

## **An Outline of the Bass Coast Model**

A primary school sexuality education project was piloted in the Bass Coast region of Victoria in 2003 with the aim of developing sustainable sexuality education programs across participating local primary schools.

The Department collaborated with Family Planning Victoria, Deakin University and the San Remo Community Health Centre on the project.

The key elements of the Bass Coast Model are:

- surveying parents, teachers and principals to develop an understanding of the needs of the school community and to inform the teacher professional training
- providing professional training to promote teacher comfort and confidence
- developing a central link with a local community agency, such as the community health centre, for support coordination, resource and knowledge sharing and use of venue for teacher peer support and professional learning activities
- promoting a partnership approach with parents
- fostering collaborative partnerships between primary and secondary schools
- focussing on the transition years from primary to secondary school.

### **Background to the project**

Primary schools in the Bass Coast region had traditionally relied on the San Remo Community Health Centre to provide a sexuality program for their students. As a result of changing priorities, the community health centre was unable to continue to deliver sexuality education for the local primary schools.

A shift from direct student education was also perceived to be in closer alignment with government sexuality education policy which emphasises the importance of teacher-led sexuality education with the use of the local community and external groups in support.

Concern was expressed by both teachers and principals, that teachers reported feeling ill prepared to provide sexuality education as they had had no professional learning in an area they saw as being challenging and sensitive within their school communities.

A reference group was established with representatives from the Department, San Remo Community Health Centre, Family Planning Victoria, Deakin University as well as teacher and parent representatives.

The Department invited schools in the Bass Coast region, who were traditionally serviced by community health centre to participate in the pilot program.

### **Preliminary needs analysis**

A needs analysis sought to identify the barriers and enablers to teachers implementing sexuality education programs. The primary school teachers were surveyed about their preparedness to deliver sexuality education. Focus groups for principals and families were also conducted.

The teachers also expressed concern that parents would not want schools to be teaching this area. However the majority of parents did not voice these concerns.

The analysis found that generally teachers:

- felt they didn't have the appropriate levels of knowledge and/or skills to teach sexuality education
- felt more comfortable teaching certain sexuality education topic areas than others
- felt that an outside organisation was far better suited to teaching in the area than they were
- believed that potential community backlash was a significant barrier to program implementation
- were unsure how sexuality education linked to curriculum policy

- were unsure what kind of support they would receive from this Department
- thought that the gender of the teacher was a significant barrier, specifically males felt a greater level of concern and discomfort about teaching sexuality education.

### **The professional training**

Teams of teachers and a number of principals participated in the two-day professional training program conducted by Family Planning Victoria.

The professional training focused on the findings of the needs analysis and addressed the following topics:

- why teach sexuality education
- the place of sexuality education in the curriculum
- planning a sexuality education program
- teaching and learning activities
- working with parents
- dealing with difficult questions.

The shared understanding about the different roles and responsibilities of schools and families was a significant foundation for professional training and program planning.

### **Evaluation report**

The Department commissioned Deakin University to evaluate the program and identify the key areas crucial for effective primary school sexuality education.

The evaluation sought to explore how participants felt after their professional training sessions and whether personal shifts had taken place. Teachers reported that they:

- had gained in confidence and levels of comfort
- developed greater knowledge and skills and felt better prepared
- believed that the classroom teacher (supported by an outside agency) was best suited to teach the program
- believed teachers and schools could develop strategies to help them either prevent or reduce the potential for community backlash
- could identify relevant links to curriculum policy
- had a better understanding of the Department policy context
- could develop strategies to ensure male teachers would feel more comfortable teaching in the area.

Perhaps one of the best examples of the success of the professional training program can be demonstrated in the following quote from a teacher participant:

'I came here not even intending on ever teaching sexuality education. There was no way known. But I am going to go back and give it a go now.' (Teacher participant.)