

Kate McIver is a SRE Programmes Co-ordinator with the NHS in Bradford and Airedale.  
For communication please email: Kate.McIver@bradford.nhs.uk

## Kate McIver

# 'Ur Choice' : an innovative approach to relationships and sex education

*Ur Choice* is a new relationships and sex education programme for secondary schools, developed in Bradford and Airedale. The pilot started in 2009-10 with two schools. Seven schools will run Year 9 (Y9) *Ur Choice* in 2010-11.

### Delivery

*Ur Choice* comprises Y9 peer sessions and adult-delivered sessions in Y9 and Year 10 (Y10). Adult programmes are co-delivered by a teacher and a 'health worker' e.g. from School Nursing, Contraception and Sexual Health [CASH] Services, Youth Services or Voluntary Sector. The peer programme is delivered in small teams by sixth formers.

### Ethos

Co-delivery involves dialogue between those delivering as well as discussion with and between young people; 'no question is a silly question and young people deserve respectful answers' (McIver, 2010). *Ur Choice* accepts that no-one has all the answers and that it can be liberating for young people to observe this in facilitators. 'Respectful answers' may acknowledge ambiguity or lack of information.

*Ur Choice* aims and objectives translate into session objectives which are shared and reviewed with young people. In this sense the *Ur Choice* 'agenda' is explicit, with the intention that young people may engage more meaningfully with the process. Ground rules assure that personal information is not required.

In keeping with Social Norms theory *Ur Choice* uses no "'health terrorism' or similar

techniques" (McAlaney, 2010). There are no depictions of genitals infected with STIs. Discussion of risk is balanced and contextualised. *Ur Choice* promotes the advantages of not engaging in sexual activity until ready and that; 'sex should be pleasurable, not pressured, coerced, painful, stressful or selfless' (McIver, 2010). Assertiveness work underpins these messages.

Inclusivity is fundamental to the ethos of *Ur Choice*; homophobia, hate crime and discrimination are addressed.

### Co-working

Co-delivery exemplifies respectful negotiation in relationships, which may have particular value for those young people who lack role models for co-operative relationships. Teachers' knowledge of their classes and classroom management combines with health workers' credibility and knowledge of local services.

Health workers' involvement enables young people to meet representatives from local services, thus increasing access to these. Anecdotal evidence from one school's Teenage Information and Advice Centre (TIC TAC) co-ordinator suggests a significant increase in numbers of Y9 students accessing TIC TAC following signposting in *Ur Choice* peer sessions.

### Programme development

*Ur Choice* development was informed by consultation with young people throughout the district. SRE guidance (DfES, 2000) and National Curriculum (QCA, 2007)

requirements also informed development, as did evaluation of the previously run APAUSE programme ([www.sreproject.org](http://www.sreproject.org)).

A multi-agency steering group includes representatives from Education, Local Authority, School Nursing, Men's Health and voluntary agencies. Specialist agencies were consulted on specific issues e.g. child sexual exploitation, child abuse, lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB)/equity issues and domestic abuse.

## Content

Y9 sessions cover topics such as STIs, conception, safer sex, assertiveness, and stages in a relationship. Also included are issues of consent, homophobic bullying and confidentiality. In Y10 young people learn about legal rights and responsibilities, abuse and gender stereotyping. Consistent with research by local and national agencies (Barter, 2009), (Brook, 2009) is the inclusion of two areas of growing concern for young people: the impact of pornography and teenage relationship abuse.

The peer programme explores societal pressures and reasons why young people have sex. Messages are given about abusive and healthy relationships and there are opportunities to practise assertiveness.

## Training

Peer educators receive two days' training. Teachers and health workers train together and have one day's training for each *Ur Choice* programme (Y9 and Y10). Training covers values and attitudes, ethos, co-delivery, sexual health, inclusive delivery and wider issues addressed in *Ur Choice*. Participants observe session delivery modelled by experienced trainers.

## Resources

Each programme utilises a PowerPoint presentation, accompanying delivery handbook and class pack. Written work is minimal and activities can be adapted to

meet groups' educational needs. Use of images, film and discussion mean that *Ur Choice* appeals to different learning styles.

Feedback from teachers has been very positive; 'Just what a teacher needs - it's all pre prepared' and, 'For a non-specialist it was really straight forward to follow and teach'. Health workers' comments echoed this; 'The PowerPoint and booklet were very user-friendly'.

## Evaluation

Pre- and post-delivery questionnaires for Y9 adult and peer programmes are completed by students. Initial findings will be available early in 2011.

A Year 11 (Y11) questionnaire is being devised to evaluate impact on behaviour and attitudes. Y11 students will complete the questionnaire in 2011, providing baseline evaluation data.

Delivery feedback has been extremely favourable. Young people appear to engage with and enjoy *Ur Choice*. Formerly apprehensive teachers reported finding delivery easier than anticipated and felt optimistic about future delivery. They could think of no improvements to the programme. One teacher wrote; 'In all sessions they engaged and discussed the material'. Another stated; 'Lovely lesson plans' and another; 'Interesting, well structured materials'.

Peer educators enjoyed delivering and suggested some changes to the programme, which have been implemented. Y10 *Ur Choice* was very well received by adults attending training.

## Future

There is scope to use baseline evaluation data to inform young people's perceptions of their peers and their own behaviour and attitudes.

*Ur Choice* will be rolled out to additional secondary schools and ultimately offered to all. 2011 will see first use in pupil referral

units. Increasing availability to marginalised young people is a priority. There is potential to develop *Ur Choice* for additional year groups in secondary and primary schools.

#### References

(All Internet references accessed November 2010)

Barter, C., McCarry, M, Berridge, D. and Evans, K. (2009) *Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships*. University of Bristol.

Brook. (2009). Young People and Pornography: A briefing for workers. <http://www.sexualhealthsheffield.nhs.uk/resources/pornographybriefing.pdf>

DfES. (2000). SRE Guidance. <http://publications.education.gov.uk>

QCDA. (2007). National Curriculum. <http://curriculum.qcda.gov.uk>

McAlaney, J. Bewick, B.M., and Bauerle, J., (2010). *Social Norms Guidebook*. [www.uksocialnorms.org](http://www.uksocialnorms.org)

Mclver, K. (2010). *Ur Choice Year 9 Delivery Handbook Third Edition*. SHARe team, NHS, 28.