

SEX & ETHICS FRAMEWORK PILOTED IN WELLINGTON

A pilot programme running in Wellington is teaching young adults how to negotiate sexual relationships in a healthy and safe way.

The Sex & Ethics pilot to prevent sexual violence is half way through and is already being labelled highly successful.

The Wellington Sexual Abuse Network received \$164,000 from the Ministry of Justice for a two year pilot of the programme Sex & Ethics, developed by Australian Moira Carmody.

Professor Carmody has 25 years experience in sexual violence prevention.

The new programme is a move away from traditional sexual violence prevention programmes which tend to teach individual women how to manage risk and avoid sexual violence, Wellington Sexual Abuse Network (WSAN) project manager Sandra Dickson said.

“These programmes leave women holding the responsibility for sexual violence. Sex & Ethics teaches how to negotiate mutual, healthy and safe sex with sexual partners and how to step in when they see others in sexually risky situations.

“Internationally there is very little evidence that traditional programmes worked at all. We know from tackling other issues like smoking that changing the environment people live and socialise in works better than trying to change the individual’s behaviour.”

Professor Carmody asked young people what they wanted to know about having good sexual relationships and based Sex & Ethics on what they told her. They said they:

- knew how their bodies worked
- knew about condoms
- didn’t know how to negotiate sexual interactions
- didn’t know how to help when they saw others in sexually unsafe situations.

MOST DON’T KNOW THE LAW AND MOST DON’T KNOW HOW TO HANDLE SITUATIONS WHERE SEXUAL VIOLENCE USUALLY OCCURS

Ms Dickson said many young people report unwanted sexual contact and negative sexual encounters here in New Zealand (Youth 2000 study). Most don’t know the law and most don’t know how to handle situations where sexual violence usually occurs – with people they already know.

“Traditional programmes focus on stranger rapes but these are rare.”



THERE WAS DEFINITELY A RIPPLE EFFECT OUT FROM THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE PARTICIPATED SO FAR.



The WSAN pilot will run Sex & Ethics for eight groups of young people across four sites, during 2009 and 2010. The young people are drawn from Evolve and Vibe community centres and Victoria University groups.

So far 40 young people aged 18 to 24 have participated – half men, half women and a good cross section of New Zealanders in terms of ethnicity, education, sexual preferences and sexual history.

They were invited to be part of the pilot. Results are being evaluated by Professor Carmody.

“Everybody loved it. They welcomed the opportunity to be talking about this issue,” Ms Dickson said.

“Every single person among the Māori and Pacific Island participants said it was wonderful to be able to talk about sexual relationships.

“The hunger from the young people to find ways to explore how to have safe and healthy sexual interactions was extraordinary.”

The programme includes an ethical bystander component where participants role play ways to help their friends to manage risky sexual situations.

Participants are involved in the evaluation for six months after they complete the programme.

There was definitely a ripple effect out from the people who have participated so far, Ms Dickson said.

“We assume that women have the responsibility for sexual safety but we really need to teach safety to both genders and the young people welcomed that approach.

“This programme feels really ground breaking, and not just to me. Every single time I have been involved in promoting the programme or presenting about it, the feedback is ‘I would have loved to do that programme’ – many of them in the over 25 age group who have had poor sexual experiences in the past.”

A clinical workshop will be run next year for counsellors who want to incorporate Sex & Ethics into their one-on-one work.

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For more information please contact Sandra Dickson at wsanprevention@xtra.co.nz

The Wellington Sexual Abuse Network is a collaboration between Wellington Rape Crisis, Sexual Abuse HELP Foundation and Wellstop.