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ABSTRACT

This report on the Peer Helper's program, assesses the effectiveness of the training and counseling of peer helpers, the training of peer helper facilitators, and its recruitment procedures. This program, introduced into 10 public schools in the 1992-93 school year, provides training to selected high school students to help them identify and address problem areas for at-risk students. Training of these "peer helper" students includes providing information about school-based services, as well as an introduction to some counseling techniques. SPARK, the high school component of the school system's drug and alcohol prevention program, supports the peer helper program and also trains counselors to work as peer facilitators. Evaluators judged the SPARK Peer Helper program as highly successful in meeting program objectives. Peer helpers enjoyed the program, valued the learning experience, and appreciated the opportunity to share life stories with each other. In its first year, the program successfully incorporated the peer helpers into the SPARK student support services network. However, quantitative data on the program's impact on the peer helpers, as well as the students they served, were not available; progress reviews and training class data were insufficient to capture the full scope of peer-helper services. (RJM)

OER Report

1992-93 EVALUATION OF THE SPARK PEER HELPERS PROGRAM

1992-93 EVALUATION OF THE SPARK PEER HELPERS PROGRAM

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

The Peer Helper program was introduced into ten New York City public schools in the 1992-93 school year. The aim of the program is to provide training to selected high school students in identifying and addressing problem areas for students who may be at-risk. Training of these "peer helper" students includes providing information about school-based services and an introduction to some counseling techniques. SPARK, the high school component of the school system's drug and alcohol prevention program, supports the peer helper program and trains counselors to work as peer facilitators in order to ensure and monitor program implementation in the schools.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This report presents the findings of the Office of Educational Research's (OER) assessment of the program's first year. The objective of the OER evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of the training and counseling of peer helpers, the training of peer helper facilitators, and recruitment procedures.

Peer facilitators provided evaluators with data regarding the numbers and types of activities that each peer helper participated in, the number of students counseled, and the facilitator's counseling activities. In addition, OER evaluators visited four program sites during the 1992-93 school year to interview peer helper candidates and facilitators, and to observe classroom sessions. The SPARK peer helper coordinator and assistants were also interviewed to gather their perceptions of whether program objectives were met.

FINDINGS

The 1992-93 SPARK Peer Helper program was highly successful in meeting program objectives. A total of 427 students were in the program in the ten schools. Nine of the ten schools recruited the proposed 30 to 40 students, and five schools were able to recruit more than this number. During training sessions facilitators discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the manual, and developed strategies for the second year of program implementation.

Peer helpers enjoyed the program, valued the learning experience, and appreciated the opportunity to share life stories with each other, and the "space" that it created for students to deal with personal issues. Students also expressed a deep appreciation for the guidance that they received from facilitators. Qualitative responses from students indicated that

they had acquired the knowledge and skills needed to be a peer helper, as specified in the proposal. Program activities for peer helpers included supporting entering students, providing classroom presentations, making peer helper posters and referring and counseling students. Most peer helpers participated in at least one activity and 60 percent of all peer helpers (247 students) participated in three or more activities.

In the 1992-93 program year 137 peer helpers provided counseling to 550 students. While peer helpers may not have directly counseled high-risk students, 239 peer helpers referred high-risk students to facilitators, and 63 students cofacilitated intervention groups. Peer helper candidates reached out to others through classroom presentations, by participating in SPARK events, and through recruiting students for peer helper activities.

Peer facilitators were clearly considered to be a resource by the entire school community as evidenced by the fact that a total of 577 referrals were made to peer facilitators by peer helpers, school staff, parents, and community-based organizations.

Although the original proposal stated that peer helpers were to attend classes five days a week for two terms or semesters, only one of the schools complied; in the other schools classes were not held all five days. Additionally, most students were unable to attend the peer helper class for two terms because it conflicted with their regular class schedules. Students thought of the facilitator as an available mentor and friend with whom they could speak at any time. Program objectives stipulated that there should be regular structured meetings between facilitators and peer helpers to review progress; most of the schools, however, were unable to have these meetings.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

The first year of the program successfully incorporated the peer helpers into the SPARK student support services network. However, quantitative data on the program's impact on the peer helpers as well as the students they served were not available. Moreover, progress reviews and training class data were insufficient to capture the full scope of peer helper services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings OER recommends that the SPARK Peer Helper Program administrators:

- Formally incorporate into the program the proposed goal that whenever a peer helper meets with a student in a counseling session he or she is to meet with the peer facilitator.

- Collect monthly evaluation forms completed by each peer facilitator that (i) detail activities and lessons covered, and (ii) indicate the number of students receiving services (including counseling) as a result of program participation.

- Interview or administer surveys to students who have received services from the peer helpers so that facilitators get more feedback about how this activity has helped them.

- Administer pre- and posttests to peer helpers to measure the program's impact on them in terms of changes in behavior, knowledge and skills.

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I. INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The SPARK Peer Helper program was introduced to the New York City public schools in the 1992-93 school year. The Office of Educational Research (OER) will be conducting an evaluation of bot' years of this two-year program; this report represents its findings for the first year. The primary aim of the program is to develop a corps of high school students to serve as peer counselors by training them in counseling techniques, and providing them with information about school-based services so that they can advocate for, and refer students to, those services. Expected program outcomes are for participants to demonstrate increased knowledge of the problems of high-risk students, and improved ability to assist peers in identifying and addressing problem areas. The program was implemented in ten high schools* within the five boroughs. Forty students were to train as peer helpers in each of the ten schools, totalling 400 students system-wide.

The Peer Helper program is supported by SPARK, the high school component of the school-based alcohol and drug prevention programs in the New York City public schools. SPARK's central office, including SPARK's training institute, provides the

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* The schools and their respective superintendencies were: Curtis, Port Richmond and Van Arsdale high schools in the Brooklyn and Staten Island superintendency, BASIS; Sheepshead Bay and Edward R. Murrow high schools in Brooklyn; Roosevelt High School in the Bronx; Van Buren and Hillcrest high schools in Queens; and Art and Design and Stuyvesant high schools in Manhattan.

program with staff development, guidance, and program materials. The program is directed by the SPARK Peer Helper coordinator, who supervises two other SPARK staff members who act as advisors in program administration. These advisors also function as peer facilitator trainers (although one of these advisors took the primary responsibility for this area) and are the designers and writers of the peer helper manual which, as a primary tool for facilitators, outlines program lessons and activities.

At each school, a peer facilitator, recruited and trained by the SPARK central office, organizes and conducts the peer helper training activities. Borough supervisors of the SPARK program oversee the activities in the schools and provide feedback to the peer facilitator coordinator and advisors.

Students in some of the program schools had been trained in peer programs by SPARK counselors before the funding and development of the Peer Helper program. Those students who participated in this year's programs are referred to as peer helper "alumni" in this report.

The program is scheduled to continue for two years, in order to train an adequate number of students as peer helpers who can then help to reach an optimal number of "high-risk" students.

PROPOSED OBJECTIVES

The following objectives were proposed for the 1992-1993 Peer Helper program:

1. Training of Peer Facilitators. Peer facilitators are to be provided training to equip them with the knowledge and the skills to implement the peer helper program in their

schools. They are to demonstrate the ability to recruit, train, assist, and assess students in the peer helper model.

