

Paper Presentation

Topic: Innovations and Good Practices in Volunteering

Volunteering of Youth: Sexuality Education Volunteer Team

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Abstract

In April 2001, the Family Planning Association of Hong Kong (FPAHK) has set up a youth volunteer team called “Fam+2” to achieve the realization of youth participation and youth empowerment, and to promote sexuality education through the approach of peer education. This paper presents the mission of the youth volunteer team, its activities and experiences on delivering sexuality education to the local community, and what have been done to enhance youth volunteers’ commitment and sense of team belonging. Future development and feelings of one of the members is also shared.

Background

Youth participation is valued as a human right. It plays a crucial role in maintaining democratic principles and is key to the development of young people. Whereas in the past, youth only participated in designing, planning and implementation, youth participation now occurs frequently in governance, advocacy and project development (IPPF, 2004). Although the practice of creating meaningful opportunities for young people to participate as active agents in decisions affecting them is relatively new in most countries, the earlier young people are provided with opportunities to participate, the greater the benefit is to both themselves and the wider society (World Youth Report, 2003). The Family Planning Association of Hong Kong has long treasured the youth participation in its work. The Association’s Youth Volunteer Scheme was established since 1990’s. Short-term youth volunteers were recruited to assist in clerical work or other minor projects. To further achieve the realization of youth involvement and youth empowerment, and to actualize the concept of peer education, the Youth Volunteer Scheme was revamped in April 2001.

Our Aims

Under the revamping scheme, some devoted youth, including me, joined the sexuality education volunteer team, named 'Fam+2'. Since then, we have dedicated ourselves to the road of promoting sexuality education and reached a consensus to achieve the following aims:

1. Increasing youth involvement in promoting youths' awareness of their sexual and reproductive health;
2. Serving as Youth Ambassador to design, organize and implement educational programs so as to promote sexuality education and peer education among youths in the local community;
3. Enlarging network to disseminate information on sexuality education;
4. Electing a number of youth volunteers to attend the council meeting so as to facilitate youth participation in governance / policymaking level;
5. Through working together with youth volunteers, staff of the Association will better understand youths and be able to shape the related programs and services to suit their needs and interests.

Training and Recognition

These are the important elements for enhancing youth volunteers' commitment and sense of team belonging. We are keen to attend related trainings to strengthen our knowledge, confidence and skill in implementing sexuality education. Apart from offering internal trainings with contents covering scope of sexuality education, exploration of sex attitude & values, leadership skill and basic counseling skill, the Association would also sponsor us to attend regional or international interflow conference so as to expand our exposure. It is reflected that all these provisions are fruitful as we learn more about volunteerism, while self-awareness is also enhanced. Furthermore, tangible recognition such as certificates, recommendation letters, souvenirs, etc. and verbal appreciation are indispensable for good performance. To further achieve youth empowerment and increase youth participation in the policy decision-making level, the Association elected four youth volunteers as the council members to attend the Council Meetings. The youth representatives share equal voting power as other committee members. It reveals that youth volunteers can have a reasonable autonomy in governance.

Program Participation

Members of Fam+2 are active and dedicated to voluntary services. During the years, we have organized different kinds of sexuality education programs such as postcard and slogan design competition, quiz and debate competition for primary and secondary students, sexuality education camp for children and adolescent, children sexuality education booth design competition, sharing on ‘sexual life of elderly’ and program on ‘love and dating’. As the designed programs match up to the developmental needs of teenagers, parents and teachers would show their willingness to support youth participation.

Future Development

There are still plenty of rooms for development in sexuality education. As a youth myself, I feel that the sexual and reproductive health needs and rights are not fully addressed in the Hong Kong society. The Youth Sexuality Study 2001 conducted by the Association indicated that the number of young people engaged in sexual activity had greatly increased over the last decade. On the knowledge level about sexuality, however, young people showed poor knowledge about contraception & HIV/AIDS. The data shows that there is a pressing demand for the local agencies and government to promote comprehensive sexuality education in schools (and through media) to accommodate changes in youths in matters concerning their knowledge, attitudes and behaviors towards sexuality. However, there are schools that often focus on the physiological aspects when delivering sexuality education and seldom touch on life skills such as communications or decision-making skills. To increase youth awareness of their needs and rights, we are now organizing a pilot project to train up secondary students to be the peer sex educators. After completion of training courses, these peer sex educators will be equipped to deliver healthy sex attitude and accurate sex knowledge to their peers in schools.

Feeling Sharing

The experience of being a volunteer is very special to me. It is full of scope for self-fulfillment. After I have joined the Fam+2, not only did I learn more about sexual knowledge, be more positive towards sexuality and acquire practical skills in organizing activities, I also made some good friends who share the interest to do something for promoting sexuality education in Hong Kong. Voluntary services indeed broaden my horizons and improve my communication skill from contacts with different people. I think I have made a right decision to join this volunteer team, as this helps a lot for my personal growth and brighten up my life.

References

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3. FPAHK (1991, 1996, 2001) *Youth Sexuality Study*, Family Planning Association of Hong Kong.