

Webinar Series



Lessons from implementing an Alberta-wide train-the-trainer approach for scaling-up evidence-based healthy youth relationships programs in schools and communities

In April 2022, Lianne Lee from Shift: The Project to End Domestic Violence presented a webinar *Lessons from implementing an Alberta-wide train-the-trainer approach for scaling-up evidence-based healthy youth relationships programs in schools and communities*.

[Click here to view webinar](#) | [Click here to view presentation slides](#)

About Shift: The Project to End Domestic Violence

Shift, located at the University of Calgary in the Faculty of Social Work, is a primary prevention initiative that aims to stop violence before it starts. Part of Shift's work focuses on summarizing research for various stakeholders, and partnering with them to understand, test, and integrate best and promising practices to advance social change. To do this, Shift designs, implements, and evaluates strategies that support individual skill development while also building environments and structures that promote non-violence and equity. Shift focuses on promoting healthy youth relationships and preventing adolescent dating violence because it is a critical primary prevention approach for stopping adult domestic violence before it starts.

Shift's Alberta Healthy Youth Relationships Strategy

The Alberta Healthy Youth Relationships (AHYR) Strategy aimed to cultivate healthy relationships skills in youth through evidence-based and evidence-informed programming in schools and community-based programs. Between 2012 and 2018, Shift partnered with Western University's Centre for School Mental Health and PREVNet, as well as school districts, teachers, and community organizations throughout Alberta to scale up the implementation of the Fourth R, the Healthy Relationships Plus Program (HRPP), and the Healthy Relationships Training Module (HRTM).

As a result of our collective efforts, Shift's AHYR Strategy achieved the following reach (2013 – 2018):

Fourth R

- 42 school districts and 317 schools
- 1600 teachers trained
- Over 83,000 grade 7-9 youth reached

Healthy Relationships Plus Program

- 828 facilitators trained
- Over 18,000 youth reached

Healthy Relationships Training Module

- 813 adults who work with youth trained (i.e., community professionals, coaches, and health practitioners)

The AHYR Strategy Cascading Train-the-Trainer Model

Shift's primary approach for scaling healthy relationships programs in Alberta was through creating and coaching a cascading network of leaders who had the competencies and the institutional support of their respective organizations to provide training and support to individuals within their community/region who work with youth. The AHYR Strategy train-the-trainer model is outlined below.

Key Stakeholders



Key Roles and Activities

1. Shift worked with Western and PREVNet to:

- Coordinate all trainings in Alberta
- Pay for all trainings and curriculum materials in Alberta
- Lead evaluation and knowledge translation

2. Shift worked with institutions and organizations to:

- Ensure institutional support
- Establish Memorandum of Understanding
- Allocate staff and resources towards the strategy

3. Shift created and trained 26 Master Trainers that:

- Were certified in the Fourth R, HRPP, & HRTM
- Were responsible for training and supporting people in their regions
- Met as a cohort to complete ongoing professional development with Shift

4. Teachers and people working with youth participated in trainings that:

- Certified them to implement the Fourth R, HRPP, and HRTM programs with youth, others working with youth, and parents

5. Youth and parents participated in healthy relationships programs that:

- Built youth's competencies to develop and maintain healthy relationships
- Helped parents teach their adolescent children healthy relationships skills

Key Lessons from Scaling Healthy Relationships Programs in Alberta

1. Influence school climate to improve teachers' implementation fidelity

Our research shows that although teachers received training on how to implement healthy relationships programs, and received the program resources at no cost, they had a difficult time implementing the programs with fidelity because they needed greater school-level support. To support implementation fidelity, schools need to create a climate that promotes and reinforces the importance of implementing healthy relationships programs.