2. Recruitment. Each facilitator will recruit from 30 to 40 peer helpers at each of the participating schools.

3. Training of Peer Helpers. The aim of the peer helper training is to improve the communication, problem-solving, assertiveness, and refusal* skills of peer helpers and to increase their knowledge of substance abuse issues and of school and community resources which provide assistance for substance abuse-related issues.

4. Counseling of Peer Helpers. The goal of peer helping counseling is for 100 percent of the participating peer helpers to make significant progress in addressing the personal and family issues which they bring to the program.

5. Counseling of At-Risk Students. The goal of the counseling of at-risk students is for 75 percent of the counseled students to demonstrate improvement in at least one area identified as problematic as a result of participation in individual or group sessions.

PROPOSED PROGRAM FORMAT

Staff Development

The peer helper coordinator and the two program advisors will implement staff development training, and will guide and review the development and implementation of action plans in each school. Borough meetings will be scheduled to provide facilitators in the schools with opportunities to share strategies and concerns.

Peer Helper Recruitment

In consultation with the program coordinator, the borough supervisor, and the schools' principal, each facilitator will identify criteria for the recruitment of peer helpers and will

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* Refusal skills are defined as the ability to refuse or resist substances such as drugs, alcohol, and nicotine.

conduct the screening process. Facilitators at each school will distribute recruitment materials to key members of the pupil personnel team to aid in recruitment.

Peer Helper Training

The SPARK Peer Helper coordinating team (the coordinator and two advisors) will design and outline peer helper training activities. Classes are to be held for one period five days a week for two terms. Peer helper candidates are to be trained in a variety of areas and involved in a minimum of three peer helper activities each term. These activities include co-facilitating intervention groups, providing support to entering students, doing classroom presentations, making peer helper posters, establishing a substance abuse prevention information system, providing counseling, and referring students to the peer facilitator.

Peer Helper Counseling

Facilitators will observe each candidate during screening and training to identify issues to be addressed for counseling. Candidates will receive individual and group counseling on a weekly basis from the facilitator. Each peer helper candidate will maintain a written log highlighting successes, difficulties, feelings, attitudes, and responses to the training activities. These logs will be submitted to the peer facilitator at least once a month and will be used to assist the facilitator in delivering appropriate counseling services to the peer helper candidate.

Counseling At-Risk Students

Students who are considered to be at risk are to be referred to the peer facilitator by peer helpers and by school staff, parents, or community-based organizations. Each referred student will be screened by the facilitator and will be scheduled for individual and/or group counseling at least once a week. The facilitator will maintain a written confidential record of the services provided and will refer those students in need of additional services to appropriate community-based resources.

Peer helpers are to assist facilitators in the delivery of services by participating as co-facilitators of intervention groups, assisting with individual counseling, providing assistance as a buddy to entering students, and organizing a student information table.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

OER's goals in conducting the 1992-93 program evaluation were to observe the project's implementation and to assess program outcomes. The evaluation objectives and methods were as follows.

Staff Development

To assess the success of training in preparing peer helper facilitators to implement the peer helper model in their schools, OER evaluators interviewed the peer helper coordinator and selected facilitators, and observed a sample of training sessions. They also reviewed the peer helper manual and

discussed its development with facilitators and the peer helper central staff.

Peer Helper Recruitment

Evaluators interviewed selected facilitators to: 1) document the schools' recruitment criteria, and the effectiveness of recruitment methods, 2) determine whether the proposed 30-40 peer helpers were recruited at each participating school, and 3) ascertain the drop-out rate among peer helper candidates.

Peer Helper Training

To assess the effectiveness of peer helper training, evaluators interviewed a sample of peer facilitators and peer helpers for their perceptions of whether peer helpers gained the knowledge and developed the skills necessary to work with their peers. Additionally, a sample of training sessions were observed, and quantitative data were collected from all program schools indicating the number and kinds of activities in which each peer helper participated.

Peer Helper Counseling

Evaluators interviewed a sample of peer helper facilitators and peer helpers to determine whether counseling was effective in identifying and addressing peer helper needs, and in helping them overcome their problems.

Identification and Counseling of At-Risk Students*

Through interviews of a sample of peer helpers and facilitators, and by analyzing quantitative data collected from all program schools, evaluators probed the means of identification, referral, and counseling of at-risk students, and determined the number of at-risk students who received such services.

Site Visits

OER evaluators visited four program sites during the 1992-1993 school year which, for purposes of maintaining anonymity, will be called schools E, G, H, and J. Evaluators observed training sessions and interviewed program staff and participants. The project coordinator, and the coordinator's staff (the program advisors who also served as project trainer and curriculum writer), four peer facilitators, and 12 peer helpers were interviewed for this purpose. In addition, O.E.R. distributed survey forms to facilitators in order to collect data about the numbers of peer helpers, their grade levels, and the activities that they participated in, and on the means of identifying and counseling at-risk students from the ten program schools.

SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

Chapter II of this report describes OER'S evaluation study findings. This includes discussions of peer facilitator

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* For the first year of program implementation, at-risk students were not identified; therefore, it was not determined whether such students demonstrated improvement in at least one area described as problematic, as a result of participation in weekly individual or group sessions.

training, peer helper recruitment and training, and the counseling of students who are at-risk. Chapter III details conclusions and recommendations.

II. FINDINGS

PEER FACILITATOR TRAINING

Overview

Peer facilitators attended monthly citywide training sessions conducted by the peer facilitator trainer. The format for each session had been designed by the trainer in conjunction with a training institute conducted by the SPARK program; that format was later reviewed and modified by the peer coordinator, who also attended each training session and served as a general resource person for the training participants.

The training program began with a two-day orientation to familiarize peer facilitators with the peer helper manual and with methods used to implement the ideas in the manual. Peer facilitators were shown how to set up a peer helper class, including the recruiting and screening of students, dealing with scheduling issues, and utilizing available resources. Subsequent sessions focused on the study of the individual topics outlined in the manual, such as communication skills and decision-making, and an analysis of the methods needed to organize sessions to train peer helpers in these skills.

Within the class sessions, peer facilitators were encouraged to participate and provide as much feedback as possible. Peer facilitators shared experiences, advice, and information, and discussed their projects, barriers to program implementation, the dynamics of group process, and methods of improving their counseling skills. The trainer arranged for the more experienced

facilitators to help the others to developqsogram implementation plans for their schools. In the final training session, each peer facilitator was given five to ten minutes to present a particular issue that they felt would be helpful to the group. The trainer stated that the information imparted at this session was particularly vital, and that it was the most effective session of the training.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Peer Facilitator Training

Strengths of training. Peer facilitators were hired by the SPARK borough supervisor and by the SPARK program director (to whom the program coordinator reported), and were required to have experience in counseling and conducting training, and a strong track record in helping adolescents. One of the strengths of the program was that the training was built on the prior knowledge of the peer facilitators, as well as the experience they were gaining in the field. The more practiced peer facilitators in the group strengthened the training program with their ability to give experienced-based guidance and information. Training sessions also provided the opportunity for facilitators to interact and network with each other, and to communicate with administrators.

