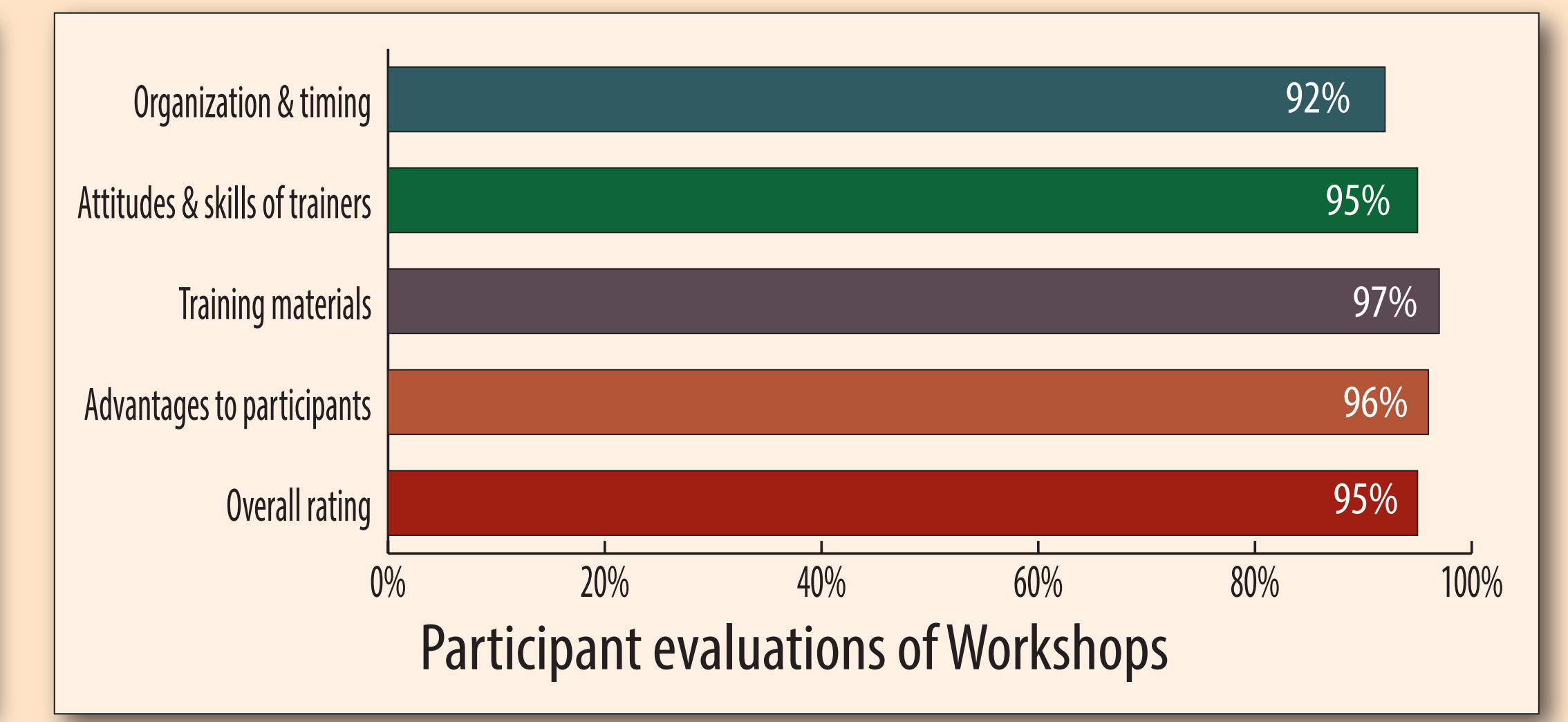


Smoking Sucks Workshops: Peer-education for tobacco reduction by Cree youth

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Smoking in Eeyou Istchee

- Eeyou Istchee has a population of 17,000 in 9 communities.
- Smoking rates among Cree youth are extremely high (~75%).
- Youth in the 10–24 age group are 26% of the total population.



