

Evaluation Report

SWOVA's "Pass It On" Program, 2015-16

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Program background

The “*Pass It On*” (or PIO) program was developed to assist pre-adolescent and adolescent girls in understanding and managing some of the many challenges that confront them at their age and stage of social and emotional development, using a mentoring and interpersonal skills learning model. The *Pass It On* mission statement states:

“*[The program] provide(s) experiences and relationships that foster reflection and resilience, leadership and mentoring capacities*” in the girls with whom it works. Its key goals are “*to increase the capacity of rural young women and girls for (i) leadership, (ii) self-esteem, (iii) staying safe and (iv) accessing community supports*”.

It is therefore a social and emotional learning (SEL) program, a capacity-building program and as a result, a violence prevention program.

“*Pass It On*” was designed by SWOVA (Salt Spring Women Opposed to Violence and Abuse), a community-based organization with a long and successful history of working in partnership with schools and community-based educators to encourage the development of skills for healthy and respectful relationships in the lives of small-town and rural youth. The PIO program was delivered by SWOVA’s staff of specialists in adolescent development for the first time in BC School District #64 (Salt Spring and the Southern Gulf Islands) during the school year 2008-9, and almost every year since then, depending on the availability of funding.¹ Its delivery for 2015-16 has just been completed.

The program recruits young women in grades 10 to12 from the local high school, who learn skills with which to act as mentors for “buddies” in grade 8² with whom they are paired after their preliminary training. As well, PIO includes a second layer of mentoring, which depends on (i) an extensive time commitment from the adult program facilitator who is senior mentor to all the PIO participants, and (ii) one-off presentations/discussions with a selection of women from the community who share their life and leadership experience with the young mentors and buddies.

In 2015-16, 21 mentors and 20 buddies signed up and participated in the training sessions, and all but one in each category stayed with the program until the end of the year. The weekly meetings for mentors, and monthly meetings for all the mentors and buddies together are the core of the program. The program for these sessions is flexible, depending in part on input from the girls on the aspects of their lives and the social/emotional development issues they want to explore with the program facilitator and invited guests, within the overall framework of the program.

This year, plans included the delivery of two workshops for all grade 8 girls at the middle school, facilitated in part by the mentors. Scheduling issues at the school made that impossible, but administrators have expressed great interest in trying again next year.

¹ The program is partly self-funding.

² Grade 8 is the last year of middle school in District 64.

1.2 Evaluation in 2015-16

Funding constraints limit the amount and sophistication of program evaluation which can be undertaken. That said however, SWOVA continued its commitment to program assessment and feedback for “*Pass It On*” this year. In one of early sessions, the program coordinator and facilitator (one person) administered a brief pre-program questionnaire to the girls to find out about their hopes and expectations for the PIO program, thereby gathering insights which could be used to help shape the sessions for the year. In addition, she collected written feedback from participants on the training session which started off the program. This activity was part of PIO’s goal to develop the girls’ communication skills, and was also useful for the feedback it produced.

This evaluation report focuses on the assessment data from the “program completion surveys” that mentors and buddies were asked to answer at the end of the year. Nineteen out of the original 21 mentors completed a 19-question assessment of their experience, and 18 of the original 20 buddies completed a 15-question assessment of theirs. Most of the questions asked the girls to evaluate the PIO program and its impacts on them subjectively, and also to make recommendations for future iterations of the program. The survey was therefore a tool to help the girls reflect back on their experience as part of their own closure process, as well as providing PIO and SWOVA staff with insights into program impact and ideas for its further development.

The data gathering and analysis process does not identify or attempt to assess mentor-buddy pairs as such, but examines participants’ collective experience based on their role. Given the small numbers in the program, the data should be considered suggestive rather than definitive.³

2. MENTORS’ EXPERIENCE

The 19 mentors were asked to state, in their own words, three goals they had for joining the *Pass It On* program, for a total of 57 possible goal statements. They were also asked to score each one, on a scale of 1—5, in terms of successful goal achievement. Out of the 57 goals listed by the mentors, 65% were rated at 5 out of 5 in terms of success, 18% at 4 out of 5, 16% at 3, and only one girl rated any of her goals below a 3. This indicates a very high degree of program satisfaction. In future, it would be useful to compare the girls’ goals for themselves more directly with the program’s basic goals for them, and investigate the extent of concurrence. This could involve a goal-setting exercise at the beginning of the year, planned by the program facilitator and evaluator together and revisited at the end of the year.

