

Gareth Davies is the Young Leaders Project Manager and based at the Terence Higgins Trust
For correspondence please e-mail: gareth.davies@ttht.org.uk

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The Young Leaders project: UK sexual health project of the year

The Young Leaders project, run by HIV and sexual health charity Terence Higgins Trust (THT), was awarded 'UK sexual health project of the year' at The Brook Awards 2009 in March.

Young Leaders is a national peer-led, grant-giving, sex and relationships education (SRE) project, where young people teach their peers about sex, relationships and sexual health. Young Leaders is a three year project, launched in April 2007 and funded by the Big Lottery Fund. THT consulted 120 young people to develop the project.

National and regional boards

Each year a board of young people (13-19 years old) are recruited in seven regions across England to establish and manage a grant programme to support SRE projects created by other young people. These boards are supported by a national board of young people who ensure a co-ordinated national approach for the whole project. As well as working on a regional basis all the young people involved in the project get to meet each other twice a year, at an annual conference and a weekend residential. One national board member has said,

"The residential was a great way to get to know all the other young people across the UK that believe just as passionately as you in young people's right to get sufficient sex and relationship education! Regardless of regional differences, we worked together throughout the weekend - as a national board we began our preparation for the '09 Conference and worked on the marketing opportunities for the young leaders project. We also did several team-building activities including trying to get the a

group of 10 over a 7 or 8ft wall! It was great."

To equip the young people with the necessary skills to run the project they receive accredited training on 'Sex and Relationship Education' and 'Developing Group and Teamwork Communication Skills'. This guarantees their commitment is recognised in a tangible way. In the last two years, the Young Leaders have awarded grant money and supported hundreds of projects, reaching a diverse range of young people. One regional board member has said,

"We have been learning a lot about SRE topics which has help me loads. I now know and understand different types of contraception, safer sex and what a healthy relationship should be. We've also just been through what seemed like thousands of applications which were really difficult to decide which ones to accept but the board came to an agreement with 4 main projects, many of the applications were good but the four stood out with different and interesting ideas but were still youth led at the same time."

Regional projects

Young people aged 13-19 in the seven regions who belong to a youth organisation can apply for a grant to run and manage projects around SRE issues, successful applicants are offered training from their peers on the regional boards to help them deliver their project.

Project examples from London

Safer Sex Awareness Hour hosted by DJ Whiplash

A radio station focusing on sexual health and relationship issues will be set up and broadcast online for young people to listen

to. Songs will be played that looked at relationships as well as guest speakers giving opinions on recent statistics surrounding around sexual health. Advice would also be given around sexual health, contraception, pregnancy and relationships in between songs.

Love Me, Love Me Not...

The project will put together a DVD that can be circulated around secondary schools in Hounslow. The DVD will cover SRE from a young person's perspective and would be used within PSHE lessons already in schools to aid in the teaching of SRE. An e-mail address and support will also be set up to deal with unanswered questions.

Project examples from the Yorkshire and Humber area

Crossley Heath School

Young people applied for funding to run a Health Fayre for Year 9s in their school as they felt it important that young people had more sex education at that age. The students delivered assemblies to make the young people aware of what was going to happen and to raise the issues in their minds. They then supported their younger peers around a variety of stalls, and organised for each of them to have essential information in a goodie bag. They took a holistic view and included information about relaxation, and healthy eating, substance use and mental health.

Focus Forum

A group of young mums applied for funding to build their skills and knowledge on relationships, contraception, and STI's so they could develop a DVD focusing on the realities of being a young mum, and how to make positive choices about sex, relationships and contraception. The group has run peer led sessions with other groups and plan to deliver sessions at other groups in the organisation.

Project examples from the South West

Breaking the Taboo

A project aiming to reduce vulnerability

and a lack of information in Asian communities. The project has run culturally appropriate SRE discussion groups and provided advice on SRE to sexual active Asian young people who cannot talk to their parents.

Sex and Relationships questions you're afraid to ask

Launching with a theatre performance at school and continuing with a peer led drop in session and handing out 'bags of sex' which contain important sexual health information - by young people at Stoke Damerel Community College, Plymouth.

Project examples from the North West

Youth Service Moreton Sex Education Crew

Received a grant for an SRE notice board project. Nine young people researched local services and devised a photographic story board for their Youth Centre. The money bought a camera, art equipment and resources for a grand opening event. This will be kept updated by the young people who were granted the money.

Body Positive North West

A peer education project developing a DVD highlighting some of the issues faced by young people living with or affected by HIV. The DVD was to be done in collaboration with Contact Theatre and a school for Deaf young people.

Applying for a grant

Grant round 4 should be beginning in May 2009. One board member offers some advice to those thinking of applying for a grant:

"Be realistic: do you honestly need to spend money on something you could obtain from somewhere else, maybe for free or for a lesser amount? Although the number of people reached is very important, it is quality over quantity and the quality of the SRE delivered means more than the number of people who have access to it."

For more information visit the website:
www.tht.org.uk/youknowyou