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'Out in the Field': Developing guidance for community based sex and relationships education in Wales

The Welsh Assembly Government's *Sexual Health & Wellbeing Action Plan for Wales, 2010-2015*, (SHWW) released in November 2010, highlights the importance of prevention, education, individual responsibility and access to healthcare services. The plan also aims to promote a culture where people feel able to discuss and ask questions about sexual health and relationships openly. All of these features are particularly relevant within the field of community based Sex and Relationships Education (SRE).

The Action Plan introduced a number of projects and initiatives to be delivered by the All Wales Sexual Health Network. As part of the SHWW, the All Wales Sexual Health Network has led, or contributed to, the development of standards for the delivery of C-Card Schemes in Wales; the development of downloadable resources to support parents in the delivery of sex education; and explored with young people how better to actively involve them with the All Wales Sexual Health Network. The development of guidance for community based sex and relationships education in Wales is another of these projects.

The All Wales Sexual Health Network is a professional network for practitioners working within the field of sexual health in Wales. The Network was originally established in 2000, as part of the earlier action plan to implement the Welsh Assembly Government's '*A Strategic framework for Promoting Sexual Health in Wales*' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2000)

The Network aims to provide a discussion forum for a range of agencies involved in promoting better sexual health, and to be a means of promoting good practice and increasing public understanding of sexual health issues.

The Network currently has approximately 800 registered individual members, who come from a variety of professional backgrounds, for example the academic sector, primary care, the third sector, public health and the private sector. It is important to note at this point that the Network does not have a direct remit for providing advice and guidance to the general public, yet much of its work, including the projects discussed within this article, is produced with the improved sexual health of the Welsh populace in mind.

Wider Policy Context

Shortly before the release of SHWW, in September 2010, the Welsh Assembly Government's Education Department released *Sex and Relationships Education in Schools* (Welsh Assembly Government, 2010). This guidance provides advice to schools on how they should develop their sex education policies, plan and deliver their sex and relationships education provision and work in partnership with others.

Under the Education Act 2002, SRE became a compulsory part of the basic curriculum in all secondary schools in Wales. Primary schools are also required to have a policy on SRE, outlining details of their SRE programme or explaining their decision not to provide SRE. The Welsh Government recommends that primary schools have a graduated programme of SRE tailored to the age and emotional maturity of the children.

The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and this is demonstrated through the development of the policy *Children and Young People: Rights to Action* (2004). This promotes seven core aims for children and young people, including the entitlement of children and young

people to access educational and health services, and addresses their right to be listened to and to participate in the decisions that affect them, including them being given the necessary information to make choices. This policy has been followed in recent years by the *Children's Rights Scheme* (Welsh Government, 2011), implemented following the 'Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure' being passed in the National Assembly for Wales in 2011. This Scheme places a duty on Welsh Ministers to have due regard to the rights and obligations within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and its optional protocols.

Existing Evidence Base

After accessing a Public Health Wales literature search on the effectiveness of SRE in community based settings, the existing evidence base was found to be inconclusive in most of its results, although many studies did make recommendations for good practice which are in line with the guidance produced. However, key evidence shows that sex and relationships education is most effective when it is delivered through a partnership of education from home, community and school, a key message this guidance promotes and mirrors in the schools SRE guidance.

The community based SRE guidance sets out current good practice recommendations and acknowledges the ongoing and developmental nature of this work.

Project Initiation

FPA (Family Planning Association) is a UK sexual health charity. It provides straightforward information, advice and support to all people across the UK on all aspects of sexual health, sex and relationships.

FPA has established projects and developed guidance and resources for SRE in community based settings throughout its existence, examples of which include *Beyond Barbie* (Brown-Simpson, 2003), *The Boys are Aw'right* (Street et al, 2006) and *Jiwsy: A Pick 'N' Mix of Sex and Relationships Education Activities* (Gadd & Hinchliffe, 2007).

Jiwsy is a FPA community based project delivering targeted SRE to groups of vulnerable young people, under 25 years of age, in

community settings throughout North Wales. It has been in operation for over ten years, having been established in response to the Welsh Assembly Government's 'A Strategic framework for Promoting Sexual Health in Wales' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2000). The name *Jiwsy* is a Welsh take on the word 'Juicy' and was chosen as the project title in consultation with a group of vulnerable young people.

Vulnerable young people often miss out on SRE that meets their needs. They are at increased risk of unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections or other sexual health problems. *Jiwsy* works with these groups of young people, who are identified as being vulnerable and at increased risk of sexual health problems now or in the future and delivers developmental programmes of SRE concentrating on issues identified by the young people themselves. *Jiwsy's* groups include, but are not limited to: looked after children and young people who are about to leave or who have left care; young people with physical or learning disabilities; young people with behavioral problems; socially disadvantaged young people; rurally isolated young people; young offenders; minority ethnic groups, including young refugees and travellers; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning (LGBTQ) young people; homeless young people; young people with mental health issues; young parents; and young people who have been or are at risk of being abused or abusing others.

In parallel to its work with young people, *Jiwsy* also runs a popular North Wales SRE practitioners' network and trains practitioners from a range of disciplinary backgrounds in effective and engaging community based SRE delivery.