When asked what their favourite part of the PIO program was, the majority of mentors identified the weekly and monthly group meetings, referring with different specific examples to the value of exchanging ideas with one another in the framework of the program designed by the coordinator-facilitator, who received many personal endorsements and was mentioned by many in answer to a question about the part of the PIO program that “most inspired” them.⁴

Their answers about what had inspired them in the PIO program showed that “mentoring” is about more than the one-to-one relationship set up in each mentor-buddy pair, see Table 1:

³ Note that the numbers participating in this year’s program were the highest in the program’s history, an indicator of success, and very likely the maximum that could be accommodated in one program delivery.

⁴ It would be informative to have a list of the topics covered and community guests for future evaluations.

TABLE 1: What was the most inspiring part of the PIO program?	
Being vulnerable with girls I'm not normally close with.	
Listening and relating to everyone's stories.	
[The program facilitator].	
Hearing all the stories from women and girls in the community.	
Listening to my peers speak.	
Hearing discussions from women in the community.	
The talks from women in the community.	
Seeing people who don't know one another open up.	
[The program facilitator].	
The talks we would have.	
Working with [the program facilitator].	
Talks with women in the community.	
Talks with community women.	
[The program facilitator] and the other women in the community, listening to their stories and advice.	
Working with [the program facilitator].	
Not sure.	
Seeing each other grow and the amount of support out there.	
Women's stories.	
[The program facilitator].	

When asked what if anything in their program experience disappointed them, the two themes that came up were familiar from previous years' evaluations: (1) the challenges of mentors and buddies having enough time together, and (2) in a small number of cases, the difficulty of making a good relationship between the mentor and her buddy. The time question seems to reflect primarily the busyness of both mentors and buddies, as well as scheduling difficulties which are made difficult in part because the different schools they attend do not all finish the teaching day at the same time. However, their difficulty arranging for regular 1: 1 meetings could also perhaps be interpreted as an indicator of the girls' variable commitment to this element of the program. In future evaluations, it would be helpful to dig deeper into this issue.

This year's evaluation placed particular emphasis on the mentor-buddy relationship, including two other opinion questions. Mentors were asked how they would rate themselves as mentors on a scale of 1—5 and how much they thought their buddies benefited from the relationship, using the same scale. The mismatch between the two may reinforce the idea of reviewing this aspect of PIO, and setting some measurable outcome expectations for next year's mentors.

TABLE 2: Self-evaluation as mentor, scale of 1—5

Score	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Response numbers	0	2	8	8	1	19
	-	(10.5%)	(42.1%)	(42.1%)	(5.3%)	(100%)

TABLE 3: Perceived benefits of mentors' relationship to buddies, scale of 1—5

Score	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Response numbers	0	1	13	4	1	19
	-	(5.3%)	(68.4%)	(21.0%)	(5.3%)	(100%)

One avenue for “digging deeper” would be to ask future mentors who are experiencing some disappointment in their relationship with their buddies what advice they have for the program on strengthening this element of PIO, perhaps as part of a “problem-solving session” partway through the program. Several girls did offer advice on this issue when asked for suggestions on program improvements for next year. Their suggestions re the mentor-buddy relationship were:

Encourage the buddies to reach out as much as the mentors.

Choose buddies that really need the extra mentorship but aren’t unlikeable.

[Have a] required amount of buddy-mentor meet ups.

Maybe get the buddies and mentors together more altogether [as a group].

The last of these suggestions was supported by the results of another question which asked the mentors to rate eight program elements on a scale of 1—5 in terms of their “success and value to you”. One of those elements was “monthly meetings of mentors and buddies,” which received a very high score, with 57.9% of the mentors rating it at 5 out of 5 and almost all the rest (36.8%) rating it at 4. This indicates that the whole-group context may be working better for some—perhaps many—of the girls than the 1: 1 mentoring context. It would not be difficult to suggest factors which could explain this, such as the shared responsibility for outcomes in a group, the power of group energy and dynamics, and the presence of the program facilitator in the group context. It is a matter for program staff to decide on the appropriate balance among program goals and components, and whether the 1: 1 mentoring component needs review.

