

# Respectful Relationships Program

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## Engaging Youth in Social Change

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Report to The Canadian Women's Foundation:

The R+R Program for 2011/2012  
Southern Gulf Islands School District #64

Written by

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## Report to The Canadian Women's Foundation:

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### The R+R Program for 2011/2012 Southern Gulf Islands School District #64

*"The R+R program  
has made me a gentler  
person"*

Grade 10 Male  
Student

## Program Information:

**S**WOVA Community Development and Research Society is a non-profit society located on Salt Spring Island in British Columbia. Its members are women and men who work for social change, helping to create a world where women and children are valued and able to live without fear of violence and abuse.

Between September 2011 and the end of February 2012, SWOVA's **Respectful Relationship's Program** was successfully delivered in eighteen classrooms in Southern Gulf Islands School District #64. For the eleventh consecutive year, approximately 500 students in grades 7, 8, 9, and 10 participated in the R+R program. Chris Gay acted as Program Coordinator, with Christina Antonick and Kevin Vowles as the Adult Facilitators delivering over 220 hours of classroom workshops.

Thirty-five (35) youth aged 14-17 years from Gulf Island Secondary School became R+R Youth Team members, participating in six months of training in the areas of social justice, facilitation, leadership skills and self-awareness. These same youth were involved in the delivery of R+R workshops with their peers along with the adult facilitators in numerous grade 7 and 8 classrooms. Half a dozen also went to the outer Gulf Islands with the adult facilitators and took the lead facilitation role during a day-long session, to 33 grade 7 and 8 students.

## PROGRAM DELIVERY STYLE

*“I grew out of the shell that dictated that it was cool to hate this program and realized that I didn’t.”*

Grade 10 Male Student

*“One guy was picking on me hardcore and now he slowed down.”*

Grade 10 Male Student

*“I also thought it was nice to know that the other students and I had a lot in common.”*

Grade 10 Female Students

In the 2011-2012 R+R workshops youth were actively engaged in a collaborative learning process. Interactive activities, personal story telling, and writing, were used to explore topics including self esteem, stress, conflict resolution, dating violence, systemic violence and personal boundaries. The curriculum delivery focused on social competence and emotional learning in an atmosphere where youth were encouraged to take greater responsibility for themselves as well as the group as a whole. Social behaviours and attitudes were explored and differences in opinions were encouraged and valued as opportunities to articulate, share and become more competent in hearing other people’s perspectives.

At each grade level youth were also given the opportunity to experience R+R sessions with their own gender, exploring issues including boundaries, self esteem, consent, healthy dating relationships and media violence. After these sessions, many students expressed their satisfaction and comfort in having the opportunity to meet as young men and women to discuss relevant issues that they are dealing with in their lives. R+R separate gender workshops foster a growing awareness that as young men and women, they play a significant role in understanding and working towards ending violence in its many forms in our society.

One group of Grade 10 students who participated in R+R were involved in a self-assessment process initiated by the vice principal of the high school. He felt it would be a way to solidify the perception of the R+R program as a bona fide component of the students' school programs. The students went into the program knowing that they would have to complete three short, guided reflections on any three of the sessions they attended and, when the program concluded, they completed an end-of-program self-reflection.

The top six statements that had relevance for the students were:

- ✓ Be more aware and respectful of the personal boundaries of others
- ✓ Be aware of issues around homophobia, racism, sexism, and bullying
- ✓ Understand the influence of the media on my thinking and decision-making

- ✓ Understand the impacts of violence in relationships
- ✓ Value diversity amongst people
- ✓ Recognize and resist stereotypical thinking

When asked what they would apply based on what they learned this year the following comments were shared:

*Male* "I learned better communication skills, and better empathy skills."

*Female*: 'I'll think about other people's feelings, and be careful about what I say.'

*Male*: "Being able to reflect on difficult situations with myself and others."

*Female*: "I'll have a lot more empathy and be able to deal with negative emotions in a healthier way."

This year the adult facilitators worked on strengthening the leadership capacity within the Youth Team. Much of the time spent during their weekly meetings was focused on enhancing their facilitation skills. This was the first year that a clear emphasis was placed on ensuring the youth team members took a leadership role in the facilitation of the grade 7 and 8 sessions relying on the adult facilitators as support only. For the delivery in the outer Gulf Islands, seven youth facilitators ran the day.

Another remarkable opportunity emerged this year for the R+R Youth Team. Two youth from the Youth Team were chosen to be part of the Teen Healthy Relationship Programming National Skills Institute, February 22-25, 2012, in Toronto, Ontario. This event was sponsored by the Canadian Women's Foundation. The two R+R Youth team members sat on the Youth Advisory Committee that planned the youth portion of the gathering. Approximately two hundred people from all over Canada met in Toronto. One-quarter of the participants were youth.

