

Title: Starting Out: Sexual Health Peer Education for the Next Generation.

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Background/Purpose

Young people are increasingly identifying with diverse genders and sexualities. In 'Writing Themselves in 4' 27.2% of respondents identified as trans and/or gender diverse (TGD), and 45% as multi-gender attracted. This demonstrates a need to expand HIV and sexual health promotion for communities beyond men who have sex with men.

ACON's online workshop, 'Starting Out', connected young LGBTQ people (18-26), especially TGD youth, to increase their HIV and sexual health literacy and access, and support social connection and well-being outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Approach

Utilising a parts and practices model, content on HIV prevention and sexual health was adapted to include the diverse experiences of young LGBTQ people. Workshops were peer-led, creating space for participants to have open and affirming discussions about sex and pleasure. Wellbeing, mental health and strategies for self-care were also discussed, which were vital during COVID-19 lockdowns. Referrals to LGBTQ- specific mental and sexual health services were also provided.

Outcomes/Impact

Six workshops were delivered between July 2020 and September 2021. Of the 42 participants, one-third were TGD. Evaluation data (n=32) demonstrated that participants were highly satisfied (9/10), valued the sessions (8/10), and would recommend it to their peers (8/10).

Written feedback demonstrated that participants valued social connection with other LGBTQ youth during the pandemic, being able to openly discuss sexual health and pleasure safely with their peers, which wasn't possible at school.

Innovation and Significance

A parts and practices approach created a safe learning space for young LGBTQ people to connect during the pandemic, which led to increased HIV and sexual health literacy and improved mental health outcomes among a population that has historically had inequitable access to health information. 'Starting Out' highlighted the successes of creative and flexible approaches to adapting HIV and sexual health promotion in response to the changing needs of young LGBTQ people.

Disclosure of Interest:

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