NOTE: it should be pointed out that the questionnaire used for this evaluation limited the number of questions in order to increase the response rate and thoughtfulness of responses. As a result, it did not probe other major components of the PIO program as thoroughly as it did the 1: 1 mentor-buddy relationship. A more complete program assessment would need to focus more thoroughly on the transition from middle school to high school and the enhanced connections between youth and adults in the community, among other program goals.

That said, evidence of enhanced connections between youth and adults was shown by the fact that this element also received very high scores from the mentors in terms of “success and value to you”, with 63.2% rating it at 5 out of 5 and most of the rest (26.3%) rating it at 4. As well, about a third said that “talks with women in the community” had been the “most inspiring” part of the program for them in answer to an open-ended question.

In addition, mentors were asked “how much did you gain” from the PIO program in relation to seven of its learning goals, this time on a scale from 1—4. If all 19 girls had circled 4 for an item, the total or perfect score for that item would have been (19 x 4) or 76 , i.e. 100%.

The actual score for each of the seven goals for all the mentors taken together appears as a percentage of the perfect score in Table 4, below.

TABLE 4: How much did you gain in terms of ...	Combined score
Feeling more accepted by peers	63/76 = 82.9%
Emotional maturity	61/76 = 80.3%
Confidence about expressing yourself in social situations	60/76 = 79.0%
Ability to ask for help/support when you need it	58/76 = 76.3%
Self-esteem	57/76 = 75.0%

Leadership ability	53/76 = 69.7%
Having more friends	52/76 = 68.4%

These are generally high scores, with only two falling below the 75% mark—a strong indication of positive program impact.

Finally, in terms of their overall assessment of the *Pass It On* program, mentors were asked if they would recommend the program to other girls their age next year. Fully 100% said yes, another strong indication of positive program impact. Some examples of what they would say in their recommendations are as follows:

This program is an amazing opportunity for young girls.

It's empowering & inspiring & talks about legit (not-sugar-coated) stuff. So vital!

It's a great program, the leader is awesome, you'll have great conversations and meet cool, creative people [from the community].

It's a really great program which allows you to learn to better communicate with others and it will help you to broaden your peer group.

3. BUDDIES' EXPERIENCE

The buddies, who by design are all in grade 8 (the final year of middle school), were asked to state in their own words up to three goals they had for themselves in joining *Pass It On*, just as the mentors were. Something along the lines of 'making a connection at the high school' was their most frequently stated goal, followed by the idea of 'making new friends'. Overall however, their sense of accomplishment in relation to their goals was markedly lower than was reported by the mentors, as shown in Table 5 below where the scores are expressed as a percentage of all goals taken together at each score level for the two groups.

TABLE 5: Mentors' and Buddies' Views of Goal Achievement					
Score level	5	4	3	2	1
Mentors	65%	18%	16%	-	2%
Buddies	35%	29%	18%	14%	4%

Of the 12 buddies who listed something to do with 'connection at the high school' as one of their goals, seven rated that part of their experience at 4 or 5, three rated it at 3, and two rated it at 2 or 1. They were not very articulate about what the "greatest success" of the program was for them, although five did refer to making a connection at the high school as a success. In terms of disappointments, ten listed their relationship with their mentors as disappointing, mostly in terms of lack of time together. However, in answer to a question about the "success and value to you" of different parts of the program, thirteen of the buddies (72%) rated both "getting matched with your mentor" and "your relationship with your mentor" at 4 or 5 on the scale of 1—5, a good result, though somewhat contradictory.

Table 6 shows a wide range in the rating by buddies of time spent with their mentors, using the scale of 1—5. Comparison with the results of Table 3 shows a clear mismatch between mentors and buddies on this point, with the mentors underestimating both the low end and the high end

of their buddies' perceptions, again reinforcing the possible need for a review of the 1: 1 mentoring relationship.