With all of this in mind, it was considered by the All Wales Sexual Health Network management that the FPA was best placed and suitably experienced to produce a comprehensive guide for delivering SRE in community based settings in Wales. To make a comprehensive guide formed from the existing knowledge base, the Network envisaged a document that incorporated aspects of the three resources referenced above and other relevant work, such as FPA's *Core competencies in sexual health for youth workers* training course.

The project specification for the community based SRE guidance highlighted the key content requirements, including for example an overview of the policy and legal context in Wales, advice on how SRE programmes should be developed, engagement with young people in the development of community based projects and anecdotal examples from the field.

The main vision for the guidance was that it should be a reference point for services to develop and maintain their community based SRE programmes, and also provide a personal reference point for an individual's career development, through matching content to the core competencies.

Developing 'Out in the Field'

'Out in the Field' was developed as a title for the guidance document to reflect the settings experienced by a varied range of community based SRE practitioners.

FPA has a good sense of what SRE practitioners find useful and what key questions and concerns may be. FPA is also familiar with the unique opportunities and challenges that working in community based settings such as local community centres, youth clubs, street-based work, etc can present.

Using the key content requirements as a base, FPA worked to develop the guidance into an easy to use 'route map' for sexual health education practitioners of all levels, whether an occasional volunteer or a full-time manager. Experienced in delivering practitioner training, FPA designed the guidance as if it were delivering training: guiding a participant through various stages of professional development including values awareness, critical thinking, information and skills acquisition and the confidence-building that equips a practitioner to deliver SRE to varied client groups. Also asking the questions; what would be most useful for them and what are common worries and questions?

Early on in the guidance, Section One sets the scene, is inclusive and deals with practitioner wellbeing. Within Section One, a definition of what is meant by 'community based' is provided, explaining that, "community based refers to work that takes place in informal settings, usually within the client's local community and not part of mainstream school

curriculum (but it could sometimes involve work taking place in schools) ... Although this guidance is not intended for mainstream education settings we recognise this work can often take place in settings such as special schools and pupil referral units." (Gadd, M (2012) pg. 3). Within the wider definition, it is acknowledged that "Working with young people within community settings usually means that participation is voluntary, unlike school. Barriers to access and participation are often reduced and effective participation can take place" (Gadd, M (2012) pg. 3).

A comprehensive Section Two; 'Am I Allowed to Deliver This Work?', focuses on the 'rules' associated with SRE delivery in community settings, such as confidentiality and child protection, and is designed to be enabling rather than put practitioners off. It includes guidance on how to work in partnership with parents/carers as young people tell FPA they want parents/carers to be a primary information source. This section has links to relevant current guidance in Wales such as schools SRE guidance, SRE and youth and community work and the recent All Wales C-Card Standards.

Section Three then addresses practitioner competencies, based on FPA's *Core competencies in sexual health for youth workers* training course, and explores what young people tell us they want from their SRE provider. This section also explores the responsibility being a positive role model, managing professional boundaries and distancing techniques and the importance of continual professional development, training and support.

Section Four focuses on delivery. This section of the guidance doesn't give sex and relationships education content - there are plenty of fantastic resources around that can offer that and the links to these are included in the guidance - rather it gives tried and tested methods for planning and delivering effective, engaging SRE. Methods such as undertaking needs assessments, adapting for different groups and settings, setting good learning outcomes, using active learning techniques, participation, safety, inclusive practice, gender issues, using appropriate resources, working in partnership and meaningful monitoring and evaluation are covered. There is also a handy

section on common problems and suggested solutions.

The final section, Section Five, contains some SRE activities from *Jiws: A Pick 'N' Mix of Sex and Relationships Education Activities* (Gadd & Hinchliffe, 2007) and a glossary of common abbreviations and terms; SRE contains as much jargon as any other field! All the way through the guidance are quotes and case studies from practitioners who deliver SRE in community based settings in Wales to keep the guidance grounded and relevant to day to day practice. Links to relevant documents and resources are also included for ease of use by the practitioner.

Using 'Out in the Field'

A guidance document, however relevant, is only useful if it is accessible and is used by practitioners. Its launch has been promoted through the Public Health Wales website, Public Health Wales' internal and external stakeholder e-bulletins, and the All Wales Sexual Health Network's 'Week in Review' e-bulletin and quarterly publication *Intersexion* (All Wales Sexual Health Network, 2012). The guidance will also be presented at a parallel session at the All Wales Sexual Health Network Annual Conference, in February 2013, where delegates in attendance will learn about the guidance and participate in some of the activities presented within it. Feedback on the guidance to date from practitioners in the field has been entirely positive.

'Out in the Field' Delivering Sex and Relationships Education in Community Based Settings' is available as a free download from the All Wales Sexual Health Network website and has been one of the most downloaded documents available on the site since its launch in September 2012, attracting (as of 4th February 2013) 462 views for the English-language version of the guidance and 161 views for the Welsh-language version of the guidance.

We are sure that the guidance could be of use to community based practitioners not just in

Wales but also those outside of Wales, and encourage readers to download it and let us know what you think.

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