

## **Speakeasy - Pencoys Case Study**

**Name of initiative:** Speakeasy

**Organisations involved:** FPA - Sexual Health Charity, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Primary Care Trust (CIOSPCT) Health Promotion Service (HPS) incorporating Speakeasy and Cornwall Healthy Schools Programme

**Date:** 9<sup>th</sup> March

**School name:** Pencoys Primary School, Cornwall

**School type:** Primary School

**Participants involved:** Parents, Speakeasy Development Worker and Speakeasy Facilitator

**Theme:** Sexual Health

### **The activity/intervention<sup>1</sup>**

#### **What is Speakeasy?**

Speakeasy is an educational programme for parents established by the sexual health charity FPA in schools and community settings. It supports and encourages parents to communicate with their children about sex, relationships and growing up. The course is run over a number of weeks and is delivered directly by FPA trained Speakeasy facilitators.

Speakeasy offers an inclusive non-threatening group based opportunity for parents to gain the knowledge, skills and confidence they need to enable them to communicate with their children about relationships and within that, sexual health. It is designed to be fun and relaxed, providing an atmosphere where parents can learn together from their experiences. Parents are encouraged to gain greater confidence when talking about issues which are often considered taboo or embarrassing.

Creative methods are used within groups including collage and artwork, role play and games as well as more traditional written work for those

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<sup>1</sup> This section draws heavily on: Ramm and Lester (2009), *Understanding the effects of the Speakeasy course-a control group comparison*, London: fpa

who wish. The emphasis is on making the course as accessible as possible for those who will benefit. A taster session is often held to help parents understand what will be involved. Course structure may vary in detail and timing according to the needs of the parents. Tasks may be set after each of the sessions.

Each session lasts approximately two hours and the course typically follows the structure shown in Table One. The Speakeasy course is registered for accreditation with the Open College Network (OCN). For parents who wish to do so, the course and the portfolio work arising from it can be used to gain OCN credits at level one or two (roughly equivalent to an NVQ level 1 or 2). The Speakeasy project has been nominated for the Children & Young People Now Awards 2009 in the Health and Wellbeing Award category. Speakeasy is targeted in areas of multiple deprivation and where high teenage pregnancy rates occur.

<b>Table One</b>	
<b>Week</b>	<b>Topics</b>
Taster Session	What SRE is and how this relates to our children. Brief outline of course and OCN accreditation. Parents and Carers experiences of SRE activity. A selection of activities from Speakeasy course adapted to size and nature of group.
Week One	Hopes, fears, expectations, group agreement, language and the words we know/use, pre-course questionnaire. Physical and emotional changes during puberty. Naming body parts using scientific language.
Week Two	SRE in the context of family life. Time line activity - needs of children at different stages of their life.
Week Three	How to respond to the needs of children in relation to SRE within family life. Giving age-appropriate information and creating learning opportunities with children. Useful resources and websites.
Week Four	Social and cultural attitudes towards sex and sexuality as they relate to children. How children are influenced from inside and outside the home and wider cultural influences. Strategies for dealing with pressure. Stereotypes, positive and negative role

	models collage.
Week Five	Methods of contraception - memory game and fun presentation of different types of contraception. Condom demonstration game. Contraception quiz.
Week Six	Information on Sexually Transmitted Infections and Safer Sex incorporating 'milk game' and jigsaw activity followed by STI quiz.
Week Seven	Strategies for keeping children safe from harm. Re-visit group agreement. Protecting children from abuse (categories of abuse). Risk from harm activity, how to protect children and local reporting of child protection/safeguarding concerns. Case studies activity. Internet safety.
Week Eight	Sex and Relationships Education in schools - statutory and non-statutory guidance. Activity exploring key stages 1-4 and SRE curriculum. Look at and review local school policy. Completion of portfolio. Post-course questionnaire.

### **What were the objectives?**

The Five main aims of the fpa Speakeasy course are to:

1. Increase parents' confidence and communication skills with their children.
2. Help parents show a more positive and open approach to discussions of sex, sexuality and sexual health.
3. Increase parents' factual knowledge around sex and sexual health.
4. Provide a step towards further learning or professional development for traditionally excluded groups of parents.
5. Enable health and educational professionals to give higher priority to work with parents and carers, with the backing of accredited Speakeasy training so that large numbers of parents throughout England will have access to a Speakeasy course.

