

EVALUATING THE YOUTH ANTI-ABUSE PROJECT – PHASE 2

Prepared for:
The Youth Anti-Abuse Project

**The Sexual Assault Centre (Hamilton and Area) and
Wesley Urban Ministries**

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*Celebrating more than 40 Years
of social development in Hamilton*

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1.0 BACKGROUND

The *Youth Anti-Abuse Project Phase 2: Strengthening Supports and Expanding Diversity (YAAP)* is evaluated in this report. This project was a partnership fostered by the Sexual Assault Centre of Hamilton and Wesley Urban Ministries. This project spanned 15 months (January 2007 – March 2008) and building on the success of the Phase 1 pilot, YAAP had four goals:

1. Providing individual and group support to street-involved and homeless youth around issues of sexual violence, dating violence and other related issues.
2. Engaging in assertive outreach efforts to connect with more street-involved and homeless youth victims – particularly Aboriginal and gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer (GLBTQ) youth.
3. Offering comprehensive professional development on sexual violence related issues for service providers who work with street-involved and homeless youth.
4. Coordinate a “Creative Empowerment Project” with street-involved and homeless youth – the mural.

This report includes sections on methodology, evaluation outcomes based on the four objectives, overall evaluation findings, future directions for street-involved youth sexual violence programming and conclusions.

2.0 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

It was important to capture the perspectives of the three main stakeholder groups in the Youth Anti-Abuse Project – the project staff, the community partners/agency staff participants and the youth.

We used a number of methods to capture evaluative data from each of the stakeholder groups:

Project Staff

A key informant interview was conducted with the Youth Anti-Abuse Project Coordinator

The Community Partner/Agency Staff Participants

The YAAP project coordinator, with the SACHA's public educator, facilitated three separate training sessions (two "Phase 1" sessions and one "Phase 2" session). Forty-three participants completed evaluation surveys and these were reviewed for this report (see Appendix A for Sample Training Evaluation Form). Additionally, five key informant interviews were completed with seven staff from YAAP community partner agencies¹ (see Appendix B for the Key Informant Interview Guide).

Youth

Youth were the most difficult group to connect with for evaluation information. The evaluator attempted to connect with two youth who communicated to the Project Coordinator to be willing to be interviewed. Unfortunately, neither interview took place. We also set up a voicemail for young people to leave their comments about the YAAP and handed out handbills to promote this opportunity. No youth left messages related to the YAAP project over the course of the evaluation.

A focus group was held with approximately 15 youth at Notre Dame School during the 'Let's Talk' program. The YAAP project coordinator met once weekly with the Let's Talk group to discuss a variety of relationship and self-esteem issues. The focus group with the youth revolved around the project coordinator's group work and the mural project (there is no focus group guide as it was set up to be an informal conversation).

¹ Good Shepherd Youth Services - Notre Dame House, Good Shepherd Youth Services – Notre Dame School Program, Health Initiatives for Youth Hamilton, Living Rock Ministries, Wesley Youth Housing.

3.0 PHASE TWO OF THE YOUTH ANTI-ABUSE PROJECT: MEETING THE OBJECTIVES

The results of the interviews, evaluative surveys and focus group are organized by the objectives of the project. The various methods outlined above all contributed to the following analysis.

Objective #1: Individual and group support to street-involved youth around sexual violence

Continuing to develop, pilot and offer individual and group support to street-involved and homeless youth around issues of sexual violence (both adult and childhood), dating violence and other related issues. During Phase 1, supports focused on street-involved and homeless young women. During Phase 2, the project was expanded to offer counseling supports to include young street-involved and homeless men.

According to evaluation participants this objective was met.

How was this objective realized?

Two YAAP project staff connected with youth individually the following street-involved youth agencies: Health Initiatives for Youth Hamilton, Good Shepherd – Notre Dame House and School Program, Living Rock Ministries and Wesley Youth Housing. The project staff divided their responsibility along gender lines – one worker was dedicated to working with young women and one with young men. The project staff also did group work with young people at Notre Dame School and the Living Rock Ministries.

What worked well?

