



WHEDco's Just Ask Me (JAM) Assessment Analysis 2015-2016

WHEDco's Just Ask Me (JAM) is a peer-led sex education and reproductive health program for 6th through 8th grade students attending WHEDco's After School Enrichment program at PS/MS 218 in the South Bronx. JAM's peer-led program model has a dual purpose: 1) to provide awareness and knowledge to rising teens (6th-8th grade students) about sexual health and relationships and 2) to empower and further the knowledge of the teenaged peer educators (high school students). Peer educators are trained by the Sexual Education Program Coordinator during the Fall. In the Spring, peer educators and the Sexual Education Program Coordinator lead JAM lessons with the students. Six JAM sessions were taught on 1) Healthy relationships, 2) Anatomy, 3) LGBT, 4) Pregnancy, 5) STIs and Protection, and 6) Summary and Reflection. Each grade level was taught in individual sessions, with all of the eight grade students in one session and with both the sixth and seventh grade classes broken into two groups – thus, there were a total of five JAM sessions (one eighth grade, two seventh grades, and 2 sixth grades). Seventy-two (72) total students participated in the JAM pre-assessment.

Beginning in the Fall, the Sexual Education Program Coordinator met with peer educators twice a week to help prepare them to lead the JAM classes. The peer educators revised the lessons from the 2014-2015 school year, with a strong focus on examining the topics through a social justice lens. The peer educators practiced teaching the lessons and learned how to answer sensitive questions. These trainings also served as a way to build community between the peer educators to help build trust within the classroom. Training meetings continued in the Spring, to reflect on and revise the lessons as needed, as well as to offer feedback to one another, and prepare and practice for upcoming sessions.

JAM Assessment

In order to determine learning growth, students were given an assessment before they began JAM, and then given the same assessment a week after their final JAM session. The assessment was comprised of ten questions most with multiple parts with a total of 34 available points. The assessment included open-ended questions, word bank fill-in responses, and matching. The following table depicts the average score (as the percentage of correct or accurate responses) as well as the change between the pre-assessment and post-assessment. As seen in the table, all three grades had pre-assessment scores under 70%. The 6th graders made a substantial gain from the pre-assessment to the post-assessments with an almost 90% increase. The 7th graders also increased substantially at an almost 60% increase. The 8th graders made the lower gain of almost 25%; however, their pre-assessment score was considerably higher than that of the 6th and 7th graders, and the 8th graders scored the highest on the post-assessment, with a total average score of 82%.

Table 1. Summary of Pre- and Post-Assessments by Grade

	Pre-Assessment	Post-Assessment	Difference in percentage points	Percent change between assessments
6 th grade	34.7%	63.5%	+ 30.3%	+ 87.3%
7 th grade	48.9%	76.5%	+ 27.6%	+ 56.4%
8 th grade	67.0%	82.0%	+ 15.0%	+ 22.4%

Through the post-assessment, JAM students expressed a clearer understanding of consent as well as the specific notion of enthusiastic consent. Consent was explained as asking a partner for permission to engage in specific activities. Students explained that enthusiastic consent consisted of being “happy, proud, and excited to give someone permission to make contact with you” and that you should “ask your partner if they really want to” engage in sexual activities.

There was also consensus that it is important to wait for the right person and communicate with him/her about their feelings; a common sentiment was to "stop and let the partner express their feelings" if they sound unsure. The students agreed that tone and absence of pressure are fundamental to enthusiastic consent. Students showed a tremendous grasp of the concept of consent and learned about effective, respectful communication practices.

The students also expressed knowledge of the appropriate responses to give if someone makes homophobic or transphobic remarks. In response to a remark such as, "That is so gay," students responded with "That is very disrespectful" and "insulting." In response to a remark such as, "Transgender people are weird, they should just be normal," students defended the transgender community, and said that a person who makes these remarks is "judgmental" and "offensive;" in addition they questioned what “normal” is supposed to mean.

On the subject of STI's and Protection, the students demonstrated an increase of knowledge for appropriate forms of contraception and protection from sexually transmitted infections. The students learned that it is not necessary to pay to get tested for an STI, and that the process is confidential. Students also became more aware of clinics or other medical facilities they can use to receive free and confidential sexual health services. Students also expressed that they feel most comfortable talking to their family members, the Sexual Education Program Coordinator, or a close friend when they need to talk about issues related to relationships or sexual health.

Peer Educators Experience

The peer educators are fundamental to the success of JAM. A total of eleven students were active peer educators during the 2015-2016 school year. These young people are extremely committed, dedicated, and passionate about their role as a peer educator. In order to better understand their experiences as a

peer educator, WHEDco's Research, Policy and Evaluation team held a focus group with eight of the peer educators at the end of JAM.

The peer educators all fundamentally enjoy and relish the opportunity to educate the JAM students on sexual health, reproduction, and relationships. The peer educators strongly believed that being close in age to the JAM students was an essential component of the program which allowed them to relate well to the students and understand the students' perspectives and experiences, yet also be seen as a model or mentor. In addition to educating the students in JAM, the peer educators saw themselves as educating the entire community on these issues – "I am giving back to my community by teaching these students, my friends, my family, anyone who needs to ask questions or get information can come to me." The peer educators enjoy being a resource and love when the students develop knowledge and cultivate a larger perspective on these issues. The peer educators frequently discussed the importance of sharing their knowledge and creating a safe space for everyone to learn and live healthy lives where everyone is respected.

In addition to what the peer educators give to JAM and their communities, it is also evident that they have received positive benefits in their role as peer educators – primarily in their own growth and in the bonds they have developed with each other and the Sexual Education Program Coordinator. Several peer educators spoke of how much they have learned while being a peer educator – "I learned this information when I was in JAM as a student, but I *really* learned when I became a peer educator." Peer educators spoke of becoming extremely knowledgeable, more open-minded, and more conscious of the importance of these issues. The peer educators also discussed the development of their critical thinking skills. In addition, the peer educators explained they are more confident, less shy, and much more adept at public speaking. The peer educators also spoke of their increased levels of maturity and the patience they have developed when trying to educate people who express disrespectful ideas or state factually incorrect information. Finally the peer educators have developed incredible bonds with each other that they all greatly cherish. JAM is a safe space for them as well to be themselves, encourage each other, learn from each other, challenge each other, and support each other in all facets of their lives. The peer educators have also developed a very strong bond with the Sexual Education Program Coordinator – the students appreciate everything they have learned from the Sexual Education Program Coordinator as well as the support and interest she has in their lives. JAM is a very special space for the peer educators – "we really are like a family and not in a cliché way" so much so that numerous peer educators would like to replicate elements of JAM when they go to college.