



Lessons learned from nimble adaptations to organisations' responses to the sexual and reproductive health (SRH) needs of adolescents in the context of the COVID-19 crisis

Country: Zimbabwe

Students and Youth Working on Reproductive Health Action Team (SAYWHAT)

Students and Youth Working on Reproductive Health Action Team (SAYWHAT) is a membership-based public health institution based in Zimbabwe that serves as a platform where students in tertiary institutions can discuss their sexual and reproductive health challenges. We aim to foster personal responsibility for maintaining good sexual and reproductive health status and seek to mobilize students to participate in the promotion of the global targets and goals for sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence.

Were you delivering services to young people before the COVID-19 crisis?

Prior to COVID-19, we provided young people with sexuality education and information through various platforms and support. Our call centre services also provided psycho-social support to students and young people across the country.

These include institutional resource centres and clinics, social media, and college-based activities. We trained peer educators, distributed SRH commodities such as condoms, and referred young people, including students for relevant clinical services.

What new approaches did you use to respond to the barriers created by the COVID-19 pandemic to reach young people?

After COVID-19-related restrictions were implemented, we were no longer able to hold in-person interactions with students and young people. Our targeted beneficiaries are early adopters and consumers of Information Communication Technology Services (ICTS) and are inclined towards creativity and innovation. In this regard, we transitioned to virtual programming.

We embraced the use of social media and the creation of innovative spaces for students and young people to generate innovative approaches to reach the targeted beneficiaries.

These approaches included:

- training peer educators using Zoom,
- holding discussions on different SRH issues on social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Zoom, and Twitter,
- holding TV and radio talk shows, which were broadcast on social media platforms,
- offering online referrals for SRH services,
- hosting virtual edutainment activities.

In addition to these services, we updated the SAYWHAT Smart Choices application to include COVID-19 information which complemented the existing SRH information. We also strengthened our call centre to ensure young people who reached out could receive online counseling services on a number of issues they were affected by including COVID-19. Through the call centre, young people were also served with psycho-social support and referrals for services addressing gender-based violence.

Why did you decide to use these approaches?

Our decision to use social media was informed by studies and consultations conducted with our target beneficiaries and other stakeholders. These studies showed that most young people are readily available on social media platforms. This prompted us to share accurate relevant SRH information on social media platforms. Prior to COVID-19, our trained peer educators had been disseminating information using WhatsApp groups created for the organization. During the COVID-19 crisis, these WhatsApp groups presented an opportunity to continue to engage with the students in a virtual format. We held quarterly provincial and national reflection platforms for our peer educators. These quarterly reflections also informed how we selected our approaches.

How are you working to find out if these approaches are having the desired impact?

Our monitoring and evaluation department has been continuously evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of the approaches employed. The continuous assessments include the use of evaluation forms, collecting direct feedback from beneficiaries, as well as tracking the implementation of the communication and advocacy strategy during the COVID-19 crisis. We tracked our social media platform performance by tracking follower engagement rates per post and our overall reach. We analysed call centre queries, to inform our programs.

The number of people downloading the SAYWHAT Smart Choices application and registering on the TuneMe mobi-site[1] was analysed to check on relevance and effectiveness. We found out that 100 people had downloaded the app. Furthermore, we trained our peer educators on monthly reporting, which highlighted activities done, challenges faced, successes, and recommendations.

- I. TuneMe is a platform where users can get real, honest advice and share their opinions. They can live chat with experts, tell their stories and get answers to hard-to-ask questions. If you want to learn more, you can find a case study in this series focused on TuneMe.

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