

ABSTINENCE:

Opening Dialogue and Building Partnerships

**A Report for the 2-Day Summit
July 20 and 21, 2004
Washington, DC**

**Sponsored by
the Institute for Youth Development
and the
**Division of Adolescent and School Health
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention****

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INTRODUCTION

When the topic is sex education, what is the most effective message for teens? This is an issue which continues to divide youth care workers, teachers, parents, legislators, religious, and community leaders in cities across the United States. Some believe that “abstinence until marriage” education should be the expected standard to prevent unwanted pregnancy, disease, and emotional distress, as well as to strengthen family formation. Others believe that “abstinence only” programs may not provide sufficient information to prevent sexually transmitted diseases and unintended pregnancy and that expecting people to remain abstinent “until marriage” does not reflect the diversity of relationships in today’s society. There is a growing need to find a mechanism for increased dialogue and collaboration among these groups as they strive to serve America’s youth.

On July 20-21, 2004, a 2-day summit entitled *Abstinence: Opening Dialogue and Building Partnerships* was sponsored by the Institute for Youth Development and funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Division of Adolescent and School Health (DASH). The objective of the summit, which was held in Washington, D.C., was to convene a group representing diverse opinions on the topic of sexual abstinence and teen pregnancy prevention for the purpose of dialogue and seeking areas of agreement. A long-range goal was that this interaction could potentially spawn future collaboratives among these organizations around this issue.

The invitees represented national non-governmental organizations, as well as other youth serving organizations, several of which receive CDC funding. Two consultants from the National Coalition Building Institute, a non-profit leadership organization headquartered in Washington DC, were selected to facilitate the two day dialogue. This report summarizes the necessary steps for organizing the dialogue and selecting the participants, as well as a detailed description of what transpired at the summit, the agreements that were reached, and comments from the participants.

As much as possible, this report reflects the actual process and voices of the participants, and subjective analysis of the activities has been minimized. The voices of the participants speak most effectively to the process and to the power of the program.

Prior to the dialogue, some were skeptical that it was possible to gather people from divergent viewpoints and find common ground on this issue. By the conclusion, most agreed that the activity was a positive first step in understanding other’s viewpoints and in finding some areas of agreement.

SELECTING THE CONSULTANTS- SETTING REALISTIC OBJECTIVES FOR THE SUMMIT

Cherie Brown and Larry Bell, from the National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI) were selected to facilitate the summit. Bringing extensive experience in facilitating discussions on many contentious issues (e.g. abortion, transracial adoption, affirmative action), NCBI specializes in work on prejudice reduction, intergroup conflict resolution, and coalition building. They have developed a controversial issues process, which trains people, in the face of highly emotional and polarized issues to listen to the

heartfelt concerns on each side of an issue and to build bridges. The process reflected in this report has been successfully implemented in similar dialogues related to various contentious issues---issues where there were polarized sides, lack of knowledge about other's positions, and divergent views on what constitutes "correct" policy.

This report may be useful, not only for agency staff who must implement controversial policies, but also for legislators and community advocates who are seeking creative, non-divisive ways to institute forums enabling exploration of all sides of an issue before crafting legislation and policies.

The objectives for the summit were:

- 1. To dispel myths regarding the various positions on the issue***
- 2. To define areas where the group could reach agreement on behalf of the welfare of youth***
- 3. To identify joint messages and strategies to address HIV/STD and teen pregnancy prevention in youth***

The NCBI staff assisted IYD with setting realistic goals for the summit. For example, it was realistic to establish goals concerning dispelling myths about each other's positions, seeking areas of common agreement, and committing to speak cooperatively about one another in the community following the summit. Conversely, it was not realistic to set out to change the minds of those with divergent viewpoints.

An equally important task in the planning phase of the summit was developing criteria for selecting participants. The NCBI staff advised careful recruitment of participants, as those attending would be critical to the overall process. For example, it would not be productive to include participants who might attend for the purpose of platforming their positions, without any willingness to hear from others. In addition, it was vital to the intended process of breaking down barriers and building future coalitions to convene a group representative of significantly divergent views on the issue.

