

25% of the young people interviewed said that they had formed at least one new sexual relationship while on holiday.

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Sea, Sand and Safer Sex messages

A particularly innovative peer education project has taken place in Torbay, Devon, over the past three years, where Plymouth & Torbay Health Authority have approached HIV/AIDS peer education from a different angle. The peer educators in Torbay have been out and about in the local night-clubs and pubs, and have attended Radio One Roadshows, as part of the *Sea, Sand and Safer Sex* project.

A peer educator simply means someone of the same status (in terms of age, occupation, or interest) who is involved in 'educating' his or her peers. The majority of peer educators have been school or college students who educate pupils that are of the same age or younger than themselves. Many peer education sessions have taken place within the college timetable or during youth club sessions.

Peer education has become very popular over the past few years as a method of sexual health education. Many schools and colleges have successfully taken part in HIV/AIDS, as well as drugs and alcohol peer education projects.

The aims of the Torbay project were:

- *To raise public awareness of the dangers of unprotected sexual intercourse.*
- *To promote correct, consistent use of condoms to reduce sexually-transmitted diseases, including HIV, and to reduce the number of unplanned pregnancies and the need for abortions.*
- *To minimise the harm from intravenous drug use and alcohol use.*
- *To reduce the prejudice and stigma around HIV issues.*

The idea of the *Sea, Sand and Safer Sex* project started in 1989 when a survey of tourists visiting Torbay (carried out by the Institute of Population Studies, Exeter) found that those young people who engaged in unsafe (unprotected) sexual behaviour tended to be those who frequented pubs and night-clubs and had high levels of alcohol consumption. The results showed that although only a minority of all the young visitors interviewed engaged in sexual intercourse with a new partner while on holiday, most of this particular night-life group did engage

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in unsafe practices, characterised by low condom use and multiple partners. Analysis of interviews carried out in 1990 showed that 25% of the young people had had sexual relationships with at least one new partner while on holiday, and 60% of this group did not use a condom.

Choosing the setting

Part of the underlying concept of the project was to reach this minority of young people, who were most at risk from a sexually-transmitted infection, in the very settings that precede casual sexual contact, and then to attempt to make them more mindful of the health risks.

The survey also found that young people wanted to receive more information about AIDS and sexual matters, and felt most comfortable when receiving this information with their friends in small groups. The report of this survey recommended:

- *The use of peer sources for sexual health information.*
- *The need for interactive discussion in order to explore the meanings and social pressures surrounding sexual activities.*

The need for sexual health education outside full-time education, and the wider issues of health education and leisure lifestyles, were also highlighted (Ford, 1991).

A pilot scheme entitled *Happy, Healthy Holidays* was run in 1990, and the experiences of this pilot project were drawn upon in the development of the three-year *Sea, Sand and Safer Sex* project (Ford & Inman, 1991). *Sea, Sand and Safer Sex* involved many local organisations and groups in its steering committee, which enabled various interest groups to be involved in the planning stages and throughout the three-year period.

The peer educators visited various night-clubs each summer (July, August and September) wearing promotional T-shirts and baseball caps and disseminating information, leaflets from local agencies, and free condoms. The DJs in the night-clubs ran 'safer sex' competitions, and the peer educators encouraged the young people to take part in the competitions, handing out 'safer sex' crosswords, quizzes, and word-searches.

Party atmosphere

In the first year, 29 party nights took place in the night-clubs, and the peer educators chatted

to the young people about safer sex and where to go for advice. In addition to visiting night-clubs, they also attended Karaoke Talent competitions, which were run in the Torbay pubs. The events were staged in a party atmosphere with balloons and stickers, and the peer educators often had in-depth talks with young people about safer-sex issues.

In addition to the night-clubs and pubs, they also attended Youth Days, National Music Week events, and sessions at bowling alleys and leisure centres. The peer educators attended a total of 38 events in this first year, and spent an average of 3 hours at each one. Individually, they spoke to an average of 19 males and 18 females at each event. They reported that during each event some young people came up to them voluntarily, while others had to be approached.

Each year, around 25 peer educators (between the ages of 16 and 36) attended a residential training weekend, where they were addressed by various speakers and participated in small-group work on the issues of HIV/AIDS, family planning, drug use, and sexually-transmitted diseases. Peer educators from the first year proved to be invaluable mentors for the newly-trained intake in the second and third years. This was another example of successful 'peer education'.

Gauging the reaction

The Institute of Population Studies was involved in evaluating the project. The first-year evaluation examined the views of the night-club owners, bar staff, DJs, the peer educators themselves, and a small sample of the young people attending the events. These views were used to modify the second-year project (Mathie & Ford, 1993). The second year involved interviewing young people in Torbay in order to gauge their reaction to the project and also to evaluate the impact of the peer education (Blacksell & Ford, 1994). The third year is currently being analysed.

The reactions from all those concerned were overwhelmingly positive, and the young people appreciated the combination of fun with serious and relevant messages. Comments from the young people included:

It was good fun, but got the message over.

Everyone was having fun but talking about serious things.

Some of the young people commented on the night-club setting.

It's better there, people are more embarrassed in the open air.

One particularly positive comment came from a 19-year-old male:

AIDS education in clubs is the best way to spread the news.

An 18-year-old female said:

I think it's very useful, as many people meet other people in pubs and clubs and end up sleeping with them. Good work — keep it up.

The peer educators talked to some people briefly and others in more depth. One of them reported:

One man stood and had a very good conversation with me for about half an hour. Both he and his girlfriend were virgins, but he wanted to know what else to look out for.

Other peer educators commented:

People seemed interested, and I was able to hand out a lot of leaflets and give advice.

I talked to a lot of people and I felt they actually listened.

The free condoms were very popular, and the peer educators said that they were asked for four times the amount they had!

Spreading the message

Overall, the *Sea, Sand and Safer Sex* events were well received, and the peer educators were very successful in engaging the attention of young people without embarrassment. Information, advice, leaflets and free condoms were appreciated by this group of young people, who may otherwise miss out on sexual health education.

The DJs in the night-clubs proved to be crucial to the success of the evening, and the project co-ordinator played a key role in providing support to the peer educators, organising the events and co-ordinating with the venue owners.

Over the summer months, the *Safer Sex* message reached a large number of young people in Torbay, and one of the fringe benefits of the

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project is that the education continues informally across boundaries, enabling the ideas to be diffused to a much wider population beyond the target audience.

References

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'Just what we've been looking for.'

LIFESTYLES 2 (Mainly Money)

A datafile about pupils for pupils

Lifestyles 1 (Mainly Social) contained selected responses of 200 Year 10 pupils to Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire surveys, enabling the user to advance and test hypotheses about the links between social behaviours and other 'lifestyle' factors.

Its success encouraged us to develop a second, larger datafile, aimed particularly at investigating how spending power may affect people and the things they do. *Lifestyles 2* (Mainly Money) contains the same number of Year 10 pupils (100 boys, 100 girls, surveyed in 1994), but there are 25 variables in the database instead of the 18 in *Lifestyles 1*.

Lifestyles 1: £10.00

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If you have any queries, talk to Anne Wise, who developed the datafiles, on 01392 264728.