



Empowerment

Women's sexual health
through education:
a peer leadership
model

Women's Health Goulburn North East (WHGNE) was established in July 2000 and is the government funded specialist women's health service for the Goulburn Valley and North East Victoria.

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Prologue

This report features work that can be described as a partnership between women with disabilities and health practitioners working for health promotion and education.

The report exists to serve two functions. Firstly, we provide it as an account of the work undertaken this year for the project titled *Count Me Two*. It represents stage two of the work. We have chosen to feature the peer leadership model in this report as this was the work that extended stage one. However, we reproduced the group work model trialled in stage one. Three groups were available in our community this year:

- ° Young Men's Group
- ° Women's Group *Living and Loving*
- ° Young Women's Group *Groovy Chicks2*

Secondly, we provide it in the hope that colleagues will find it interesting and take up some of the ideas for use in practice. We have provided rich description to aid this process and we also encourage enquiries.

The work has been founded on partnerships and we wish to thank and acknowledge contributing agencies for their commitment to the project:

- ° North East Support and Action for Youth
- ° Ovens and King Community Health Service
- ° Department of Human Services: Human Relations Program
- ° Central Hume Domestic Violence Outreach Service
- ° Upper Murray Centre Against Sexual Assault
- ° North East Health Service

History

In September 2001, Women's Health Goulburn North East began the work associated with the project that came to be known as *Count Me Two*. Many people participated: seventeen women aged between eighteen and sixty-six, workers from many community based agencies and representatives from the Department of Human Services.

The project used an action research approach to explore barriers to sexual health experienced by women with an intellectual disability. We also sought to understand what women had found helpful to their sexual health.

Our findings

Women have no disability in their hopes and dreams. They hope to be related to first as women. Frequently women are related to through their disability and this limits women's opportunities to engage with others in broader and perhaps more meaningful conversations and activities. Women aspire to belong to family and friendship circles that include opportunities for them to have partners and for some, to become mothers. Women with intellectual disability do not have access to the freedom of choice, education, support and social participation that enables these hopes to be seen to fruition. It is apparent that preparation for adolescence, with a focus on menstruation, is one aspect of sexual health education that has been consistently delivered locally (North East Victoria). This is a good start. Education is missing in other stages of women's lives and this is an issue that demands attention. Education can be delivered at transition stages of the life cycle. Future and ongoing education opportunities should also include:

- ° Education when women reach transition from adolescence to adulthood, with a focus on healthy relationships, including family planning and, where indicated, preparation for motherhood.
- ° Informing women about proactive health care with regard to sexually transmitted

- disease, cervical screening and breast care and supporting women to access this health care.
- At mid-life women offering women the opportunity to discover more about menopause.

Please refer to the report titled, 'There's No Disability in Women's Hearts,' for more detail about Stage One of the project (www.whealth.com.au).

Feminist philosophy and practice

Women's Health Goulburn North East is a feminist organisation and the trial was informed by feminist philosophy. The practice strategies employed, that will be visible in an exploration of the work include:

- Working in groups
- Using participatory decision making processes
- An egalitarian approach
- Service user orientation
- Social education
- Practical assistance to women, such as providing resources and information

Through the use of these strategies we believe that women enjoyed an empowering experience, one through which personal and collective change took place. This is evident in the experiences of change women told us of through evaluative conversations. For example:

"I could never say anything and now I can talk to people and get help when I'm not sure. I know where to go to get help."

"All of it was important. Now I can go home and say I had a bad day today. I used to keep everything to myself."

"Everything's changed... in myself... relationships didn't work out before... now I'd rather

be friends until later on and see what I want.”

Communication

Verbal communication is not always an easy way for people with intellectual disability to communicate about how they feel and what is important to them. For this reason we had a community artist as a member of our group. She facilitated a range of activities that gave women an opportunity to express themselves through various mediums. We used plain English throughout.

Groovy Chicks

In response to the findings we produced a pilot program. The pilot was a twelve week group work program designed to deliver sexual health education. The women who participated titled the group ‘Groovy Chicks.’ This program was for women at transition to adulthood. It was designed according to the expressed interests of women who were aged between eighteen and twenty-eight years. Their input to the program not only guaranteed relevance but also contributed to the key principle of the work, which is that the women will lead all work. Further information is provided in the following statement of principles:

- ° Every woman will be respected for who she is, how she chooses to live and what she believes in.
- ° We will support the well being and growth of each of us within the group.
- ° We will encourage each other to talk about things that are close to our heart.
- ° We will work together to make our lives what we want them to be.
- ° We will work in a way that makes us feel equal to each other.

