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## Health Relationships Plus Program Facilitator Implementation Experience Feedback

Debbie G. Chiodo Ms.

Western University, [dchiodo@uwo.ca](mailto:dchiodo@uwo.ca)

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## Brief Report

# Healthy Relationships Plus Program Facilitator Implementation Experience Feedback

### PROGRAM CONTEXT

The Fourth R Healthy Relationships Plus Program (HRPP) is an evidence-informed small groups program that aims to equip students with the skills they need to build healthy relationships and help themselves and their peers reduce risky behaviours. The HRPP consists of 14 one-hour sessions covering topics such as peer pressure, help-seeking, media literacy, healthy and unhealthy peer and dating relationships, healthy communication, mental health and wellbeing, suicide prevention, and the impacts of substance use and abuse.

The Health Canada's Drug Strategy Community Initiatives Fund has supported the implementation, evaluation, and the scaling-up of the HRPP in three provinces and one territory since 2014. Schools and community agencies received training, materials, and ongoing support to deliver the program to youth. In the first two years of the project, more than 2000 number of youth participated in the HRPP across Canada (See Table 1).

**Table 1:** Number of youth enrolled in HRPP in participating provinces/territories from 2014-2016

| Province / Territory  | # Schools /<br>Community<br>Agencies<br>Participating | # Youth<br>Participating |
|-----------------------|---|--------------------------|
| Ontario               | 36  | 679                      |
| Saskatchewan          | 11  | 394                      |
| Alberta               | 26  | 732                      |
| Northwest Territories | 14  | 339                      |
| <b>TOTAL</b>          | <b>87</b>   | <b>2144</b>              |

All teachers or community leaders who delivered the HRPP (i.e., program facilitators) participated in a full or half-day training session. At training, facilitators received HRPP materials to deliver to youth either in a school or community-based setting. At the end of training, participants completed a training feedback survey. During program delivery, facilitators tracked the lessons and activities they delivered to the youth.

Program facilitators were asked to complete a feedback survey about their implementation experience at the end of the program, and the summary of their feedback is provided in this report. On the survey, facilitators were asked questions related to their overall satisfaction with the HRPP, modifications they made while delivering the program, the appropriateness of the training they received, whether they intended to implement the HRPP in the future, advice they would give to first-time implementers, and the perceived benefits of the HRPP for youth. This report is based on the feedback from 135 program facilitators/co-facilitators who delivered the program in the first two years of the project (2014-2016). The HRPP was delivered in 87 different sites across participating provinces and territories. The majority of these sites (78) were school settings, and 68 sites were facilitated by educators. In total, 138 HRPP groups were run, with an average of 14 youth in each group. Group size ranged from as few 4 participants to a large classroom group of 34 youth.

### HRPP TRAINING

Program facilitators receive either a full or half-day of training prior to delivering the program. The majority of program facilitators in this evaluation (83.5%) had received training the year they were delivering the program. Reflecting on the HRPP training session that facilitators would have received prior to delivering the program, facilitators were asked to rate the extent to which the training prepared them to implement the program. The majority of facilitators rated the preparation they received at training as high (77.8%).

Program facilitators were also interested in attending additional HRPP trainings in the future if they had the opportunity to do so (76.5%).

Despite their interest in attending additional HRPP trainings in the future, fewer than half of facilitators (41.2%) accessed the HRPP training modules and resources that were made available to all facilitators online on the Fourth R website ([www.youthrelationships.org](http://www.youthrelationships.org)). Training modules provide facilitators with additional strategies and techniques to

## OVERALL IMPLEMENTATION EXPERIENCE

Program facilitators rated their satisfaction for three questions along a scale of not at all, not very much, neutral, somewhat, and very much. When asked the extent to which delivering the HRPP was a positive experience, 96% of facilitators answered favorably. When asked the extent to which they would recommend the HRPP to other colleagues, 94% of facilitators stated somewhat or very much. Finally, when asked to rate the extent to which they felt the HRPP was beneficial for their youth, 96% of facilitators agreed. Overall, almost all program facilitators had a positive experience delivering the program to youth, would recommend the program to their colleagues, and believed that the program was beneficial to youth.

**96 % of facilitators nationally indicated that the program was beneficial for their youth**

## MODIFICATIONS TO THE HRPP

Program facilitators routinely make modifications to programs to tailor activities to meet the needs of youth in their group, in addition to meeting the needs of the specific delivery context the program is embedded within (e.g., school or community setting). Seventy-four percent (74%) of program facilitators who delivered the HRPP over the two-year period reported making modifications to the program during implementation. Program modifications were made more often by facilitators who had been working with youth in a professional capacity for five or less years (81%) compared to program facilitators who had been working with youth for six years or more (71%). It is not uncommon for facilitators who are more new to working with youth to make modifications to a program they may be delivering. The balance between delivering the program, managing youth behaviours, and knowing how to facilitate youth discussions can be difficult initially.