2. Focus on high-quality implementation of evidence-based programs and support appropriate adaptation

Teachers and professionals reported that the healthy relationships programs did not always reflect the lived realities of the youth and families they worked with – and this was especially true for equity deserving groups such as Indigenous peoples, racialized people, people with (dis)abilities, people living in poverty, 2SLGBTQIA+ people, etc. It is important that programming prioritizes the unique experiences and needs of diverse groups.

3. Deepen engagement with the Ministry of Education

The AHYR Strategy was able to develop a robust partnership with the Government of Alberta's Ministry of Human Services, which was critical in scaling up healthy relationships programs in community-based settings. We needed to develop the same type of partnership with the Ministry of Education to ensure that the AHYR strategy was embedded within the education system.

4. Continue to explore how best to facilitate systems-change

Although scaling healthy relationships programs is a critical approach for preventing adolescent violence, it does not address the root causes of violence. In addition to scaling programs, we need to shift legislation, policies, resource flows, and power dynamics to change the underlying systems and structures that perpetuate adolescent dating violence.

5. Programs that target youth, alone, are not enough

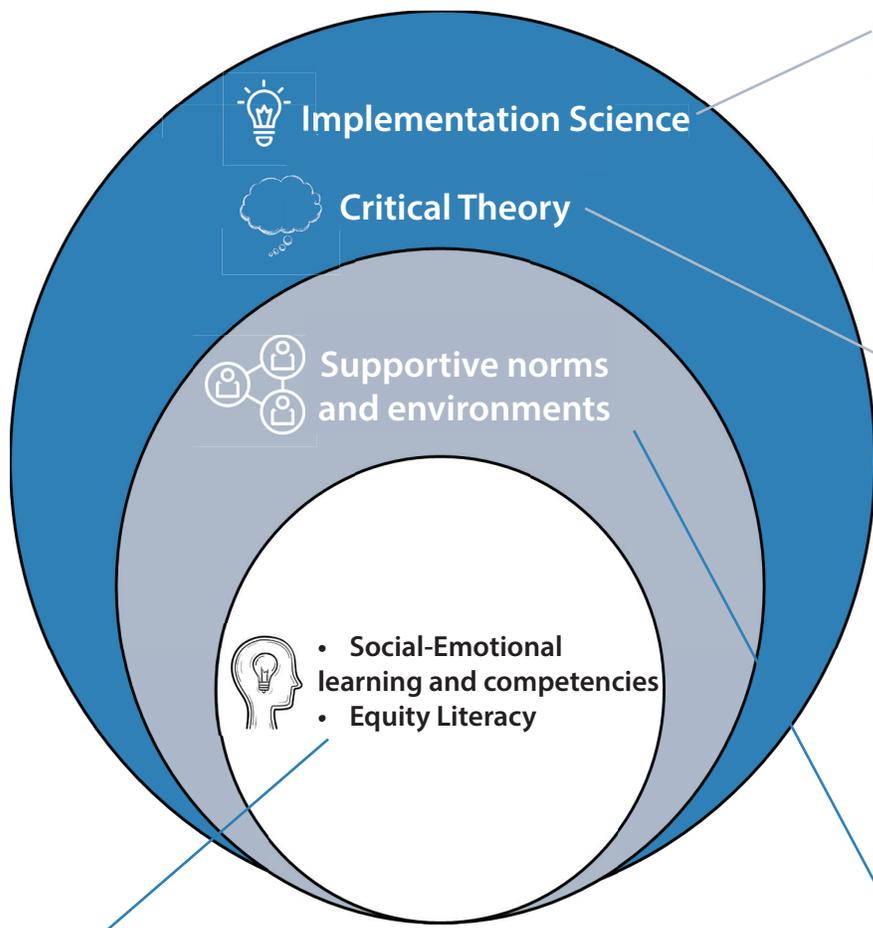
Our approaches to preventing adolescent dating violence need to continue to build the skills and will in adolescents to develop and maintain healthy relationships – but that is not sufficient. Our approaches also need to ensure that the contexts in which youth live, learn, and play are effectively promoting healthy relationships as well.

