widely used, again showing that the youth selected a media that had teen-appeal.

Visit our web site at: www.beststart.org

THE POWER OF NUMBERS

Youth Survey on Sexual Health Education

As part of our initial effort to improve sexual health education in schools, we asked youth to complete a four page questionnaire about how they would like to receive sexual health education and what topics they would like to be taught. We originally anticipated that survey results would be helpful in supporting the process and in allaying any opposition within the community. We discovered just how valuable the information was as we returned to the survey results again and again during the two-year process.

We wondered where youth wanted to get information about sexual health. Did they want to learn from friends, magazines or computers? We were relieved to hear that most youth preferred to learn about sexual health at school and from their parents. Later on, the survey results helped us decide what topics should be included for each grade level. Finally, the survey also gave us some helpful information that we used to design the teacher training. For example, the results revealed that girls wanted separate classes for some topics.

Insight

It was definitely worth the effort to ask youth about how they wanted to learn and what they wanted to be taught. It was helpful that we asked many questions on that initial survey. We were able to use the results a number of times and in unexpected ways. Youth are willing and able to give serious insightful answers if they think you really want to hear. They also want to change things for the better for themselves and others.

BE READY TO LISTEN

Just Give Us the ___ Chicken

When you ask youth about problems in the community, you need to be ready for tough answers. You should be ready to listen and respond. Young people may criticize your agency. It may be that you have only heard positive things about your agency because you have previously only talked with youth using the services. Talking with youth can bring out some interesting information about needs and barriers. This is a story about a thought provoking comment from a teen parent.

We arranged to survey pregnant and parenting teens to find out what services and supports they found helpful and not helpful. The usual results were seen on many questions. Youth talked about feeling judged, not fitting in and the struggle of daily existence. Once again, it was apparent that teen pregnancy and parenting had a lot to do with stress and poverty.

In one discussion a woman who had been a teen mom commented that she had experience with a number of programs. One cooking class taught 5 ways to cook a chicken, including what to do with the skin and bones. Her response was this, "Just give us the ___ chicken." In other words

she was indicating that access to food had been a more difficult issue for her than how to prepare the food.

This brought home how deep judgementalism can be. We often offer cooking classes to help people eat healthier food. This parent was clearly stating that if we wanted her to eat well, we could help most by giving her food, not information. The barrier to healthy eating was money, not knowledge. If we really wanted to make a difference for pregnant and parenting teens, we needed to work on food security.

The traditional approaches, the funding streams and guidelines of our organizations often limit the services and supports we can offer. But youth sometimes say that they need services that are beyond what we have provided in the past. What then? Most importantly we listened to the youth, believed what they said, and tried to find a way to make a difference. We explored the



option of a weekly drop in centre for pregnant women that would offer food, information and social support.

Insight

It is much more difficult for us to address food security and other issues resulting from low incomes than to offer cooking classes. When asking youth about issues, be ready for possible negative statements about your agency and for initiatives that may go beyond your mandate. Then try to look for creative ways to act on comments and to involve youth in addressing their concerns.

TEENS TELL US

101 Ways Sticker



We worked successfully on body image and youth for several years. We decided

we wanted a simple inexpensive resource to give to youth during body image presentations. Youth liked the slogan, “101 Ways to Feel Good about Yourself”. It tested well and seemed suitable for a binder sticker format. But how could Best Start come up with 101 teen suggestions on feeling good?

Youth were happy to provide this information. At a youth conference, we asked youth to offer suggestions for the binder sticker. From those submitted, we chose 101 comments and a graphic artist came up with a design in two colour options. One was a purple and orange combination; the other was blue and pink. As adults we loved the softer blue and pink colours and found the purple and orange loud and garish. Just to be sure, we asked youth what they preferred. Much to our

surprise, they liked the one that we did not. So, we now have lots of garish purple and orange binder stickers, and the teens love them.

Insight

Young people know what they like and do not like. Adults are not always successful at choosing colours, designs and materials that appeal to young people. Asking youth to review draft resources is an important part of the planning process. Also, youth are happy to participate in short term tasks that interest them, such as suggestions on feeling good. You can capture the interest of teens by giving them a voice about a positive aspect of their lives.

