

# Developing Powerful Public Awareness Campaigns

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It is often by looking at the day, week, or month designated for specific populations or issues that we can see who and what is marginalized within the dominant culture. So Eating Disorder Awareness Week joins Black History Month and International Women's Day, for instance. It is through raising public awareness that we hope that such marginalized and misrepresented people and issues will be better integrated into everyday understanding and appreciation. Our global aim at NEDIC is thus to work towards a time when *every day* is a celebration of the natural diversity of human bodies and abilities.

## Meeting the needs of participants

Eating Disorder Awareness Week (EDAW) has come and gone. There were many successful events held across the county, among which was what we believe to be the first ever youth conference devoted to body-image and eating disorders. This conference, organized by NEDIC and held at the Ontario Science Centre, was specifically designed for students from Grade Seven to OAC. Students' workshops included exploration of body image and self-esteem through the use of expressive techniques of voice, movement, and visualization.

While the conference was open to both sexes, certain sessions were closed to either males or females to ensure that issues of safety and vulnerability were respected. This also served to optimize interaction and self-expression. One workshop was exclusively for male students. It sought to explore some of the pressures that young men are experiencing in measuring themselves against cultural stereotypes. Useful connections between these issues and the experiences of young women were made.

Another workshop was designated for teachers and healthcare workers. The main focus of the conference was to acknowledge and hear issues of concern around food and weight preoccupation, and to support and encourage workable solutions for students. Looking for appropriate solutions is particularly important in the context of individual and community resources.

All in all, evaluations of the day point to this being an event worth repeating. While there were probably many others, 110 EDAW events from eight provinces were registered with NEDIC. They included focus groups to identify the ongoing needs and concerns of local communities, screening programmes, the establishment of peer mentoring programmes within schools, fashion shows celebrating size diversity, candlelight vigils, public forums, and media campaigns amongst others.

## Planning ahead for success

While these events may have from the outside simply been available one day, for many of us they were the culmination of months of work. For those of us who work in coalitions and/or with feminist practices the richness of these processes was largely affirmed. We thank the many individuals and agencies engaged in this work, and encourage others to join us: It is rewarding work.

Now is a good opportunity to sit down and plan at least one event for International No Diet Day (INDD) on 6 May 1996, while the glow of success and the fresh imprint of new and improved ideas are still fresh in one's mind. Interested individuals often wish to do something to commemorate EDAW or INDD, but are intimidated by a perceived lack of resources. The most important asset one has in organizing an event is enthusiasm and dedication. It can take remarkably little money to organize and hold an event. This is especially true when one forms coalitions with other individuals or agencies who may provide access to venues, publicity, or other resources. Some of the questions that are helpful in planning an event follow:

- Whom should we invite to sit on a committee? What resources do these people bring to the committee and event? Do we have a good participatory representation of our population?
- Who is our target audience? (age, gender, cultural groups, etc.)
- What kind of theme would we like to promote? (e.g., prevention, secondary or tertiary care, nutrition, socio-cultural issues, etc.)
- What kind of tone would we like to promote? (e.g., primarily celebratory, educational/informational, non-medical)
- In what form would we like our event to take place? (e.g., lecture, round-table, conference, arts performance, information booth, mass media blitz, etc.)
- What kind of venue would be most appropriate for our event?
- How much is it going to cost to sponsor the event(s)? (venue, honoraria, materials, publicity, etc.)
- Whom can we approach for donations? What will be provided in return? Are sponsors comparable with the message we want to convey?
- Where can volunteers be found? (schools, women's centres, community groups)
- How and where can we best publicize the event(s)? (media, schools, health and women's centres, etc.)
- What promotional materials do we need?
- Have we called NEDIC to see what resources/promotional materials are available?

## **Working together to make a difference**

It is a good time to be focussing on opportunities that will maximize the impact of our work. To enable individuals and communities to construct a better future we need to engage in a process of identifying and clarifying problems, articulating how we would like things to be different, looking at viable alternatives and then translating these into achievable goals and actions. These problem-solving activities can benefit from working in strong coalitions. Let's work together to make a safer, more respectful environment for all!

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