TABLE 6: Perceived benefits of time with mentors by their buddies

1	2	3	4	5
4 (22.2%)	1 (5.6%)	4 (22.2%)	5 (27.8%)	4 (22.2%)

When buddies were asked “what could have been better” in their relationships with their mentors, almost all had responses but not so many had practical suggestions.

TABLE 7: How could your relationship with your mentor have been better?
I really liked my [mentor] but I feel like I may have done better with someone else.
Having more time with them.
More time with buddies.
Coming more.
Our personality match up was way off.
I wish we could have hung out and talked more!
Meeting up more.
Talking on the phone more.
Having a mentor that had more time.
Hanging out more. (We texted a LOT though.)
If we had done more things together.
The amount of time able to hang out and not only being constricted with one [mentor].
Nothing.
More [illegible] of food.
Contacting me.
Knowing when the meetings were and seeing my mentor more often.
I don't know.
Trying to make it fit people's schedules somehow.

The buddies, like the mentors, made it clear that they derived a great deal from elements of the PIO program other than the 1: 1 mentoring relationship. About 50% referred to the group meetings and conversations as their favourite part, and one girl said that her *least* favourite part was “that we only met [altogether] once a month.”⁵ This suggests the possible added value to buddies of more whole-group meetings.

As things stand, the program for buddies includes offers only monthly meetings in addition to 1: 1 meet-ups with their mentors, not weekly meetings. The program coordinator has indicated that she would like to increase the number of sessions designed for buddies as a group, but PIO would need additional funding to accomplish this. The evaluation supports this direction.

The buddies, also like the mentors, demonstrated the richness of their overall experience of PIO in more detail when asked what “the most inspiring part” of the program had been for them, see table below.

⁵ The mentors met as a group once a week.

TABLE 8: What was the most inspiring part of the PIO program?
All the conversations.
Talking without worrying. [= No judgments.]
Women's Day.
Making friends and talking.
Talking in a group.
Spending time and talking to older girls.
Talking about grief.
Talking/listening to others.
Hearing other people's sad stories.
Realizing how many other girls are going through the same things as me.
The talks, notably about loss/grief.
Talking about loss and grief and people who handle it and get through it.
All of her shoes. (?? Illegible)
Hearing about other girls' experiences.
Hearing some inspiring personal stories.
Meeting so many new people.
I'm not sure.
Getting to hear everyone's opinions on different topics.

Also like the mentors, buddies were asked “how much did you gain” from the PIO program in relation to eight selected program goals, on a scale from 1—4. If all 18 buddies had circled 4 for an item, the total or perfect score for that item would have been (18 x 4) or 72, i.e. 100%. The actual score for each of the eight goals appears below, in Table 9, as a percentage of the perfect score.

Scores by the buddies were considerably lower than for the mentors (refer back to Table 4). The range for mentors extended from a high of 82.9% to a low of 68.4%, whereas the high for buddies is only 68.1%. In other words, the entire range scores by buddies fell below the lowest score by mentors on these items. Given the age gap between them, which is more significant in developmental terms in adolescence than later in life, this difference may not be entirely unexpected. But given that the question was framed in terms of “how much did you *gain*...” (i.e. irrespective of your starting point), the result may warrant discussion by program staff.

TABLE 9: How much did you gain in terms of ...	Combined score
Emotional maturity	49/72 = 68.1%
Feeling more accepted by peers	49/72 = 68.1%
Having more friends	47/72 = 65.3%
Confidence about going to high school	47/72 = 65.3%
Leadership ability	45/72 = 62.5%
Ability to ask for help/support when you need it	44/72 = 61.1%
Confidence about expressing yourself in social situations	43/72 = 59.7%
Self-esteem	38/72 = 52.8%

Finally, the buddies were asked if they would recommend the PIO program to others of their age next year, to which a strong 100% said yes. Examples of their recommendations are as follows:

After [and] during this program you will feel great! It's like having a big sister. Make sure you try to make the time. Also talking in the group is great!!! [heart symbol]

Make sure you'll see your buddy really often.

You should do Pass It On! It's so much fun and you learn a lot about yourself and others!