The youth facilitated workshops on 'Youth Facilitators in Action - Best Practices'. They were part of discussion and working groups on 'To Engage Youth Leaders', 'Engaging Youth Facilitators', and 'Creating a Safe, Authentic, and Sincere Program Environment for Youth'.

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The female Youth team member who attended provided the following description and testimonial:

*“When I participated in the first conference call it made everything more real; then doing the prep on the conferences calls, blogging almost everyday with our committees, brainstorming with people I had never met, it was all new territory for me. Working along side my male facilitator, we prepped for the workshops for two weeks before the meeting after school and emailing all the time. When we arrived at the hotel in Toronto, we had time to go straight into a meeting, talking, instructing people, and really just learning all the time. I co-facilitated four workshops and those workshops were the highlight of the whole trip. Working with the youth was so much fun and such an awesome experience, but working with the adult facilitators was a whole different way of facilitating. I really want youth to have a bigger voice and bridge the gap with adults.”*

## PROGRAM CHALLENGES

*“It’s better to have sessions with other people who aren’t teachers and to meet people from outside the school.”*

Grade 10 Female Student

Overall, the implementation of the R+R program in SD #64 this year went very well. As experienced in previous years, some of the challenges this year included:

- Timetable/Classroom Schedule - Working with the school administration to fit the R+R program into an existing busy school timetable. Project staff worked to ensure that communications between school administration, teachers, the R+R coordinator, facilitators and teachers were clear.
- The numbers in the grade 9 classrooms fluctuated due to scheduling conflicts and a new format used in the school to support independent learning pods. For more consistency, a dedicated time and placement in the curriculum without other conflicting priorities would support a more solid attendance rate of 25-30 students, rather than the sporadic numbers of 10-12 that were sometimes occurring.
- Youth Team members balancing school work, other extracurricular activities and being present in the classroom to co facilitate R+R workshop delivery was an area that required attention and commitment from R+R staff to work with youth in balancing project needs and team members busy schedules.
- Addressing specific R+R sessions that are not as engaging and incorporating more experiential activities in some sessions.
- More emphasis needs to be placed on the work experience for members of the youth team. There was a concerted effort to articulate clear outcomes. Next year the process will be more stringent with less emphasis on the honorarium and more on the deliverables required in order to gain credit for participation as a youth team facilitator and the learning outcomes achieved.

## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS:

- ✓ Increased engagement of youth in dialogue about respectful relationships.
- ✓ Development of youth's critical thinking skills.
- ✓ Increased youth awareness that there are adults in the school and larger community who care about them.
- ✓ Higher awareness towards systemic violence and an understanding that violence is more than physical.
- ✓ Dedicated school-community partnerships-schools are able to demonstrate to students that social justice and anti-violence issues involve everyone in our society.
- ✓ A marked high level of engagement among classes where teachers were engaged in the program through their participation in discussions, highlighting the power of teacher support.
- ✓ R+R curriculum goals matched the B.C. Ministry of Education's prescribed learning outcomes (PLOs) which were of great value to teachers.
- ✓ Anecdotal evidence supporting an increase in student maturity after engaging in the R+R program. This was attributed to the curriculum's focus on critical thinking skills.
- ✓ More focus spent on training the youth team to be facilitators and to take a leadership role in facilitating grade 7 and 8 sessions.

## Youth had the following to say:

“For me specifically I’ve needed to work on leadership and patience. I have definitely learned those.”

“I personally think that respecting others is the most important skill in every kind of circumstance. When people are respecting one another conflicts will gradually decrease, as long as people are willing to listen and accept other’s opinions.”

“This work experience (as a Youth team member) undoubtedly has a strong impact on developing my personal thinking towards different situations in school and outside school, building cooperative skills when participating on a team, building self esteem and the capability to speak in public.”

“I actually want to study law and I think listening skills are good for every job. I’m also interested in social work and I’m still looking at how I can combine law and social work.”

“It was a good experience to try out how it is to work in a school with younger kids.”

“The list is endless. R+R provides invaluable people skills, clear communication, and different counselling skills such as empathic listening. Also clear and purposeful expression of ideas (including self expression) is frequently practiced. Finally we learn how to be leaders.”

“I feel I am becoming a more empathic, confident, kind, and emotionally healthy individual through this work.”

“Learning about respect and relationships will help me to achieve anything I want because everything in life involves interactions with others and relationships.”

“The work that SWOVA and R+R does is very important because nobody else addresses these important topics with youth and helps find ways to work with all types of situations that most teenagers are in.”

## GRATITUDE

**S**WOVA and the Respectful Relationships Program would like to offer its deepest appreciation to the Canadian Women's Foundation for its support and commitment to improving the lives of youth. Your support has enabled us to foster strength and resiliency in youth in our community and provide them with opportunities for learning and leadership that will allow them to become powerful agents of positive social change.

# PHOTOS

2011/2012

R+R Youth Team and Adult  
Facilitators



Members of youth team assisting at a community awareness event for SWOVA