All training participants who were interviewed rated the training positively and stated that they found the manual to be particularly useful. It was also stated that the training structure provided the flexibility to adapt training goals to individual needs.

Weaknesses of training. One of the primary emphases of the training program was for peer facilitators to train students to become peer helpers, as opposed to providing counseling to them; this caused difficulty for some facilitators. The director of the peer facilitator training program found that some facilitators were more comfortable as counselors, and resisted the idea of being trainers. This caused some of them to be less amenable to the training content; they complained that their students needed different services. In order to enable facilitators to "perform their duties adequately," and to discourage them from recruiting students who should actually be receiving intervention services, much of the training component focused on helping facilitators make the transition to a more instructional role. Those facilitators who were unable to make that transition were moved to a different position within the SPARK program.

Another weakness was that the limited amount of training time left many individual needs unaddressed; the trainer would have liked to have had more training sessions. The peer facilitators, however, found that the need to take off one full day a month for training disrupted their schedules and limited the time spent in their regular day-to-day duties.

The peer facilitator trainer found that the best format for training was the one in which peer facilitators were given time to make individual presentations to exchange their program implementation experiences. Unfortunately, that format was not

utilized until the last session. The peer facilitator trainer also realized that the training did not sufficiently help those peer facilitators who did not feel adequately prepared to address the issues that students were dealing with.

PEER HELPER RECRUITMENT

In the 1991-92 school year a total of 426 peer helpers from ten schools participated in the program, averaging 43 peer helpers in each school. This was higher than the proposed average of 30-40 students per school, and all but one school (which trained only 19 students) met this target. The difference in the number of participants varied from 19 students in one school to 75 in another. The greatest number of students were from the tenth grade (171), followed by the eleventh (124), twelfth (84), and ninth (47) grades. Table 1 summarizes the number of peer helpers in each school and their grade levels.

Criteria for Recruitment

The guidelines for peer helper recruitment are specified in the peer helper training manual, and were discussed at peer facilitator training sessions. Peer helper candidates were to have the following traits: a satisfactory behavior record, good coping and leadership skills, and an academic standing which indicated the ability to handle the extra course work. Additionally, it was desirable for peer helper candidates to display a willingness to work with peers in a positive way, and a desire to listen, cooperate, and reach out to others. They were to be somewhat "street smart" and able to relate to the type

Table 1[a]

Summary of the Number of Peer Helpers in Each School By Grade Level

Grade Levels	SCHOOL A	SCHOOL B	SCHOOL C	SCHOOL D	SCHOOL E	SCHOOL F	SCHOOL G	SCHOOL H	SCHOOL I	SCHOOL J	TOTAL
Ninth grade	9	0	5	7	3	4	16	0	3	0	47
Tenth grade	36	9	8	6	17	38	7	7	11	32	17L
Eleventh grade	19	27	10	0	17	3	5	15	14	14	124
Twelfth grade	11	2	9	6	15	0	13	8	17	3	84
Total number of peer helpers in each school	75	38	32	19	52	45	41	30	45	49	426

[a] The ten schools participating in the program have been assigned letters.

- Most of the peer helpers were tenth or eleventh graders.

of students who might be considered "at-risk". According to the peer helper coordinator, this criteria could vary depending upon the school personnel, location, and student population: "[T]he borough supervisor and principal of each school, along with the peer facilitators, adapted the guidelines for their specific sites."

Interviews with peer facilitators indicated that while they were all aware of the broad criteria for recruitment, individually they valued certain traits more than others. Some felt that the student's ability to care about and reach out to others, to be open-minded and empathetic, were the most important traits. Others focused on a general personal style in relating to others. One facilitator's philosophy was that any student who was interested should be given the opportunity to join.

The criteria for selecting peer helpers were not easily agreed upon, and were debated about at peer helper facilitator meetings. The peer facilitator trainer preferred selecting students who did not need a great deal of counseling themselves; not all facilitators interviewed agreed with this position.

Methods of Recruitment

Peer facilitators were assisted in their recruitment efforts by teachers, guidance counselors, other peer helpers, and SPARK personnel, and through such SPARK events as open houses and parties. Facilitators wrote letters to teachers and guidance counselors asking them to recommend peer helper candidates. Additionally, students at all field study schools self-referred

by signing up for the program when a facilitator was giving a classroom presentation, running an event, or making an announcement.

While certain methods of recruitment were common to all of the schools, each site appeared to focus on one particular approach. One of the field study schools (School H), for example, used SPARK-run biweekly lunchroom groups, where students met to talk about their personal needs and problems. Students learned about the peer helper program during these groups, and were then identified and recruited as peer helper candidates. At School G, most of the students were recruited during classroom presentations by the peer facilitator. The students interviewed at the school each found out about the program through the peer facilitator's ninth grade in-class presentations, including hygiene, guidance, and gym, indicating that the peer facilitator presented the program in a variety of venues in order to introduce as many students as possible to the program. At School E, peer helpers organized an open house which was held just before registration for each term; this was a primary recruitment tool for this school. At School J, all freshmen students were enrolled in the peer helper training program.

The responses of ten students who were interviewed in the four study schools demonstrated that a diversity of methods were used to recruit peer helpers. Two of the students stated that they were recruited by teachers, and two said that they were identified by the social worker. One student learned of the

program through an open house; another got interested through a friend who was in the program. Three students signed up for the class when the facilitator gave a classroom presentation, and one student signed up when the facilitator made an announcement about the program in the lunchroom. In all cases the peer facilitator interviewed the students after they were initially recruited. In two instances, the social worker interviewed two of the students with the facilitator, and two other students were interviewed by an advanced student in the program, an alumnus.

Problems in Recruitment

With the exception of School J, which had a high student enrollment in the program, the other facilitators and students wished that the program was larger. This was particularly the case at School E, where the facilitator and students confirmed that most students did not know about the program, and few showed interest in becoming peer helpers.* At this school the program was just beginning to have an impact. According to one student interviewed:

> People are starting to realize more and more that other people their own age in school are available to talk and to understand. We wish more people could start to find out about it.

Even at those schools where a peer program had already been established by SPARK counselors who had become peer facilitators,

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* The facilitator felt that, due to the small number of potential peer helpers, many students may have been accepted as peer helpers who might not ordinarily have been chosen. On the other hand, the low number of interested students made it possible for the facilitator to thoroughly screen students.

students wished for more student involvement. At School G one student wanted to see more student involvement and suggested that the class be mandatory rather than an elective.

An issue that was strongly articulated by students and the facilitator at two schools (Schools H and E) was that SPARK's negative image discourages students from joining the peer helper program. Many students misunderstand the intent of the program and believe that students who join it have serious alcohol and drug-related problems. A student at School H noted,

> Some people want to join the program but they are shy. Others think that the program is for drug heads and alcoholics. We need more activity to recruit students.

Other students confirmed this viewpoint:

> A lot of students think that the SPARK office is a place for alcoholics and "dope heads."

