

## **Everything to Know About Peer Ed!**

While they're not staff, our high school Peer Educators are a vital part of the organization. They help us provide education to youth and increase their comfort level in learning about sexual health and accessing services around it. They also encourage, and sometimes come with, their teen friends and family to our weekly Teen Clinic. Teens make up 12.5% of our patients.

Peer Educators present in classrooms and act as advocates informally with their peers when someone has a pregnancy scare, is sexually assaulted, doesn't know how to use a condom, and so on. They help teach kids from kindergarten through college and even have the opportunity to present at community events, including international film festivals, Pecha Kucha events and professional conferences.

### **Why Peer Ed?**

With so many physical and emotional changes happening during adolescence, it can be a time of isolation, especially if families are not comfortable discussing sexual health and relationship issues with their children. To help overcome these challenges, Bridgercare and HAVEN have partnered to co-facilitate a high school peer-to-peer education and advocacy group. Having high school aged Peer Educators model comfortable communication about these issues normalizes concerns many teens assume only they have, which can reduce the social impacts and financial costs of teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and dating violence.

The Bridgercare/HAVEN Peer Education Team not only offers medically-accurate, developmentally-appropriate, evidence based, culturally-sensitive sexual health and relationship information to students in local schools and community groups, but they also provide resources and referrals outside of presentations in informal settings. In this way, area youth are better able to access the information they need as it becomes relevant to them.

### **Other things Peer Educators Do**

Aside from teaching in classrooms, Peer Eders are invited (but not required) to volunteer at events for Bridgercare and Haven, help solicit donations for fundraising events, help raise funds themselves during "Give Big Gallatin Valley", sticker condoms, be interviewed on video, serve as model patients for advertising and any host of other random things that come up that you're willing and able to help with! All of these things are voluntary, but great ways to support the work of Bridgercare and Haven besides teaching in classrooms and informally to your friends.

### **What Does it Take to Be A Successful Peer Educator?**

You do not have to be a great public speaker to be a great Peer Educator, though teaching in classrooms is a big part of what we do so it's helpful if you're willing to push into the discomfort of presenting (even if it's just to the littlest kids rather than your peers or adults).

A successful Peer Educator is:

- Committed – please plan to attend nearly every weekly meeting. We understand some absences are necessary, but without regular attendance at meetings you fall behind the group, aren't able to teach and don't learn the additional materials that help you understand the issues enough to answer tough questions in classes. Additionally, please practice lessons before teaching them in the classroom – students can tell when you know what you're talking about versus reading off a script and will learn the lesson better and interact with you more if you know your stuff.
- Passionate about the topics (sexual health, healthy relationships and consent/coercion)
- Willing to push into the discomfort – whether it's public speaking to your peers (think your younger siblings, your ex-partner, or your own gym class), learning about a new topic that others in the group may know a lot about already or advocating and intervening in situations in your life.

### **What do you learn in Peer Ed?**

We always learn the basics so we can teach them in classrooms and/or teach them to your peers outside of presentations:

- Puberty
- STIs
- Contraception
- Healthy, Unhealthy and Abusive Relationships Characteristics (and the gray are between these)
- Advocacy when working with someone who has experienced teen dating violence or been sexually assaulted
- Consent and Sexual Assault/Coercion Prevention
- Being an ally to LGBTQ+ community
- Bystander Intervention

On top of that our weekly meetings explore topics we are unlikely to teach in classrooms, but which relate to our work. In the past these have included:

- Intersectionalities – like race and sex, religion and sex or sex for people with disabilities.
- Teen Parenting (we invite teen parents to come share their experiences)

- Pregnancy and childbirth
- BDSM Community
- Abortion
- Relationship Styles and Love Languages
- Sex Trafficking and the difference between this and prostitution
- Toxic Masculinity

### **General Peer Ed Timeline**

1. Recruit Peer Eders for following school year (March/April). Will accept applications from students who will be in grades 9-12 the following year from any school (or homeschooled)
2. Peer Educator candidate interviews and final selections: May
3. Summer Orientation and Leadership Retreat: Five days in August
4. Weekly meetings: October – May on Tuesdays from 6:30 – 8:30 PM. No school = No peer ed meeting.
5. Organize, schedule and attend education events and presentations: September - May once Peer Educators are trained
6. End of year celebration: May

### **Have Questions?**

Email Cami, Bridgercare's Education Director, at [carmijo@bridgercare.org](mailto:carmijo@bridgercare.org)!