Participant-selection guidelines were as follows:

- 1. Seek participants who hold as many different views as possible on the issues of adolescent HIV/STD and teenage pregnancy prevention, and teaching about abstinence***
- 2. Seek participants who understand that they are coming to a meeting to both share their views---and most importantly---to want to understand the views of those who hold divergent opinions.***
- 3. Seek participants that can commit to the full two-day summit.
(See further comments in "Challenges" section)***
- 4. Do not select any participants who appear, in phone interviews, to simply want to platform about their position and are not able to come with a generous spirit and a desire to learn about what shapes the positions of folks on all sides of the issue.***

5. *Do not eliminate participants just because they hold very strong views (particularly if those views are different than yours). In fact, it is vital to include folks who have very different perspectives. Consider eliminating someone only if they do not seem open to listening to others.*

An email was sent to invitees stating the purpose and logistical information for the summit. If the participants responded positively to the email, the phone script which had been created by the NCBI staff and IYD was not utilized. For the remainder of the invitees, the following phone script was employed in the outreach calls:

PHONE SCRIPT -- We would like to take this opportunity to tell you about a two-day open dialogue on adolescent HIV/STD and pregnancy prevention issues. This two-day summit is being funded through a cooperative agreement from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The primary purposes of the summit are to:

- *To dispel myths regarding the various positions on the issue*
- *Identify joint messages and strategies to address HIV/STD and teen pregnancy prevention in youth*
- *Define areas where the group could reach agreement on behalf of the welfare of youth*

I would like your advice on who would be the appropriate person to invite from your organization. We are seeking individuals that will respect the goals of the summit and are genuinely interested in listening and learning from people who might hold differing views on these issues, as well as desire to seek a common group and common agreement.

Is this something that you or someone at your organization might be interested in participating in?

If they say yes then ask:

- *What about this summit most interests you?*
- *What would your goals be in attending?*

THE SUMMIT -- DAY ONE

- 1. Introductions:** Each person stood and answered the following short questions: (1) name (2) organization, community group or institution affiliation (3) a word that describes an attitude that you bring to your work. (The goal of this introductory question was to encourage participants to recall strengths they could bring to the summit).

Listed below are the responses that the participants volunteered to describe the attitude that they would bring to the two day meeting:

**Empathetic
Understanding**

**Passionate
Committed
Positive
Caring
Willing
Optimistic
Dedicated
Voice
Compassionate
Focused
Passionate
Visionary
Energetic
Equity
Enthusiastic
Sacrifice
Motivational
Listening
Enthusiastic
Present
Chutzpah
Perseverance**

- 2. Up-Downs:** The purpose of this activity was to identify areas of commonality and to learn to affirm each other for the diverse groups represented. The facilitators called out a set of categories (see examples below) and participants affiliated with those groups proudly stood as the other participants applauded them. This set a welcoming tone for the two days work as participants learned that they had many things in common with others in the room. Categories used in the “up-down” activity included: birth order; place of birth; cultural/ethnic/national heritage; religious affiliation; age; gender; class/economic background. At the conclusion, participants were paired and asked to brainstorm additional categories to be used in the affirmation activity (ideas included political affiliations, educational degrees, type of work with young people, and length of time working on the issues of abstinence or sex education.).

- 3. Pairs:** Participants were paired and asked to share other group affiliations that are important to them and have shaped their identity (e.g., ethnicity, nationality, gender, religious affiliation etc). Finally, they were asked “*When you leave tomorrow, what are your highest hopes for accomplishment,*” and requested to list several goals and objectives that they envisioned for the summit. These goals were then shared with the entire group.

GOALS OF GROUP PARTICIPANTS:

- **To get to know more people with different points of view**
- **To get to know different organizations/constituencies**
- **To challenge stereotypes about each other**

- **To remember to focus on actual data about how kids learn**
- **To understand the broader purpose of what we are doing**
- **To agree on where we can disagree**

GROUND RULES

The group reached agreement on the following ground rules necessary to insure the safety important to successful dialogue:

- **Confidentiality**
- **Each person only speaks for themselves**
- **Confidentiality should be both as individuals and as organizations (the views expressed here do not necessarily represent the views of our organizations)**
- **When frustrated, take a deep breath and pause**
- **Encourage people to speak up—to not stay silent and then later on say--- I disagree**
- **Always remember that we are all here because we care about youth**
- **Keep cell phones off**