> It takes time for people to learn and to know about the program. The program needs to be promoted more; people think that SPARK [is] only [for someone who] does drugs, [and] we need more people to know that it can help them understand their problems.

At School E, the young males were especially susceptible to this image and were reluctant to join the program. As one young man, who was a peer helper, explained:

> Everybody else in the program is a girl. A lot of guys do not join the program. Nobody knows that you can come to SPARK to just talk and hang out, everybody thinks that if you are in SPARK you are a drug head. But I participate in peer helper activities. I do not care what others think of me.

This perception of SPARK contributed to a particularly low peer helper candidate enrollment at School E. Students here felt that the program needed more positive publicity. To get more people involved, the facilitator is planning to open up a

"comfort zone" -- a room where peer helpers can hang out and counsel students. She hopes that this will attract more students and traffic, and that it will be a good way to counsel students who do not want to talk to her. This would make it only the second of the peer helper schools to have drop-in sessions.

While SPARK's negative image initially discouraged students from joining the peer helper program, the program has subsequently improved this image in all of the schools. In fact, a student at School G found an outcome of the peer helper program to be a dramatic change in student perceptions of SPARK and its programs.

PEER HELPER TRAINING

Topics

Peer helper training lessons in each school were organized according to a structure dictated by the manual. The introductory lessons involved activities to "break the ice" and make the students more comfortable, as well as discussions about grades and earning credit for the classes. Ensuing lesson topics included AIDS, substance abuse issues, teen pregnancy, sex education, and relationships. Students were instructed in effective communication technique; they were taught to observe, to listen, to focus, and to be empathetic and non-judgmental. The facilitator introduced students to relevant psychological and sociological issues such as passive and aggressive behavior, assertiveness, child abuse, and suicidal feelings. Students were taught how to make contact with students who are at risk, make

informed decisions, deal with authority figures, and handle peer rejection. Finally, in order to help them make appropriate referrals, students were informed about the structure of the SPARK program, including personnel functions and resources. The peer coordinator emphasized that students have to be able to translate what they have learned into helping others; they should be able to help at-risk students define a problem area, and recognize the importance of keeping information confidential.

Students participated in group discussions and activities during their class time. The broad range of topics introduced during these sessions gave them a base of information designed to help them tackle the serious and difficult situations they would be confronted with.

Training Classes

Students received elective credit for program participation in all of the schools. The number of peer helper classes held at each school varied based on student demand, and on the level of administrative support.

At School H, two daily peer helper classes were held for the full academic year, and were comprised of students from every grade-level. Since the school would not grant credit for a peer counseling class, students were given a health credit in the first semester and an English credit in the second semester. The facilitator at this school followed the manual closely, "because it is geared to teach in the most effective way." In this school, which had an already-established peer helper program,

students became peer helper alumni after a year of training. This is a voluntary position without class credit; in the 1992-93 school year, there were 12 alumni at this school. The facilitator felt that the program at this site was well-focused, because classes met in the same place at the same time, and were conducted for both semesters of the school year. The facilitator emphasized the importance of giving students credit for the peer helper class and said that the program could not be as effective if it was based on informal, less structured groups.

At School E the school year was divided into three ten-week cycles. Two peer helper classes--one advanced and one regular--met four times a week during each cycle; peer helpers also attended one full-day workshop at the end of each cycle.

At School J five daily peer helper classes were held throughout the school year. Classes were organized according to grade-level, with separate classes for sophomores, juniors, and seniors conducted by the facilitator. Additionally, three peer helper alumni, in their senior year, held weekly classes for all freshmen during history and nursing classes to introduce them to SPARK.

Scheduling Problems

Facilitators at Schools H and E noted that the peer helper class was often scheduled at a time that conflicted with that of required academic classes, making it impossible for students to take. According to the facilitator at School E, part of this problem stemmed from the fact that the school was understaffed,

and the resultant limited number of available academic classes created scheduling conflicts.

As in School H, School E's students had a new class schedule every ten weeks. If the peer helper class was not considered a priority for the student, and if the guidance counselor was unable to fit it into the student's schedule, then the student was restricted to a one-cycle enrollment. The peer facilitator felt that the peer helper course required at least 20 weeks to train the students effectively, and although she was disappointed with this situation, she did not want to antagonize the guidance counselors by pushing them to place students in the peer helper class. She had written to individual guidance staff about this predicament, and raised it in her monthly cluster meetings with other facilitators.

At School H, only 20 of 40 students who signed up during the fall term were able to complete the class. Students dropped out primarily during the first two weeks. According to the facilitator at this school, many of the students who were peer helpers were academically oriented, and considered the peer helper course to be an "extra." It was, therefore, the first course to be dropped if it did not fit in with the rest of the student's schedule.

Class Requirements

At all schools, peer helper students submitted homework assignments and took written tests which originated from the manual. At the end of each term students were administered a

test to measure the level of their peer helper skills. Peer helpers were also required to keep a daily journal, the content of which included comments about peer helping, boyfriend/ girlfriend problems, family problems, and other issues they were dealing with. The journals were submitted to the peer facilitator once a week, and the facilitator responded with comments, affirmations, and a grade*. Facilitators conducted ongoing skills evaluation through such in-class activities as role-playing, and students assessed their own progress as they worked on their individual skills.

When queried as to whether they took this class because they thought it would be easy, students' responses indicated that while this may have been the initial motivation for many, they soon discovered that this was definitely not the case. According to one peer alumnus interviewed at School J,

> Everybody in the beginning of the sophomore year thought that it was a free period. But there has been a progression and nobody thinks this now. There is one girl who doesn't even come to school but comes to peer counseling.

Another student said,

> At first, some students take this class for easy credit but then most of us really get into it. Others are quiet and drop out of the class. But we try to change them.

A student at School G said that he thought more students did not take the class because it was not easy:

> Most seniors want to take the minimum amount of classes and do not want to take this class. Rather, they prefer to take ceramics. There are a lot of requirements in this class:

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* Methods of grading varied; for example, at School A the facilitator graded student journals on how often they were submitted rather than on content.

[you] have to keep a journal, take tests, and class participation is considered mandatory.

Evaluators' Classroom Observations

Evaluators observed peer helper training classes in schools H, G, E, and J. Although the lesson format was dictated by the manual, the structure of each class reflected the choices and individual style of each peer helper facilitator. As a result, the classes at one school appeared to be very different from those at another, and it was expected that this difference was reflected throughout the program schools. It is also important to note that some observed classes may have been structured primarily to present information to the observer, and as such may not have accurately reflected the normal peer helper class at that school.

School H. Each student introduced himself and some aspect of the peer helper program. Students were bright and lively, and laughed easily in the class. They seemed to like the class, be close to each other, and care for the facilitator. The students described different activities that they participated in and enacted three short plays that they had directed and presented to five classes in the school. One team dramatized a party scenario with peer pressure to use drugs, another group discouraged substance abuse with a rap song, and the third, a two-member team, dealt with a student persuading her friend to overcome her resistance to taking an AIDS test.

School G. The OER evaluator was shown videos of SPARK programs that were held in this school throughout the year. These included the "Great Smoke Out," the "SPARK Day Celebration," a party for newcomers, and "Prom-Promise" activities. The video also described the different services that the SPARK program was providing in this school.

