



PREVENTING TEEN DATING VIOLENCE: ENGAGING BGC YOUTH IN BUILDING SAFE AND HEALTH RELATIONSHIPS – RESPECT2CONNECT

MAY 2018-MARCH 2022

BGC Canada

Formerly known as Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada

BGC Canada would like to acknowledge partners in this project including

- Taylor Newberry Consulting
- Magehun Tails Inc
- Learning by Hand Inc
- Participating BGC Canada Club staff and youth

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Introduction

BGC Canada (formerly known as Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada) entered into an agreement with the Public Health Agency of Canada to create a national project that would develop, deliver and test a dating violence prevention program at eight clubs across Canada with 300 students in grades seven to nine. This project aimed to address an important gap in knowledge and evidence about the effectiveness of community-based teen dating violence prevention programs. Through their Preventing Gender-Based Violence: the Health Perspective Investment Program, PHAC generously contributed \$574,563 over four years to support the project from May 2018 to March 2022.

Background

In 2018, BGC Canada convened an advisory committee of Club staff, researchers, program designers and evaluators, and explored the literature on teen dating violence prevention. Through information garnered from research and literature reviews it was evident that teen dating violence prevention is important for numerous critical reasons. Canadian and American statistics indicate that adolescent dating violence is a serious and prevalent issue.

Canada's Chief Public Health Officer (2016)[1] identified family violence as a complex and multilayered public health issue that goes beyond physical injury to detrimentally impacting mental health. In addition to the immediate consequences of being victims of violence (physical injuries, sexual violence), emotional harm resulting from these violent experiences can include fear, anxiety, depression, hopelessness and suicidal thoughts. Victims of dating violence may engage in unhealthy coping strategies such as alcohol and substance abuse, withdrawal from school and other relationships, as well as engaging in harmful eating patterns. Victims of dating violence are also more likely to engage in high-risk sexual behaviours, placing them at increased risk for STIs and unplanned pregnancies.

Research has additionally found that:

- Violence against women, girls, and LGBTQ2 people is one of the most widespread, persistent and devastating human rights violations around the world. Globally, it is estimated that one in three women experiences intimate partner violence in her lifetime.[2]
- The rates of police-reported intimate partner violence are higher in rural areas than urban areas, with women accounting for almost 8 out of 10 victims.[3]

[1] The Chief Public Health Officer's Report. (2016). A Focus on Family Violence in Canada. Retrieved from: <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/canada/public-health/migration/publications/departement-ministere/state-public-health-family-violence-2016-etat-sante-publique-violence-familiale/alt/pdf-eng.pdf>

[2] World Health Organization (2021). Devastatingly pervasive: 1 in 3 women globally experience violence. Retrieved from: <https://www.who.int/news/item/09-03-2021-devastatingly-pervasive-1-in-3-women-globally-experience-violence>

[3] Statistics Canada. (2018). Family violence in Canada: A statistical profile, 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2018001/article/54978-eng.htm>



Research demonstrates that Indigenous peoples disproportionately experience victimization:

- Self-reported rates of violence victimization—including sexual assault—among Indigenous people is more than double that of non-Indigenous people, with the highest rates being among younger Indigenous people aged 15 to 24.[1]
- In 2014, Indigenous females had an overall rate of violent victimization (220 violent incidents per 1,000 people) that was double that of Indigenous males (110 per 1,000), close to triple that of non-Indigenous females (81 per 1,000) and more than triple that of non-Indigenous males (66 per 1,000).[2] High victimization rates among Indigenous females, however, could not be fully explained by an increased presence of other victimization risk factors. Even when controlling for these risk factors, Indigenous identity still remained a risk factor for violent victimization of females. Of note, Indigenous females were disproportionately more likely to report experiencing both physical and sexual maltreatment as a child than their male counterparts (14% versus 5%), and they were less likely to report binge drinking or drug use in the month prior to the survey.
- Indigenous people (9%) were more likely than non-Indigenous people (4%) to have been a victim of spousal violence in the past five years. Specifically, Indigenous women (10%) were about three times as likely to report being a victim of spousal violence as non-Indigenous women (3%), while Indigenous men (8%) were twice as likely as their non-Indigenous counterparts (4%).[3]

Program Research

Through our project we conducted a literature and program review of 10 healthy relationship programs from the United States and Canada, along with programs offered by 4 member Clubs. We learned that it is important to talk with teens about healthy relationships because of how entrenched they are within larger systems. Diverse factors can affect a teens ability to engage in healthier relationships – this can include exposure to violence in their surroundings (i.e. with family, in communities, schools), and experiencing abuse and neglect.

Research Conclusions

Engaging young people in opportunities to learn about how to develop and maintain healthy relationships is a key way to build young people’s communication, conflict resolution and other skills which may help prevent violence and abuse – or at least raise their awareness of its existence. Moreover, engaging a diversity of youth in decision-making and leadership in programs has shown to be effective in meeting healthy relationship program outcomes.

[1] Statistics Canada. (2014). Victimization of Aboriginal People in Canada, 2014. Retrieved from: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2016001/article/14631-eng.htm>

[2] Statistics Canada. (2015). Criminal Victimization in Canada, 2014. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2015001/article/14241-eng.htm#a8>

[3] Ibid.



Key Activities and Outputs

Based on what we learned through our literature and program review, Respect2Connect (R2C) was designed to provide youth members with the tools and techniques to develop and sustain healthy relationships. The program is designed for youth aged 12-14 years old. To address the skills necessary to develop healthy relationships, the R2C program takes a positive strengths-based and trauma-informed perspective to help members develop skills that will help them navigate healthy relationships of all kinds. In doing so, the program emphasizes that healthy relationships begin with self-care while also recognizing that there is a diverse range of perspectives and approaches to relationships. Ultimately, the R2C program is rooted in the belief that everyone has a basic human right to healthy, positive relationships, and engaging young people in opportunities to learn about how to develop and maintain healthy relationships is a key way to build their communication, conflict resolution and other skills which may help prevent violence and abuse.