- We agree that what we talk about in the group is private and will not be talked about outside the group.
- Each woman is in charge of her own life and will decide what action she wants to take. If she wants support to take action with any issue in her life she can seek it within the group.

In the pilot program women chose to explore:

- Healthy relationships
- Pap tests
- Breast care and screening
- Sexual intimacy, safe sex and contraception

Count Me Two Stage Two

Peer Leadership: training and employment

This year we were able to extend the pilot program by offering the young women who had participated in Groovy Chicks the opportunity to undertake peer leadership training and to then work as peer leaders for the next group of young women choosing to access the group. The peer leadership model employs workers and is not a voluntary activity. We chose to proceed with peer leadership since it is suggested that health education is much improved with the presence of peers working in health education roles (Cooper & Temby 1995). Furthermore, there is evidence that young people with learning disabilities prefer to have access to peer leaders.

When young people with learning disabilities were asked who would be good people to help disabled people to learn about sex, other disabled people came on top of the list.

(Shakespeare, Gillespie-Sells & Davies 1996 pp. 32)

The peer leaders were supported throughout their work by co-facilitators: Kerry (Social Worker, Women's Health Goulburn North East), Jacque (Therapeutic Artist) and Brooke (Social Worker, Futures for Young Adults, Ovens and King Community Health Services). The peer leaders invited professional health workers to the group to provide education to their peers on the basis of a needs assessment undertaken within the group in the first two weeks of the group's gathering.

Inclusion

The peer leadership model has been an exciting one to work within and to learn from. We used a strengths approach to conduct the training. We also used an inclusion principle. We did not target women deemed to be the natural leaders of the previous group, or those seen to have more ability. We chose to offer the opportunity to all, with a belief that each young woman had unique strengths and knowledge to share with others. In the process of undertaking their leadership training, women reflected on their personal strengths and interests and chose roles they would take up as peer leaders.

Roles

Women worked in these ways:

DJ	Providing music that was enjoyable to have playing during group activities.
Care Leader	Selecting and preparing food for the group.
Games Leader	Facilitating games and activities that were part of our learning, with regard to sexual health.
Talk Leader	Welcoming the group and asking them about what they like. Asking the group about what is working for them or what needs to be changed (evaluation).

Liaison Leader Introducing guest speakers, such as the sexual health nurse, to the group and explaining what services are available for young women.

Education Leader Talking about relationships and the difference between good relationships and ones that hurt you.

While these were the roles women anticipated playing and fulfilled very well, the power of their work was evident when they spontaneously shared knowledge and experience with other young women.

Much of what took place in the group is confidential and we apologise for the fact that we can't share it here. However, the peer leaders have engaged in an evaluative conversation at the conclusion of ***Groovy Chicks2*** and we present it for you, anticipating that you will glean some of the interesting and exciting possibilities that exist through a peer leadership model.

When reading the transcript we expect you'll find evidence that the peer leaders benefited from their roles in these ways:

- Improved confidence
- Enjoyment of the role, particularly of helping others and sharing knowledge
- An opportunity to be creative and to use their initiative
- The ongoing learning opportunity
- Team work

We suggest that one benefit of peer leadership to group participants is that support exists outside the group meeting time. Strengthening support between women with regard to sexual health is an important aspect of the work, as we are informed by broader research that women with disabilities do not talk about sexual health with each other. Consequently they experience another form of isolation. An aspect of this experience is described by one of the peer leaders during the evaluative conversation:

“I never used to talk about this much to friends and that, because I would get embarrassed and stuff, so yeah...”

Finally, in relation to the transcript, the women acting as peer leaders demonstrated an understanding of the connection between needs analysis, planning and service delivery. This is a very positive outcome and one that supports our assertion that the peer leadership training was effective.

“... because when we get a new group, they’ll have their own ideas and their own opinions. They can help us and we can help them. We can say who do you want? So they might bring up something and we can organise something to bring up for them ‘cos everyone has their own ideas.”

Transcribed conversation with Peer Leaders

(Pseudonyms have been used for peer leaders and group participants to preserve privacy)

Kerry "Okay, today we are going to talk about being a peer leader which you have been doing this year, first with peer leadership training and then with **Groovy Chicks2**... First we could talk about what has been good about being a peer leader..."

