

Why Oak Park Our Whole Lives?

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Oak Park public health data

- In 2005, "risky sexual behavior" was identified as a public health priority by the village because of high rates of transmissions of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). As of the village's Department of Public Health's most recent annual report, the village reported over 250 STD cases (Village of Oak Park Department of Public Health, 2011).
- The Oak Park teen birth rate in 2008 was 22 births per 1000 population (Village of Oak Park Department of Public Health, 2011).
- Oak Park area statistics are not available for the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), but the 2015 Illinois data indicates that:
 - 38% of all students are sexually active by high school
 - 3% were sexually active prior to age 13,
 - 9% of respondents had had four or more partners,
 - 44% had not used a condom (up 2% from 2013),
 - 15% had not used any form of birth control, and
 - 20% reported having used drugs or alcohol prior to their most recent sexual experience.
 - 11% reported having experienced physical or sexual dating violence
 - 9% reported having been raped (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015).

Need for the program

Several indicators suggested that Oak Park had an unmet need for sexuality education.

- The First United Church of Christ in Oak Park offers its own OWL program (including the *Sexuality and Our Faith* module) for Grades 7-9 and 10-12, but does not currently have an elementary OWL option for their congregants.
- The Unity Temple Unitarian Universalist Congregation (UTUUC) has a long-standing OWL program for congregants but is unable to offer it on a community basis due to church policy.
- The local elementary and middle school system offers "reproductive health" instruction but not comprehensive sexuality education.
 - Fifth graders also take a one-day field trip to the Robert Crown Center for Health Education in Hinsdale, IL; an associated unit covers some reproductive health basics.
 - Some reproductive health instruction is offered in grades 6-8 as part of the general health curriculum. Health classes are offered for one trimester at each grade level, and D97 estimates that about 1/3 of the course material deals with reproductive health topics.
 - In 2016, the district adopted a new social-emotional learning program, "Second Step," K-8. The program covers some interpersonal, communication, and decision-making skills.

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Research

"Conventional sexuality education focuses on physiology and sexual and reproductive health, but does not address issues of gender and power. By contrast, comprehensive sexuality education focused on gender norms, power in relationships, and participatory teaching methods."

-- International Women's Health coalition, "Comprehensive Sexuality Education: What We Know."

To date, no rigorous evaluation has been done of the Our Whole Lives Curriculum, but we do know a few things about comprehensive sexuality education effectiveness in a more general sense.

- Sexuality education does not hasten sexual activity, but has a positive impact on safer sexual behaviours and can delay sexual debut and increase condom use. (UNESCO, 2015)
- Programs that address issues of gender and power are markedly more likely to demonstrate significant positive effects on health outcomes - such as reductions in sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancy - than programs that ignore gender and power. (Haberland and Rogow, 2015)
- Comprehensive sexuality education has a positive impact on sexual and reproductive health and contributes toward reducing sexually transmitted infections, HIV, and unintended pregnancy. (UNESCO, 2015)

Program data

- OP-OWL offered five classes (2 each of the elementary classes and 1 middle school class) in 2016-2017. A total of ~55 students were served.
- At least seven families had more than one child participate in the program, and most volunteer facilitators are willing to continue to facilitate courses in the second year of the program.
- Initial family surveys show high levels of satisfaction, and for the 4th & 5th grade class, high levels of perceived impact on student knowledge and understanding about sexuality.

References

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