



## **Exploring Enterprise-Based Life-Planning Skills Training**

**Guangdong Provincial Highway Company**

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**China Youth  
Reproductive Health Project**



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**Abstract:** This case study documents the implementation from November 2001 to September 2005 of the China Youth Reproductive Health project by the Guangdong Provincial Highway Company, a division of the Guangdong Transportation Group. Project processes, outcomes, and challenges related to implementation of life-planning skills training and other project activities are shared.

## 1. Background

The China Family Planning Association (CFPA) and PATH jointly implemented the innovative China Youth Reproductive Health (YRH) project. The program operated in 14 sites across 12 Chinese provinces, with an overall goal of improving adolescent sexual and reproductive health. To reach this goal, the project staff adopted a holistic strategy focused on a youth development approach, including the provision of life-planning skills (LPS) training for youth. Additional project components included policy and advocacy development, youth-friendly services, monitoring and evaluation, media involvement, and informational materials. This case study focuses on one site's efforts to integrate project activities, particularly LPS training, into the Guangdong Provincial Highway Company located in Shenzhen, China.

### 1.1 Employee structure and characteristics

Specializing in highway construction and management, the Guangdong Provincial Highway Company supervises over 20 projects involving highway construction and administration. The company is worth approximately 35.38 billion RMB (about US\$4.42 billion) and manages approximately 1,340 kilometers of highway. Overall, the company employs 5,436 workers, the majority of whom—92 percent—are between the ages of 18 and 25, with an even ratio of males to females. Of these, 3,174 are unmarried.

Additional characteristics of the company's employees include:

- **“Double” migrants.** Almost all (99 percent) of the company's employees are migrant workers who come from other provinces. These migrant workers are stationed in numerous toll plazas along the highway, far from Guangzhou City, where the company headquarters is located. As a result of this, they are considered migrants twice over.
- **Common living arrangements.** Scattered along the 1,340-kilometer highway, most work in remote areas but live together with co-workers in company housing under a semi-military administrative structure.
- **Similar education levels.** About 78 percent of the young workers are high school graduates, while 16.5 percent of them have bachelor's or associate's degrees.

## 1.2 Needs assessment: young employees' reproductive health status

In August 2001, the company family planning office<sup>1</sup> conducted an assessment to determine what service and education needs existed among employees. They distributed 140 survey questionnaires regarding reproductive and sexual health knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors to unmarried employees. Among the 134 people who completed and returned the questionnaires, 66 were male and 68 female. In addition, they conducted two focus group discussions (FGDs) with a total of 35 employees and managers to gain further information on reproductive and sexual health knowledge and attitudes and needs for education and services. One focus group consisted of 10 male and 10 female unmarried youth, while the second included 15 managerial staff, including the office director, human resources manager, and toll plaza and road administration division supervisors.

### 1.2.1 Knowledge

Survey findings showed that young workers had some understanding of sexual and reproductive health. However, this knowledge was topical and general, and misconceptions remained. For example, only about 20 percent of participants could correctly name the male reproductive organs, and about 50 percent could correctly identify the female reproductive organs.

### 1.2.2 Attitudes

Table 1

Questions	Agree		Somewhat agree		Disagree	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
1. It is understandable and acceptable for two people in love to have premarital sexual relations.	72	53.7	40	30	22	16.4
2. Public places and employment sites should have condom vending machines.	115	85.8	17	12.7	2	1.5
3. It is impossible for me to contract HIV/AIDS.	82	61.2	32	23.9	20	14.9
4. Only people from high-risk groups need to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS.	7	5.2	18	13.4	109	81.3
5. All HIV/AIDS patients should be quarantined.	46	34.3	54	40.3	34	25.4

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<sup>1</sup> It is common in China for companies to have family planning offices to provide family planning information and contraceptives to their employees.