(silence)

Kerry "Everyone's silent. The tape's a worry (lots of group laughter), I'll hide it... What's been good about being a peer leader?"

Peer Leader "Meeting new people, working with young women... as a peer leader. Yes, as a Groovy Chick."

Kerry "What's been good about working with young women?"

Peer Leader "Working with younger women. Yes. When Angela found out about John's nana dying."

Kerry "What's been good being a peer leader Karen?"

Peer Leader "Helping Angela."

Kerry "How could you help her?"

Peer Leader "I said, 'It's okay Angela.' I said, 'She's gone. She's no longer here.'"

Kerry "You comforted her."

Peer Leader "Yes."

Kerry "That's good."

Peer Leader "Because John was upset about her, so I said to Angela she's gone."

Kerry "So you were a peer leader outside the time that we met..."

Peer Leader "Yes."

Kerry "You were looking after Angela somewhere else?"

Peer Leader "Yes."

Kerry "That's really great. What about you, Mel? What's been good about being a peer leader?"

Peer Leader "It's alright to hear the talk show."

Kerry "What about when you came to Groovy Chicks and you were looking after other people?"

Peer Leader "I know... I put the music on."

Kerry "That's right."

Peer Leader "Doing the relaxation."

Kerry "Yes. And you did something else for us too didn't you?"

Peer Leader "Oh yes... massage."

Kerry "So that was good."

Peer Leader "Mel started that off."

Kerry "So you were able to do shoulder massages and taught the others how to do it too."

Peer Leader "Yeah."

Kerry "What about you Tara, what's good about being a peer leader?"

Peer Leader "Helping others, supporting them and getting them to open up and they don't have to be shy or anything. If they didn't want to say anything, they could tell me and then I could tell somebody else. Some people are shy that you see around this sort of work."

Peer Leader "And if they don't want to speak to us, there's all these other people they can speak to and we can let them know who they are. And if they don't want to talk to us, they can still talk to someone else."

Kerry "What about the times they do want to talk to you, when you are the peer leader... what's been good about that?"

Peer Leader "Some of them have talked to us... to most of us haven't they... they can depend on us too... we know them... they know us really well. We know them through other stuff. We see them in other places. We know them really well and we can always help if they need any help or anything. A lot... a lot... Tara's took all my words away... mine's exactly the same as Tara's. I would just like to keep going and we've said that haven't we Tara? 'Cos we really love it."

Kerry "You love the work."

Peer Leader "Yeah and like I said today... we've never done this kind of work and I would work with much older women too you know. It would be good."

Kerry "What's been hard about it?"

Group "Nothing."

Kerry "Nothing?"

Peer Leader "None of it's hard. It's just work. No paperwork!"

Kerry "Anything been hard?"

Peer Leader "Not really."

Peer Leader "It's not hard because we have always got ideas and stuff to do."

Peer Leader "As a group you know... even the girls here... we work out what to do."

Peer Leader "Yeah, we plan games, relaxation."

Peer Leader "But we planned it... the week next... we used to plan it every Tuesday for the next week... so it's all planned."

Kerry "You sure did... and you've planned fun ways of learning... remember you told me we weren't having enough fun!" (everyone laughs)

Peer Leader "The colours game about feelings were great, remember, we learned how to connect our feelings with colours. The games were great... those sorts of things you know... all games related to women's health."

Kerry "So what about you, what happened for you as a peer leader? What changed in yourself, or in life, through being a peer leader?"

Peer Leader "My confidence. I never had much confidence with myself. I wouldn't talk in front of a group like this now. I was always the shy one, well everyone goes through that, you just break out of your shell. I used to go really red and my heart raced, stuff like that, at high school. Now I can just say what I want and say what I feel without getting embarrassed, because I'm telling people my

knowledge, what they're receiving and what I can give them..."

Kerry "Sharing your knowledge..."

Peer Leader "Yeah, about sexual health. Yeah, everyone's got their own ideas, their own experiences, what's been happening to them and stuff like that."

Kerry "Has your knowledge about sexual health changed?"

Peer Leader "Yeah, it has a bit, being part of this group. I never used to talk about this much to friends and that because I would get embarrassed and stuff. So yeah... But everyone else talks about it because they might have started much earlier or something like that, but I wasn't ready until last year, that's why I kept everything to myself until I was ready to open up to everything. Yeah, so now I've 'been there done that,' I can share my stuff with other people."