YOUTH TAKE ON INITIATIVES

Dear Annie Articles

We hired a student to interview youth on the subject of peer pressure. We provided training in leading focus groups and in writing newspaper articles. The student invited young people to pizza night focus groups where she asked them about the types of peer pressure they had experienced, what they had done about it and what advice they had for other youth.

Based on the information from the focus groups, she wrote Dear Annie style question and answer articles for the local paper. By

using common situations of peer pressure as questions, she was able to respond and provide information to youth, with comments from the focus groups. The articles covered many topics including sexuality, alcohol, smoking, drugs and suggestions for parents. We provided support and assistance to her throughout the process, as well as advice on the drafts of the articles. The articles were eventually enlarged, laminated and displayed in the high school as posters.

Insight

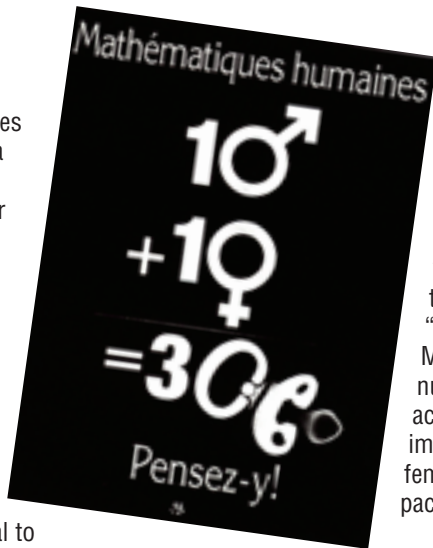
The student was able to invite youth to the focus groups and put them at ease. The articles were catchy, lively and written in teen language. They appealed to youth and were well read. As a young person, the student was able to reach youth in ways that health professionals could not. Her creativity, skills and energy gave a unique flavour to the campaign. The experience was also very valuable to the student involved.

TEENS MAKE A RESOURCE

Designing a French Poster

It is difficult to find health promotion resources for Francophone populations. We produced a few French resources to try to fill this gap. One was a poster about teen pregnancy. Although we knew that a poster alone would not change behaviour, we hoped that it would be a useful resource for agencies taking a comprehensive look at teen pregnancy. We went to youth for their help and advice.

Seventy-nine youth participated in focus testing to determine what would appeal to young people. They were very clear about the style of posters they liked and did not like. They wanted few words, direct messages and simple images. They came



up with ideas and slogans. These were then sent to a graphic artist. He drafted several mock-ups, which were also focus tested with youth. The one they liked best was "1+1=3, Human Mathematics". The numbers were accompanied with images of male and female symbols and a pacifier.

The youth were happy with the poster. They made decisions about where they should be displayed. Later we also printed buttons, T-shirts, locker size

posters and Post-it Notes with the same image. Also, there was so much demand from the English speaking population that the poster was translated and is now available in both languages. Interestingly enough, adults do not always understand the Human Mathematics poster.

Insight

Once again, youth helped us make a product that suited the teen audience. The poster has colours, a message and images that are meaningful to youth. Adults do not always understand the message, and that is fine, for they are not the intended audience. The key to success is in testing the resource with the audience it is intended for.

YOUTH INTERVIEWING YOUTH

Choosing Not to Smoke



We used co-op students to run the "Choosing Not To Smoke" campaign. This was a media campaign that featured local youth who had decided they were not going to start smoking. Staff outlined the general format for the campaign and then young people were trained to interview other youth and to write articles.

Once trained, the young people needed to identify other youth who had decided that they were never going to smoke. The students then needed to see if they would be interested in being featured in the paper. The co-op students interviewed the youth and took their pictures. The articles often went through many drafts before they were ready for the paper. The featured youth were acknowledged with gift certificates for pizzas. The co-op students benefited from improved writing, interviewing and

computer skills, and had a file of newspaper articles they could include in their portfolio.

Insight

An adult would not have had the same rapport with youth. Youth may not have responded to an adult-led initiative in the same way. Approaching and interviewing youth would have been challenging for an adult. The co-op students knew which young people were interesting and credible to other youth. The students were able to choose the information that would most appeal to youth from the interviews with teen non-smokers. By investing some time in providing direction and training to the co-op students, the campaign quality was improved.

