Aurora Silayan-Go

Entertainment for health

Concerned about the increase in pregnancies (especially illegitimate ones) among Filipino teenagers, the Population Center Foundation tried a non-traditional approach to this and other traditional problems facing young people. Two popular songs with a cautionary message about young love were produced and released by a commercial recording company as a backdrop to the Foundation’s educational and support activities, featuring a telephone hot line staffed by experienced counsellors.

Public health is no longer just a medical issue but one of public life-style. And the prescriptions need no longer be written by health professionals alone. Entertainment for public education and public health can be a powerful approach, as shown by a multi-media campaign for young people carried out in the Philippines.

Sponsored by the Johns Hopkins University/Center for Communication Program, the campaign was implemented in Metro Manila in 1987–88 by the Population Center Foundation (PCF). PCF’s concern for youth development with respect to sexuality and fertility management dates back to 1979. Even then, almost 10% of all live births in the Philippines were to mothers aged 19 and below. Among teenage mothers, 17% of births were illegitimate. To counter these trends, PCF designed and tested projects ranging from the training of school counsellors to the setting up of multi-service youth centres and industry-based programmes, and even the integration of health information and counselling services into government health centres. It was only in 1987 that we ventured to try out an approach we had never explored before.

With technical assistance from Johns Hopkins, what originally was just a telephone hot line for young people was redesigned and expanded. The idea was to utilize music and media and link them to the telephone counselling service. The campaign was to have a time frame of one and a half years (June 1987–December 1988) and was aimed at young people 15 to 24 years old.

The first step was to produce, release and popularize, through regular commercial channels, songs that would deliver relevant messages to the young—messages about responsible sexual behaviour in boy-girl relationships. Two songs were released and promoted through a recording company, two corresponding video clips being produced as support materials. Once the songs became popular, they were used as background music for four television commercials and three radio spots intended to (a) deliver self-contained messages to young listeners and viewers, and (b) advertise the

Ms Silayan-Go is Vice-President, Population Center Foundation, South Superhighway, Makati, Philippines.
availability of the telephone counselling hot line, called “Dial-A-Friend”. The “Dial-A-Friend” service not only provided information and counselling, but had links to 25 referral centres.

Music, television/radio advertising, a telephone hot line and a network of referral centres were thus the major components of a campaign designed to reach out to the great number of young people in Metro Manila, a city of 7 million people, of whom 1.4 million are in the 15–24 age bracket.

How the campaign was implemented

The songs

The decision to use a recording company to release the songs commercially, and to keep the involvement of PCF quiet, was deliberate. The songs had to be a commercial success before PCF could use them for health promotion purposes. Otherwise, we ran the risk of turning away young people with our social development objectives.

The songs were selected on the basis of extensive pre-testing among students from six schools and meticulous review by a panel of musicians, composers, music directors and managers of popular singers. Two songs emerged as having the most appropriate message and best musical scoring among the original 15 entries: “That Situation”, a fast number sung by Lea Salonga with a group called the Menudo, and “I Still Believe”, a ballad performed by the same female singer together with Charlie Masso, formerly of the Menudo. “That Situation” was composed by Gary Valenciano and “I Still Believe” by Manny Aquino.

A number of criteria were used in the selection of a female artist. She had to be a positive role model for Filipino youth, with a following among the target audience of low- and middle-class youngsters; a talented singer and dancer; articulate enough to do live promotion activities; and available for production and promotional work. Lea Salonga, who has since become an international star, met all these criteria.

To popularize the two songs, a video clip was produced for each of them.

Exactly what message do the two songs convey?

“That Situation” tells young people that they should avoid serious boy-girl relationships which could lead to problems they can’t handle; their future is in their hands. Thus, they should be careful and “not get into that situation”. Similarly, “I Still Believe” is a duet between a boy and a girl who are very attracted to each other and think that they are meant for each other. But because they are still very young, the song cautions them to “wait for a while”, for love must stand the test of time. As the lyrics say, “I don’t think you should need me for just a lonely night”.

Corollary activities were undertaken to reinforce the message of the songs. A programme hosted by Lea Salonga toured 12 public and private schools in the Metro Manila area. It included a question and answer session that drove home the songs’
From an advertisement for “I Still Believe”. The song’s lyrics are printed on the back of the card.

“I Still Believe”

message and drew out audience reactions to it. Approximately 40,000 students took part in these campus tours. A second activity, also carried out in schools, was an art contest to interpret the message of the songs. Finally, there was a systematic effort to ensure that Lea Salonga appeared as a guest on televised entertainment shows where she could be interviewed. In all these settings, Lea would advertise the telephone hot line as well.

**Television and radio advertisements**

For the production of our broadcast commercials, advertising agencies were invited to bid for the contract and one was selected by PCF from among four. Criteria used for selection were creativity, impact and the agency’s credentials.

Four television commercials were developed. Three depicted crisis situations faced by young people today, namely peer pressure to have sex, sexual identity crisis, and unintended pregnancy. The fourth was a special advertisement featuring Lea Salonga and making use of footage from the video clip. The messages of all these commercials were not to lose hope and despair when faced with “a deep problem” (unintended pregnancy), not to give in to confusion when things are happening too quickly (pressure to have sex, confusion over sexual identity), and a reminder that “there is someone you can count on—just ‘Dial-A-Friend’”.

The radio spots were longer. This gave us more time to send out positive messages, and not just ways of coping with crisis. Our goal was to communicate the messages of “saying no to sex as a teenager”, “respect for the values of another” (one’s partner) and “shared responsibility between boy and girl”, while simultaneously referring to

In a post-campaign survey eight months after the launching of “I Still Believe”, 85% of respondents chose the song as one of their favourites, 56% said it had had an impact on them, and 90% were aware of the telephone counselling service “Dial-A-Friend”.