Community partners and youth resoundingly agreed that the individual work was very well done by the YAAP project staff. This good work was attributed to a few key traits demonstrated by the project staff: availability, flexibility and approachability. Project staff worked hard to meet youth in places they felt comfortable (youth agencies, the gym, on the street) and maintained a consistent presence in all of the agencies whether youth wanted to engage or not – a strategy critical for relationship building. All of the key informants agreed that the project staff were quick to modify their schedules to ensure that youth were well served. According to one key informant, “(The project staff) bended over backwards to meet with youth who would benefit...she would give the individual the phone number and meet off-site if that was more comfortable”. The key informants described the gender specificity of the work as particularly important.

Key informants described the group work that was done with equal positivity. The focus of the group work was on self-esteem, sexuality, health relationships – issues that often built the bridge necessary to talking about deeper sexual violence issues one-on-one. According to the young people, they felt that the project staff respected their opinions, never got upset and spent time to get to know each and every student. One participant explained that she enjoyed coming to the Let’s Talk group, “if I was in a bad mood – I liked coming in to talk”.

What was challenging?

In terms of individual work, a couple of the community partners felt that the time limited nature of the project made it difficult for the project staff to develop the strong connections with youth necessary to open up conversations about sexual violence and past sexual abuse. Many street-involved and homeless youth have faced sexual violence both as children and now as young adults but the time limited nature of the project may have precluded some of those conversations from happening. All of the community partners agreed that starting out with conversations about self-esteem, healthy relationships and sexuality is the key to bridging to the more difficult discussions.

While the feedback around the groups work was almost entirely positive, two of the community partners expressed the view that they would have liked to have seen groups at their agencies. Both partners acknowledged the logistical difficulties that presents them and the responsibility of the community partner to support this process.

Objective #2: Outreaching to more street-involved youth agencies, Aboriginal, LGBTQ youth

Engaging in assertive outreach efforts to connect with more street-involved and homeless youth victims. One way this will be achieved is by working with YAAP community partners, Living Rock Ministries and Good Shepherd Youth Services, in order to connect with street-involved and homeless youth who access their services...Engaging in focused outreach to Aboriginal and gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer (GLBTQ) street-involved and homeless youth. Studies clearly demonstrate that youth in both of these groups are at higher risk for becoming street-involved and homeless and for some experiencing sexual violence. YAAP must tailor its efforts to meet the needs of these youth.

According to the evaluation participants this objective was partially met.

How was this objective realized?

With the recognition that Aboriginal and GLBTQ youth are overrepresented on the street, the project staff engaged with staff in the community partner organizations to make explicit their commitment to working with these particular populations of youth. The project staff also demonstrated open-mindedness and one staff shared her lesbian identity with the community to increase the comfort of youth.

What worked well?

The evaluation participants indicated that this objective was partially met with challenges engaging the Aboriginal community. Some witnessed an explicit effort to engage young people from diverse backgrounds and GLBTQ youth. Others described the program staff as respectful and inclusive of all youth – traits that would encourage connection with any unique population.

The community partners and project staff agreed that the connection with the GLBTQ community was stronger than the Aboriginal community. Two key factors contributed to this success. First – the project staff engaged with the Rainbow Youth Drop-In group at Health Initiatives for Youth Hamilton. Second, the project coordinator is an out lesbian and encouraged community partner staff to share this with clients as appropriate. The coordinator explained that this seemed to prove successful when GLBTQ began to approach her on their own, comfortably. Project staff accompanied a community partner and youth to the Waterloo Queer Film Festival – an event that received excellent feedback from the young people.

What would change/what was challenging?

Engaging Aboriginal street-involved youth proved challenging. While Aboriginal youth are overrepresented on the streets the project staff were not able to identify many at the community agencies. The project coordinator felt that better connections with the Aboriginal community would inform effective service delivery and contribute to strong relationships for culturally-centred referrals.

Objective #3: Professional development around sexual violence and street-involved youth

Offering comprehensive professional development on sexual violence related issues for service providers who work with street-involved and homeless youth. During Phase 1 YAAP offered a day-long training for 25 service providers who work with street-involved and homeless youth. At the end of this training the group felt that they urgently needed further education around dealing with disclosures of abuse. In Phase 2, we propose to offer “level 1” training to additional street-involved and homeless youth service providers and to develop and deliver a new “level 2” educational session. This new session will offer skill-building opportunities (via information sharing and role playing) on ways to support street-involved and homeless youth who disclose sexual violence.