I would 100% recommend it.

It's a great way to meet new people and helps you feel more comfortable going into high school.

It didn't work for me but I think other girls would enjoy it.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The *Pass It On* program for girls in SD 64, the Southern Gulf Islands of BC, is a year-long program of social and emotional learning, as well as self- and community discovery for young women. It is designed to use mentoring relationships to link girls in grade 8, about to enter high school in the following year, to older girls already in grades 10 to 12, and to adult women in the community with life lessons to share. It was developed and continues to be coordinated and led by a community-based facilitator with experience working in a variety of contexts to support girls and young women in meeting the challenges of adolescence and maturation toward adulthood in ways that will help them make healthy relationship choices and stay safe throughout their lives.

The success and popularity of the program has grown through the six years of its operation as one of the programs delivered by the community-based organization, SWOVA (Salt Spring Women Opposed to Violence and Abuse). In 2015-16 it included 20 grade eight girls and 21 older girls in weekly meetings for the mentors and numerous other activities for all the girls together, and for mentors and their buddies separately.⁶

Within the scope permitted by its funding, the evaluation program has showed that the mentors in particular were extremely engaged in the program and showed evidence of high program satisfaction and positive program impacts across a range of PIO's goals. The buddies, although positive about the program overall, showed some dissatisfaction including with their relationships with their mentors in several cases, as well as lower scores on some of the impact measures. This has been a persistent finding, and age-related maturity may explain part of the difference between mentors' and buddies' assessments (including possible differences in their commitment).⁷

That said, because the mentor-buddy relationship is so important to the program, **it is recommended** that its framework, set up and experience be reviewed, perhaps with input from other SWOVA staff and educators who support the goals of the PIO program, to see if the relationship could be strengthened to be more effective from the buddies' perspectives.

⁶ For more program information, see the SWOVA website: <http://www.swova.org/>

⁷ The program coordinator has commented on the lower levels of responsibility and self-confidence that she has observed in the buddies, as compared with the mentors, due to their age and stage of development.

It is also recommended that consideration be given to an expansion of the program to allow for more frequent meetings of the buddies as a group, with the program facilitator, to engage in discussions and activities that can help them develop more confidence in social situations and increase their connections to their age-mates, much as the mentors do now with their own age-mates. If this were to become possible, **it is further recommended** that empathy be another of the capacities considered for development (for example using role reversal techniques) based on some evidence of lack of empathy in the younger girls.

It is also recommended that future evaluation be extended to permit some more extensive and sophisticated research to be done overall. Among the areas where more research could be useful are:

- (i) further investigation into the program's primary goals and the girls' primary goals in order to measure the extent of their similarity or coincidence;
- (ii) a mid-term review of the girls' goals in the 1: 1 mentoring context with the opportunity for some supervised mutual feedback and redirection if needed;⁸ and
- (iii) the possibility of looking at the mentor-buddy pairs as such, instead of or in addition to the data now collected and aggregated from all the girls as members of the two age-distinct groups.

It is recognized by the evaluator that the relationship between mentors and buddies was a particular focus in this year's program assessment, perhaps to the detriment of assessing other goals. Accordingly, **it is recommended** that next year (if funding permits) the PIO program coordinator work with the evaluator to identify other program goals that should be assessed in depth, including the goals of 'learning to stay safe' and 'learning about community supports', if those two goals are still central to the program.⁹

This last recommendation should perhaps include some specification of the way or ways that *Pass It On* is intended to contribute to SWOVA's overall "mission" as an organization to prevent interpersonal violence in the lives of youth in Southern Gulf Island communities. Also in this connection, it would be extremely interesting for program research to assess the buddies' risk profile at the beginning and end of the program, to see if gains have been made by the end.

⁸ This might include some kind of appreciation exercise, with an opportunity the girls in the mentoring pairs to ask for something from one another in the way of personal change during the PIO program period. (C.f., the 'three stars and a wish' exercise in R+R, if the evaluator remembers it rightly.)

⁹ In this regard, it could be that some team work be done between the coordinator of the *Pass It On* project and the coordinator of SWOVA's new project on sexual safety (consent and assault).