CAUCUSES---DISPELLING MYTHS

In keeping with the topic, participants were asked to identify a group they belong to which might be misunderstood by others and one where they desired an opportunity to dispel myths about this group and its position. This was an important first activity in the summit to demonstrate that there were many misperceptions about how the issues were viewed and that these misperceptions contributed to the inability to reach common agreement. The participants then selected a caucus group and were given 15 minutes to prepare a report for the larger group. The questions that the caucus groups were asked to answer were:

1. ***What do you never again want others to say, think, or do towards your group and how your group views this issue?***
2. ***What do you most want others to understand about your group and the positions that you take on this issue, as well as your reasons for your positions?***

Each caucus group came to the front of the room and shared their report. Participants were asked to listen respectfully to each report without initial questions or comments.

A key element in this activity was that each participant had the opportunity to define their caucus group and was not limited to a pre-arranged set of caucuses. The caucuses that participants requested were:

- 1) **Abstinence until Marriage**
- 2) **Public School Educators**
- 3) **CDC (Centers for Disease Control staff)**

- 4) **Comprehensive Sex Education**
- 5) **Sexuality and Youth Development**

NOTES FROM THE CAUCUS REPORTS

1. Abstinence Until Marriage

What we never again want people to say:

- **we are fear-based, medically inaccurate; we are harmful to youth; we withhold information**
- **we use scare tactics**
- **we are right wing fundamentalists; we're unrealistic**
- **we are abstinence only**
- **we are narrow minded, homophobic, exclusionary**
- **we are not culturally competent**
- **we don't deal with sexually active kids**
- **we're a bunch of church ladies that are uptight about sex**
- **we shame teenagers; we are coercive**
- **we are not interested in the sexual health of youth**
- **our method is un-proven; it doesn't work; it's unscientific**

What we want you to know about how we see the issues:

- **Sexual intimacy should be within marriage for the best outcome and healthy message.**
- **Abstinence until Marriage—should be treated with equity as any other public health issue by advocating primary prevention.**
- **We are a holistic approach that is Directive vs. Nondirective.**
- **Brain development and cognitive development should be age appropriate (the Pygmalion study).**
- **We want abstinence with a purpose. Character; behavioral restraint. Risk behavior---all advocate for abstinent behavior**
- **We are parent friendly.**
- **What we offer is realistic and attainable.**
- **We think that public health policy should reflect the optimum in health for youth.**

2. Public School Educators and Policy Makers

What we never again want people to say:

- **We don't care what parents think.**
- **We're encouraging our kids to have sex. If we teach them about it, they will do it.**
- **All we care about is test scores.**

- Teaching kids health isn't as important as math and reading.
- Sex education is not the responsibility of the schools.
- Our policies and programs are promoting homosexuality.
- Health education is synonymous with sex education which is synonymous with handing out condoms.
- Anybody teaching sex education in schools must be in a heterosexual marriage.
- Girls and boys must always be separated for sex education.
- Schools have no business teaching sex education in elementary schools.
- All we have to teach them is to "just say no"
- We are undermining the morals of kids.

What we want you to know about how we see the issues:

- Public education is for all children.
- There are different levels of the school system where decisions are made about what is taught in the classroom.
- Decisions that are made are within the context of the administrative structure and legal structure of each state.
- Decisions are often politically based, not scientifically based.
- A lot of decisions are based on state curriculum standards.
- The vast majority of people at all levels of public education want the best for all youth to become productive members of a democratic society.
- The primary mission of schools is education—education that is more than achievement test scores.
- Public schools exist to serve all starting from wherever they are and helping them to succeed to maximum potential.
- Schools need families and communities as their partners of these issues.

3. CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Staff)

What we never again want people to say:

- We do not strongly support abstinence for young people.
- We mandate specific curricula for grantees (i.e. "Programs That Work").

What we want you to know about how we see the issues:

- We advocate abstinence as the safest choice for young people.
- Curriculum selection should be made at the local level with community input.
- Science drives our technical assistance and guidance (i.e. guidelines and tools).