HOW TO PARTNER WITH YOUTH

Be Realistic

Be realistic about the amount of time it takes to do effective work with youth. To involve youth on a committee, determine concerns of young people and act on these concerns in partnership with youth takes time. But, by involving young people, you are much more likely to reach effective solutions.

Connecting

Students with a particular interest in the issue are more likely to be involved and committed to your work. You may find interested youth by talking with school staff or other community partners. Co-op programs, college work placements and summer positions also provide opportunities to involve youth in initiatives.

Approaching

There are many different methods to encourage youth to participate - posters, ads in the school paper, announcements on the school PA system, presentations to classes, and youth inviting other youth. The most effective method to involve youth is through word of mouth. If a teen knows the person inviting them, they are much more likely to be involved.

It is even more difficult to recruit young people who are not in school. Consider putting up an interactive booth in a mall, visiting a teen drop in centre or asking for help from someone who works with youth who are not in school.

Meeting their Needs

It is helpful to hold meetings nearby, in a familiar safe place such as a school classroom. For some youth transportation is an issue, and rides to the meetings need to be arranged. Often other needs must also be met. The meetings are usually less formal, and involve more socialization. Comfort foods such as pizza and pop are important.

Training

The number and variety of tasks that were accomplished by youth pleasantly surprised Best Start. There seemed to be no limit to the types of tasks they could take on and successfully accomplish. However, training is important in helping the youth do quality work. When a teen joins a committee, some background information on the role of the committee and current activities will help them feel at ease. Arrange to meet with the youth before a meeting to fill them in and to answer any questions that they may have. Keep in mind that the first meeting may be an intimidating experience. Do what you can to help them feel at ease. When a young person takes on a bigger task such as peer facilitation, running focus groups or writing newspaper articles, they will need specific training and time to become comfortable with their new role.

Tailoring Tasks

Sometimes youth have highly developed skills in specific areas, such as artistic or computer abilities. Tasks need to be matched with individual interests and skills. Often partnerships with youth mean that learning goes both ways. Be receptive to their ideas and suggestions. They know the teen audience better than we ever will. Take advantage of their skills, and gear tasks to their interest areas.

Working Together

Involve your audience right from the planning stage. They are a valuable resource when it comes to knowing what will work and what will not. You can do large surveys to get quantitative data, or a few focus groups to gather qualitative information, but do not stop there. Asking youth is not enough. You will also want to respond to them and involve them in planning and implementation and evaluation. Once youth indicate that a certain initiative is appropriate, consider how to continue to involve youth. Youth can help by sitting on a committee, reviewing draft resources or by taking on complete initiatives. In many cases they can do a

better job than an adult, for example in interviewing other youth, running youth focus groups and in writing articles for youth.

Young people like to see things happen quickly. If a committee is slow to progress, youth may become frustrated. Plan on starting with some smaller, more easily accomplished tasks. This will help you get to know each other, and will help build faith in the committee. It will also help if the first initiatives are suggested by teens. By responding to their ideas, you show them that they are valuable members of the committee. Some examples of good first initiatives are resource guides for youth, fact sheets about the issues or newspaper articles.

Letting Go

Keep in mind that young people are only teens for a few years. Youth also experience exams, homework, part time jobs and changing interests. There are many very good reasons for a young person to leave a committee. Be ready to thank them for their valuable input and consider recruiting youth an ongoing task for the committee.

QUICK TIPS

- Youth know what their problems are
- Youth know what would make a difference
- Youth have many skills and ideas
- Youth like messages that come from other young people
- What young people prefer is not necessarily what adults prefer
- Find out what the problem is before you try to fix it
- Ask youth what time and location is best for meetings
- Provide food that they like to eat
- Respect young peoples' point of view
- Believe that they are inherently important and worthy
- Be non judgmental

TEENS TELL US

Comments and quotes from teen participants in Best Start initiatives



"We have been noticing what has been happening to our teens. Teens start smoking, then it is drugs, alcohol and sex at young ages. There is nothing to do and there is a lot of peer pressure and crime. It is time to do something for the teens. It may help with the school drop outs and the drinking, drugs and crime. Lets get kids off the streets and give them a town and a

future to be proud of. Other organizations raise money for their needs why don't we?"

"Freedom to make our own choices."

"As teen mothers, we don't usually ask for help because it feels like everyone thinks we aren't capable and they're waiting for us to prove it."

"Today's education does not meet our needs."