According to evaluation participants this objective was met.

How was this objective realized?

The YAAP project coordinator with a Sexual Assault Centre of Hamilton staff co-facilitated three training sessions. Two of the sessions were Phase 1 – covering the basics of sexual violence. One Phase 2 session was offered – advanced intervention techniques.

Training program participants were asked to complete an evaluation form at the end of each session. The evaluation asked participants to rate and comment on the value of the session, the effectiveness of the facilitation, the most valuable learnings and areas of additional learning. All of the responses were very positive.

What worked well?

A review of the completed training evaluation forms for each session indicated a very positive response from the participants:

- The 27 participants in the two sessions of the Phase 1 training rated the value of the session at 4.6/5 and rated the effectiveness of the facilitation at 4.7/5 (1 rated as “not valuable” and 5 rated as “very valuable”).
- The 16 participants in the one Phase 2 training session rated the value of the session at 4.1/5 and rated the effectiveness of the facilitation at 4.5/5 (1 rated as “not effective” and 5 rated as “very effective”).

The training participants (through comments on the evaluation forms and in interviews) agreed that the sessions were very well facilitated and the topics were applicable to the population with which they work. Particularly helpful information identified in Phase 1 included: power and control, law and court information, statistics, the offender perspective. According to one Phase 1 participant, “I have learnt a lot of things that were previously unclear to me. I think I am better able to provide support, without pushing my own advice or being judgmental”. Particularly helpful information identified in phase 2 included: strategies and tools. According to a Phase 2 participant, “excellent incorporation of group work, case scenarios and feedback – also excellent use of introducing anti-oppressive use of anti-oppressive practice”.

What would change/what was challenging?

Two of the community partners interviewed were not aware of the training sessions and indicated that they would have been interested in attending. Participants acknowledged that it can be challenging to ensure that all appropriate staff are notified of such opportunities. Some changes that the training participants indicated they would have made include making the content more street-involved youth specific – some participants felt challenged to determine the applicability of the concepts discussed into their work environments.

Objective #4: Creative Empowerment Project – the mural

Coordinate a “Creative Empowerment Project” with street-involved and homeless youth. This exciting project component seeks to address the issue of violence and abuse using “teen-friendly”, creative intervention and empowerment tools. Based on the input we receive from our mini-assessment with street-involved and homeless youth, we will select a creative project and invite street-involved and homeless youth participation... The goals of this type of intervention are: a) to create a safe, “teen-friendly” way for street-involved and homeless youth to address violence and abuse issues, b) to support street-involved and homeless youth in gaining/developing creative skills (which leads to increased self-esteem), c) to share the final products with a wider audience as a means of raising awareness around violence and abuse issues faced by street-involved and homeless youth.

According to evaluation participants this objective was met.

How was this objective realized?

The project staff engaged a total of 61 youth twice per week to complete a mural highlighting issues of sexual violence. Incentives were provided to the youth for their participation and informal discussions around healthy relationships, self-esteem and sexual violence were held during the mural programming.

What worked well?

Everyone consulted for this evaluation (community partners, youth and program staff) agreed that the mural project was very successful. The fact that it was well advertised and an opportunity to have youth connect with adults through a mechanism that was very accessible contributed to this success.

Youth described the project as fun and built self-esteem because they found out they were “good at painting”. The community partners described youth as connected, committed and proud of the project. Youth seemed to feel real ownership and were eager to invite people to the launch of the completed mural. The project staff watched youth become increasingly engaged through the duration of the mural – youth having conversations that would not have normally happened and seeing their work as part of a larger, important issue. The project staff described the youths’ connection to the mural, “I love how the youth love the mural”.

What was challenging?

Despite its clear success, the project was not without challenges. Moving host locations halfway through the project made it difficult to retain youth interest. However, the new location ended up being even more successful in the end. A community partner suggested that the process was potentially too long for some youth. Another challenge emerged in working with youth who are committed to the project in different ways. While the honourarium was clearly an incentive for many youth (because of poverty or saving face) some of the participants were more engaged and committed to the process than others. This impacted the flow of the work and the project staff indicated that in future youth engagement work, she might try other strategies for keeping the process inclusive and barrier free while honouring the commitment of the youth.