4. Sexuality and Youth Development

What we never again want people to say:

- **You can disassociate sexuality from the full aspect of youth development.**
- **Sexual decisions should define youth.**
- **All the complexities of sex are not part of overall youth development.**

What we want you to know about how we see the issues:

- **We are interested in high school teens up to age twenty-four.**
- **We want a comprehensive approach to understanding why people make the decisions they do.**

5. Comprehensive Sex Education

What we don't want people to say about our group:

- **Comprehensive sex educators want or encourage young people to have sex.**
- **We don't support abstinence education.**
- **If you give young people information, they will act on it by having sex.**
- **If you don't tell them how to do it, they won't know.**
- **Condoms are ineffective.**
- **Comprehensive Sex Education is promoting immorality or poor values.**
- **We usurp the family rights/values.**
- **Youth are unable to make healthy decisions.**
- **Having sex as a youth is unhealthy.**
- **We are anti-religion.**

What we want you to know about how we see the issues:

- **We focus on the whole child—not just about sex; it's about health and well-being.**
- **Sexuality is healthy. Marriage is important but it's not the end all and be all.**
- **It isn't an either or debate—abstinence vs. sex. We support developmentally appropriate choices for youth.**
- **Sexually healthy adults are what we want and we want them to be able to navigate options.**
- **This is not a snapshot in time—it's a continuum of healthy individuals.**
- **Comprehensive sex education gives us the opportunity to meet young people wherever they may be and to help them.**
- **Teaching comprehensive sex education is not confusing—we don't have to be sending a mixed message---it can be clear.**
- **The data supports that Comprehensive Sex Education is effective.**
- **We believe that parents and families should share their values with their children in order to have the children more involved.**

Following the Caucus Reports, participants were paired to discuss the following questions:

- 1. Having listened to the caucus reports, what was new information?*
- 2. What particularly touched you hearing it from a particular caucus group?*
- 3. What was new information that you might not agree with, but was still helpful to hear?*

The caucus reports gave many of the participants a chance to dispel myths, and in many cases, to realize that participants were not nearly as far apart on issues as had been previously assumed. Here is a summary of some of the comments that were made by participants following the caucus reports:

- **It was new information that the abstinence until marriage group doesn't like the term "abstinence only."**
- **We noticed commonalities---we all want parents to be involved.**
- **It was interesting to me that the abstinence until marriage group mentioned cultural competencies. I wouldn't have expected them to be concerned with that.**
- **It was new information to me that the abstinence until marriage group was focused on broader based issues based on human development and that they were interested in holistic health issues.**
- **It was new information that specific curricula are not mandated by CDC.**
- **We were touched by the sincerity of everyone. We are people, not just positions.**
- **It was new information-- the data on brain development and how it applies to adolescent development.**
- **I realized that our interpretations and applications of the same data are different.**
- **How much commonality we had in message and approach---we all wanted parental involvement.**
- **We need clearer definition of terms.**
- **I realized how much public schools are dictated by ordinances and state regulations.**
- **There was a tremendous amount of sincerity by everyone and a willingness to listen that touched me.**
- **I'm encouraged that public educators want to teach health.**
- **I was struck realizing that the abstinence until marriage folks were primarily about a prevention model.**
- **It was new for me thinking that delayed gratification has broader application.**
- **I was struck hearing someone say that sexual activity between teenagers could be healthy.**
- **The realization that we can go so far with what we agree on---and then we hit a brick wall---when we don't understand each other's definitions of terms.**

Following these statements, it was apparent that a number of key questions were

emerging. (The facilitators pointed out that some of these questions might work well in the controversial issues process.)

QUESTIONS:

- **What does a sexually healthy adult look like?**
- **In comprehensive sex education, when we include abstinence--- abstinence until when?**
- **How do we as public educators reconcile abstinence until marriage for those who will never get married (i.e. sexual orientation)**
- **Is marriage the end goal for everyone? What are the long term social goals for each young person?**

TEACHING LISTENING SKILLS - THE CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE PROCESS

Following the caucus reports, the facilitators taught the group a process for listening to heartfelt concerns on opposing sides of a contentious issue. This process was taught on the first day, so that on the second day of the summit when the areas of common agreement and disagreement were outlined, participants could practice this set of skills when listening to each other.