Kerry "Fantastic. What's changed for you Mel?"

Peer Leader "Nothing much."

Kerry "Nothing much? Are you the same as you were when we first met?"

Peer Leader "Oh, different."

Kerry "Do you know how you are different?"

Peer Leader "Much better... music. I do the music for the group. I do that."

Kerry "So you like making the music?"

Peer Leader "Yes, me bring the CDs."

Kerry "You bring your CDs? That's new. You didn't bring your CDs earlier, you didn't

share that with us."

Peer Leader "So sorry about that..."

Kerry "There's nothing to be sorry about..."

Peer Leader "Helping other people has been good."

Kerry "You've liked that?"

Group "Yes."

Kerry "Yes... What about you though as a peer leader? What's changed for you?"

Peer Leader "Coming to Groovy Chicks."

Kerry "And how's that make you feel?"

Peer Leader "Happy."

Kerry "Does it? What else has changed?"

Peer Leader "Helping Ruby. Yes."

Kerry "What about your knowledge of sexual health? Have you learned anything?"

Peer Leader "Yes, how to use condoms."

Kerry "Oh, that is important."

Peer Leader "Yes."

Kerry "OK... you've talked about a few bonuses to being a peer leader. What about you Cate?"

Peer Leader "I'm a bit quiet probably... and finally, you know I've had more confidence and more confidence being in a group and helping myself, helping myself to do it and the other team members too... helping them has been good."

Kerry "So it's been nice to be part of a team?"

Peer Leader "Yes, I felt pretty shy before, especially when it came to sexual health. But I've finally come out of my... you know out of my shell."

Kerry "Yeah... come out of yourself."

Peer Leader "Out of myself and like a flower, or something like that. I've bloomed."

Kerry "Like a flower... that's really great... What about your knowledge of sexual health?"

Peer Leader "I don't know about sexual health! Course I do... umm... yeah, I've learned a lot... you know about condoms, periods, feelings and from Lynne of course and other people..."

Kerry "What did you learn from Lynne?"

Peer Leader "Good and bad relationships and other stuff like if you've got any violence, if anyone's hitting you or anything like that you can see Lynne. Yeah, I found out a lot about friendships."

Kerry "So you've learnt a lot for yourselves first time around and then you learned a lot as peer leaders. So, thinking of the times this year when you were working as a peer leader, what did you do that you would do again? What worked do you think, in the way that you ran the group?"

Peer Leader "We ran a group."

Kerry "Yeah, you ran a group and what worked?"

Peer Leader "Well, we did our own activities. Tara did one, Marly did one, Mel did one, Kirsten did one..."

Peer Leader "We had a role... everyone had a role."

Peer Leader "We all had a responsibility for a person, like Mel had Amy and I had Ruby and that helped."

Peer Leader "And there was a person doing food... making sure the food gets out."

Peer Leader "Like Mel was doing the massage and the music. Everyone helped."

Kerry "Introducing guest speakers."

Group "Yes, yes."

Kerry "If you compare when you were Groovy Chicks the first year with when you were Groovy Chicks peer leaders, what do you think would have been better for this group, because they had you as peer leaders? What do you give that we can't give?"

Peer Leader "That's a hard question."

Group "It is."

Peer Leader "I have to think on that one. I need a good think on that one."

Kerry "Have a good think and we'll come back to it. Would there be anything you would do differently if you ran another group?"

Peer Leader "Maybe, maybe totally different. Like different guest speakers."

Kerry "How would you decide to have different guest speakers?"

Peer Leader "Well..."

Kerry "On what basis would you decide? (Pause) You're alright... keep going."

Peer Leader "Maybe from the same group but different people, like there's so many different people at the agencies you know, not just the same people all the time. Ovens and King for instance, they've got heaps of people there... there's drug and alcohol, there's heaps of people."

Group "Yes, they were good."

Kerry "Now there's a point... there are drug and alcohol workers and we didn't have a drug and alcohol speaker. Do you remember why we didn't?"

Peer Leader "Because maybe the women that we had weren't quite wanting it."

Kerry "Yes. They didn't bring it up."

Peer Leader "No they didn't. They just wanted the same thing that we did. But having different speakers would be good."

Kerry "So that's one idea... having different speakers."

Peer Leader "Have Lynne back again, she was good and Ange, she was good."

