

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Association for Sexual and Reproductive Health XY



Promoting Young People's Sexual and Reproductive Health

Association XY has empowered young Bosnians through its new youth-friendly clinic and centre.

Association for Sexual and Reproductive Health XY (Association XY) has built on its successful youth-friendly model and has changed the lives of young people throughout the country, including the capital Sarajevo. The Bosnian Member Association was one of 18 that received funding from the Dutch government to improve young people's sexual and reproductive health and their access to services and information.

Ongoing myths and social norms about gender roles place disempowering expectations on young Bosnians. These gender norms inhibit young women and men from fully expressing themselves and from enjoying their sexual rights.

Through the Promoting the Sexual and Reproductive Health of Young People project, Association XY purchased space in the centre of Sarajevo to serve as a clinic for young people and as a youth centre. The strategic location of the new clinic close to the city's main university means that it is more visible to young people.

The Association's youth programme includes training, comprehensive sexuality education classes, services and counselling. Staff members mentor young people on topics related to sexual and reproductive health. Young people are involved in designing and implementing activities and include young men who have sex with men, young people living with HIV and poor young people from rural areas.

Young people value the knowledge they have gained at the clinic and youth centre, which has boosted their confidence, given them a sense of empowerment and made them feel more secure about making informed decisions in the future in terms of sexual and reproductive health. Young men in particular have expressed how the project has significantly changed their lives for the better.

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I went to XY and everything was great; I liked the approach. I had information and condoms. I decided to become a volunteer, and to help young people who needed similar information to me.

19-year old male

Achievements

Learning and empowerment

A major achievement of the project is the continual learning that the young people experience, and the subsequent learning that they share with others. The constant support and mentoring from Association XY staff has empowered the young people, many of whom have become leaders among their peers and within the organization. Because they feel empowered, young volunteers and beneficiaries want to keep spreading the word about Association XY. They want more young Bosnians to experience and learn what they have.

Because of what they have learned, young people feel much more prepared to confront future situations, including sex and relationships. They feel safer knowing they can make informed and healthy decisions in the future, and they feel more mature as a result.

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Now I think differently and am more mature. I know something more that I didn't know before...I can make better decisions than before.

14-year old female

Young people value the friendships they have made at XY and recognize the importance that these relationships have had in terms of their learning and development. These friendships, coupled with the ongoing learning, keep them coming back to the clinic. One young person said, "Everyone [at the Association] is my friend; they have all changed my life."

Openly discussing sexuality

Another achievement of Association XY's youth programme is that it is dispelling myths that exist in Bosnia around sex and sexuality. Association XY promotes openness and dialogue to combat taboos that inhibit access to information and services for young people. Many young interviewees commented on how their eyes had been opened by participating in trainings and workshops, particularly about sexual diversity as well as ethnic diversity. They see their new openness as a significant change to their lives.

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She used gynaecological services... it was her first time at 19. She was very afraid, and didn't know how to tell her parents and friends here because it's taboo. She found it very useful that her first visit to the gynaecologist was just talking. They just talked so that she could relax.

20-year old female

One young PEER interviewer said, "After his experience with XY, he's relaxed when he talks about sex. He doesn't have any restrictions or inhibitions."

Young people expressed how much more confident and comfortable they feel when speaking about topics that they would have considered taboo in the past. Many of them now talk to parents, friends and family members about their newly acquired knowledge and, in this way, are contributing to wider social change. A 14-year-old girl explained: "After the encounter with XY, I became more open to talking about issues with my parents and others."

Combating harmful gender norms

Ongoing myths and social norms about gender roles place disempowering expectations on young Bosnians. These gender norms inhibit young women and men from fully expressing themselves and from enjoying their sexual rights. One young woman said, "My friends that have had sex, I know that their parents are not

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The Association helped me a lot; it literally changed the course of my life. Before joining XY, I was on a bad road with my life in terms of violence, bad grades, bad behaviour, bad company... Nowadays, I frequently ask myself what would've become of me had I not joined XY.

aware of it. If [the parents] find out, the boy would be a hero and the girl would probably be considered a prostitute. That is how it works in my country."

