

## Book Review

Save The Children. (2004). *Effective peer education: Working with children and young people on sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS*. London: Save The Children. ISBN: 1-84187-088-9; \$18.50 (paperback); 166 pp.

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*Effective Peer Education: Working With Children and Young People on Sexual and Reproductive Health and HIV/AIDS* is a workbook constructed for individuals who are interested in developing sexual and reproductive health peer education programs for children and young people. More specifically, Save the Children crafted this toolkit for “managers and project staff in non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community groups and government organisations. It is designed to be used by organisations that are thinking about starting peer education on sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS with children and young people as well as by organisations that are already working in this area” (p. 8).

### **Overview**

The four major sections in the toolkit take users from the point of deciding whether peer education would be an appropriate strategy for their needs through designing and implementing a sustainable peer education program. The structure of the toolkit provides subsections in each major section to help the reader work through issues involved in program planning. The sections begin with a summary of the aims and focus for that particular section and then cover the subsections of “Overview,” “Key questions to ask your programme,” “Lessons learned,” “Activity,” “Do’s and don’ts,” “A case study,” and “Further resources.” A fifth section provides additional programming options and is structured differently than the first four sections.

Section 1 of *Effective Peer Education* focuses on helping interested organizations to determine if peer education will meet their respective needs. This section starts by reviewing a variety of strategies that may be used to address issues surrounding sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS, including peer education. Section 1 also defines peer education and reviews its disadvantages and advantages. This section finishes by reviewing different types of peer education such as community-based peer education, institution-based work, and school-based peer education. This last segment contains particularly helpful descriptive information regarding these different types of programs.

Section 2 provides information for those who have decided to use peer education and are ready to begin creating a high-quality program. This section discusses ways to get children and young people involved in the program as peer educators. Topics include addressing the need to include members of marginalized groups, gender

sensitivity, and creating appropriate message content. Especially useful in section 2 is the content covering procedures for selecting peer educators.

Section 3 details how to keep peer education programs moving forward and staying effective. The section emphasizes training and retention of peer educators as well as mobilizing community support and garnering supportive partnerships. Instruction involving ways of “Building community ownership of peer education” (p. 88) and “Resourcing peer education” (p. 91) constitute important aspects of this section.

Section 4 moves beyond awareness raising as a goal of peer education toward sustained behavior change. The book explains that “moving beyond awareness-raising refers to strategies that go beyond providing information and, instead, focus on building the knowledge, skills and attitudes that people need to change their behavior” (p. 98). Although this section features fewer pages, it does contain some helpful information.

Finally, section 5 acts as an appendix in many ways to the first four sections. It provides “Quick guides to 18 programming options,” which include, for example, condom promotion and distribution, diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and family planning services. This section goes into more depth with specific program recommendations. The fifth section of the text is helpful in providing more detailed information regarding a variety of sexual and reproductive health topics. It provides concrete ideas for those newer to the program planning process or those with less experience with the specific topic.

## Reflections

Overall, sections 2 and 3 contain the best information in the workbook. They offer valuable application-oriented recommendations. Organizations ready to pursue peer education programs would do well to include particularly those sections in deliberations regarding program planning.

The strength of this workbook comes from the vast amount of experience that Save the Children possesses regarding peer education programs and its work with children and young people on sexual and reproductive health issues. The structure of the toolkit sections is very user friendly, and it is immediately applicable for program design. The authors suggest that practitioners may use the toolkit in a participatory fashion in either a workshop style or review process. The workbook is well structured for that environment. The sections are short and full of information. The overviews of the sections, particularly for sections 2 and 3, are clear and direct. The “Lessons learned” and “Activity” subsections likely will be the most helpful for working through the development process for a peer education program. “Lessons learned” give very specific pointers that can help a group to avoid certain pitfalls and increase the chances of success. The activities provide useful ways to engage in the problem-solving and decision-making processes described in the text. At times, activities include drawing pictures that represent the issue being addressed. While this strategy may be an attempt to engage the users of the toolkit, it may not be necessary. Making lists of the issues under review could serve the purpose just as well and be less time consuming.

My criticism of this toolkit centers on defining the goal of the workbook. The title of the workbook indicates that it is a tool for developing peer education programs regarding children and young people and their sexual and reproductive health.

The first section, however, is designed to help a group to determine if peer education is even the right avenue to reach the group's objective. If a group has decided to use peer education, then some of section 1 is irrelevant. Conversely, if a group decides that peer education is not the answer, then only section 5 provides additional information or resources. For instance, section 5 provides different ways to address a variety of sexual and reproductive health concerns. This material is also helpful, but not always on point with the focus on peer education.

Overall, *Save the Children's Effective Peer Education: Working With Children and Young People on Sexual and Reproductive Health and HIV/AIDS* has a lot of important and helpful information that can serve as a guide for program planning. While health promotion scholars might find the information valuable in designing research or teaching campaign design, organizations that have decided on the peer education format and need help in program planning and implementation would be best served by this toolkit.