### 1.2.3 Behaviors

**Table 2**

Questions	Definitely yes		Not sure		No	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
1. I can actively discuss sex-related health questions with my friends and family.	28	20.9	90	67.2	16	11.9
2. I can actively seek sex-related health and HIV/AIDS prevention information from family, friends, and medical professionals.	44	32.8	75	56	35	26.1
3. My only resources for sex-related health information are friends, magazines, or books.	62	46.3	72	53.7	0	0
4. I will only have one sexual partner if I am sexually active.	89	66.4	41	30.6	4	3
5. I will request that my partner use a condom if I am sexually active.	93	69.4	37	27.6	4	3

### 1.2.4 Intention of participating in health education activities

**Table 3**

Questions	Yes		No		Don't know	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
1. I would like to learn about reproductive health through company-organized activities.	70	52.2	23	17.2	41	30.6
2. I would like to learn about safe sex methods and techniques with my peers.	76	56.7	27	20.1	31	23.1

Findings from the needs assessment regarding young workers' reproductive health status were both positive and negative.

Positive findings included:

- Many young people are active thinkers, curious about sexual and reproductive health. Approximately 84 percent considered premarital sexual relationships understandable and acceptable, showing that they are tolerant of sexual relationships among young people.
- Youth have some intention of protecting themselves. Nearly 86 percent agreed with providing access to condom vending machines in public places and employment sites. Sixty-six percent indicated that they would be faithful to one partner, and about 69 percent agreed to request condom use of a partner.

- Youth need and want to acquire reproductive health knowledge. Even without advocacy efforts, over 52 percent of young employees agreed to participate in the reproductive health education program, and nearly 57 percent of them agreed to join the peer education activities.

Negative findings included:

- Sexual and reproductive health knowledge among youth is inadequate. Only 20 percent of participants could correctly identify the male reproductive organs, and about 50 percent could correctly name the female reproductive organs. Moreover, 85 percent of young workers felt it was impossible for them to contract HIV/AIDS.
- Youth are sexually active. During the FGDs, five youth admitted to having premarital sexual relationships, and two female workers admitted having had abortions.
- Youth lack life-planning and problem-solving skills. Thirty-seven percent of participants revealed they did not know how to refuse their partners' sexual requests, and approximately 70 percent did not know how to deal with sexual harassment. Forty-five percent indicated that they would go to a small and/or unlicensed clinic for an abortion, if they or their friends experienced an unintended pregnancy.

### **1.3 Rationale for conducting the life-planning skills training program at Guangdong Provincial Highway Company**

#### ***1.3.1 Fulfilling young workers' needs***

By providing an open and comfortable environment in which to obtain reproductive health information, young employees will improve their life skills and develop healthy attitudes and responsible behaviors.

#### ***1.3.2 Employee-centered management***

Reproductive health education is a key component of the company's culture, representing its humanitarian and employee-centered philosophy. Young, healthy workers with positive attitudes and competitive spirits will benefit the company.

#### ***1.3.3 The company family planning work agenda***

The company's family planning agenda is shifting from pure administration to service provision through the introduction of interactive, participatory methods. A wider range of training topics that emphasize real-life situations will help improve the company's family planning services. This pilot reproductive health education project introduced new concepts for advocacy and education in a workplace setting.

## 2. Project implementation

### 2.1 Advocacy

The Guangzhou Family Planning Association (FPA) introduced the YRH project to the Guangdong Transportation Group's family planning office. The company family planning office then agreed to make the project activities compulsory for the company's branches. However, just prior to launch, some company leaders and employees expressed skepticism about the program. Company executives asked the company family planning office to show how the program would benefit the business. Department chiefs and some workers were concerned that participation in the reproductive health trainings would affect work schedules and cause loss of productive time. Due to these concerns, the company family planning office actively advocated for the program by:

- Presenting project-related documents prepared by CFPA to corporate leadership to help them understand the importance of participating in the YRH project to their workers' health.
- Reporting to the leadership on the current reproductive health status of company employees (based on needs assessment findings) to show the need to conduct reproductive health trainings.
- Inviting company executives to observe training sessions to help them recognize the benefits and understand how the training works.
- Conducting a project feasibility analysis, sharing results, and holding meetings with decision-makers and mid-level managers to gain leadership support.