Part I --- Selecting the Issue for Learning the Controversial Listening Process

In small groups of five, participants were asked to select two possible issues that could be utilized when learning the listening process. The criteria given to the small groups for selecting issues included:

- *The issue should be emotional, with participants holding a strong advocacy position on the issue, believing their side is right and the other side is wrong.*
- *They can frame the issue in either a “yes” or “no” position.*
- *From what they know already about the entire group, they assume the issue will be controversial*
- *It would excite them to talk about that issue, the issues would be relevant to the topic at hand, and they would most like to learn how others in the room view the issue.*

Each group offered a number of issues for possible selection. Some of the proposed issues were:

- **Should we provide more detailed information on contraceptives for high school students, including skill development and use?**
- **Is sexual activity a natural part of growth and development?**
- **Should reproductive health services be provided in school based health centers and clinics?**
- **Should we teach high school youth how to use contraceptives?**

- **Are there developmentally appropriate ways for youth to be sexually active?**
- **Should adolescents be taught to abstain from sexual activity until marriage?**
- **Is marriage, as it is currently understood and defined in the legal and religious context, the expected standard for sexual activity for all people?**
- **Condoms are safe sex. Yes or No.**
- **Is the end goal marriage?**

The group selected the topic *should adolescents be taught to abstain from sexual activity until marriage* to practice the skills of the controversial issue process. Two participants representing opposing viewpoints volunteered to model the skills.

Part II --- The Dialogue

The two participants came to the front of the room, and Participant A was asked to state her position. The facilitators requested that Participant B listen carefully to Participant A and then repeat what she had heard. Participant B was encouraged to ask Participant A the question “*I’m eager to know more about how you see this issue. Is there something in your life that might help me to understand what has shaped your concern on this issue?*” (The purpose of this question is to communicate the person’s desire to know more about how the other sees the issue.) Next, the roles were reversed and Participant B stated her position. Person A repeated what she had heard and asked Participant B the same question to gain further understanding.

Part III --- Mapping Out the Interests

The entire group generated a list of concerns they had heard from both participants and these were recorded on newsprint.

Participant A---Why not to teach abstinence until marriage exclusively:

- Don’t want anyone to be stigmatized**
- Message would be exclusive**
- Blanket statements are not useful**
- People could perceive that they have no future**
- It excludes gay and lesbian youth**
- It excludes those who choose not to get married**
- Safety and protection**

Participant B---Why we should teach youth to abstain until marriage

- All kids have the best possible outcomes**
- Sexual intimacy within marriage makes a healthier society**
- Societal health; individual health**
- Love and caring**
- Don’t want to offer a false sense of security by teaching young people to rely on condoms**

- Important to support the data
- Safety and protection
- Capacity to start over

Part IV --- Reframing the Issue

Lastly, participants were paired to answer two questions:

1. *What common concerns did you hear from both Participant A and Participant B?*
2. *By including a key concern from Participant A and Participant B's position, the pair was asked to write a reframed question using this formulation—"How can we...while at the same time..." This reframed question links the concerns and sets the stage for seeking solutions that would satisfy both points of view.*

The group noted the following common concerns:

- **Safety and protection**
- **Wanting all kids to have the best outcomes**
- **Regardless of what an individual child has done, wanting them to be able to grow and succeed and not be stigmatized**

A sample of reframed questions that were generated were:

- a) **How can we avoid stigmatizing or excluding those youth who choose to be sexually active, choose not to marry, or those who cannot marry while at the same time promoting the message that sexual intimacy within marriage leads to a healthy society?.**
- b) **How can we promote best outcomes for young people without excluding anyone?**

On Day One, the facilitators guided the participants through the controversial issues process where tension and lively debate abounded as areas of agreement and disagreement were explored. During this process, participants honed their listening skills and built greater trust with each other. It was apparent that even when areas of disagreement exist, areas of common concern can be found.

At the close of the day, participants were asked to share one highlight from Day One.