Peer Leader "Yeah, she was so good."

Kerry "What would you do differently Tara? Was there anything?"

Peer Leader "Not really, because when we get a new group, they'll have their own ideas and their own opinions. They can help us and we can help them. We can say,

'Who do you want?' So they might bring up something and we can organise something to bring up for them 'cos everyone has their own ideas. Not everyone is the same. There's not anyone in this world who is the same."

Kerry "So for example, it might come up for another group that drug and alcohol is something they want to talk about."

Group "Yeah."

Kerry "Is there anything you would do differently Mel?"

Peer Leader "Ummm..."

Kerry "If you were running the group again, is there anything you'd like to do with them that we didn't get a chance to do this time?"

Peer Leader "More music."

Kerry "More music, bring more music into it."

Kerry "Perhaps we could even have some singing... even just amongst ourselves."

Group "Yes. Yes."

Kerry "Well, we can do that, singing is a good strategy for expressing ourselves and learning to relax as well. What about you Marly, would there be anything you would do differently?"

Peer Leader "Have Jodie back again."

Kerry "Have Jodie back again, the breast care nurse. Is there anything to do that we didn't do?"

Peer Leader "No."

Kerry "Are there any ideas you have that you haven't been able to do yet?"

Peer Leader "Ummm... I suggested one... This was a while back now... that we could do role plays or something like that... 'Cos a lot of us have had experience in drama at school and it's a good way to learn."

Kerry "OK, so that's a good way to learn and an idea we can use. There were some things that women raised like Amy did - not feeling very good at TAFE when the boys made fun of her body. So we could role play about that and work out ways she could manage it. Well, there's some good ideas about what we could do differently. Does anyone else have ideas they'd like to add?"

Peer Leader "If we did have another group, we could ask them like we did with the second group... we can ask who'd they'd like to hear from and what they'd like to learn. And write a list of people they want to hear from."

Kerry "Yes, we did do that last time, but perhaps we'd do it differently... maybe more slowly?"

Peer Leader "Yeah, you'd do it slowly and make sure everyone was comfortable."

Kerry "'Cos this group was very different to your group. Every group will be different. Some will be quiet, some will be loud... they'll all be different. I'm going to take you back to the time when you did your training as peer leaders. Tick tick tick tick tick. You did some peer training with Brooke and Jacquie and I in the old building... what do you remember about your training? What was good?"

Peer Leader "Meeting every Monday."

Peer Leader "We talked about what we were going to do... planning what we were going

to do with the second group."

Peer Leader "We did a lot of training didn't we Tara?"

Peer Leader "Yep."

Kerry "Do you remember how we did the training?"

Peer Leader "Well, you told us how to do planning and gave us information."

Kerry "Yes, we worked out what to do and looked at information."

Peer Leader "We wrote it down."

Kerry "Yes, writing down things so we could remember them... What did Jacquie do to help you with your training?"

Peer Leader "Fantastic. It was the art."

Peer Leader "She did art like she did with the first group. And that's when she taught us how to play other games - well Tara and Jacquie learned how to play that feeling game."

Kerry "Yes... and you did portraits of yourself. With paint. Why do you think we did that? What was important about getting to know yourself a bit better?"

Peer Leader "So that the girls would know us too."

Peer Leader "So they would know who we are."

Kerry "Yes... it helps you to work out ideas about yourself and then you can use them in the group, because that's how we started working out your roles in the group - like who you are and what you have to offer."

Group "Yes."

Kerry "Do you remember playing with the basket of symbols Jacquie had? What did you do?"

Peer Leader "We made a cake board picture with the objects and like... like this makes me feel happy, or this is like me in some way."

Peer Leader "Yes, I did that."

Kerry "Remember pulling out a symbol that you could use - to talk about something you recognised you have as a strength?"

Group "Yep, Yeah."

Kerry "How did that work for you?"

(silence)

Kerry "Did you know your strengths before you did that exercise?"

Peer Leader "Yes."

Peer Leader "Yeah, I knew."

Kerry "Do you often get to talk about them?"

Peer Leader "No, not really."

Kerry "What about Mel and Marly. Do you get a chance to talk about what you're good at?"

Group "No. No."

Kerry "One of the reasons we talk about strengths and do the strengths exercise is to give you the chance to know what you're good at and therefore you know what you can offer the group. That's important. Now if we were to run peer leadership training again, what would you put into the training for another group?"