To better understand what type of program modifications were made to the HRPP, facilitators were asked to identify how they modified the program. This information is helpful in understanding implementation experience in general because some modifications (e.g., adding additional resources, combining more than one session into one class period) may not necessarily compromise program integrity and instead may be a beneficial, local adaptation.

Program facilitators were asked to rate several common modifications made to the HRPP. The highest rated modification was “shortened sessions by dropping activities” (57%), followed by “added supplementary resources” (33%), and “added new activities” (16%). For the program facilitators who completed the survey in Year 2 (n=56; 2015-2016), two additional reasons for modifications were added to the survey: split sessions across more than one class period (32%) and combined more than one session into one class period (21%).

deliver the program successfully after training. In our experience, program facilitators prefer to receive training face-to-face rather than online. The interactive nature of face-to-face training, the ability to ask questions to the trainer or other colleagues, and the opportunity to practice lessons with colleagues and receive feedback from program trainers are often cited as reasons of the benefits of face-to-face training. More recently, some of our Master Trainers have begun to review the web-based resources as part of their in-person training, and we hope that this orientation to available resources will increase the use of them in the future.

## HRPP TRAINING SUGGESTIONS

Program facilitators in Year 2 (2015-2016) were asked to provide suggestions for future HRPP trainings. Specifically, facilitators were asked to think back to the training session they participated in, and to provide specific feedback about what they may have needed to feel better prepared to deliver the program. In their own words, facilitators offered a variety of suggestions that were categorized into two broad themes:

- Additional role play practice
- Additional time to review program content.

**Future trainings would benefit from additional role play practice and additional time to review program content**

For example, one facilitator noted that a half-day training is too short to review all the content in the program, and other facilitators wanted additional time with colleagues to review the program materials. Several teachers noted that additional time to practice facilitating role plays and going through one complete lesson from start to finish would be beneficial to training. Many teachers also noted that the training they received made them feel quite prepared and did not have any suggestions for future sessions.

## HRPP IMPLEMENTATION

### WHO DELIVERED THE HRPP?

Program facilitators were mostly female (62%). The HRPP is structured to allow for co-facilitation either with a youth or an adult co-facilitator. The program can also be delivered successfully with one facilitator. In terms of facilitator, the program was mostly delivered. The HRPP was delivered mostly by a sole facilitator, but in some cases (28%), a co-facilitator was present. Slightly fewer than half of program facilitators (45.2%) had been working with youth in a professional capacity for more than 10 years.

***The most frequent program modification made to the HRPP was shortening sessions by dropping activities***

## ADVICE TO FIRST-TIME IMPLEMENTERS

Program facilitators were asked to provide some implementation advice to those that may deliver the program for the first time. In their own words, program facilitators identified helpful suggestions for first-time implementers (see Appendix 1). Responses were categorized into seven themes:

- Read all of the materials, prepare your tools, and plan ahead.
- Modify program content according to classroom and / or student needs
- Have additional and local resources available
- Allow important discussions to progress
- Get enough training, practice, and feedback
- Consider scheduling and time management
- Have a co-facilitator

## REASONS FOR MODIFYING THE HRPP

Understanding why facilitators modify program components during implementation is important because incomplete or missing activities can compromise the integrity of the program. On the other hand, some modifications to programs may be necessary for programmatic success in the local context.

Facilitators were asked to indicate their primary reason for modifying the HRPP. Time constraints or reducing /dropping activities to stay within time limits was the highest rated reason of modification. As noted by one facilitator, *“Due to time constraints we did not have enough time to do every activity to the full extent of what is outlined in the program”*. Another facilitator said, *“Time was a big part of it. A lot of the discussion we had went over time because we found the topics to be extremely meaningful and relevant”*.

***The primary reason for modifying the HRPP was because of time constraints***

Many facilitators felt that the time allocated for program lessons was not sufficient because youth wanted more time to discuss the topics in greater details. For example, one facilitator noted, *“The time limits given for each activity was not long enough as students wanted to discuss many of the issues in further detail”*.

Finally, as stated by one facilitator, artificially stopping a meaningful group discussion just to stay within the allotted time frame of the lesson activities was not the typical way she would manage group discussions,

*“Often our discussions ran over the allotted time, but they were so engaging and on topic it wasn’t always natural to stop them and I wanted to give students the chance to share their voice on those topics”*.

