

PPT Now

Planned Parenthood Toronto Newsletter

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Honouring Kathie Siriunas' 15 Years of Service with PPT!

Fifteen years ago, Kathie Siriunas saw a description for the volunteer role of PPT peer educator in a book titled "Be a Local Hero." She recognized it as a volunteer opportunity that would allow her to really help people in an area of her interest. "I guess first and foremost it was the pro-choice angle that prompted me to get involved," said Kathie, who began advocating for women's rights when she was in grade 5 and fought for a girl's right to wear pants to school.

Kathie started as a peer educator at PPT's satellite site, the Bay Centre for Birth Control (BCBC), and graduated to staff as a Volunteer Support Worker. During these years, her work has consisted of seeing women from the ages of 13 and up, educating and informing them about birth control, pregnancy options, safer sex sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing, sexual pleasure, finding a family doctor or referring them to PPT. "As a volunteer, nothing beats the feeling when you have a client who comes in, head down, embarrassed, nervous, or

shy, barely speaking, and by the end of the session, she is looking you right in the eye and asking all kinds of questions," says Kathie. Being there, without judgment, for young woman with unplanned pregnancies or personal issues, is an extremely rewarding experience and the reason Kathie would encourage anyone to participate in making a difference through PPT.



Kathie Siriunas

As an amateur photographer and photo editor who is currenting writing an erotic romance whose protagonist works at PPT, Kathie reminds us that each PPT volunteer and staff member brings their own special blend of creativity and passion to the organization.

On behalf of all of the volunteers, staff and management at PPT, we would like to take this opportunity to recognize and thank Kathie for 15 years of hard work at the BCBC, as well as her commitment to choice by providing women with access to sexual and reproductive health care and education!

"With many volunteer opportunities you don't necessarily see that you are making a difference, but here you do. You see it, you feel it, and you hear it." ~Kathie speaks on volunteering with Planned Parenthood Toronto.

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Toronto Teens Need More Sexual Health Education and Better Clinical Services

The findings of the Toronto Teen Survey (TTS)*, which were released on June 2, 2009, contains some important findings about the sexual health needs of Toronto youth and calls for major changes to fight increases in sexually-transmitted infections and misinformation.

The TTS revealed that teens in Toronto are engaging in risky sexual behaviours and young people in the groups most at risk are not getting the information they need to protect themselves. “Toronto teens are sexually active in a wide variety of ways but 83 per cent have never accessed sexual health care from a doctor or a clinic,” said Susan Flynn, PPT’s Directory of Research and Program Development. “Most still fear that they will be judged, and they are very concerned about confidentiality.”

The survey of 1,216 teens, ages 13 to 18, is a joint project of Planned Parenthood Toronto, York University, the University of Toronto and Wilfrid Laurier University, in collaboration with Toronto Public Health. The survey concludes that teens experience a variety of barriers to sexual health information and services; the type and impact of the barriers varies greatly, depending on the teen’s age, gender, language, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, immigrant/refugee status and socioeconomic status. “Teens need both sexual health care services and education that are tailored to their age and situation,” says Sarah Flicker, professor of Environmental Studies at York University.

Sexual practices were rated from no risk (inexperience or masturbation) to high risk (vaginal and anal intercourse). The survey found that young women were twice as likely to access sexual health services, but that males, younger survey respondents, and people from the Black, Asian, Aboriginal and Muslim communities were less likely

to use sexual health services.

Even those who had received sex education said it didn’t teach them what they want to learn. The top three sexual health topics youth have learned about are HIV/AIDS, sexually-transmitted infections, and pregnancy and birth control. The top three topics they want to learn about are healthy relationships, HIV/AIDS (more information), and sexual pleasure.

The report calls for a number of major changes to be implemented by the Ministry of Health, doctors and clinics, Toronto Public Health, community organizations, and the Ministry of Education, school boards and schools, including health services aimed at youth in under-served neighborhoods and age-appropriate sex education each year from kindergarten to grade 12.



The full report and list of recommendations are available at www.torontoteensurvey.ca.