6. Engage primary caregivers where they naturally go

Our research shows that school settings during afterschool hours may not be the most effective places to engage parents in violence prevention efforts and we need to consider parents' priorities around work, childcare, and other everyday responsibilities.

4 Ways to Use What Shift's Learned to Promote Healthy Youth Relationships

Our research on the AHYR Strategy surfaced many ways to more effectively promote healthy youth relationships. The visual below outlines 4 ways to use what Shift's learned.



Use implementation science to improve scaling efforts¹

- Implementation science focuses on understanding how to implement programs effectively in daily practice.
- Effective program + Effective implementation = Increased likelihood of socially significant outcomes.

Use critical theory to design, implement, adapt, and scale healthy and equitable relationships programs²

- A critical lens can help us design and implement programs – and offer appropriate adaptations – that consider the ways power, privilege, and social inequalities permeate our systems, structures, and social norms, which impact our life experiences and relationships.
- Putting critical theory into practice will help ensure that we avoid practices that may further harm equity deserving groups and instead promote social conditions that foster equity and non-violence.

Build social-emotional learning and equity literacy skills in everyone to create social conditions that reinforce healthy relationships³

- Administrators, teachers, support staff, community organization professionals, families, and youth all play a role in promoting healthy youth relationships and we all need to continually build relevant skills.
- Equity literacy is an important healthy relationships skill that involves: 1) Recognizing biases and inequities, 2) Responding to biases and inequities in the immediate term, 3) Redressing biases and inequities in the long term by addressing their root causes, 4) Actively cultivating equitable cultures, and 5) Sustaining equitable institutional cultures.

To learn more: <https://youthdatingviolence.prevnet.ca/document/inclusive-prevention-practice-a-workshop-on-incorporating-equity-literacy-into-adolescent-dating-violence-prevention/>

Use a whole-school, whole-community approach to create supportive norms and environments

- Build commitment and engagement from leadership.
- Engage the right people at the right time.
- Ensure adequate resources to promote effective implementation.
- Ensure policies and procedures focus on social-emotional learning.
- Prioritize robust and equitable school-community collaborations.

Next steps: Engaging the primary caregivers of adolescents to promote healthy youth relationships

Drawing on lessons from the AHYR Strategy, Shift is currently leading the design, implementation, evaluation, and scaling of ConnectED Parents, a primary prevention initiative that engages the primary caregivers of adolescents (10 to 20 years old) to promote healthy youth relationships and prevent adolescent dating violence. ConnectED Parents includes three co-occurring interventions:

1. Alberta-based service providers that specialize in working with groups of parents develop the capacity to build a healthy social climate where parents of adolescents naturally gather,
2. Key influencers within these groups of parents build the capacity to provide peer-to-peer supports, and
3. Parents receive brief interventions delivered via text message that build their knowledge and skills to teach their adolescent children about healthy dating relationships.

To learn more about ConnectED Parents: <https://youthdatingviolence.prevnet.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Engaging-Caregivers-fnl.pdf>

¹Bauer, M. S., Damschroder, L., Hagedorn, H., Smith, J., & Kilbourne, A. M. (2015). An introduction to implementation science for the non-specialist. *BMC psychology*, 3(1), 32. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-015-0089-9>

²Sensory, O., & DiAngelo, R. (2017). *Is everyone really equal?* (2nd ed.). Teachers' College Press.

³Gorski, P. (2020). *Basic Principles for Equity Literacy*. EdChange and the Equity Literacy Institute.

To Cite This Document:

Lee, L; Wells, L., & Keough, J. (2022). Lessons from implementing an Alberta-wide train-the-trainer approach for scaling-up evidence-based healthy youth relationships programs in schools and communities. Retrieved from youthdatingviolence.prevnet.ca



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This document was created by PREVNet, Lianne Lee, and Jordan Keough. The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Public Health Agency of Canada.