### **Description of the initiative at Pencoys Primary School:**

Since 2007 Pencoys Primary school has incorporated the Speakeasy course into the school's relationships and sexual health programme. Parents with children of any age attend Speakeasy and in Pencoys even

parents with babies have participated in preparation of their children's needs as they grow.

Originally the programme was facilitated by an external fpa Speakeasy facilitator from Cornwall Healthy Schools Programme. This led to the school's Learning Mentor Tracey Bennett and Parent Governor Mandy Lancaster training as Speakeasy Facilitators and delivering the next parent/carer course at Pencoys. Mandy is now employed by Health Promotion Service (HPS) as Speakeasy Development Worker for Cornwall.

Two more parents from Pencoys have subsequently become Facilitators, ensuring the sustainability of Speakeasy within the school. One of the new Facilitators, Sue Taylor, is now employed sessionally, by HPS, to deliver Speakeasy across the county. Over 40 Speakeasy Facilitators have been trained in Cornwall to deliver the course.

There is an emphasis in the intervention on learning accurate information but parents equally explore a wide range of skills to enable them to communicate more effectively with their children. These include communication skills to enable them to talk comfortably and openly with their children; they learn the scientific language, alongside family and slang terms, for sexual parts and activities and to feel comfortable using them; listening skills are developed as well as interpersonal skills. In addition parents are encouraged to examine their own attitudes to issues of sex and sexuality and to understand the origins of these.

The Speakeasy intervention has been adapted by the school's facilitators to include additional creative and interactive learning tools. As well as discussion, role plays and games, in Pencoys School Speakeasy includes a "University Challenge" style STI Quiz, making a collage of the sexual organs using a wide variety of material and putting a condom on a prosthetic penis while wearing "drunk goggles" - to simulate the experience that many young people have of trying to put a condom on correctly whilst drunk. As Mandy Lancaster explains:

*"Parents are getting an idea of how to talk to their children whilst realising that you can actually make it good fun to learn".*

**Mandy Lancaster, Speakeasy  
Development Worker**

Through the course parents are encouraged to use a timeline to think about when they feel it is appropriate to speak to their children about a wide range of issues:

*"It's about getting them to realise that it's a whole host of conversations that you have through the child's life, not one little session that you have and you give them a book and send them away."*

**Linda May, Head Teacher Pencoys Primary School**

Parents provide peer support within the group for each other and are also constantly supported by the school's open door policy. They can call Tracey Bennett, the Learning Mentor at any time for advice or support. Additionally parents are fully informed of the school's teaching on relationships and sexual health. Prior to children receiving SRE parents are encouraged to watch the Channel Four DVD "Living and Growing". They can do this either in the school or at home with their children. Parents were also involved in writing the school's SRE policy.

The Speakeasy intervention mutually supports the school's wider sexual health programme with pupils. From nursery age the school provides relationships education. In Year One pupils learn social and emotional skills and explore values and attitudes and by Year Two sex and relationships education is fully embedded and continues through to Year Six. Education focuses on exploring different types of relationships (including same-sex relationships), puberty, body changes, feelings and emotions, peer pressure, safeguarding and later contraception and STI's. Pupils are taught communication skills, empathy, safety and health. Teaching style goes beyond the biological model to explore the more emotional and inter-personal aspects of relationships, sex and sexual health. The approach is very interactive involving collages, role plays and a lot of discussion, which is guided by teachers but led by the pupils themselves. Teachers have received training from the "Christopher Winters Project" a sex and relationships consultancy in partnership with Cornwall HPS that provides resources, schemes of work and teacher training in this area.

### **Who was involved?**

The whole school; parents, pupils, teachers, Speakeasy facilitators, Cornwall HPS, incorporating CHS-plus, the Sex and Relationships Advisor for Cornwall and Christopher Winter Project (CWP) facilitators.

### **Were any partners involved?**

CHPS incorporating; Speakeasy (FPA), CHS-plus and CWP

### **How were the outcomes monitored?**

Qualitative interviews with sixteen parents who had not attended the Speakeasy course were matched on demographic characteristics with parents who had attended a Speakeasy course in Bradford.<sup>2</sup>

Qualitative interviews at four time points, between 2005-2008, with parents who attended Speakeasy during 2005.

### **What were the outcomes?**

There have been a number of evaluations of Speakeasy.

This study positively evaluated Speakeasy. It found that in contrast to the parents who had taken the Speakeasy course, some parents who had not felt they had deficits in their knowledge base, were less proactive and open in their discussions with their children and less confident in discussing issues of sexual health.<sup>3</sup>

Parents value the course in the long and short term.