"People are suspicious about me ripping off the system because I have a baby. Even people whose jobs are to help families are judgmental and sarcastic."

"Want to be treated like a person."

"There should be a place where we can walk in and have a calm woman who has good information...who knows how to deal with stress...can relate to us and is not in some other world...who really listens." "We have no-one to talk to in our class."

"Did a teacher really say 'boys will be boys?'"

"If you want help, it's usually there, you just have to know who to ask. It took me two years to figure it out! Some haven't been able to sort this out."

"Pamphlets aren't enough!"

KEEP IN MIND

- You can get better results if a young person facilitates a teen focus group
- You might not know what would help
- You might not know what appeals to youth
- A young person may not stay on a committee for a long time
- A young person may not be able to come to every meeting

FINAL COMMENTS

Best Start initiatives were enriched by the involvement of youth. Although, at times, it was a lot of work recruiting, training, co-ordinating and supporting the teen volunteers, the benefits for Best Start and the youth were immeasurable. They knew the problems for youth in the community, they knew what would be helpful, and they often were better at completing certain tasks than adults were. We recommend that you not only ask youth, but also respect and involve them in all levels of planning youth initiatives.

WHERE TO GET MORE INFORMATION

Best Start resources

Here is a list of Best Start resources which may be of interest to you. Many are available in French. To order these resources or to find out about other Best Start services, call 1-800-397-9567 or visit our website www.beststart.org

1+1=3 Locker Poster
1+1=3 Full Size Poster
1+1=3 Buttons
101 Ways to Feel Good About Yourself Sticker
Baby Think It Over Report
Choosing Not to Smoke Report
Empathy Belly Report
Healthy Body Image Package
Planned Parenthood: Sexual/Reproductive Health Initiative Report
Planned Parenthood - Promoting Reproductive Health & Choice Report
Sexual Health Package
Voices Report - Voices of Pregnant & Parenting Teens
Young Ideas on Smoking Report

Other relevant sources of information

Alan Guttmacher Institute website: www.agi-usa.org
Canadian Environment Network - *The Youth Friendly Guide*
Tel. 613-728-9810
Canadian Institute of Child Health - *The Health of Canada's Children*
Tel. 613-230-8838
Canadian Institute of Child Health website: www.cich.ca
Community Addiction & Mental Health Foundation - *Youth Action Program* Tel. 416-595-6144
Health Canada - *Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education*
Tel. 613-954-5995
Health Canada - *Trends in the Health of Canadian Youth*
Tel. 613-594-5995
Health Canada - website: www.hc-sc.gc.ca
Ontario Physical & Health Education Association - website:
www.ophea.org
Planned Parenthood - website: www.ppfca.ca
Resource Centre for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention - website:
www.etr.org/recapp/
Sex Information & Education Council of Canada (SIECCAN) -
Common Questions Tel. 416-466-5304
Sex Information & Education Council of Canada (SIECCAN) -
website: www.sieccan.org
TeenNet website: www.cyberisk.org

Please feel free to copy all or part of this brochure.

*Best Start is funded by the Ontario Ministry of Health & Long Term Care
and supported by OPC.*

How to contact Best Start

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Notes...



Best Start: Community Action for Healthy Babies is a unique health promotion project funded by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. It is a comprehensive population-based model for improving maternal newborn health through community development. Two locations, Algoma and Barrie, were selected by the Ministry to develop and demonstrate the Best Start model. From 1992 to 1998 the two sites worked with their communities on areas of concern to maternal newborn health. They were supported and guided by the Best Start Resource Centre in Toronto.

Best Start addressed a wide range of factors that contribute to the birth of low birth weight babies. Low birth weight as a health indicator lends itself to a community wide approach and Best Start initiatives were directed at the entire child bearing population. Poverty, smoking, substance abuse, violence, nutrition, stress and workplaces, all have a significant effect on the health of an unborn child and were a focus of Best Start's work. Best Start brought together agencies, services and individuals to form working groups on local concerns. The community groups were involved in selecting, designing, implementing and sustaining initiatives that increased awareness, provided support and addressed policy.

The Best Start Resource Centre continues to offer support to individuals and groups working on maternal newborn health in Ontario. Best Start services include on-site consultations, training, facilitation of planning, telephone support, information, resources, and a web site.