Highlights from Day One

1. **To hear different views from the people who hold them**
2. **To talk to those who hold the same view---and to those who differ**
3. **Affirmation that I am doing the right thing in the community**
4. **It's exciting to see the connections being made**
5. **Bravo to the two who did the controversial issue process-- for speaking and**

- validating each other
6. Hearing personal stories
 7. Respectful conversation
 8. Experience of sharing
 9. Hearing everyone's issues and concerns
 10. The demonstration of the skill of asking for personal experiences and listening to the story
 11. The role play on the controversial issue
 12. The skill of becoming a better listener
 13. There were no arguments or raised voices
 14. Watching how important it was to be able to listen and repeat back the words of the other
 15. Working together in small groups
 16. The broad scope of room for all of the issues
 17. Dialogue and compromise
 18. Learning that there are many voices to these issues
 19. Being able to speak with each other in more than sound bites
 20. The focus on the whole child and the development of the person
 21. The humanity of people deeply trying to reach for each other
 22. Seeing that the divide is not as big as we are being told

SUMMIT -- DAY TWO

Part I --- Statements of Agreement/Disagreement

The facilitators began Day Two by asking participants to brainstorm a list of all areas of possible agreement based on what was learned on Day One. The group voted to be certain that each proposed statement had the consensus of the group. (Most issues had the full agreement of the group; however, a few did not.)

When the group was unable to reach total agreement on a statement, each person who had a disagreement with that statement was asked to describe their particular concerns. After listening to the concerns, the group (including the person/persons stating the disagreement) worked to redraft the statement to find language that was acceptable to everyone.

The community- building work on the first day coupled with the conflict resolution skills in the controversial issues process enabled the participants to communicate more effectively on Day Two. The goal was not to gloss over any substantive differences (and there were still a number of these), but to use these listening skills to determine where it was possible to find mutually acceptable language in a given statement. (See "Challenges" section for further comments regarding differences)

Statements that did not have total agreement after 5 or 10 minutes of striving to find mutually acceptable language (even if it was only one person who disagreed) were listed under "not yet in total agreement." Thus, Day Two began with the realization that many areas of agreement existed.

A. Statements where there is Agreement:

- 1) We strongly believe that sexuality education should be taught in schools.**
- 2) Youth should be taught the skills necessary to develop healthy relationships including: decision making, communication, resisting peer pressure, and goal setting.**
- 3) Part of any effective program for young people is the knowledge and skills to access help and resources to deal with coercive or abusive relationships.**
- 4) We should focus on the whole young person when addressing issues of abstinence and sexuality education.**
- 5) Abstinence is the best way to prevent unwanted pregnancies and disease (we define abstinence to include oral, anal, and vaginal sex).**
- 6) Youth are capable of making healthy choices and they should be included as partners in the prevention planning process.**
- 7) Regardless of the content of sexuality education, young people need motivation, skills, and facts.**
- 8) Latex condoms can be effective in reducing (not eliminating) the transmission of HIV, and reducing the likelihood of pregnancy.**
- 9) Positive youth development should be a part of any prevention program.**
- 10) Media awareness education should be a component of health education.**
- 11) Young people's unhealthy, risk taking behavior in the past does not need to continue in the future (we don't all agree on what defines unhealthy, risk taking behavior).**
- 12) Young people should have access to information about sexual health.**
- 13) Parents and/or families should be actively engaged in health education including sexual health of their children.**
- 14) Abstinence can still be a viable option for children who have become sexually active.**
- 15) Schools should work with families and communities to foster appropriate messages regarding adolescent sexual behavior.**
- 16) Young people should receive information that is age and developmentally appropriate, culturally sensitive-culturally competent, medically accurate, and scientifically based. Further work is needed to define these terms as these terms are often used as unnecessary weapons against each other.**
- 17) Parents and care-givers should be primary educators of their children on sexuality education**
- 18) We must ensure that teachers work hard to embrace adolescents wherever they are and information be made relevant to diverse populations of youth.**
- 19) In planning sex education and abstinence programs, program planners need to consider all young people, whether they are sexually abstinent or sexually active, in school—or out of school.**

B. Statements where there is not yet total agreement:

The following are statements where participants were unable to find mutually agreeable language in the time allotted:

- 1) **Is it ever developmentally appropriate for young people to be sexually active?**
- 2) **Should we speak of marriage preparation for all?**
- 3) **Accurate medical data regarding success and failure rates of contraceptives for adults and teens should be imparted in health or life skills classes (in the context of marriage and the family).**
- 4) **Young people who are sexually active should not be stigmatized.**
- 5) **A second chance message for sexually active youth should be encouraged.**
- 6) **What defines “unhealthy risk taking behavior”?**
- 7) **What is “age- appropriate”?**

Part II -- Handling tough emotions: using the controversial issues process

Tension mounted as areas of strong disagreement on several key issues persisted. The facilitators desired that the participants’ confidence increase so that even on the thornier issues where total agreement was difficult, that they could still seek to understand each other. The Controversial Issues/Listening Process that began on Day One was reintroduced on Day Two. The group was asked to vote and select from one of the previous statements above where there was not yet agreement, and then begin another round of the controversial issue process.

