Small towns need big thinking

Carl Heslop
Acknowledgement of Country
• No specialist sexual health or youth health services
• Delivery of RSE needs support
• Limited GP options
• Great initiatives – lack of coordination
• Accidental experts

Small towns
Need big thinking

- Localised advocacy
- Strong organizational networks
- Commitment and clarity
- Champions
- Coordinated approaches
‘Everyone knows everyone’: Youth perceptions of relationships and sexuality education, condom access and health services in a rural town

and

‘You’re not going to get the whole town to start thinking about adolescent sexual health’: Stakeholder perceptions of relationships and sexuality education, backlash and health services in a rural town
Youth

- Relevant and credible sexual health education
- Make it easy
- GP accessibility
- Discreet condom supply

Stakeholders

- “You’re not going to get the whole town to start thinking about adolescent sexual health”
- Backlash, stigma and secrecy
- Being consistent, credible and available
- Small-town communication
Condoms

“Nicky, Nicky can I have some condoms please?” (youth)

“The girls only have the tampons and the pads and the boys only have the condoms.” (youth)

“I mean if they start you know, you find used condoms in the toilet and stuff like that, then obviously that’s going to be an issue” (youth)

“Stealing them’s easier”(youth)

“They weren’t willing to have condom machines outside [central supermarket]. Well we can’t let that happen, that’s encouraging them to have sex. Hey Charlie, they’re already having sex’ (stakeholder)
I still don’t even know who our school nurse is.

‘Is it free to go get standard checks and whatnot or not? Is it still a doctor visit technically?’

No, not a clue

‘I don’t know what youth sexual health services are active if any. And what’s available in [nearby larger town]. So that, not having that knowledge means that I can’t pass that information onto a student who needs it.’

‘We don’t advertise it. I may be underestimating it... maybe they do know it’s available’

CH: So, does anyone here know whether they’d have to pay?

So, does anyone here know whether they’d have to pay?
The best way to avoid backlash is to do nothing. Or to hide what you are doing.

Slide it under the radar

Country communities are conservative

I certainly wouldn’t want to be a young gay or lesbian person in town

The community would be against sexual health promotion as such unless it was in a very contrived environment
“You’re not going to get the whole town to start thinking about adolescent sexual health”

but

we need to support, advocate and champion those that do
Consistent & credible SRE and information

Health service accessibility

Discreet condom supply

Communication & collaboration
Publications


- [accepted for publication] Heslop, Carl William, Sharyn Burns, and Roanna Lobo. ‘You’re not going to get the whole town to start thinking about adolescent sexual health’: Stakeholder perceptions of relationships and sexuality education, backlash and health services in a rural town* Sex Education