Peer Leader "I would do it the same all over again."

Peer Leader "Yeah, the same."

Kerry "It was that good was it? Is there anything you'd change if you were offering training to another group?"

Peer Leader "Train them. Give them the same training, but a bit bigger group next time."

Peer Leader "I'm pretty happy with the training I got."

Kerry "You're doing really well."

Peer Leader "Yes, I loved the training time. I'd do it again."

Peer Leader "What do you think Kerry?"

Kerry "I loved the training time."

Group "You taught us. You taught us."

Kerry "I thought it was a really special time, because when people like me join in with you, fair enough we have got a job within the organisation called Women's Health, but I learned more about myself. I found out what it was like to be part of a really great team, so it's really nice for me in the same way that it was for you."

Groovy Chicks Peer Leader's Art

This art exercise of self-portraiture was one of many used to help the young women explore their identity, their strengths, their roles and their womanhood.

Title: Just Doing My Life

"That's me. The colours. The purple. It presents love, peace and good friendship with everyone. Caring. I've mixed the colours. It's purple around me. My hair was that colour once. It's called blueberry."



Title: Social Butterfly

"I like socialising like a social butterfly. One wing is dull and represents the times when I feel down, or someone I know is down. One wing is bright, happy, blooming and is about the times I feel happy. I still socialise when I'm down and tell others how I feel. It might make me happy or it might not. The two wings of the butterfly are the two sides of me."



Title: Care Leader Kersten

"That's the basket of fruit and me and the cutting board. That's my role as a leader in the group."



Peer Leadership Training

We conducted peer leadership training over six weeks during two hour sessions. Through each stage of the six week program we encouraged women to find their preferred role as a peer leader. Communication was considered very important. We modelled assertive communication styles and discussed this as the opportunity presented itself. Our six week training program included these components:

1. Identifying personal strengths and the strengths/qualities of a leader. Discovering strengths we have or want to develop.
2. Learning about leadership roles. Playing with these roles.
3. Statements of principles regarding sexual health work. Exploring a framework.
4. Group agreements. What they're for and how to help a group develop one.

Peer Leadership Training Exercises

The peer leadership training was conducted through the exercises described in the following pages. Creativity and symbolic work were strongly featured and worked very well for the young women. We encourage your critical review of our approach. At the same time we recommend the approach - the young women adopted their peer leadership roles with ease and confidence. Their practice demonstrated acceptance and inclusion of all. Bravo, Groovy Chicks!

Theme 1 Looking for and identifying our strengths

Activity Symbols of our strength

Purpose Bringing personal strengths to the work of leadership

We have a basket with all sorts of things in it: rocks, crystals, velvet, mirrors, characters, soft toys, bracelets, seeds. Participants are asked to select from the basket an item that symbolises a strength that they have and that can help them to talk about this strength. Anyone starts. Talk goes around the group. Facilitators start if need be.

Assisting young women to recognise and discuss their personal strengths.

Activity Search for leader's strengths

Purpose Identifying leadership qualities and strengths

We laid out the strength sheet (See appendix 1). Participants were asked to close their eyes and picture someone who has been a leader in their life. They were asked then to think about what qualities or strengths this person has shown them that have made them significant as a leader. Then participants could use the strength sheet to discuss who this leader was and what their particular leadership qualities are.

Assisting young women to identify leadership qualities and skills.

Theme 2 Learning about leadership roles

Activity Leading with strength

Purpose Recognising ourselves as leaders

We recorded the words women used to describe their own strengths and to describe the strengths of a leader in their own lives. These words were compiled to make a strengths sheet (Appendix 1). We used the strengths sheet to circle the strengths we recognise we have. This helped us to know that we have similar strengths to those held by people we identify as leaders. Individually, we also used the sheet to highlight the strengths we feel we need to develop to enjoy leadership roles.

Assists participants to acknowledge current personal resources and to set personal development goals. Assists both facilitators and participants to plan relevant skill building exercises.

Activity Leadership roles

Purpose To develop further understanding of the roles of a leader

We looked at the leadership roles Wendy Weeks (1994) has described (Appendix 2). We talked about what these leadership roles mean to us. We imagined what else leadership means to this group and came up with three points to add to those Wendy described. We produced another resource that is a compilation of the leadership roles Wendy identified and those the group identified (Appendix 3).

Prepares participants for leadership roles and offers the opportunity to influence the description of the work.

