



## **Establishing a Peer Support Network - Altona**

### **Project Target Risk Factors:**

Healthy Eating                      Physical Activity  
Tobacco Reduction                Mental Wellbeing

### **Target Population:**

Teens

### **Project Leads:**

Team: Warren Friesen, Guidance Counselor, and Lindsay Lawrence, Resource Teacher, at WC Miller Collegiate and Dorothy Braun – Healthy Together Now Altona – Chair and Volunteer

**Community:** Altona

**RHA:** RHA-Central

### **Project Partners:**

W.C. Miller Collegiate and Altona Healthy Together Now Committee

### **Project Details:**

A multiple event and ongoing project

### **Description:**

We established a peer support network in our collegiate. A Peer Support Network is a group of students, identified by their peers as natural helpers, who are brought together and given the training and resources to support them in their natural helping role in the school. They assist with events in the school such as Bullying Awareness Week, Addictions Awareness Week and the Spring Health Fair. Some of them help with community programs like Kids in the Kitchen and after-school activity programs for children in elementary schools. They have plans to help with other Healthy Together Now community projects. They can earn a high school course credit for their participation in this program.

### **Time:**

Prior to training the first group of peer support students, considerable time was spent discussing the need for the program and the nature of the program with stakeholders.

Time estimates for the project team leaders currently include: Retreat Planning and Training - 40 hours; regular follow-up lunch hour meetings with the peer helpers every two weeks during the school year and planning meetings for special events - 60 hours; and numerous additional support hours and peer helping volunteer hours.

### **Objectives:**

- To support students who are already helping other students
- To develop students' communication skills and problem solving skills
- To increase awareness about the process of helping other students, the resources that are available and the specific situations that require referral
- To build supports in the school through developing natural helpers

**Planning Supports:**

The local Youth Health Survey and awareness of issues in the community helped to mobilize the team to develop the Peer Support Network. Two of the project team leaders have training in developing Peer Support Programs. The Rey Carr Program from the University of Victoria and other USA resources provide the background and tools for training the peer supporters.

**Results:**

Each year 25 students are trained. Students who have been trained return for additional training the following year. Students report helping-activities over and above the formally planned activities. The students have planned and coordinated a number of school events each year with the support of school staff. A number of students have received a high school course credit for their work in this program.

**What worked:**

The program has been running for a few years now. It is essential to have committed teachers to enable and support this program.

**What didn't work and any changes made:**

The greatest challenge is the time for everyone involved - the students, the teachers and volunteers.

**Unexpected Outcomes:**

We assume the students at the peer support training all know each other, but the training helps them to get to know each other and in the subsequent years' trainings the growth of their relationships and their abilities to support each other is evident.

We didn't expect all the attention that one of the activities, the Cup Stomp, is getting.

**Volunteers:**

Dorothy Braun is a volunteer on the Project Lead Team. She is a retired educator and administrator. Each year 25 students volunteer to take or continue the training. Gradually some of the peer support students will be trained and able to assist with providing training to younger students in the program.

**Facilities:**

The school and the Winkler Bible Camp for the retreat training

**Total Costs:**

The total grant from Altona Healthy Together Now Committee is \$2500. The retreat cost about \$1800. The school pays for the bussing of students to the training. Other events at the school, such as the Health Fair costs, vary from year to year. The students help to raise some of the money for events.

**Contact Information:**

Community: Altona

Region: RHA-Central

Contact person: Warren Friesen (W.C. Miller Collegiate in Altona)

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An alternate contact or for more information on other Healthy Together Now programs in this area please contact Cheryl Pearson at [cpearson@rha-central.mb.ca](mailto:cpearson@rha-central.mb.ca)