Some young men have noticed a change in their lives following their involvement with Association XY's programme to combat harmful gender norms. The Association works with young men through schools in poor and under-privileged areas. By working with teachers and school counsellors, Association XY is helping to change young men's attitudes and behaviours that are discriminatory or harmful towards women. One 21-year-old said, "I went to a boys' school, but after the training I didn't have that aggression anymore. I was a different man after that."

Youth-friendly approach

The youth-friendly approach of the staff is undoubtedly a major contributing factor to the success of the clinic. Young people are made to feel comfortable as soon as they arrive at the clinic, which eases their access to information and services and encourages them to return. Young people value the non-judgemental approach of the clinic staff who have made them feel comfortable during counselling or service-related visits.

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The Association is a great place to make friends, to learn something that you didn't know, to tell people about it, to change something.

20-year old male

AssociationXY has truly achieved a model for youth involvement, participation and leadership at all levels and in all activities of the organization. It is a model that recognizes the importance that peers and friendships play in shaping young people's lives and development; the role that the organization has to play in mentoring young people; and how putting young people in leadership roles can truly empower them and change their lives.

Lessons

✓ The importance of having truly youth-friendly clinics and involving young people cannot be underestimated. The youth-friendliness of Association XY's clinic and centre has resulted in young people accessing more services and information. In addition, the Association works hard to ensure that young people feel part of the organization from the moment they enter the clinic, youth centre or any other place where young volunteers gather. This approach has gained the trust and loyalty of all its youth volunteers and has resulted in the young people continuing their involvement with the Association and reaching out to their friends.

✓ Young people appreciate the creative ways that Association XY disseminates information, including the 'street classroom' approach which is a mobile classroom that the Association creates in Sarajevo's main square, inviting anyone passing by to sit down and listen. Other creative approaches have included media workshops and theme-based photography competitions. An 18-year old explained, "The first time we were attracted was with media workshops – [XY] brought this girl from the art school; she was really cool and fun. We did photography. Our theme was anti-violence; we had a competition with this."

✓ Existing social norms can obstruct the way that young people benefit from the information and services they have access to at youth-friendly centres. The socio-culturally defined gender roles impact on young people's ability to negotiate safe sex with their partners and to access information and contraception. Even though they learn about the benefits of condoms through Association XY, some girls are still unable to convince their partners to use them.

Young people do not have much space at home or school to reinforce what they learn at the Association. It is uncommon for parents to discuss sex and relationships with their teenagers, and many teachers are opposed to introducing sexuality education in their classrooms.



In our society, it's not common that mothers talk to their daughters and advise them that it's alright to have sexual intercourse but it should be safe.

17-year old female



Bosnia and Herzegovina

Country context*

Population (millions), 2011	3.8
Public expenditure on health (% of GDP), 2011	5.6
Adult literacy rate (% aged 15 and above), 2011	97.8
Maternal mortality ratio (deaths of women per 100,000 live births), 2011	9
Female seats in parliament (%), 2011	15.8

Context for young people*

Adolescent fertility rate (births per 1,000 women aged 15-19), 2011	16.4
Combined gross enrollment in education (both sexes) (%), 2010	75.6

* UNDP. Country Profile: Human Development Indicators, Bosnia and Herzegovina <<http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/BIH.html>>.



This case study is one of a series of qualitative reviews called "IPPF Changing Lives" which capture the stories of IPPF's beneficiaries and clients from around the world. A rapid PEER (participatory ethnographic evaluation and research) approach was used to train project beneficiaries to interview people in their social network. These voices provide us with powerful testimonies on lives changed (and, in some cases, lives saved) and illustrate how IPPF is making a difference. To learn more about this methodology, see <http://www.options.co.uk/peer>.



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