The program includes 12 sessions that cover the following topics:

1. Program Introduction: program overview, introductions; member requested content
2. Program Introduction: healthy relationships 101; community resources
3. Different Perspectives: stereotypes, media influences; gender identity
4. Different Perspectives: personal choices/preferences; inclusion/diversity
5. Self-identity: strengths profile; self-esteem
6. Self-identity: trust/support network; resilience
7. Personal Barriers: peer pressure; power dynamics; bystanders
8. Personal Barriers: rejection; discrimination
9. Communicating your Needs: expressing your feelings
10. Communicating your Needs: consent
11. Communicating your Needs: self-advocacy; conflict resolution
12. Program Conclusion: reflection on personal learning; celebration

By the end of the program, it is expected that members will be able to:

- Explain what healthy relationships look like.
- Recognize diverse views and perspectives on relationships.
- Identify the strengths they bring to all their relationships.
- Address specific and personal barriers.
- Communicate their needs safely.

After the initial program content was created in 2019, activities and new content were added to reflect First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures and perspectives about healthy relationships. This addition was based on an identified need among Clubs who ran the pilot project.

Taylor Newberry Consulting was contracted by BGC Canada to lead the development and implementation of the R2C program evaluation between 2019 and 2022 with the assistance of the 8 Clubs. The evaluation involved pre- and post-test youth surveys, youth focus groups, staff interviews, and written staff reflection forms.



Project Outcomes

Project outcomes were explored through youth surveys, youth focus groups and staff interviews. We observed that youth rated their knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours quite positively on average on the pre-program survey. These are the conditions of a “ceiling effect”, in which there is no room to see improvement as measured, even if improvement is real. We see this problem fairly often among youth who may “not know what they do not know”, and therefore attribute greater confidence to themselves regarding program content. Ironically, once participants learn program content, their ratings may actually decrease to reflect the feeling of “I now know that I do not know this”. Ceiling effects were evident across many of the survey items. However, it was also clear that youth gained considerable skills and knowledge related to healthy relationships.

From discussions with program staff, it was evident that the program had significant relevance for those who participated. Staff explained that often discussions about healthy relationships are not broached in youth’s lives outside the Club, and in certain contexts such discussions may actually be discouraged (i.e., discussions about consent in relationships). Staff witness youth members experiencing “aha” moments when they realized how program content applied to their lives.

The supportive environment that staff cultivated alongside members during the delivery of R2C was highlighted as a key ingredient of the program. Some members approached staff, perhaps more than in any other program, with requests for additional support. As a result of disclosures by youth, staff were able to facilitate more referrals to community agencies.

Central to R2C is helping members build knowledge and skills necessary in developing and sustaining healthy relationships. Survey results indicated that by the end of the program, members had a greater awareness of the components of healthy relationships. They reported having a better understanding of what they are looking for in their relationships, and became more respectful of ideas, perspectives and practices that are different from their own. They were more likely to know where to go to access resources and information about healthy relationships, understand that it is okay to have different interests from their friends/romantic partners, and know how to communicate their ideas, wishes and needs in their relationships. During focus group discussions members also spoke about how they have become more confident in setting and respecting boundaries in their relationships.

Members also reported that they have applied what they learned during programming to their own relationships. Of those who responded to surveys (~80 youth), 90% have applied what they learned about communication skills, 88% have applied what they learned about boundary setting, 89% have applied what they learned about consent, and 89% have applied what they learned about equality in relationships.

It was also clear that R2C strengthened the capacity of staff to encourage healthy relationships among youth members. Monthly R2C community of practice meetings were held where staff received helpful advice about program implementation, and some staff also described experiencing a growth in their confidence to engage in discussions about difficult topics.



Next Steps

Several of the Clubs who participated in the development and piloting of the Respect2Connect program mentioned that this program has been essential in supporting their youth members to build and maintain healthy relationships of all kinds. The Respect2Connect program will continue to be offered as a core program in their clubs.

BGC Canada is developing an online platform, currently referred to as The Youth Hub for youth, modeled after an online platform used by Boys and Girls Clubs of America: www.myfuture.net. The Youth Hub will house BGC Canada staff E-Learning platforms and innovative programming for members and Clubs across Canada. The Respect2Connect program will be adapted to be housed on the Youth Hub where members will work their way through the program either independently or as part of a Club program, and earn badges of completion.

The Respect2Connect manuals are available for free to all Clubs across Canada in both official languages. Member Clubs are encouraged to incorporate national Respect2Connect programming into their local program offerings. As well, BGC Canada's fund development team will present the Respect2Connect program to corporate funders with the goal of securing funding for Clubs to implement the program in their communities.

With much gratitude and appreciation, BGC Canada would like to thank the hundreds of youth and staff from the following BGC Clubs across Canada:

BGC Airdrie, Alberta (initial pilot Club)
BGC Wetaskiwin, Alberta (initial pilot Club)
BGC Dawson, Quebec (initial pilot Club)
BGC Summerside, Prince Edward Island
BGC South East, Ontario
BGC Strathcona, Alberta
BGC Williams Lake, British Columbia
BGC Moncton, New Brunswick

The program was initially delivered in three pilot Clubs in the 2019-2020 funding year. Five additional Clubs joined the pilot Clubs to deliver the program in 2020-2021 and again in 2021-2022. Their support, feedback and guidance was critical to the success of the Respect2Connect Program.