School E. The facilitator instructed a small class in lessons from the peer helper manual, and students did some role-playing exercises. There was little discussion of personal issues.

School J. OER attended a peer helper training session taught by the facilitator, and one led by an alumnus. The facilitator and alumnus provided broad frameworks for discussion, and in both classes there was a great deal of student participation. In the facilitator-directed class, students discussed how they felt about a fellow classmate's crying in the previous session because of breaking up with his girlfriend. Some of the other boys appeared to have had problems with this incident, and some of the girls found it revealing that a boy would express his feelings in such a way.

Students also discussed class evaluation forms, which raised the issue of how students would evaluate themselves and their classmates' implementation of peer helper skills and knowledge. Some students spoke about the improvement in their ability to handle anger. All issues were discussed freely with students exhibiting a sensitive and supportive attitude towards each

other. Students at this school appeared to feel close to and admire the facilitator, who maintained an open, friendly, and relaxed relationship with them.

Friendships, family relations, sex, and boyfriend/girlfriend relationships were the central topics of discussion of the training class facilitated by the peer alumnus. The class replaced a nursing class and was primarily populated by girls. The peer alumnus directed class discussion by encouraging students to review their issues in more analytical directions. For example, when a student was describing a friend's behavior that she disliked, the peer alumnus encouraged the student to ask herself why her friend behaved in such a way, and why she disliked the behavior.

Topics ranged from a girl stating that she was upset with her best friend because she constantly sought male attention, to another student who expressed anger at her father who did not talk to her, and who she thought did not like her. This student told the class that even though her father did not give her any attention, she had started to give him a kiss when she returned from school. At first her father was surprised by this, but now, the student stated, he is more easily affectionate with her.

Another student, who is the daughter of a white mother and a black father, spoke of how she felt that her maternal grandmother favored her all-white grandchildren. Her reaction to the situation was one of defiance and rejection of her white cousins and grandmother. Another student also took the chance to speak

very openly about her family. For over 20 minutes she told a very attentive audience about how she had only recently discovered how abusive her grandfather was and how he hurt her grandmother, her own father, and her aunts and uncles.

The peer facilitator later confided to the OER evaluators that the discussions of child abuse were very difficult for the peer alumnus, who had similar problems. After class the peer alumnus discussed his/her reactions to the class session with the peer helper facilitator.

OER's Assessment of Classroom Observations

There was considerable variation in the proportion of time schools assigned to group counseling and to lessons from the manual. The success and popularity of the program at School J (as determined by the large student enrollment) might have been due to the open enrollment policy and/or to the class' focus on group counseling. Peer helper classes at this school played the dual role of providing group counseling to students and of making students aware of how to be peer helpers. In-class discussion topics were effective in tying the students' personal issues to the larger issues being discussed. Topics ranged from family matters to common school problems. Topics sometimes came from the group, and at other times were introduced by the peer facilitator. In the words of a peer helper, "[W]e do talk about general stuff in the peer helper meetings, but . . . [the facilitator also] encourages us to speak about personal stuff."

At the other extreme, School E classes followed the peer helper manual closely and topics were of a general nature. There was little "space" for tying in personal issues to the more general issues in the curriculum. If a student wished to talk about something that was bothering him or her, then he or she could initiate a "mini-session" between two peer helpers, which was a structured forum in which a student chose a peer helper who he or she wished to talk with. However, according to the peer facilitator, this form of peer helping was not used very much. "Occasionally, very rarely, they have a group process when they talk about personal things." That School E had significantly fewer peer helper classes compared to School J might, in part, reflect lower student interest due to the pedagogical approach of the facilitator.

School H fell between Schools E and J in the proportion of time allocated for group counseling. From Monday through Thursday the facilitator led the class from the manual, and on Fridays students raised their own personal issues. In the words of a student, "[O]n Friday everybody gets to discuss whatever they want. We discuss feelings, family problems, and anything that we might have done that week that made us upset or angry."

It was interesting to note that most of the students that OER interviewed and observed were comfortable with using terms such as peer pressure, communicating skills, self-esteem building, and all the other concepts that they had been learning about. Facilitators at all field sites emphasized that they

encouraged students to learn such skills through practice; for example, when students had talked about personal situations, the facilitator had encouraged them to think about them in terms of what they had learned in the training class.

Individual Counseling Received From Facilitator

According to the program coordinator and the peer facilitator trainer, peer helpers were to meet with facilitators at least once a month outside of the peer training class, to discuss their own concerns and their counseling activities. However, this occurred at only one of the four field sites (School G), where all three students interviewed said that they met monthly with the facilitator in an individual session.

There was no structured individual counseling at the other three sites. At School H the peer facilitator met with peer helpers on an as-needed basis: this generally worked out to two or three times a year, except in crisis situations, when she met with them more often. Similarly, the peer facilitator at School E tried to see all peer counselors individually at least twice a year. The facilitator noted, however, that since "a lot of the peer helpers have their lives together they do not need to see the facilitator often." School J had the same "open door" policy as School H; the peer facilitator was available for students who wished to be counseled.

At all four schools students were confident that they could talk to the facilitator about anything that was bothering them. A student interviewed at School H said, "I always go to [the

facilitator] and initiate meetings with her." Another peer helper at this school, who received both individual counseling from the facilitator and group counseling from the class, praised the peer facilitator's ability to identify a student who was in need of counseling:

> The facilitator is excellent at picking up on a student's feelings in the classroom. If someone is looking low she immediately expresses concern. Then she gives the student the option of talking about the problem in the group or on a one-on-one basis with another student or with the facilitator.

At School G, where all students interviewed had structured individual counseling with the facilitator, the facilitator was given favorable reviews. In the words of one student, "I get lots of support and help from the facilitator. He is a leader and friend . . . a person who sets trends and roles to follow." Another student described the facilitator as a person who "trains peer helpers and give them the right information." Students interviewed at this school said that they had found the facilitator's counseling helpful in setting goals, venting frustrations, and talking through their problems.

The facilitator at School E also established a good relationship with the students; they felt that she was always available to talk to them. One student said that while he did not meet with the facilitator because he had his "life pretty much together," he knew that

> . . . if I needed to talk to someone, she [the facilitator] would be where to go.

However, at this school the peer helper class was small, and interviews indicated that students did not often go to the facilitator for counseling.

Students at School J also spoke about their facilitator's accessibility. One student said that the facilitator "gives me advice whenever I want." Another student, who did not meet with the facilitator individually, said that she was aware that the facilitator was always watching out for her, and was willing to counsel her:

> We mostly receive group counseling. I don't have time to meet with her individually. Sometimes at the end of the class . . . [the facilitator] may ask me what is wrong with me if I appear quiet or in a bad mood, and then I will talk with her.

Group Counseling

A critical aspect of the program was the support peer helpers received from each other. The classroom was a place where students not only learned but also practiced listening attentively, asking open-ended questions, "sharing" (for example, discussing personal information), and talking. In one of the field study schools (School E) this was done primarily through role-playing, which involved students practicing learned peer helper techniques on each other. In the other field study schools, in addition to role-playing, students brought their personal issues to the classrooms and dealt with them through techniques learned in the class. Participants reported that the interaction in these groups resulted in an exchange of helpful information.