4.0 OVERALL PROJECT EVALUATION

The key informants and focus group participants were asked to provide overall evaluation remarks about the Youth Anti-Abuse Project. In addition to the fulfillment of the objective outlined above, the stakeholders consulted for this evaluation agreed that Phase 2 of the Youth Anti-Abuse Project was highly successful for four reasons. First and foremost, the caring, approachable and non-judgmental project staff were named as the cornerstone of this success. The project staff made an impact on both the youth and community partners with whom they worked. Second, the clear consistency throughout the project (staff at an agency at the same time each week, the same staff dedicated to each agency) contributed to the important relationship building with both youth and agencies. Third, staff felt that the presence of the YAAP staff in their respective agencies provided a sense of reassurance when dealing with relationship, abuse and sexual violence issues – there was security in knowing that someone was available for consultation and support for the community partner staff. Finally, having a worker dedicated to the needs of young, street-involved men was named as an overall strength.

The Youth Anti-Abuse Project was not without challenges. The time limited nature of the project was a disappointment to all. Youth and community partners articulated the need for staff to work specifically on the issues of self-esteem, healthy relationships, sexuality, abuse and sexual violence with both young women and men. Another challenge arose in finding the right way to build relationships with street-involved youth to talk about the serious issues. Starting with potentially less intense conversations around healthy relationships seemed to work well. Many of the community partners agreed that youth have faced sexual abuse in their past and sexual violence in their present lives but acknowledge that for some youth even deeper, longer term relationships need to be built to work on those issues than the YAAP would have allowed. Finally, while community partners felt they were well-informed about how the YAAP fit into their respective agencies, a few community partners indicated a desire to understand the broader implications, overall goals and general direction of the project.

5.0 EXTENDED LEARNING AND FUTURE SEXUAL VIOLENCE PROGRAMMING FOR STREET-INVOLVED YOUTH

Participants were asked to talk about how they would extend their learning from the training or from working with either project staff even after the project came to a close. The community partners indicated that they will draw elements of the project into their work with youth. Community partners and training participants talked about extending the learning from the project coordinator in their approach and sensitivity working with street-involved and homeless youth who have faced sexual abuse and violence in their lives. They indicated that they had the opportunity to observe work that project staff did with young people and will replicate their approaches – silence, non-judgment, approachability and thoughtful facilitation. Another important outcome of this project, according to a few of the participants has been the relationship built with the Sexual Assault Centre (Hamilton and Area).

When asked for their advice on the best way to engage street-involved youth around the issue of sexual violence, the evaluation participants felt that the multi-resource approach of YAAP was the best way to engage young people around sexual violence issues. Community partners and youth also identified more opportunities to use art and recreation to talk about difficult topics, organizing forums for youth to talk about sexuality/healthy relationships and building this information into all programming since it is so pervasive.

6.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Phase 2 of the Youth Anti-Abuse Project was successful. Three out of four of the project objectives were met and one was partially met. The feedback from the community was resoundingly positive and the research for this evaluation illuminated the community's keen interest in programming that supports street-involved and homeless youth who have experienced sexual violence. The Youth Anti-Abuse Project was described as a highly successful, viable model for working on this complex and important social issue.

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE TRAINING EVALUATION FORM

APPENDIX B
KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE

Youth Anti-Abuse Project Evaluation

Key Informant Interview Guide

- 1) What is your understanding of the Youth Anti-Abuse Project?
- 2) The YAAP Phase 2 project had a few key goals. Please comment on the extent to which you saw the realization of those goals:
 - a. Offering individual and group support to street-involved and homeless youth around issues of sexual violence?
 - b. Outreaching to more street-involved youth agencies, Aboriginal and LGBTQ youth?
 - c. Offering professional development around sexual violence and street-involved and homeless youth?
 - d. The coordination of a “Creative Empowerment Project” – the mural?
- 3) What were the strengths of the project?
- 4) If YAAP or something similar were to happen again what would you change about the project?
- 5) From your perspective, how did youth engage with the project workers?
- 6) Either from attending the training or in working with Diane and Raye – how will you extend your learning from the Youth Anti-Abuse Project as it comes to a close?
- 7) In an ideal world, what elements of the YAAP project would you have continue?
 - a. What elements of the YAAP project would you like to see grow?
- 8) What are some other ways we can engage youth around issues of sexual violence?