As a result of advocacy efforts by the Guangdong Transportation Group's family planning office at the branch and headquarters levels, company executives not only agreed to the program but also provided 50,000RMB (approximately US\$6,250) in support. An important step toward gaining this commitment occurred in June 2002, when the chairman of the board at that time, Zhu YongLing, participated with 60 employees in a project training session entitled *Love, Marriage, and Life*. Chairman Zhu was able to observe the enthusiasm of the youth, and after the training, he commented:

"I feel happy that you have education opportunities like this. Today, not only all of you learned something, I did too! Training like this is wonderful. It teaches responsibility! This company is responsible for all of you, and from now on, this kind of education program should be conducted often. In turn, we expect you to be responsible for this company as well, dedicated and hard working!"

Shortly after, Chairman Zhu shared his experience during an executive meeting and requested that leadership and the various company departments fully support the project.

## **2.2 Development of the implementation plan**

To ensure the quality of project implementation, the company developed an implementation plan in October 2001 detailing the structure of project implementation, personnel, goals, methods, and the monitoring and evaluation plan. The plan was further modified and finalized in July 2002.

### ***2.2.1 Company project implementation group***

The company project implementation group—led by a company executive—included staff from the company family planning office, the labor union, and the youth league.

### ***2.2.2 Goals***

The implementation plan defined three specific goals: 1) increasing young workers' sexual and reproductive health-related knowledge and skills; 2) promoting use of youth-friendly counseling and clinical services; and 3) improving the health care providers' ability to serve youth, including changing their traditional conservative attitudes toward reproductive health services for this group.

### ***2.2.3 Target groups***

Three target populations were identified: young workers under 24; people with direct influence on YRH knowledge, attitudes, behavior, and access, including peer educators and family planning workers, among others; and policymakers capable of influencing reproductive health educators and service agencies, such as the company leadership and department directors.

### ***2.2.4 Project phases***

By March 2002, a company branch was selected as the pilot project site, attracting 200 workers to participate voluntarily in LPS training. In June 2003, the project was expanded to another branch, with 200 additional employees participating in training. In 2006, this program will gradually expand to all of the company's operating units.

### ***2.2.5 Sustainability***

In addition to scheduling and implementing LPS training for current employees in all company branches, the plan also ensured that LPS is included in the new employee training program, helping to ensure sustainability.

## **2.3 Implementing LPS pilot training**

The company selected Guanghai Company, a branch close to Guangzhou City, as the pilot project site. There were three main reasons for this decision: Guanghai has about 300 young employees; it is located in close proximity to Guangzhou, making the commute for educators convenient; and the company already had a strong foundation in family planning upon which to build.



With no prior experience, this pilot project was the company's first attempt to conduct YRH activities. To achieve better results, two problems needed resolution before implementation:

- **Lack of LPS facilitators.** The company did not have LPS facilitators to initiate the program and relied on the Guangzhou City-Dongshan District FPA to address this difficulty. The company family planning office made education plans in advance and took the initiative to contact the Dongshan District FPA to invite them to support training sessions by providing facilitators.
- **Need to attract young workers to the program.** In order for the program to be successful, young workers had to be willing to participate. The company decided to use their existing quality control management tools and methods for this program, and launched a quality control group activity aimed at improving participation rates among young workers. The team helped identify factors affecting young employees' participation in the program, including lack of a favorable educational environment; prior negative experiences with similar (boring) training programs; scheduling conflicts; and logistical problems associated with a dispersed workforce, making it difficult for young workers to gather for trainings.