1. **CHOOSING THE ISSUE:** The issue chosen for continuing the dialogue was---
Should we speak of marriage preparation for all?
2. **LEARNING TO LISTEN IN THE FACE OF DIFFICULT EMOTIONS:**
Two participants representing opposing perspectives on marriage education stated their views. Facilitators reminded the group that that the goal of the controversial issue process is NOT necessarily to change people's positions, but to change their hearts. This may be accomplished by hearing the life stories that were instrumental in shaping the positions. By sharing these stories, the “humanity” in the positions emerges, and working towards shared goals becomes easier.
3. **MAPPING OUT THE INTERESTS:** After the participants stated their positions and shared their personal stories, the larger group listed the concerns they had heard from each side.

Person A: Marriage preparation does not include all.

- **Some might feel their experiences were not acceptable**
- **Marriage as an end goal is not as important as teaching about healthy relationships**
- **Ability of human beings to contribute to society is not based on whether they are married**
- **It will stigmatize those who aren’t married**

- **Community support can exist for non- traditional families where there isn't a marriage**
- **Shouldn't be exclusive about marriage (which doesn't mean to be anti-marriage)**

Person B: Marriage preparation should be taught for all.

- **Giving teens the help they ask for**
- **Skills for healthy long term relationships = marriage skills**
- **Marriage is a component of a healthy society**
- **Wanting the best for her family**
- **Not wanting others to be hurt like her or her children (by divorce)**
- **There is compelling data about the advantages of marriage for having healthy children**

4. AREAS OF AGREEMENT: Next, the group considered the responses and defined areas of common concern:

- 1) **Both care about healthy relationships**
- 2) **Both care about what's best for young people**
- 3) **Both want a healthy society**

5. REFRAMED QUESTIONS: After examining the concerns listed from both viewpoints, the group generated three reframed questions:

- a) **How can we teach skills necessary for young adults to have long term committed relationships while at the same time ensuring that marriage is a central component of the program?**
- b) **How can we prepare young people for healthy marriages while at the same time ensure that all young people feel proud of their own family experience and whatever choices they make about their own future relationships?**
- c) **How can we respond to what current social science data suggests about the benefits of marriage while at the same time respond to current cultural trends that suggest changes in traditional family formations?**

Participants chose one of the above reframed questions and brainstormed possible ways to provide answers.

A few suggestions included:

- **Look at a wide range of data and disciplines, including cross cultural data.**
- **Gather more social science research on types of families.**
- **Look at cross cultural and tran historical data.**
- **Look at who benefits.**
- **Recognize new data—and that data is always changing.**
- **Look at data and disciplines on all the factors contributing to youth development, including employment, violence etc.**
- **Look at the age of marriage and what is happening across the world.**

- **Healthy relationships will be one part of the total marriage preparation class---marriage must be with two healthy individuals. A strong relationship includes: good communication skills, dating skills, levels of intimacy, and identifying interpersonal compatibility.**
- **Courses should teach the difference between love and infatuation, conflict negotiation skills, validating gender differences, teaching red flag indicators.**

NEXT STEPS

As a concluding activity, the participants formed three groups and were allotted twenty minutes to create a list of “next steps.” Each group presented a summary of their suggestions to the larger group.