**The TTS research project is a partnership between the Gendering Adolescent AIDS Prevention Project (University of Toronto), Planned Parenthood Toronto, York University’s Faculty of Environmental Studies, the University of Toronto’s Public Health Sciences Department, and the Ontario HIV/AIDS Treatment Network (OHTN). Toronto Public Health also collaborated on the project.*

Revamping Spiderbytes

Spiderbytes.ca, a website for teens, was launched in 2002, when the Internet was still beginning to establish itself. Since then, the site has logged more than 1.5 million unique visitors. The time and energy spent creating a resource that reflects PPT's values and philosophies has paid off. Few sites communicate information to youth in the way that Spiderbytes does, framing sexuality as a web of choices youth can make, and offering the information by which to begin making those choices.

Instant Messaging was the hot new thing in 2002, and one clever volunteer suggested offering peer education through this new

medium. The success of using this type of program was evident immediately. A website loaded with all kinds of information, supplemented by a messaging system through which youth could use to instantly access live support, was something that youth immediately responded to.

While Spiderbytes really opened the door for PPT to think about the Internet and technology as means of appealing to and communicating with youth, it failed to keep up with emerging trends in sexual health and web-based technology. A lot has changed for youth in the last five years. For instance, new birth control methods have been made

available and significant changes have been made to the ways that young men are tested for sexually transmitted infections. Some of the links on spiderbyters were not working and the quizzes were outdated. An awareness that something more than a facelift was urgently needed led to the creation of the Spiderbytes Reno Project, which began in 2008.

The project consisted of three phases. For the first phase, which involved a complete redesign, a team was organized and set to work in early 2008. Steve Szigeti, who coordinated the original design of the site, worked with several original

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Staff Profile – Shawn Fowler

In addition to being Canada's first democratically elected male prom queen, Shawn Fowler is also the Teen Programming Coordinator at PPT. His history with PPT extends back over ten years. He's been a volunteer with the T.E.A.C.H. program and a staff member in Health Services.

As the Teen Programming Coordinator, Shawn organizes the Teen Sex Infoline, teen workshops in schools, the Spiderbytes.ca website and the MSN messaging program. He enjoys the ongoing contact with youth that his role at PPT enables him to have. "It's really rewarding when

you're doing health promotion or educational work and youth clue into something or really take the time to think about things and develop their values. For example, it's really great to hear about how youth involved in our program would go back to school and tell their teacher that what they taught their class about abortion was wrong. It's a good example of how community engagement happens and that it works."

One of the reasons that Shawn enjoys working with youth is that they have so much to offer to PPT. Shawn reveals that, "Youth bring with them a vibrancy and a

culture. They are open to learning and they learn quickly."

Shawn feels that PPT's innovation and ability to adapt to changing times makes PPT such a great organization to be a part of. He explains that "there is data showing that the way communication is happening is changing. PPT recognizes that youth are using the internet and using it differently now from 5 years ago and is responding by doing things like making information available from mobile phones." As an avid online shopper, Shawn really understands the importance of the internet in today's world.



... a World of Possibilities

...SPIDERBYTES continued from page 3 artists and designers to create a new look and site structure for Spiderbytes. The design includes a new search feature, is friendlier to mobile browsers, and has pages to host video and other digital media. Teen Programming volunteers suggested new content areas, and writers set to work creating information specifically

geared toward young men, young parents and newcomers.

The second phase, the creation of a virtual tour of the PPT clinic, began in early 2009. With a generous grant from TELUS Toronto Community Board, Matt Austin, an independent video producer, was hired by PPT to coordinate a group of youth in

conceptualizing, writing, filming and editing short video segments to address several health care myths, as well as a clinic tour.

PPT hopes to launch the new Spiderbytes site and video in Fall 2009. Phase three is underway, so keep clicking on www.spiderbytes.ca for updates!

PPT GETS A MHUve ON AFTER OUR AGM: JOIN US!

This year, PPT's Annual General Meeting (AGM) will be held on Thursday, September 24th between 5:00 and 6:00pm at Metro Hall (55 John Street, Suites 308/309). At this event, PPT will not only review its accomplishments of the past year, but our members will also help to guide our strategic directions through the election of PPT's Board of Directors.

Please join us in Metro Hall's Rotunda on September 24th, between 6:30-8:30pm, for the launch of PPT's Mobile Health Unit (MHU)! Thanks to the generous donation of the Estate of Catherine Bragg, PPT will be making regular stops at partner women's shelters across Toronto to give women the crucial reproductive and sexual health services they need. Please join us to find out how your on-going support can help us to continue to provide sexual health care and education to women fleeing domestic violence or who have unstable housing. **Please RSVP to Sarah S by September 14th at 416-961.0113 ext 125 or ssiddiqui@ppt.on.ca**



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