

Relationship and Sexuality Education

Opening Statement

By Foróige

1. Introduction

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to present on Foróige and in particular on our work in the area of relationships and sexuality education, Foróige's REAL U programme which stands for Relationships Explored and Life Uncovered.

In brief, Foróige is Ireland's leading youth development organisation working with over 50,000 young people aged 10-18 (that is over 10% of the youth population). Much of Foróige's work focuses on enabling and supporting the development of skills, resilience, belief and aspiration in young people through needs led and outcomes focussed programmes. Our work is a unique partnership between young people, parents, volunteers and the wider community.

Youth work in Ireland was given a statutory basis under the Youth Work Act 2001. It is fundamentally an educational and developmental process, defined by active and voluntary participation. It complements formal education. We believe that youth work in general and in particular Foróige can offer the education system a) decades of expertise in enabling and equipping young people to develop the skills, confidence and knowledge to develop healthy relationships b) a comprehensive, evidence based relationships and sexuality programme, namely Foróige's REAL U programme, that could be delivered in schools through an existing and ever growing network of skilled and trained facilitators.

2. The need/development:

The REAL U programme was designed by Foróige's Best Practise Unit, which operated between 2011-2014, and which was funded by Atlantic Philanthropies. To meet the ranging needs of young people and to provide a comprehensive and holistic approach to RSE, Foróige liaised extensively with the expertise of organisations such as HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme, BeLonGTo, Marie Keating Foundation and the Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI). This coupled with an extensive literature review of best practice of what works internationally has helped us to develop our programme.

Through our decades of work with young people on relationships and sexuality we continuously received feedback from young people who felt that sex education in schools was either non-existent or in cases where it did exist, felt it focused on the biology of sex and not within the context of relationships.

A comprehensive literature review echoed this. Research from 1997, (McHale and Newell), in 2004 (Mayock and Byrne), and again in 2012 (HSE Crisis Pregnancy Programme) identified considerable information gaps existed among young people in relation to sexual health. This research also found young people would welcome more education about sex and relationships both in and out of school.

Finally, research published this year identified an even bigger gap emerging:

- Young people are not finding parents or teachers useful source of information about health sexual relationships.
- Girls are much more likely to find information from teachers 'not at all useful' than boys.

- Over 20% of young people think internet pornography is a “useful” source of information about healthy sexual relationships.
- 60% trust youth workers.

3. The programme

3.1 The REAL U programme is more than just a sex education programme. It is a personal development programme that aims to equip young people with the skills, knowledge and confidence to develop healthy relationships, make responsible decisions in relation to their sexual health and ultimately delay the onset of early sexual activity.

3.2 REAL U is holistic in its approach to RSE and includes the modules:

- Relationships
- Reproduction
- Gender and Sexuality
- Emotional well-being
- Understanding Boundaries
- Puberty and Hygiene
- Contraception and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) (to include a practical condom demonstration on how to wear a condom correctly.)
- Negotiating Consent and the Law
- Body Image
- Know Your Body
- Positive Ways to Deal with Stress
- Alcohol and Drugs
- Understanding Pornography

Modules are selected based on the needs of the young people taking part in the programme. The materials provide accurate, up to date information, offer age appropriate activities and are culturally sensitive. REAL U recognises the importance of parental/guardian engagement in young people’s relationships and sexuality needs. As part of the programme a parent/guardian information session is provided along with supporting resources both at the beginning and throughout the programme.

4. Evidence Base

In 2014, UNESCO Child & Family Research Centre NUI Galway, carried out an extensive evaluation of the REAL U programme providing it’s evidence base. The key findings from the evaluation were:

1. Baseline data showed: **There is a need for the programme.**
2. Outcomes data showed statistically significant effects for young people who participated:
There was evidence of effectiveness in two key areas:
 - a. attitudes to LGBTI+ and
 - b. knowledge about sex.
3. **Young people value and enjoy the programme** : 98% rating excellent to good, very good or excellent. Participants said that it made them better informed and more aware of the consequences of their actions
4. **Youth workers believe the programme is effective.** 100% staff trained in the programme believe the programme is effective in meeting outcomes.

5. Training

To date, Foróige has trained over 1100 staff from organisations and disciplines, including those from Barnardos, Crosscare Youth Services, Daughters of Charity Child and Family Service, Garda Youth Diversion Projects, Health Service Executive (HSE), Irish Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC), Rape Crisis Centre, RehabCare, School Completion Programme, Tusla Child and Family Agency, as facilitators of the REAL U Programme, who are running the programme with young people and service users nationwide. Evaluations of the Facilitator training and the programme has been consistently overwhelmingly positive stating Foróige's REAL U programme as the "gold standard in RSE in Ireland".

As such, we currently cannot meet the huge demand for the REAL U Facilitator training with the waiting list for this year at over 200 professionals from across the community and voluntary sector and this waiting list continues to grow.

5. To conclude:

We believe that:

The REAL U Programme meets the needs of modern Irish young people.

It has been extensively tested, evaluated and proven to do so.

If we wait for a new programme to be written, teachers to be recruited and trained, then we are failing a large number of young people with further years of delay to meet their needs.

Programme is sought after with teachers (SPHE and guidance counsellors) contacting us directly for the training and saying they were lacking the necessary support. (April 2018 to date alone- 20+ requests from Schools)

The programme has everything that the government has announced they wish to reform within the RSE curriculum.

(as listed in section 4)

The REAL U programme is ready to go and be rolled out in schools.

We recommend that the government invest in the large scale training of youth services and community organisations to deliver the REAL U programme in all schools while the schools ready themselves to deliver it.