Given these difficulties, the company family planning office focused on the following:

- Organizing a touring photography exhibition in ten toll plazas of the Guanghua Company in August 2001. The exhibit attracted nearly 400 people and helped increase awareness of reproductive health issues and interest in future project activities.
- Working with the Dongshan District FPA to provide trained facilitators to conduct participatory LPS training among the work units of the Guanghua Company from November 2002 to March 2003. Because these training sessions incorporated interactive methods, including games, role-play, and reverse conversation ("putting yourself in another's shoes"), they not only increased young workers' participation and made learning more enjoyable but also helped young workers improve their knowledge and skills. These participatory methods greatly increased young workers' interest in the program.
- Widely distributing a detailed training plan to young workers through the company website, bulletin boards, and telephone calls in order to overcome scheduling difficulties. Staff were careful to plan the sessions at convenient hours and locations, so young workers could easily attend, and repeated the same training session twice a week so that workers from different shifts could attend. They supplemented the sessions with peer education to diversify the education program and help sustain it in all toll plazas.

The quality control evaluation showed that the pilot program was a success. Of the approximately 300 young employees in the pilot location, 210 voluntarily participated in the program. Moreover, the pilot program strengthened the confidence of the company family planning office staff and helped them to gain experience in organizing and implementing such activities.

Sexual harassment does happen a lot in everyday life. I have experienced it before but didn't know how to deal with it myself and was afraid to tell other people. Through today's training, which used role-play and group discussion, I not only learned ways to handle sexual harassment but also gained confidence in myself to fight against it! Training like this is really wonderful!

—Female attendant, Qingfeng toll plaza

## **2.4 Program expansion**

As a result of the successful pilot project, the company family planning office decided to expand the program in June 2005 to another branch—Xintai—that has 225 employees and a good basic family planning service in place.

### **2.4.1 Using participatory approaches**

The LPS training curriculum, *Path to Growth*, provided by the YRH project, supplies the company with content and methods for training workers. The curriculum is used as the basic training guide, with slight modifications made to tailor activities to specific company situations. Participatory training approaches from the curriculum are used.

### **2.4.2 Supplementing LPS training**

Guangdong Transportation Group has implemented several innovative activities to supplement the ongoing LPS training. The company granted 80,000RMB (approximately US\$10,000) to establish a youth-friendly Internet café that provides an efficient way for young workers to access sexual and reproductive health-related information sources recommended by the program. In addition, an online discussion board, with the advantage of drawing together people of similar ages, backgrounds, and communication styles, has diminished the communication barriers between peer educators and trainees. Friends can now talk, share experiences, and learn from each other online. The company also supplied another 50,000RMB to obtain internal cable television services to broadcast sexual and reproductive health education programs every Tuesday and Thursday, allowing employees to have access to education programs even when they are in the dormitories.

Because of these enhancements, which diversified program activities, and the enthusiasm and caring of facilitators, young employees from the Xintai Company were eager to join the program, and 208 of 225 employees participated.

## **2.5 Youth-friendly services**

Providing youth-friendly services was a natural extension of the LPS training program. Services focus on individual cases, helping young people by providing both counseling and referral services. Ultimately, the services became a safe space for young people to come and ease pressures. They included:

- **An online counseling service.** This service primarily uses volunteers both passionate about family planning work and with extensive clinical and counseling experience to provide youth-friendly services. The company also pays an expert to provide online counseling services.
- **Development of a list of websites and contact information for professional counseling agencies and contraceptive services.** This information is now available online via links on the company website. These professional resources and referral services allow young employees timely, accurate, and convenient access to services.

## 2.6 Capacity building

In order to build the company's own capacity to conduct LPS training, 34 family planning staff from Guangdong Transportation Group and its branches participated in a three-day workshop, *Youth Health Ambassadors Training*, which included participatory training methods, facilitation skills, and other related topics, including basic reproductive health and HIV/AIDS prevention knowledge.

The company established an information system connecting all branch offices. This information system permitted the establishment of online youth-friendly counseling services and a discussion board, greatly improving the availability of youth-friendly services.

Finally, the company has incorporated LPS training into its new employee training program. In the two-week new employee orientation training, one day is designated for LPS training, covering topics such as interpersonal communication and relationships, reproductive health and contraceptives, and HIV/AIDS prevention.