Activity Leadership qualities

Purpose To be informed of the broad range of qualities a woman leading might aspire to

We used the leadership qualities sheet as a true or false discussion (Appendix 4). The women had great fun playing with it in this way. However, they disagree with three statements about women as leaders. In their view there is some doubt about whether women can influence things in a large way, or small way. Women are expected to be 'wonder woman' and women as leaders may not always recognise another person's potential.

The disagreement the women expressed about the leadership qualities is provided to illustrate their growing leadership at such an early stage and to provide others with an opportunity for critical reflection about women and leadership.

Assists women to critically explore their own ability as leaders and their experience of being led, with the aim of bringing as many leadership qualities to work as is possible for the group.

Activity Imagining myself as leader

Purpose To strengthen leadership self-image and understanding

Women were offered the opportunity to paint a self-portrait. These portraits were used by the women in different ways. Some chose to explore their own identity and others chose to portray themselves at work as a leader in a particular role.

Provides a creative way to consolidate thinking about self, strengths, leadership and roles.

Activity Role plays

Purpose Practicing self-ascribed leadership roles

Women had chosen their preferred leadership role in the course of leadership activities. From this point, they practise their roles each time they come to the leadership group.

Offers participants the opportunity to play with their preferred roles in a safe and supportive environment. Women are actively putting their theory to work and building skills.

Activity Our group work garden

Purpose A creative exercise designed to provide reflection about leadership roles and feelings

Women chose symbols from a basket provided by Jacquie, to explore their roles and feelings in a group work environment - in relation to leadership. Symbols were placed on a silver foil tray (about thirty centimetres square). Each participant discussed their chosen symbols and the meaning of them after spending some time constructing their garden. Two excerpts are provided to illustrate the effect of this activity:

“The seedpod. The group makes us feel like that. We were a seed and together we blossomed. I feel my strength too. I’ve blossomed since then. I feel like the lemon tree I put in the garden... people can pick fruit off me. I let them. People I trust (that is) and the pig... I feel like a pig, quiet and shy and they stink. I feel like that. Quiet. Shy. Secure... like any pet does. I feel protective of my friends too. I won’t let anyone else touch them. That’s the person I am. I’m very protective of my friends. No one gets in my way. I’m full of strength. I’m powerful.”

"I'll be a gnome up in the tree and look down on the garden from up high. I like climbing the heights and there's a seed... growing. I like watching the group."

This activity offered participants the time and means to consolidate and integrate their learning. It offered the space to create meaning of the various learning activities.

Theme 3 Statements of principles and sexual health work: exploring a framework

Activity Framing up!

Purpose To provide a framework to inform the leadership work that is inclusive and respectful of prospective group members

A statement of principles, with reference to sexual health work, was designed prior to group work beginning at Stage One of the project. This statement was shared with all involved in the group: young women, guest speakers and facilitators. It was important that understanding and ownership of the principles was generated amongst all, as it provided a guide to practice and behaviour. This statement of principles was put to the group during the leadership training to reinforce the importance of working from a stance such as that described by the principles. Participants were familiar with it and now needed to work with it as leaders. Critical discussion of the principles was facilitated and we explored their meaning. The principles were adopted by the leaders without change.

Assists participants to build skill with principles that contribute to good practice.

Theme 4 Group Agreements

Activity Explore the group agreement we made last year

Purpose To refresh participants' knowledge of the purpose of group agreements and how a group agreement is developed

This activity was informal. Over a cup of tea and food we reviewed the group agreement the women had produced as group participants last year. We talked about how it had worked. We recalled how the group agreement came to be.

Assists women to put current knowledge to work.

Activity Role play the creation of a group agreement

Purpose Leadership practice

The women took turns to act as group facilitators developing a group agreement with each other.

Offers practise of leadership skill specific to the creation of a group agreement.

Activity Playing with words

Purpose Generating understanding of words

We chose key words from the group agreement and the mock group agreements. We reproduced them colourfully on cardboard. The words included *accept, support, respect, privacy, trust and fun.*

Taking turns, we talked about the meaning of that word and placed meanings around the central word.

Women have the chance to explore meaning in depth. This is a non-confronting way of working that enabled women to play with meaning and at the same time to feel adequate and able in relation to knowledge and skills.

