Creating a Program for Improving Romantic Relationship & Sexual Health Knowledge for Adults with Disabilities in Michigan

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Introductions

Rebecca Kammes

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Why is Sexuality & Romantic Relationship Education Important?

Intimate relationships and sexuality expression is a healthy component of adult life (Beckes & Coan, 2011; Moos, 2003; Robles, 2014)

Adults with IDD are often restricted from having intimate relationship experiences (Black & Kammes, 2019; English, Tickle & dasNair, 2018)

Sex education often “skips” relationships, leaving this issue up to parents, caregivers, staff, and siblings to teach (Foley, 2012)

High rates of abuse/exploitation within the population, and inappropriate relationships in adult programs (Hollomotz & The Speakup Committee, 2008; Stavis, 1991; Ward, Bosek & Trimble, 2010; Yacoub & Hall, 2005)

Concern that adults with IDD are being denied the right to experience romantic relationships and sexuality expression (Richards, Miodrag, & Watson, 2006)
So What Did We Do About It?

- Community-Based Participatory Research Project
- Curriculum Development
- Program Evaluation
Overview of the SHARE Program

- ASPPIRE is a program in Mid-Michigan for adults with disabilities aimed at issues related to social coaching (including employment skills and sex ed)

- All participants are 18 and older and have a mild/moderate ID

- Majority of participants have ASD

- Small groups= more individualized

- Have a more self-determination structure to groups

- Sexual Health and Relationship Education (SHARE)

- 12-week program

- Curriculum & materials developed by ASPPIRE staff based on previous experience teaching sex ed in special education classes
Partnership Diagram

- Researcher
  - Me
  - Research Team

- ASPIRE's Leadership Team
  - Executive Director
  - ASPIRE Founder
  - Office Manager

- ASPIRE's Community Partners
  - CMH
  - Employers

- SHARE Group Facilitators

- Social Coaching Group Facilitators

- Families of Participants

- Adults with ASD who are Participants in Groups
Multi-Phase Project

Phase 1
Beginning Engagement with ASPPIRE
Examining scholarship, expertise, & experiences

Phase 2
SHARE Card Systematic Analysis
CBPR research activity

Phase 3
Restructuring the SHARE Curriculum
Phase 4
Attending the ASPPIRE Retreat
Generating new scholarship and tools in direct collaboration with community partners

Phase 5
Implementation of SHARE 2 & New Evaluation

Phase 6
Evaluation Data Analysis, Feedback & Next Steps

Evaluation Data for ASPPIRE for Future Grant Writing

SHARE 2 Updated Curriculum
Evaluation Data for Research
SHARE Notecards, Cont.

Themes
- Relationship Experiences
  - Relationships Overall
  - Social Norms
  - Sexual Behaviors
  - Communication
  - Health & Hygiene
  - Anatomy & Physiology
- Sexual Health Knowledge
Decision to Split up SHARE

01 Sexual Health Education
- Anatomy & Physiology
- Health & Hygiene
- STI & Other Diseases
- Safe Sexual Practices

02 Intimate Relationships and Sexuality Expression
- Finding Potential Partners
- Long-Term & Short-Term Relationships
- Sexuality Expression
- Safety Within Relationships

03 Dating & Relationships in the Real World
- Online Dating
- Community Outings
- Putting Knowledge into Practice
- Discussions of Practical Knowledge & Experience
SHARE Curricula

SHARE 1
1. Intro to group
2. Anatomy & reproductive systems
3. Sexual life cycle*
4. Sexual feelings
5. Sex
6. Sexual health*
7. Sexual behavior
8. Exploring your sexuality
9. Final wrap-up
*MSU nursing students as potential guest speakers

SHARE 2
1. Types of relationships
2. Starting a relationship
3. Sexual orientation & gender identity
4. Personal values & consent
5. Dating: Part I
6. Dating: Part II
7. Dating: Part III
8. Long-term relationships: Part I
9. Long-term relationships: Part II
10. Relationship problems: Part I
11. Relationships problems: Part II
12. Final wrap-up
SHARE 2 Outcomes: What We Learned

**Curriculum Content**

- Need more on starting a relationship
- Sexual orientation and gender identity as an important topic that needs to be explored further for participants
- Participants wanting to share more openly about disclosing disability within a relationship
- Talking about abuse and laws is difficult, need to find a more interactive way

**Group Format & Structure**

- Importance of role plays and providing examples
- Pair & Share vs. Group Discussions
- Engaging activities
- Concerns with evaluation tools used
Next Steps

- Continue to refine the SHARE curriculum
- Run SHARE 3 pilot
- SHARE-PC