

Teaching AIDS Prevention at Harwood High? Don't Say *Blow Job!*

Vermont CARES still cares after banned from Harwood Union High School

Fred Kuhr

One day last November, John Olson, education coordinator for Vermont CARES, an AIDS service organization based in Burlington, spoke to students at Harwood Union High School, in South Duxbury, concerning the prevention of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. On that same day, Harwood became the first high school in the state to adopt a condom distribution policy making condoms available to students from certain teachers as well as the school nurse. Later that month, the principal of Harwood, Glenn Frank, stated that Vermont CARES would not be invited

back to present similar sessions in the future. After parents complained about Olson's use of "street language", Frank was reported in the *Burlington Free Press* as saying, "There were certainly parts of it that I feel were inappropriate."

Questions remained unanswered after the *Free Press* ran its story on November 27 covering this incident. Olson and Vermont CARES have presented the same classroom instruction as part of its "Face To Face" program in other high schools throughout Addison, Chittenden, Rutland, and Washington counties. Student reaction to these sessions, including the one presented at Harwood, are generally favorable. Also, Harwood's new condom distribution policy is a "model", according to Kate Hill, Executive Director of Vermont CARES, and the decision to ban Vermont CARES "flies in the face of their very realistic approach." So why did they do it?


Hill places the majority of the blame for Frank's decision on the minority of community members who fought the condom distribution policy "tooth and nail". Although Olson's appearance at Harwood on the same day was coincidence, this minority saw Olson and Vermont CARES as their next target after losing the first battle.

Hill said that their policy at every school is to use "language that lots of kids will understand" including terms like blow job and go down on as well

as oral sex. According to Olson, some parents are "a little surprised or upset by street language...Some kids may be surprised by an adult using this kind of language." Both Hill and Olson agree, however, that this mix of technical language and street slang is the best way to reach all the students.

Frank stated the school's new policy concerning AIDS education in the *Free Press* article, "...we will handle that subject ourselves, with our own teachers who are the best qualified, because...the children know them and trust them." According to Hill, for the "average teacher", this approach does not work. Most adults "bring (their) own baggage about sex" with them, she said. Hill also pointed out that since teachers and students already know each other on a daily basis, many students would not be as likely to ask personal questions. Olson's feelings on the subject are similar. "I would love to see all educators do this kind of a program," he said in a phone interview, "but that doesn't always work."

Another complaint lodged by angry parents was that Olson only spent five minutes out of the 45 minute session talking about abstinence. Olson responded by saying that he always tells students that abstinence is a valid option, "but they've heard that already". He sees his job as getting out the facts on HIV and AIDS to the students and teaching them how to reduce the risk of infection. The personal issues of HIV and AIDS must also be discussed, he



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