“Dial-A-Friend”. Developing these messages into creative commercials was the challenge given to the advertising agency.

**Dial-A-Friend**

For the hot line, four telephone lines were installed and staffed by six counsellors, including two who did relief duty. The
counsellors were trained in psychology or had prior counselling experience. They were given special training in telephone counselling, time management, values clarification, and the upgrading of knowledge about sexuality.

The decision to use a recording company to release the songs commercially, and to keep the involvement of the Population Center Foundation quiet, was deliberate.

The telephone service operated from 1.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m. daily, except on Sunday and in case of very bad weather. On average there were about 250 calls a week asking for help with a wide range of problems, including boy–girl relationships, parent–child relationships, sexual identity, premarital or extramarital sex, marital problems, drug problems, depression, suicide and abortion.

A total of 7797 calls were received between 18 June and 29 December 1988. Documentation over this six-month period showed that the most common problems concerned:

- boy–girl relationships 2453 (31.5%)
- parent–child relationships 515 (6.6%)
- peer relationship 515 (6.6%)
- self-image 507 (6.5%)
- sexual behaviour 341 (4.4%)
- husband–wife relationships 198 (2.5%)

Calls were heaviest in the early afternoon, between 1.00 p.m. and 4.00 p.m., and were usually made from the homes of the callers. Seven out of ten callers were females, most of them single (85%). Close to half of the callers had some college education (46.5%) while about a third had gone as far as high school. The campaign obviously reached the target audience, as shown by the fact that 45% of callers were 15–19 years old and 22% were 20–24 years old.

The referral network

The referral network of 25 centres consisted of local government health centres, school-based guidance centres, a home for unwed mothers, and a legal assistance office. In addition, referrals could be made to six experts concerning sexually transmitted diseases, obstetrics and gynaecology, and psychiatry.

Services provided through this network included drug abuse prevention and rehabilitation, legal advice, marriage counselling, job placement and medical consultation. The network was particularly important for problems requiring long-term intervention, such as problems connected with homosexuality, incest, sexual frustration, exhibitionism, marital problems, premarital pregnancy, and drugs.

Did anybody listen?

A post-campaign survey of 561 respondents aged 15–24 years was conducted in January 1988, 8 months after the launch of “I Still Believe” and its video clip. The aided recall was 82% and the song was chosen by 85% of respondents as one of their favourites.

Half of those who heard the song had discussed it with peers and siblings, which is evidence of a ripple effect. More interestingly, the callers of “Dial-A-Friend” also knew of the song, as recorded in the counselling forms.

In the same survey, the video clip was spontaneously recalled as number one by
Video songs recalled by 561 respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song Title</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Spontaneous</th>
<th>Aided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Only You&quot;</td>
<td>(British)</td>
<td>8% (4th)</td>
<td>81% (1st)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Power of Love&quot;</td>
<td>(British)</td>
<td>14% (3rd)</td>
<td>79% (2nd)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Anything for You&quot;</td>
<td>(United States)</td>
<td>15% (2nd)</td>
<td>78% (3rd)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I Still Believe&quot;</td>
<td>(Philippines)</td>
<td>22% (1st)</td>
<td>64% (4th)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Make It Real&quot;</td>
<td>(United States)</td>
<td>6% (5th)</td>
<td>54% (5th)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22% of respondents, but aided recall caused the level to jump to 64%. When respondents were presented with a list of titles, "I Still Believe" was the fourth most popular among the top five video clips of 1988, the other four of which were foreign. Considering how quickly young people's tastes in popular music change, these findings in January 1989 point to the real popularity of a song launched in March 1988.

When asked if "I Still Believe" had had any impact on them, more than half of the respondents (56%) said yes. Among these, seven out of ten claimed the song had stimulated them to seek more information on and to discuss issues such as caution in choosing a boyfriend or girlfriend, how to maintain a relationship, the exercise of self-control, preparation for marriage, and giving priority to one's studies.

Nine out of ten interviewees were aware of the telephone counselling service "Dial-A-Friend". The use of the song as background music in the radio and television commercials probably produced a synergistic effect. In addition to the claimed impact of the song by listeners, many perceived (43% unaided) that "Dial-A-Friend" was a campaign on responsible boy-girl relationships.

An effort was made to weave together the components of the campaign so that one unifying, connecting theme could be maintained throughout. The youngsters targeted by the campaign would thus be made aware not just of songs with a message but, more importantly, of the support systems available to them. "Dial-A-Friend", with its trained counsellors and referral network, was there to provide correct information, facilitate clarification and decision-making, and make referrals. In sum, it was there to serve as a "friend" committed to the values of self-worth, respect for others, shared responsibility and understanding of parents—a friend with a belief in saying no to sex as a teenager, saying no to drugs and smoking, and above all, planning one's own life for the complex future ahead.

* * *

The campaign demonstrated that the use of entertainment media for social development holds a great deal of promise. As a pilot project, it generated learning and greater confidence for pursuing similar endeavours.

"Dial-A-Friend", staffed by six counsellors, received about 250 calls a week, over two-thirds from youngsters 15–24 years old. Services provided through the 25-centre referral network included drug abuse prevention and rehabilitation, legal advice, marriage counselling, job placement and medical consultation.

But much remains to be done in terms of tapping the full potential of modern technology and educating the media to have a greater sense of social responsibility for moulding the health of the young in its broadest sense: mental, social, physical and moral.