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Youth to Youth in Health  
1989—1990 Progress Report

"Thank you a hundred-fold for bringing your program here. All the children to this day are singing your songs and talking about your skits and teachings. You really can never possibly comprehend the extent of the success of the Youth to Youth having come here. It really has boosted the youths' self-esteem and pride."

—Response following visit  
 to Ailinglaplap Atoll, August 1989.

During 1989-1990, the Youth to Youth in Health dramatically expanded their outreach health/culture promotion to islands outside of Majuro, the capital; held their first two in a continuing series of youth leadership seminars on Ebeye Island; established new chapters of the organization on several islands; and supported the Ministry of Health Services' primary health care program throughout the country.

An equally important development in the evolution of the program since it began in 1986 was the late 1989 government approval of the Youth to Youth in Health's incorporation as a registered, non-profit agency.

A detailed narrative of accomplishments, with objectives for the period underlined, follows:

1. Expand health education and culture awareness outreach to communities living on islands outside of Majuro Atoll.

Grants to the program allowed the Youth to Youth in Health to make a series of visits to outer atoll communities during 1989 and 1990. The visits marked the first time that the youth group has been able to take its health and culture promotion programs to communities outside of the two urban centers, Majuro and Ebeye.

Youth to Youth in Health (YTYIH) teams of 12-15 youth volunteers joined with Division of Population and Family Planning staff to visit Ailinglaplap Atoll (August 23-September 3, 1989), Jaluit Atoll (October 23-30, 1989), Namodrik Atoll (March 3-10, 1990), and Arno Atoll (July 3-6, 1990). YTYIH visited these islands in response to requests from the community, school and elected leaders.

The YTYIH role is to share and discuss with youth and the community in general

about their activities — skits, health songs, puppet shows, and traditional songs and dances. On Ailinglaplap, for instance, the YTYIH visited four of the inhabited islands and virtually all of the people on each of these islands participated in one of more of the cultural events, health shows, health fairs, and classes led by the YTYIH. A YTYIH/Family Planning report on the Ailinglaplap visit contains the following passage about involving young people at a health fair for elementary students aged 5-14:

"The health fair is the means of sharing health information such as cancer, family planning contraceptive methods and family planning philosophy which include adequate budget for a family, good relationship within a family, child spacing, importance of examinations and pap smears, sexually transmitted diseases, etc. The Family Planning staff and YTYIH members were able to involve the children of Jeh Island by teaching them the health songs and to ease their shyness by taking their hands and dancing with them. Different health riddles were played with the children and those who gave the correct answers received awards which were balloons and pencils which have the Family Planning logo and messages about family planning" (all in Marshallese language).

A report from the visit to Jaluit, where one of the government's two public high schools is located, commented on the hunger for health knowledge among the students who came to a class with YTYIH members:

"The junior class wanted to discuss the disadvantages of consuming alcohol and smoking. The class expressed their concern that these two diseases are getting worse in their school. Some of the students were seriously concerned of increasing smoking among the women. They wanted to know what can be done about it."

2. Stimulate the growth of Youth to Youth in Health 'chapters' on islands outside of Majuro.

Though the YTYIH presence is small, relative to the population of 45,000, 1989-1990 brought an unprecedented expansion of the group because of its increased visibility through these outreach activities. Generally, each island will have one or more loosely organized youth groups, but these rarely are actively addressing community problems or promoting cultural awareness. During each of

the visits to Ailinglaplap, Jaluit, Arno and Namodrik atolls, the YTYIH members were able to meet and share their ideas with the youth on each atoll. This has led to the establishment of chapters of the group on each one of these islands which communicate and exchange with the YTYIH on Majuro in different ways.

In mid-1989, the YTYIH together with the Family Planning program sponsored its first ever youth leadership seminar on Ebeye Island, Kwajalein Atoll, the second urban center in the Marshalls, and followed up with a second leadership seminar in the summer of 1990. These seminars stimulated the creation of an active Youth to Youth in Health chapter on that island. Since the leadership seminars, the YTYIH on Ebeye have supported the Health Ministry, assisting with outreach immunization and clinic services to other islands within Kwajalein Atoll. On Ebeye during national health month in April, the YTYIH used their attention-getting songs to draw the community into health fairs and other programs on the island.