## 3. Results and discussion

In the last four years, the reproductive health education program at the Guangdong Transportation Group has developed and tested a set of effective approaches, obtained support from leadership, received necessary funding, and designated program administrators at every level. The company has a well-established network, with every toll plaza able to access cable television and the Internet, where online youth-friendly services are available. Importantly, all project-related activities are included in the company's performance assessment system. These achievements have laid the foundation for expansion and sustainability throughout the company. The YRH project has benefited the company as well as its young employees.

### 3.1 Improved knowledge of reproductive health among young workers

During those four years, a total of 908 people (facilitators and young workers) participated in the program. Through LPS training and online youth-friendly counseling services, company managers and employees believe they have greatly increased their sexual and reproductive health knowledge. Although based on limited interviews (30), the level of knowledge now compared to the needs assessment four years ago has greatly improved.

<b>Content \ Time</b>	<b>4 years ago</b>	<b>Present</b>
Able to correctly name male reproductive organs	20%	92%
Able to correctly name female reproductive organs	50%	89%
Know about HIV/AIDS	63%	95%
Know about contraceptives	68%	91%
Know about drug abuse and its harmful effects	72%	98%
Know about sexually transmitted infection prevention	45%	90%

### **3.2 Enhanced life-planning skills among young employees**

During an interview conducted in July 2005, when asked “What if your boyfriend/girlfriend wants to have sex?” 70 percent of young workers stated that they would refuse, while the other 30 percent would agree to have sex only if their partners used condoms. Also, abortion cases in the two branches (Guanghua and Xintai) appear to have fallen from a reported three cases in 2003 to zero in 2004. There is evidence that young employees are seeking more professional help after receiving training; each week, experts review and answer an average of 20 sexual and reproductive health-related questions on the company’s online youth-friendly counseling service.

### **3.3 Strengthened capacity in the company family planning office**

Prior to the project, how to make best use of the company family planning office to reach dispersed employees had been a concern. By conducting the YRH project, the family planning office has discovered that this type of education program is the best way to reach employees. This project also has changed the office staff’s traditional views by encouraging them to see things from the perspective of young people and to improve the provision of sexual and reproductive health-related advocacy, counseling, and services, thereby enhancing the company’s employee-oriented work environment.

This program also strengthened the family planning office staff’s organizational skills and creativity. The family planning office has trained a group of volunteers, while using the company’s quality control model to monitor the implementation process. Through the use of the model, the family planning office was able to conduct a situation analysis, define goals, analyze contributing factors, lay out problem-solving plans, and finally, implement and evaluate the plan.

During this process, rather than using the traditional education approaches, the company adopted the participatory methods of the YRH project that promote equality, respect, interaction, and cooperation.

### **3.4 New energy in the corporate culture**

Implementation of YRH project activities showed the company the importance of building a responsible and well-educated workforce. This project has developed new education materials and methods, as well as enhanced manager-employee communication and collaboration.

## **4. Future challenges**

There are challenges and difficulties ahead, especially in maintaining the quality and effectiveness of the YRH project methodologies as part of the company's long-term work plan.

### **4.1 Expansion**

As the program expands, the training materials provided by the YRH project will need to be further refined and adapted to make the training even more specific to the needs of different branch employees.

In the past four years, the company's reproductive health education program has only focused on two sites, reaching about 12 percent of company employees. The company has committed to expanding the project to the rest of its employees, but the details of how to accomplish this goal are still being worked out.

### **4.2 Sustainability issues**

Although the company has begun to train its own facilitator team, the training programs are still heavily dependent on the Dongshan District FPA, which poses threats to the ability to expand and sustain the project.

Incorporation of the program into the new employee training is one of the ways to address sustainability issues, and the company will continue to include a one-day LPS workshop in new employee trainings.

## **5. Conclusion**

Conducting the China Youth Reproductive Health project was a win-win situation for all participating parties—young workers, businesses, and society. This project has been an innovation for the company, and the experience was valuable and important. These lessons can be an inspiration for other businesses.