Planning

Peer leadership training was followed by a planning phase. During this phase women worked through these administrative and planning tasks:

- A needs analysis sheet - developing questions that can be used for a new group to discover what their learning needs and interests are.
- Developing a flyer to invite young women to the group.
- Identifying networks the women belong to, for distribution of the flyer.
- Administrative work. For example booking the room for the dates the group will be held.
- Fine tuning leadership roles. The women decided at this point they would add a relaxation activity to each group as a group warmer. They took responsibility for deciding what that warmer would be and conducting it.

Facilitating a group

The foundations were in place and the women worked very well as peer leaders. They met every second week outside the group for ongoing planning. They used the needs analysis to inform a guest speaker and negotiated with workers to attend the group. The transcript provided gives more detail about what the women thought of their role as peer leaders.

Conclusion

The essential ingredients of this work are:

- Partnership
- Equity
- Working in groups
- Leading is assigned to the women
- Participatory decision making

- Sexual health education
- Inclusive principles

We have learned much about what works and doesn't work in the process of doing the work. Critically reflective practice is highly valued. We will continue learning and refining the model and encourage others taking up the model to do the same. At the same time, there are aspects of the work that we will preserve, based on the merit it gained through participant and worker evaluation.

- ***The style:*** using metaphors, symbolising, imagining and creative activities to construct meaning. This happened through talk, art, music and play.
- ***Being women together:*** including professional women and leaving disability at the door when groups began. The equality in the room built fabulous opportunities for learning.
- ***The statement of principles:*** these principles were seen to contribute to good practice and to be inclusive.
- ***Guest speakers*** to the group broadened networks for the young women and therefore broadened support options. Mainstream providers shared specialist sexual health knowledge in inclusive and accessible ways thus empowering young women with information that enabled them to make informed decisions.
- ***The food and fun:*** each time groups met we had good food to share. The food and the fun were very important aspects of being together and building a sense of community.
- ***Relaxation:*** the peer leaders introduced relaxation activities to Groovy Chicks2. This provided leadership opportunities for each member of the group, enabling them to share their knowledge and ideas. It enriched personal resources of all participants. Each knew a range of relaxation/de-stress activities to draw upon when needed outside the group.

We hope that all women have the chance to access a sexual health group such as Groovy Chicks. Women gathering together like this have fun, learn and build new confidence and skills. We'd call ourselves ***whealthy women!***

References

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Appendix 1

STRENGTHS SHEET

We thought about leaders in our lives. They have these special strengths:

Supportive

Share their talents

Reliable

Loving

Protective

Honest

Thoughtful

Patient

Cheerful

Close

Relaxed

Caring

Friendly

Open

Happy

Forgiving

Sharing

Courageous

Appendix 2

Wendy Weeks (1994) gathered ideas from women all over Australia about working within a feminist leadership role. Here is a summary of what she found out about the things women do when they are leading:

1. Helping women to work together
2. Encouraging women to see issues in different ways
3. Understanding and accepting that everyone is different
4. Working together as a group, knowing that the group has the right and the knowledge to make decisions together

Appendix 3

LEADERSHIP ROLES

The *italicised script* is the work of Wendy Weeks (1994). The additions are those the peer leaders contributed as their understanding and definition of leadership.

1. *Helping women to work together.*
2. *Encouraging women to see issues in different ways.* For example, access is not just being able to get to a place, it is also about attitudes - like how people see us. Remember last year when we talked, lots of women said the doctor never talked with them about pap tests, breast care, sex or contraception.
3. *Understanding that everyone is different and accepting that everyone is different.*
4. *Working together, believing that we as a group have the right and the knowledge to make decisions.* For example, when a group is the leader rather than a single person, the whole group will decide on a way to act. Kerry could not go and make a decision for the group. Melissa could not go and make a decision for the group. No one person could do that.
5. *Working together as a team.* Team work.
6. *Support each other as leaders.*
7. *Keep confidentiality.* Our work is private.

Appendix 4

LEADERSHIP QUALITIES

Being able to make mistakes

Having trust

Being understanding of people

Knowing that someone else may be better at something

Being reliable

Being able to influence in a big way or small way

Not needing to be a wonder woman

Being able to help people

Not being bossy

Supporting others

Helping others to bring out their best

Recognising another person's potential

Being part of the group and sharing responsibility

Self-confidence

Assertiveness

Frohman, C & Storr, A., 2000, *Taking the Lead. A Leadership and Mentoring Resource Kit for Women with Disabilities*, Women with Disabilities Australia, ACT