One helpful strategy program facilitators used to address the shortage of time to complete program lessons was reducing the warm-up activities at the start of each lesson. Several facilitators noted that once students felt comfortable with each other or when students had known each other for many months prior to the program, the warm-up activities were excluded: *“We endeavoured to cover the content but reduced some of the ‘get-to-know-you’ activities as the students already knew each other.*

## PERCEIVED YOUTH BENEFITS OF HRPP

Facilitators described seeing changes in the students and the way they relate to each other and adults in their lives:

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***“I have observed my students discussing healthy and unhealthy relationships, and they are also able to identify ‘red flags’ in a relationships. I have also overheard students apologizing to friends, and the students who I delivered the HRPP to will ask the other person to make eye contact, talk to them in a private locations, etc. To me, this translates as students not only becoming aware of what constitutes a proper apology, but also becoming self-advocates. They are aware to voice their emotional needs. Students are also much more knowledgeable about mental illness and mental health. They are practicing some of the strategies they have learned to reduce their won stress and anxiety.”***

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Program facilitators rated their perceived benefits of the HRPP for their students along a scale of not at all, not very much, neutral, somewhat, and very much. Table 2 outlines perceived learning benefits for youth such as learning about healthy vs. unhealthy relationships and skill benefits such as improving skills for making an apology. Almost all these ratings are high (>80%). That is, program facilitators believed that the HRPP benefits youth across a wide range of protective factors. Ratings that were lower were related to youth demonstrating improved communication skills in role play scenarios and learning about the dangers of misusing prescription drugs.

**Table 2:** Facilitator ratings of perceived benefits for youth in the HRPP.

| To what extent did youth in the HRPP...   | % Somewhat or Very Much |
|---|-------------------------|
| ...enjoy the program?   | 82.1%                   |
| ...participate in group activities?   | 85.8%                   |
| ...learn about healthy relationships?   | 94.8%                   |
| ...learn about the connections between relationships and substance use/addiction? | 83.4%                   |
| ...learn about the connections between relationships and mental health?           | 87.0%                   |
| ...learn about the dangers of misusing prescription drugs?                        | 62.8%                   |
| ...learn about the dangers of using illicit drugs?                                | 72.5%                   |
| ...develop healthy coping strategies?   | 82.1%                   |
| ...improve strategies for helping a friend with mental health challenges?         | 77.9%                   |
| ...demonstrate improved communication skills in their role plays?                 | 62.9%                   |
| ...demonstrate improved problem solving in their group discussions?               | 74.2%                   |
| ...demonstrate skills in making an apology?                                       | 69.5%                   |
| ...provide support to each other around difficult issues?                         | 82.1%                   |
| ...develop a better sense of where to seek help for themselves or a friend?       | 84.3%                   |
| ...learn strategies for seeking help for themselves or a friend?                  | 86.5%                   |

## FUTURE INTENTIONS

Program facilitators were asked if they planned on implementing the HRPP again in the future. More than three-quarters of program facilitators (81.1%) indicated that they intend to implement the program at some other time in the future.

## SUMMARY

Overall, the experience of program facilitators implementing the HRPP in this evaluation was positive. Program facilitators were satisfied with the program, would recommend the program to other colleagues, intend to deliver the program again in the future, and perceived a variety of benefits to youth participating in the program.

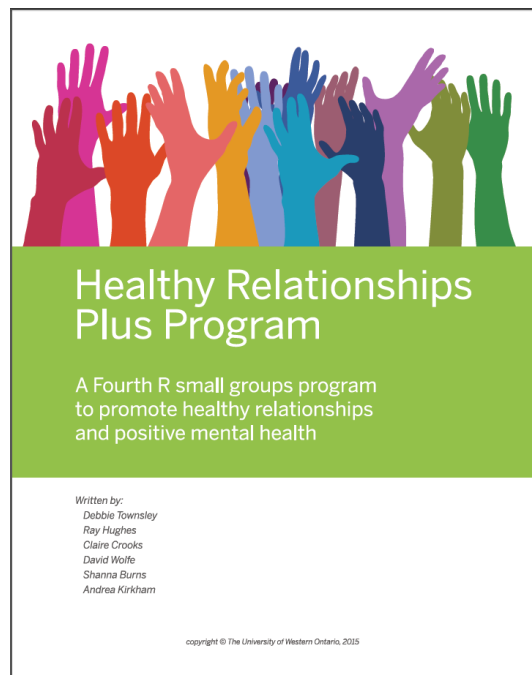
Program facilitators modified the program often due to time constraints either because of the setting in which the program was delivered, or because of the meaningful group discussions that affected the timing of lessons. The program was also modified to meet the needs of the youth in the program, as well as the setting in which it was delivered. Program facilitators found ways to shorten lessons by removing some of the warm-up activities or games to increase comfort level of students once students were well acquainted with each other.