3. Sponsor leadership seminars to train youth health educators/ motivators on Majuro and Ebeye.

Since it launched its leadership training seminars for youth in 1986, more than 100 young people have been trained as health educators/ motivators. The Marshall Islands Journal reported on the opening of a youth seminar in Majuro in June 1989:

"A panel of top Health Services officials turned out Monday to kick off the fourth summer health seminar for the Youth to Youth in Health program. Health Minister Ruben Zackhras, making his point by using a poster showing the island sinking from too many people, said the fast growing population is the main problem facing the Marshall Islands...Young people need to take their part in slowing population growth. The Ministry can't train all the youth in the Marshall Islands, so 'you are the ones' who will take the lead.

"Hospital administrator Russell Edwards said that though he is on the curative side of health care, he sees that most of the problems in the hospital are preventable. 'Young people can talk the language other young people speak,' he said, encouraging the youth to get involved. Dr. Neal Palafox, medical director of preventive services, said 'you are important and that's why we are here. Only Marshallese will save the

Marshall Islands. As Russell said, it's not enough to sit here and listen. You have to go out and teach other young people'."

The two week leadership seminar schedule included films, slide presentations and demonstrations on the population explosion, youth suicide and prevention, family planning, sexually transmitted diseases, youth responsibility to the community, and the value of Marshallese customs.

The second week of the seminar the participants break up into smaller groups to work on projects: composing health songs, developing skits with messages about health and social problems, producing slide presentations about the YTYIH as an example of what youth can do, and drawing posters. These activities were presented to their instructors, relatives and friends on the closing night.

The Marshall Islands Journal reported on the evening:

"A group of young people showed multi-media talents Monday night, using slide shows, an overhead projector, songs, posters and flip charts to promote Marshallese customs, and to talk about health problems of smoking cigarettes, malnutrition among children, and what youth can do in their community. The presentations touched off a great deal of laughter and applause from the audience of 40 or so parents, friends and health staff."

The overall goals of the YTYIH program are:

1. To develop in young people an identity and pride in their own culture and customs;
2. To promote improved community health by stimulating young people and adults to take responsibility for their own health.

The first goal is accomplished through training the young people in the Majuro and Ebeye youth leadership seminars. In addition to learning about health and social problems, the youth learned the traditional songs and dances of their elders which have been passed down from generation-to-generation of Marshallese. A majority of the YTYIH members were born and grew up on Majuro or Ebeye and have almost no knowledge/experience about their own culture. Many of them are ashamed of their culture and customs. The seminars are able to counteract that by submerging the youth in the excitement and beauty of their culture, and giving

them an understanding of the power and responsibility they have to become "change agents" in their society. In this organization they are constantly learning and having positive, first hand experience. They gain this through traveling to the outer islands promoting health and culture, and they learn from the people on the outer islands at the same time. The second goal is accomplished through community outreach activities, which the youth lead following their leadership trainings.

The YTYIH have received written comments from a number of people who have experienced their programs.

**Majuro Mayor Amatlain Kabua:** "On behalf of the council of Majuro Atoll Local Government we would like to recognize and give our sincere appreciation for all your efforts and hard work in promoting health and culture throughout our community. You are truly professional and I want to congratulate your group for the excellent performance you continue to offer freely to this community. MALGov stands ready to assist and support in whatever we can do to help."

**Phil Lum, a pastor with the Salvation Army in Majuro:** "Allow me to express my thanks to your wonderful group for the program you presented. I believe your message was well received by all those who were there. I commend you on having such a vibrant group of young people, who are multi-talented and very enthusiastic about the important message they present."

**Ajenta Luther, the student counsellor at Jaluit High School:** "I am writing to request your group to visit our school. I came to realize that my students need that kind of information your group are sharing. I was in Majuro last summer, I saw as well as attended some of your program. I not only admire your group, but fully say keep up the good work."

October, 1990