Students came to trust each other enough to express their feelings, fears, and insecurities. One student trusted others in the group so much that she said, "I know that if I am in trouble, I can go to the group if I can't go to my parents or to other adults." Another participant explained further:

> It is better to talk about things that bother you with the peer helper group rather than with a friend because we trust the group, whereas a friend may squeal. Sometimes we talk with somebody who is within the group outside the peer helper class because we have all become close and trust each other.

As another student noted:

> The most important thing is to begin to trust each other in the group, and that enables us to talk about things. For example, I have a friend in the group who I didn't trust, and we both discussed in the group why we didn't trust each other. We worked through interpersonal tension . . . through talking. If a person does not fit into the group then the facilitator moves in.

Students were able to support each other because they established a consistent atmosphere of trust. This enabled a student at School J to say that the best thing about being in the program was that she had learned to trust people enough to "honestly speak with them."

The program was especially useful for shy students. A number of the students who were initially quiet opened up as the school year progressed. Watching others talk about their fears and insecurities helped them begin to feel more comfortable about themselves, and to trust the group enough to speak out. The students in the group, who were learning listening skills, were sensitive listeners. The following quotes illustrate the changes that occurred in these students, and how they felt about them:

> Before I joined the class I used to be very shy. I thought a lot about what people thought of me. The class has helped me to see myself as an individual and not to worry about what society thinks of me--to recognize that there is a difference between society and myself.
>
> I used to be antisocial. I have become sociable. I have met plenty of people and this has helped me a lot.
>
> The program has made me a different person. It has brought me out. I am more outgoing. My family is pleased with the changes.

On the other hand, students who were not entirely comfortable talking about their personal lives were not pressed to do so. They appreciated this and stressed that discussions were based on mutual respect between group members. One student described this atmosphere by stating:

> You don't have to expose your deepest and darkest secrets. You only talk about something if it is bothering you. You find out when you talk that a lot of them [other students in the peer helper class] have shared experiences . . . People are not forced to talk, but if someone appears to be unhappy, then we ask them what's wrong.

Another student noted:

> Each of us sets our own limits in the group--some people only go so far as to only talk about school and others talk about their family. I have gotten some very good advice from people. In the groups we ask others about themselves and talk about ourselves.

Once trust had been established and students were confident that other students would be sensitive and make sincere efforts to practice being peer helpers, the classroom at School J became, in the words of a student, "a place to share constructive criticism without hurting feelings . . . a place to feel especially comfortable because we know that everything is kept confidential."

Additional comments validated group counseling and its strengths:

> Talking in a group is good. Students do not criticize or say "You're wrong". Once in a while they give advice. They really care.

> In the group, we care about each other and don't want to hurt other peoples' feelings. So we are very gentle with each other.

> Being in a group made me take into consideration how I was received differently by other people; I began to think about other people's feelings. I have become close with people in the group.

> The group is like a big family. We can trust each other. As the year starts progressing we get deeper into family life; activities are based on cooperation, therefore we get to know each other.

Peer helper support for each other continued outside the classroom. Typical of the relationships peer helpers formed with each other was a student who spoke affectionately of a fellow classmates who "keeps a tab on her" outside the classroom, and was watchful of her moods and needs.

Another student affirmed the success of the peer helper group interaction by explaining:

> We learn a great deal about ourselves, and that others in our age group have similar problems. Because the group is composed of people across race, ethnic group, and sex, we learn a great deal about each other. This is good because otherwise we think that we are all very different from each other. I have realized that people across cultures can talk about everything.

Thus, in addition to the expertise of the facilitator, the participants credited the nurturing and supportive atmosphere that the students created for each other with bringing about the positive changes within each individual member of the group.

Peer Helper Activities

The SPARK peer helper coordinator described three broad kinds of activities that peer helpers participated in: working with small groups and assisting the facilitator, teaming up with freshmen, and participating in special functions and workshops such as a "Student Information Day" and "National Smoke-out Day."

It was originally proposed that each student in the program participate in at least three peer helper activities. Only three of the ten program schools (B, G, and H) fully complied with this guideline, although several other schools came close. Table 2 details the various program activities in which students participated.

Within the ten program schools, students most frequently made peer helper posters (239 students), provided classroom presentations (236), provided support to inco ing students (207), and were active in establishing a Substance Abuse Prevention (SAP) information system (187). The number of students participating in proposed peer helper activities ranged from 41 students in one school to 238 students in another. The average number of peer helper participants in each school was 127.

COUNSELING AT-RISK STUDENTS

Counseling Provided by Peer Facilitators

A total of 577 at-risk students were referred to the ten program peer facilitators. Of these, 239 (41.4 percent) were referred by peer helpers. Peer facilitators, clearly, were

Table 2

Summary of Peer Helpers Participating in Program Activities

Program Activity	NUMBER PEER HLPRS. FROM SCHOOL A	NUMBER PEER HLPRS. FROM SCHOOL B	NUMBER PEER HLPRS. FROM SCHOOL C	NUMBER PEER HLPRS. FROM SCHOOL D	NUMBER PEER HLPRS. FROM SCHOOL E	NUMBER PEER HLPRS. FROM SCHOOL F	NUMBER PEER HLPRS. FROM SCHOOL G	NUMBER PEER HLPRS. FROM SCHOOL H	NUMBER PEER HLPRS. FROM SCHOOL I	NUMBER PEER HLPRS. FROM SCHOOL J	TOTAL
Cofacilitating intervention groups	1	0	15	4	12	4	3	8	6	11	64
Providing support to entering students	12	38	27	5	5	4	13	30	44	29	207
Establishing substance abuse information program	8	10	1	19	31	3	41	30	44	0	187
Classroom presentations	15	20	14	17	52	3	41	30	44	0	236
Making posters	17	38	6	10	52	4	41	26	45	0	239
Referring students	27	26	32	11	8	14	14	14	45	13	204
Counseling students[a]	4	26	18	7	28	9	8	16	10	11	137
Total Number of Peer Helpers in activities[b]	44	38	32	19	52	28	41	30	45	43	372
Percent of peer helpers who participated in 3 or more activities	16%	100%	59%	68%	85%	6%	100%	100%	98%	6%	66%

[a] Since it was the first year of program implementation, peer helpers counseled each other and their friends. They were not assigned at-risk students.

[b] These numbers only reflect the number of students, not the number of activities in which they participated, and therefore, are not summative.

- The poster-making activity had the largest number of student participants, 239, followed by the classroom presentation activity, with 236 peer helper students.

considered to be a resource by other people in the school: 216 school staff members, 24 parents, and 28 community-based organizations recommended students to the peer facilitator, (see Table 3).

Table 4 summarizes the services the peer facilitators provided the at-risk students in their schools. Peer facilitators counseled a total of 267 students, with School A's facilitators counseling the most students, 87 and School C's the least, 14. The remaining 293 students were referred to other school- or community-based services.