Program facilitators noted that first-time implementers should spend time preparing their lesson and reviewing the program carefully before delivering each lesson as the preparation helps with lesson flow and timing. The importance of receiving training was also identified by facilitators as critical for implementation success.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Debbie Chiodo, Ph.D., is a project consultant at CAMH Provincial Support System Program and seconded to the Centre for School Mental Health, Western University as a Research Associate to assist with the evaluation of Fourth R programs nationally. For the past 13 years at CAMH, Debbie has been involved with the implementation and evaluation of programs and initiatives for schools and communities across Canada and the US.



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Centre for School  
Mental Health

Faculty of Education, University of Western Ontario

# Appendix 1: Advice to First Time Implementers



We asked previous facilitators of the Healthy Relationships Plus Program for advice they would give to someone implementing the program for the first time.

Here's what they had to say:

## **Read all of the materials, prepare your tools, and plan ahead**

“It is an amazing and rewarding program to facilitate! Plan ahead by pre-reading sessions and if you need to make modifications, do it – every group is different and comes from different environments; make HRPP relevant to them.”

“Do the prep work before the session. You will require a lot of flip chart paper and good markers. Read the instructions clearly before implementing the activities. Make a kit (box or bin) with the handouts, flip chart paper, markers, journals, pens, and manuals to access if needed.”

“Be sure to read the manual through before implementing. It makes a difference implementing an activity when you know how it connects to the next session. I also think it is important for facilitators to not give up if it seems difficult to connect with the youth. The group we worked with was considered fairly ‘high risk’ for behaviours. Initially the students were not overly receptive to the sessions. However, as the sessions continued and we as facilitators demonstrated our commitment to the group and were consistent, the students really trusted us.”

“To read through the entire manual first and be clear about upcoming lessons. Whenever possible, do all activities as they really do engage students and build a sense of community. Do not be afraid of the role playing! The kids do get on board.”

## **Modify program content according to classroom and/or student needs**

“Make sure that you have an appropriate space. The room that we had was a little congested and a few times we moved to a larger more spread out space, it changed the dynamics of the group and the setting completely. Take your time with the heavy topics and let the kids talk it out. Be prepared to debrief one-on-one after some of the topics.”

“Pick and choose activities based on youth age. Older students may not 'buy in' to some of the activities. Also for time management most sessions cannot be completed in an hour so pick and choose activities – fewer activities make for more discussion, which in my opinion is important.”

“I would encourage them to adapt it to suit their students' learning styles. Don't be afraid to add extra resources including guest speakers to the lessons. Also, take extra time to debrief if necessary and follow up on any areas where you think your students need clarification or extra support.”

## **Have additional and local resources available**

“Have a list of local resources readily available so that if a student requires more intensive or specialized support you know where to direct them.”

“Read through the lessons, find relevant YouTube videos or literature that complements the program.”

# Appendix 1: Advice to First Time Implementers

## Allow important discussions to progress

“Err on the side of allowing group discussion rather than completing all suggested activities. Be willing to adapt the suggested flow of activities for time and for what will connect with your group (every group is different).”

“There are topics that the students really want to discuss and share their own experiences. At times it starts heading into a therapy group and you have to be careful not to go down that path.”

“When the students show a particular interest in something related to the program, use it as a teachable moment and spend the time addressing the issue. Find time to speak to the students that need to debrief individually or be prepared to refer to the proper professionals.”

“Don't overlook the importance of letting conversations take over if that is where the kids go with it. Those conversations were often not part of the ‘activities’ – however, without fail, they were the part of the program that led to the most insights, the highest levels of relationship building, and where you could really see challenges and growth in youth.”

## Get enough training, practice, and feedback

“Find opportunities to receive facilitator training (it is as important as the content training for working with youth).”

“I would advise someone new to implementing the HRPP to watch the training modules online. Seeing the strategies demonstrated gives the facilitation confidence and a model to work from.”

## Consider scheduling and time management

“Set out scheduling at the beginning of the program that allows time for all sessions. We did it during class time, which I liked, but rescheduling of classes would be necessary not to overload students and teacher.”

“Plan for additional time for each session and be willing to be open and honest with students for maximum benefit from the program.”

## Have a co-facilitator

“I made sure I had another adult here to assist with facilitating this program. I found it helpful to have two of us contributing to discussions, moderating students who dominated the conversations, and were also here to pull aside students who may have needed additional support. This never did happen but I was happy to have her here. “

“Even though some topics may be pushing boundaries and seem daunting to engage in with youth, I found that these topics were actually of most benefit and engaged more students (I was very nervous about the Dating Violence lesson). If it is possible, having more than one facilitator was very useful (e.g., social worker really helped in planning, delivery, and follow up).”