

Be a Force for Change

- Dr. Yvonne K. Fulbright

AIDS advocate Melinda Gates has called for prevention tools for women in an effort to prevent HIV infection. Whether you hope to one day be the next Melinda Gates, want to be a “sexpert,” or simply long to be a force in your community in fostering a positive sexuality, especially for other women, it’s never too early to get started on your quest to make a difference.

With 79% of junior high teachers and 45% of high school teachers failing to teach about condoms, any time and efforts you can lend to safer sex promotion at your school, your college campus, and/or local community youth or health center can only help in righting the wrongs of the abstinence-only sex education agenda in our schools and in assisting women in protecting themselves.

Starting any type of sexual health programming is always more easily said than done. But with some planning, networking, and heart, it can be a huge success. Hopefully, the following five pointers will get you well on your way...

1. *Find allies.* You’re going to need people to work with and support you, as well as provide you with venues for advertising, presentation space, and a “home base.” Unless you’ve got a degree in a sexuality-related field, round up a supervisor to oversee efforts, provide guidance, and back you on any political challenges to your agenda. These people may include your school nurse, a director of health promotion services, a health educator, a faculty advisor, and/or a Planned Parenthood counselor. Recruit members of women’s sports teams and groups in your area, including sororities that can create a stir. The two organizations below can also work with you or point you to people in your community to hook up with:

Planned Parenthood Federation of America

www.ppfa.org

National Health Education Center Organization

<http://www.nationalahec.org/home/index.asp>

2. *Make sure that you, yourself, have, at the very least, basic “sexpertise.”* Take courses that deal with sexuality issues, read books written by qualified sex experts, and check out legitimate online resources for sexual health information.
3. *Work with your local health center or department of health.* They should be able to provide you with free pamphlets and articles, if not books and videos for workshops as well. Some will also lend you samples of contraceptives for presentations, or, if you’re lucky, have safer sex freebies for you to give away as well. Groups possibly willing to lend materials include:

Advocates for Youth

www.advocatesforyouth.org

*organization dedicated to helping young people make informed, responsible reproductive and sexual health decisions; materials available in French, Spanish & English

American Social Health Association

www.iwannaknow.org

*teen sexual health and STI site

National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

www.teenpregnancy.org

Sexuality Information & Education Council of the United States

www.siecus.org

*nonprofit organization providing sex education programs and materials

4. *Be culturally sensitive.* When hosting workshops covering a wide range of topics from abstinence to condom use to HIV/AIDS to pregnancy to safer sex, make sure that you're inclusive. Resources that can assist you in specific outreach to the gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered community include:

Bisexual Resource Center

www.biresource.org

*organization providing education about and support for bisexual and progressive issues

Gay and Lesbian National Hotline

www.glnh.org

*provides free counseling, information & resources for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, & questioning community

Parents, Friends & Families of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)

www.pflag.org

*promotes health and well being of gay, lesbian, bisexual & transgendered persons, their families and friends

Spanish GLBT Informational Website

www.ambientejoven.org

5. *Keep your programming fun!* Whether you're giving a full workshop, are camping out in the student union building with an information table, or are handing out condoms, get a hold of sexual toys/aids, books, videos, and safer sex supplies for your presentations. Even sex doesn't captivate an audience forever, especially when you're trying to make things safer. So kick things up a notch with some titillating sexual enhancers from these online stores/companies and books,

with products and ideas specifically geared towards women, women's empowerment, and celebrating female sexuality.

More than anything, make sure that your efforts are sustainable. Have somebody you can hand the reins to when you move on. Better yet, have a whole sexual health peer advocates program, based on your efforts, in place so that more young people can go out and spread the word on safer sex and female empowerment. After all, being a force in and of itself can be contagious.

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