Suggestions and Recommendations from the Small Groups

Group I -- Next Steps

- 1) **Spend time with this group defining terms.**
- 2) **Make a list of people attending with contact information.**
- 3) **Link w/ RMC (Rocky Mountain Center).**
- 4) **Train different peer educators/youth in these same skills.**
- 5) **See each other’s different curricula to compare. See what needs strengthening—e.g. marriage prep—what gaps need filling.**
- 6) **Convene another group with a majority of men.**
- 7) **Have an NGO collaboration to support another session with NCBI.**

Group II---Next Steps

- 1) **Continue to dispel myths—have further dialogues.**
- 2) **Expand the participants in the discussion to other stakeholders.**
- 3) **Invite youth participation in some part of the process.**
- 4) **Have greater clarity on next steps, including how we can contribute to public policy, advocacy, and common ground issues.**
- 5) **Continue to have direction from CDC on the directions of this process.**

Group III—Next Steps

- 1) **Send out contact information for purpose of future working partnerships.**
- 2) **Get a synthesis of all the meetings of this type to date (North Carolina, Louisiana, Colorado, and Washington, D.C.)**
- 3) **Have participants share information about the meeting with their organizations.**
- 4) **Have a future event focused on men—targeting issues related to reaching young men.**
- 5) **Invite groups like Advocates for Youth, Planned Parenthood, and SIECUS to future discussions of this type.**
- 6) **Explore parity of funding issues.**

CLOSING ON DAY TWO:

As Day Two concluded, participants had a better understand of each other and their positions on the issues. Participants formed a closing circle and answered the question: *What has been a highlight or what's been helpful in the past two days?*

Highlights from Day Two:

- **Hearing the stories; watching the group rise and rise and rise**
- **Seeing everyone's commitment to the process**
- **I'm happy with the process we used; I saw us all move and make progress**
- **We worked together in a heartfelt way**
- **Seeing the dialogue---reframing issues**
- **There was much excitement as we generated ideas**
- **We got to tough issues and emotionally charged conversation**
- **Seeing everyone's passionate viewpoints—and listening to each other**
- **I got to know people better**
- **Everyone's honesty and passion---sense of humor**
- **It was unique and special to find common ground—we actually wanted to agree**
- **Learning this process**
- **The opportunity to be REAL when in conflict**
- **Meet so many people who care about youth; Role play what gets to the underlying issue; The heart connection we created between all of us; We accepted and related to each other with respect**
- **I had reservations before I came—but I'm so glad I came. Young people need heartfelt authenticity from us—and we had that here in these past two days**
- **I think we really moved forward in the dialogue in these past two days**
- **Getting a chance to know each other. Having these relationships is vital**

CHALLENGES

Some specific challenges arose which we feel should be acknowledged. Although the participants were requested to commit to the full two day summit, a small number of participants were unable to fulfill that requirement. Some attendees felt strongly that those who attended only one day impacted the overall process. It should be emphasized that obtaining a two-day commitment may be difficult, and that a true “retreat” setting would be more advantageous for bonding, focus, etc. To establish new relationships and foster a necessary level of trust, attending both days is key to achieving maximum outcomes.

From a planning perspective, striving to configure a numerically balanced group representing varied viewpoints (who were willing to adhere to the stated criteria for participation), include pertinent organizations, and offer feasible opportunities for future collaboration was daunting. It was necessary to limit the number of invited organizations to assimilate a manageable number for effective interaction. Predictably, some invited

organizations were unable to participate. Some participants expressed concern that additional organizations should have been “at the table” and that the process at times did not allow for sincere concerns to be addressed. For the sake of clarity, it should not be construed that the list of invited organizations was exhaustive of all who could have contributed positively to the process, nor that the process itself is without challenges. The summit is described in detail as a positive “first step” in the dialogue for the purpose of offering encouragement in finding common ground and outlining a framework for those who may be interested in initiating a similar event.

Some expressed disappointment that more time was needed to develop concrete steps for future collaboration, and that in our quest for finding common ground, differences which warranted further discussion were glossed over.

There were unresolved issues as to whether the participating organizations should be listed on the report. During the process, the participants were directed to “speak” for themselves, and not their organizations. However, it was agreed upon that if a list of participants was generated, names of organizations, not names of individuals would be included. Some participants felt it was important for participating organizations to be listed, while others did not.

CONCLUSION

All of the participants worked diligently to make the summit a positive experience and most expressed satisfaction with the controversial issues process and interest in utilizing it in other settings. The participants were encouraged that various points of view on controversial issues could be voiced and that areas of agreement were possible. Because new relationships were established during the two days, the group expressed interest in continuing to work together on the identified challenging and/or contentious issues.