Involving Indigenous youth in tobacco reduction

Engaging Indigenous youth in tobacco control makes excellent sense:

- when we see how many youth are current smokers,
- considering that these youth are one of the largest demographic groups in their communities, and
- knowing that smoking is still the single biggest factor in preventable disease and death in Indigenous communities and in Canada.

The Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay had previously published culturally-adapted and age-appropriate versions of the books *Smoking Sucks: Kick Butt!* for youth and *Healing from Smoking*, for adults.



We then designed workshops for Cree youth based on the book and funded by Health Canada's Federal Tobacco Control Strategy. The goals of these *Smoking Sucks Workshops* were to:

- build critical awareness of the causes and effects of smoking, and
- empower youth trainees to share their learning in both formal and informal presentations with people in their schools and communities.

Methods

Smoking Sucks Workshops

- We have delivered 11 *Smoking Sucks Workshops* (8 in 2012 and 3 in 2014), training 104 students in all 9 communities in Eeyou Istchee. 9 more Workshops are planned for 2015.
- The target group is high school students: smokers and non-smokers.
- Workshops have ranged from 7–13 participants, aged 12–19. (From experience we have found that students aged 16–19 respond best.)
- Workshops last 4 days, and use participatory exercises to engage and inspire students to examine the root causes of smoking and its effects on health.
- A program to guide smokers who want to quit is also presented.



Goal 1: Critical awareness about non-traditional tobacco use

- We continually ask "But why?" to dig deeper – from the immediate to the root causes of the problems of smoking. Our goal is to develop critical awareness rather than simply a factual understanding of the health hazards of smoking. In doing this, we also examine the role of colonialism and the intergenerational transmission of trauma.
- Although the non-traditional use of tobacco was originally introduced by outsiders, if things are to change then it is up to those present now, – especially youth – to break the cycle of addiction to tobacco by taking greater control over their lives.

Goal 2: Empowering youth to share their learning

- We empower youth trainees to share their learning with others.
- Participants practise presenting in small and large groups, ending with a presentation to the community and/or school students.



Results/Outcomes

Cessation behaviour

- Although the Workshop goal is tobacco education, not cessation, more than half of the smokers decided to quit.
- The pie charts below show that 55% of participants were smokers at the start of the workshops and that by the end, only 23% were still smoking.

Participant, peer and community feedback

- Of 104 participant evaluations using 21 criteria (under the headings of Organization & timing, Attitudes and skills of trainers, Training materials, and Advantages to participants), the average rating was 95% (range 88%–100%) – see bar chart above.
- There was enthusiastic anecdotal support from parents, family and friends of the youth participants. Trainers were asked to continue the workshops.

Sharing their learning

- Each workshop concludes with participants sharing what they learned in a formal presentation at a school assembly or community event. Speaking in public and speaking out about the problems of tobacco is a major accomplishment for most students. The confidence and skill they develop in the workshops helps them carry their learning across to peers and family.

Conclusion

- This project aimed to involve Cree youth in tobacco control. To do so, we had to help them discover how and why "*Smoking Sucks*" and help them learn how to "*Kick Butt!*" and support them in their new roles as students taking the lead for change on this issue.
- Whether participants themselves decide to remain non-smokers or manage to quit now or in the future is, of course, entirely their own business. But what the Workshops have done is provide them with critical thinking skills and confidence to assess their choices, and share their learning.
- In our upcoming work, we will include past students as co-trainers, implement a Distance Education Program for Community Health Representatives, and initiate smoke-free Challenges between communities.
- Our ongoing evaluation will assess the long-term impact of the Workshops, and engage students in research to compare data from national surveys with our own results.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the outstanding youth we worked with: many were skeptical at first, then gave their very best to make the *Smoking Sucks Workshops* succeed – for each other, their peers, families and communities. Our thanks also for the support we received from parents, teachers, our colleagues at the Cree Board of Health and Social Services, and our partners at Santé Québec, and Health Canada.