Peer Helper-Provided Counseling and Related Services

Peer facilitators and students interviewed at three of the program schools felt that during the first year of training, peer helper candidates were not ready to counsel students outside the program because it required considerably more skill than they had acquired. The program emphasis, as described by one of the facilitators, was on educating peer helpers.

As one facilitator noted,

> Because the program intent is not to produce junior psychologists but to encourage peer helpers to act as informed friends, most participants do not counsel students outside the program.

A number of students interviewed said that they were not comfortable enough to provide counseling. A student at School H said that he considered himself to be in training:

> If I wanted to, I could do this next year as part of the alumni program.

Table 3

Summary of At-Risk Students Referred to Peer Facilitators

Referral Source	SCHOOL A	SCHOOL B	SCHOOL C	SCHOOL D	SCHOOL E	SCHOOL F	SCHOOL G	SCHOOL H	SCHOOL I	SCHOOL J	TOTAL
Peer helpers	27	60	21	14	10	18	14	15	45	15	239
School staff	32	55	12	10	14	23	0	30[a]	15	25	216
Parents	0	2	10	0	0	1	0	0	4	7	24
Community-Based Organizations	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	5	6	12	28
Other	55[b]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	5	70
Total Referrals	114	117	43	29	24	42	14	50	80	64	577

[a] These referrals were made by crisis intervention staff.

[b] These students self-referred by speaking directly with the facilitator during classroom presentations or other program activities.

- The largest number of referrals (239) to the peer facilitators were made by the peer helpers.

Table 4

Summary of Services Provided to At-Risk Students

Service Category	SCHOOL A	SCHOOL B	SCHOOL C	SCHOOL D	SCHOOL E	SCHOOL F	SCHOOL G	SCHOOL H	SCHOOL I	SCHOOL J	TOTAL
Number counseled by facilitator	87	40	18	16	24	15	14	18	20	15	267
Number referred for outside counseling	0	15	9	4	5	8	0	10	10	4	65
Number receiving other school-based services	27	62	16	9	4	19	0	11	50	30	228
Total number of students served	114	117	43	29	24	42	14	50	80	64	577

- Over 45 percent of students who were referred to the facilitators were counseled by the facilitators.

Other comments were made by students at Schools G and E:

> I need more training in the basics. I don't feel ready at this point to handle big problems.
>
> I do not feel very effective as a peer counselor at this point.

However, one student at School J said that although he did not give formal counseling to students outside his class, he did counsel students in his class.

Approximately one-third of all the peer helper students (137) provided some counseling services to 550 students in the project schools during the 1992-93 school year. The number of peer helpers who provided counseling and the number of students counseled varied greatly from school to school. At School H, only four peer helpers counseled students, while at School E, 28 peer helpers provided counseling services. Most peer helpers who counseled worked with only one or two students.

Six of the peer helper students interviewed at the field schools were peer alumni, and while most peer helper candidates acted more as informed friends than as counselors, the alumni actually did counsel and refer students. All six alumni said that they identified students for individual counseling and referred them to the peer facilitator. Additionally, at School J, for example, some peer alumni facilitated classes for freshmen, developed forums for group counseling, and introduced students to counseling methods. The peer alumnus at this school believed that she and the group helped students face things: "Students hear other people's point of view . . . Students whose

parents are getting a divorce feel better." However, unless students actively sought her out, the peer alumnus did not have enough time to meet individually with her students.

Those peer helpers who did not provide counseling-related services impacted students through using communication/listening skills with their peers, recruiting students, inviting students to program discussion groups and lectures, disseminating information, and participating in SPARK-related activities.

Peer helper training classes enabled students to assist friends outside the program. Program discussion themes were integrated into real-life experiences and provided an underlying coherence to counseling activities. For instance, as explained by one peer helper:

> Some of my own friends are pregnant. I give my friends advice based on what I learn in the group. In discussing the subject topics with the group I learn a lot about people, especially when I hear them express their ideas on these issues.

Peer helpers who provided counseling enjoyed doing so. A student at School J described the best part of program participation as:

> Giving advice to friends. I always did so. Peer counseling has helped me learn a lot more. I feel good about helping others. It builds my self-esteem.

An alumnus at School H said that the best part of the program was talking to other students, and mentoring elementary school students. This student liked working with children and has organized a little league team in his neighborhood.

Almost all students in the program said that the best thing about the program was that it enabled them to help others.

Moreover, the process of helping others and learning to respect others helped to strengthen the peer helpers' self-respect and self-esteem.

Facilitator-Provided Peer Counseling Assistance

There were certain issues that the peer helpers knew must be immediately referred to the facilitator. If the peer helper was having a difficult time acting as a counselor, for example, the student was not talking to him/her, then the peer facilitator worked with the helper to develop relevant skills. Peer helpers had to write a report after each counseling session. If aspects of the reports indicated that the peer helper was overwhelmed or was counseling students about serious issues--i.e., pregnancy, drug abuse, etc.--the facilitator discussed relevant resources with the peer helper.

At School G, the facilitator supervised peer helper counseling activities by interviewing the peer helpers after counseling sessions. At these individual sessions, the facilitator conveyed his feelings about the student's progress as a peer helper and evaluated their level of commitment and feelings about their performance. At the time of the interview this facilitator had not yet found the need to intervene in students' counseling activities; he simply maintained progress notes on each student's work.

The facilitator at School E told OER that she primarily educated peer helpers about methods of counseling rather than counseling them, and that she had not involved herself in

students' family issues*. The facilitator had insisted that peer helpers inform her of cases which involved suicide, homicide, battering, risky behavior, and marijuana use, and strongly encouraged them to talk with her when they were not sure of what they were doing. While on the one hand, the facilitator felt that in order to provide appropriate services to students she needed to "keep tabs on what they are doing", on the other hand, she found the issue of breaking confidentiality to be a tricky one**.

At School J, peer alumni individually met with the peer facilitator once a week to discuss personal problems or problems related to the class. At School G, peer helpers made school staff aware of students needing services, provided support to clients, and made peers aware of alternatives. Three students were doing one-on-one counseling and other students were doing peer education activities in groups. This school's student interviewees felt that the SPARK program: 1) had helped a lot of students determine where to go for help, 2) was effective in helping students with their problems, and 3) was positively received by many of the school's students. One of the students said that the program was helpful in "changing attitudes about condoms etc. SPARK helps get answers." (This school was the only field study school where peer helpers kept a log on each

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* Some parents talked to her on open-school night and she subsequently talked to students about "peer-helping" their parents and vice versa. However, such interaction was not structured into the program.

** One thing this facilitator did to maintain counseling students' confidentiality was to instruct the peer helpers that they did not always have to specify the students' names.

counseling case, which they submitted to the facilitator once a month. All of the other schools' facilitators assisted peer helpers in informal ways.)

Staff and Student Evaluation of Program Impact

All facilitators interviewed felt that the program was effective and had a positive impact on the lives of students and on the school in general. The following response is typical of the facilitators' view of the program:

> The peer helper program, with the support of the administration, school-based SPARK staff, SPARK supervision, and most of all through students and their commitment provides services to students, faculty, and the school and has improved communications with teachers, staff, and others. It has enabled students to develop in that they have better understandings of themselves and others and are aware of their values. It has given students a chance to express themselves, and the skills to use in their own lives everyday and in their future college and work worlds. Finally, through the peer helper program the school has become aware of what a valuable support system the SPARK staff are.