### **Outcomes at Pencoys Primary School:**

- Parents are more trusting of schools delivery of SRE
- If parents have concerns they are more willing to come to the school to speak about them
- Secondary schools report that children from Pencoys are a lot more informed than other children in their year groups
- Parents have become more involved in the school generally from supporting the reading of pupils to participating in the PTA and Governing Body and there is an increased sense of community cohesion. Many of the parents and carers that attended Speakeasy now meet regularly for social occasions

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<sup>2</sup> Ramm, and Lester, 2009, C, *Understanding the effects of the Speakeasy course-a control group comparison*, Brighton: fpa

<sup>3</sup> Ramm, and Lester, 2009, C, *Understanding the effects of the Speakeasy course-a control group comparison*, Brighton: fpa

- Parents' confidence has improved through the course and for some this has led to employment and further training.

### What was learnt?

Advice for others addressing this health need:

- Find out who is able and willing to offer support in your area
- Gather together enthusiastic people who recognise the value of SRE
- Communicate your aims to all and gather stakeholder views to address policy and curriculum content
- Plan to access training for teachers and support staff
- Ideally arrange free child care for parents/carers attending Speakeasy
- Keep communication open and regular, be transparent and make opportunities for debate and discussion
- Respect others views
- Review and adapt
- Make it a normal every day learning experience for children with clear learning outcomes
- Make it fun and accessible for parents/carers to break down the barriers and engage those that are harder to engage with

### Why it works:

The sexual health section to 'A Sex, Drugs and Alcohol Awareness Teaching Resource' contains the following elements which have been linked to effectiveness in the best practice literature:

- Goes beyond an abstinence only approach
- Abstinence only as a model of SRE has been refuted by a major study in the U.S
- Provides information  
*"The children have the knowledge they need to manage themselves more appropriately. Things are often misunderstood and that's where young people get it wrong. The playground gossip can often get children into trouble."*  

**Tracey Bennett, Learning Mentor**
- Adopts an interactive approach  
*"We have a vast array of learning styles within any group, children always respond better to a more personal approach and discussion"*

*and active learning other than pencil and paper, and this applies to adults as well."*

**Linda May, Head Teacher Pencoys Primary School**

- Develops wider life skills

*We aim to develop skills so that children are able to go out and make better life choices. Because our children have the opportunity to re-visit, share, debate, and challenge, they ultimately have a greater understanding so that they are much more capable of dealing with peer pressure positively. "*

**Linda May, Head Teacher Pencoys Primary School**

- Applies across the school and is consistent

*"Most of our teachers are willing to try and answer the children's questions and we have the Learning Mentor who can give time to a child or group of children on any issue. Everyone is involved and informed"*

**Linda May, Headteacher**

- Engages with parents

*"The earlier we engage parents, the better equipped they are to support the work of the school and any issues arising. Children may come home with perhaps a variety of questions and the aim of Speakeasy is to help prepare parents and carers to feel comfortable and relaxed talking to children about growing up."*

**Tracey Bennett, Learning Mentor**

- Led by trained individuals

- *"Many of our Facilitators have participated in a Speakeasy Parents course themselves, their understanding of running a course is deeper, they really know what it is like to be on the receiving end"*

**Mandy Lancaster, Speakeasy Development Worker**

- Delivered over time, not a 'one off'

- *"The earlier a parent or carer starts talking to their child about relationships, sex and growing up the easier it is. The parent and the child grow in confidence together - and when the really tricky questions come along (and they will!) parents and carers are much*

*more able to answer them in an age appropriate way. They learn that it's ok to say if they don't know something, as long as they find out and chat to their child later. Speakeasy opens doors for people and strengthens relationships as we go through them"*

***Kate Pordage, CHSP Lead***

- Starts at a young age

*"We are finding that not all primary and secondary schools are delivering this level of SRE until much later and we feel that its too late, it needs to start much earlier. We believe that we have a responsibility to teach good quality SRE so that children are better prepared to take care of themselves, feel good about themselves and others and develop an ability to make informed and positive choices. In doing so, we also have a responsibility to support their parents and carers."*

**Linda May, Head Teacher Pencoys Primary School**

- Is tailored to pupils needs

*"We use the SHEU survey and other local health data to tailor programmes and as a basis to be more specific to children's individual needs."*

**Linda May, Head Teacher Pencoys Primary School**