Peer facilitators believed that most peer helpers actively worked to make staff aware of students in need of staff services, provided support to peers, and helped their peers become aware of the alternatives available to them.

Student feedback indicated that the program provided them with communication, problem-solving, and other skills that they would be able to use throughout their lives. Students in all the field study schools expressed an appreciation of the program's emphasis on effective communication skills such as listening, talking, "sharing," and trusting, which helped them to advance their ability to understand themselves, to improve relations with

friends and family, and to interact effectively in different situations:

> I have learned to deal with people better and I have learned a lot about myself . . . I interact with people better. I didn't used to talk to people and now I am doing it.
>
> I have an improved self image. I had a low self-esteem at first. I learned to use my skills to my advantage.
>
> I am a more caring person . . . a more talking person.
>
> I have learned not to fidget or to butt in--how to say No--I use these skills a lot with my family--now I do it [without thinking].

Peer helper classes and activities taught students how to give advice, and how to help and respect others. Many students indicated that although they always had a sincere concern for others, such difficulties as the inability to control their own emotions, to take the perspective of another, and to refrain from being judgmental got in the way of effectively helping others. Program participation enabled them to address these issues.

Student comments pointed to the value of the program in training them how to deal with anger. At one school, a student said that he "knows that if I get upset I can talk about it with the group and get my frustrations out". Students also learned to think about the reasons they feel angry, and how to channel their anger by finding other ways of communicating. This was useful in relationships both inside and outside the classroom.

The knowledge and counseling that students received through program participation increased students' self-esteem. The majority of students interviewed were very enthusiastic about the program class and excited about their own growth and expanded

interests as a result of program participation. Additionally, some students spoke about how being a peer helper gave them confidence, and made them able to stand up for what they believed in. At School H alumni had to deal with giving class presentations to freshmen who made noises and ignored them. Students also were confronted with criticism from fellow students during role-playing sessions. Students learned how to deal with these potentially embarrassing and demoralizing situations, which helped to build their confidence. One student from School E stated:

> By being difficult, it has made me strong and has improved my self-confidence. SPARK is ridiculed by most students, and if you are seen in and around the SPARK office they think that you are either an alcoholic or a dopehead. Therefore, coming to the SPARK office requires you to not care about what others think, if you think that you are doing the correct thing. Also, being booed in the freshman classrooms can be a difficult thing. But, here again, it makes you strong.

All program students who were not graduating said they will remain in the program during the 1993-1994 school year, if it fits into their schedules. Students wanted to continue their program participation so that they could learn new things, go into more depth on peer helper issues, get involved in workshops as an alumni, and become more confident. Other reasons students gave included the fact that it is "fun to provide counseling," and it is enjoyable talking with others and doing things with friends.

A number of peer helpers said that program participation had helped form their plans for the future. Three students

interviewed said that they were thinking of going to college in peer helper-related fields, and two students expressed an interest in participating in a peer helper program in college. One student claimed that the program had made him more assertive and he was ". . . even considering a career in counseling." A ninth grade student who was still in peer helper training wants to be a child psychologist:

> I always wanted to work with people and now I know that I want to work with young children.

Two of the students OER interviewed have made the possibility of doing volunteer work with a program like SPARK an important criterion in their college selection. A student at School G said that being a peer helper had helped him realize that he is most interested in social issues, and that he would like to go to law school. All alumni interviewed said that they were planning to go to college.

Evaluation

Ongoing evaluation of peer helper activities was carried out by borough supervisors and by the peer facilitator trainer who was also the author of the manual. Peer facilitators filled out monthly evaluation forms which indicated the number of students receiving lessons and other program services. These reports were sent to the borough supervisors, who formally evaluated peer facilitator performance. At the end of the year each borough supervisor reviewed each facilitator's cases and sent a report to the peer helper program director. Additionally, at the end of

the year, the coordinator provided a comprehensive report on the program to the SPARK director.

Inundated with the task of rewriting manual lessons, the author of the program manual felt that she did not focus sufficiently on program evaluation, and would like to make building more evaluation instruments a goal for the 1992-93 school year. The peer facilitator trainer felt that future evaluation should include more feedback about the content of projects, as well as feedback from the students' point of view.

III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSION

The 1992-93 SPARK Peer Helper Program was successful in meeting program objectives. Nine of the ten schools recruited the proposed 30 to 40 students, and six schools were able to recruit more than this number. Qualitative responses indicated that the program attracted a large number of students who were models of healthy behavior, and had good skills and abilities. In addition, peer helpers in the evaluation sample said that they increased their communication, problem-solving, and assertiveness skills, as well as their knowledge of substance abuse prevention issues and related resources. Unfortunately there were no quantitative systematic measures taken of these changes and therefore OER was unable to determine the overall impact of program training on the peer helper participants.

Most students participated in at least one of the peer helper activities and nearly 60 percent of all peer helpers participated in three or more activities. Peer helpers enjoyed and valued the program for the opportunity it gave them to learn its lessons, share life stories with each other, and deal with personal issues.

Peer facilitators found the training useful preparation for program implementation. These facilitators were clearly considered to be a resource by the entire school community, since a total of 577 referrals were made to peer facilitators by peer helpers, school staff, parents, and community-based

organizations. Of this number the facilitators directly counseled 267 students.

The final objective--identifying and counseling students-at-risk--was not the focus of this year's program implementation. This is not to suggest that peer helpers did not provide such services, only that the focus was on training students to be peer helpers. Nevertheless, 137 peer helpers provided counseling to 550 students during this school year. While peer helpers may not have directly counseled high-risk students, 239 peer helpers referred high-risk students to their respective facilitator, and 63 students co-facilitated intervention groups. At those schools with established alumni programs, alumni provided counseling services to high-risk students. Peer helper candidates reached out to others through conducting in-class presentations, by participating in SPARK events, and by recruiting students for peer helper activities.

The one aspect of program implementation that did not go as planned was the training schedule. Peer helpers were to attend classes five days a week for two weeks, but with the exception of one of the schools in the study, classes were not held all five days, and most students were unable to attend the peer helper class for two terms because it conflicted with their schedule. In addition, while students thought of the facilitator as a readily available mentor and friend, only one of the study schools had the proposed structured meetings between facilitators and peer helpers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, OER recommends that the SPARK Peer Helper Program administrators:

- Formally incorporate into the program the proposed goal that whenever a peer helper meets with a student in a counseling session, he or she is to meet with the peer facilitator.
- Collect monthly evaluation forms completed by each peer facilitator that (i) detail activities and lessons covered, and (ii) indicate the number of students receiving services (including counseling) as a result of program participation.
- Interview or administer surveys to students receiving services from peer helpers so that facilitators receive more feedback about how this activity has helped them.
- Administer pre- and posttests to peer helpers to measure the program's impact in terms of changes in behavior, knowledge, and skills.