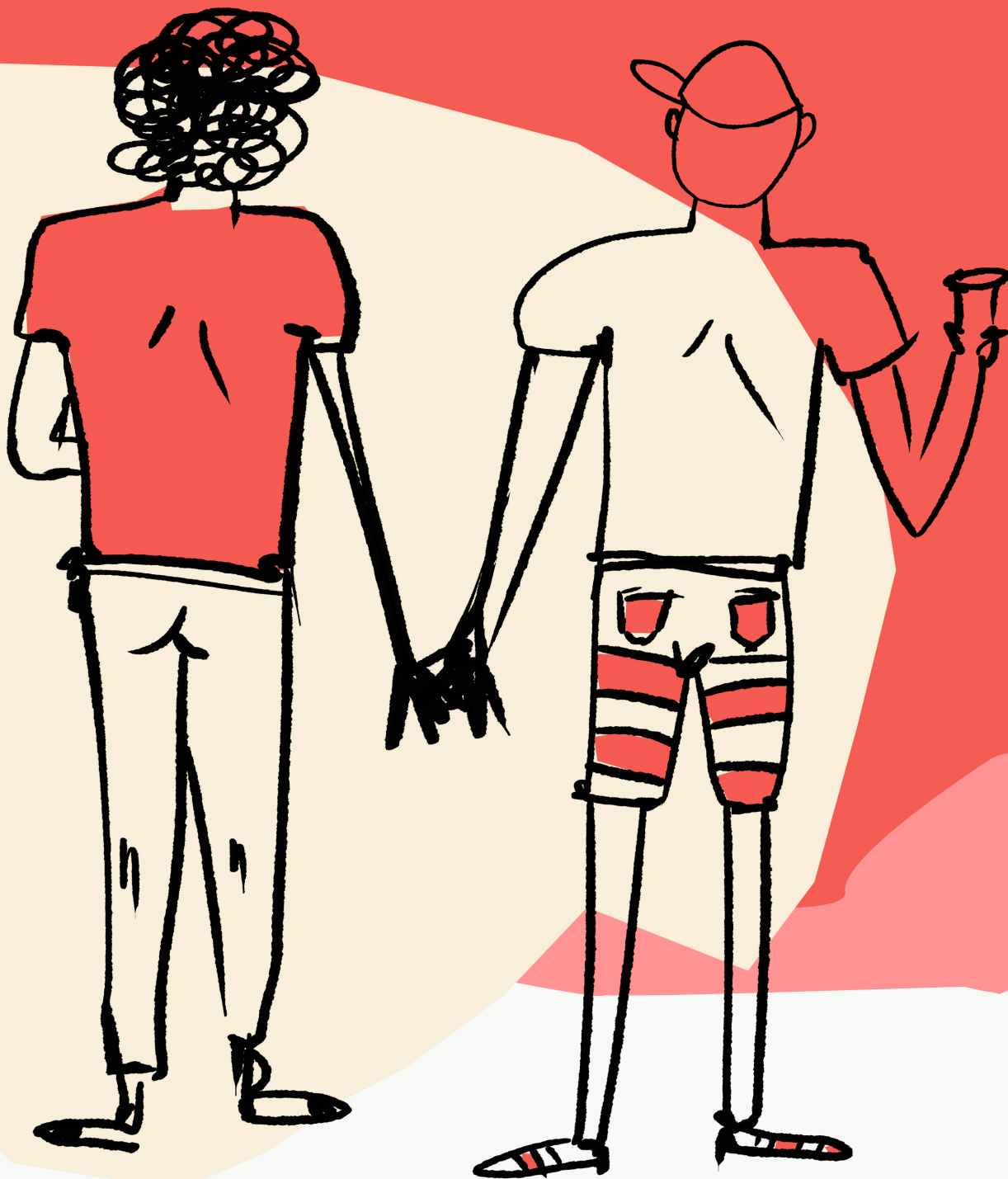


2017-2022

# Real Talk Final Report Highlights





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2017-2022

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# Introduction

Real Talk Report  
2017-2022

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) agreed to give Real Talk money from 2017 to 2022 to run sexual health workshops, train staff, and make videos.

At the end of April 2022, Real Talk had to send PHAC a report about all of the things we did in those five years.

This is a short version of that report.



# Why Real Talk?

Real Talk Report  
2017-2022

Real Talk started because dating, love, relationships and sex are normal parts of life, and people need information about them.

Lots of people with learning disabilities are interested in finding a girlfriend or a boyfriend or getting married. Some people with learning disabilities want to have sex. Some people with learning disabilities are having sex. This is normal, but sometimes people with learning disabilities don't get information about these things.

People who don't want to date, marry, or have sex may still have experiences, emotions, and questions about their bodies that they want to talk about. It's important for people to have somewhere to talk about this stuff, and somewhere to get good information. People are happier, healthier and safer this way. Real Talk creates workshops and videos where people can talk about this stuff & get information. We also train staff to be better at supporting people with their questions and concerns around sexuality.

**Everyone experiences feelings. The only question is whether we are allowed to talk about them.**



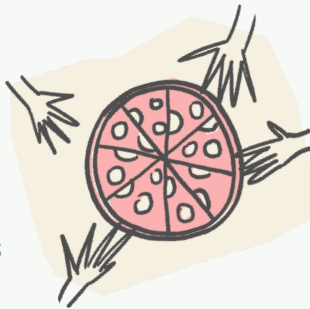
# What Does Real Talk Do?

Real Talk Report  
2017-2022

Real Talk did lots of different things from 2017 - 2022. We trained peer facilitators, we supported LGBTQ presentations at conferences, we helped put together a touring theatre show about romance, relationships, and rights. But we were mostly funded to do these things:

## 01

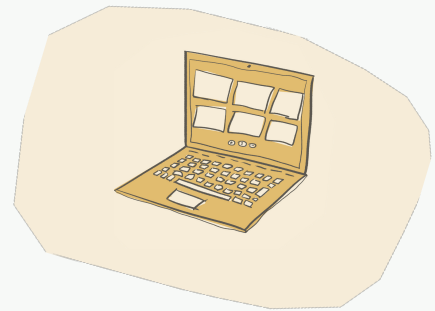
### Workshops



Real Talk ran workshops where people could get together, eat some pizza, and talk with an educator about dating, love, relationships, and sex. People could ask questions and not get into trouble.

## 02

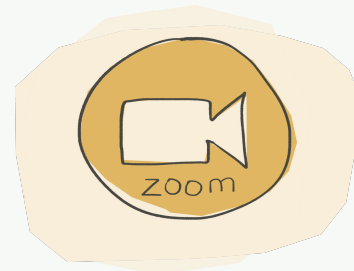
### Training



Real Talk ran trainings to show staff **how** to support people's sexual health, **where** to get information, and **what** their workplace policies & procedures say about this stuff.

## 03

### Videos



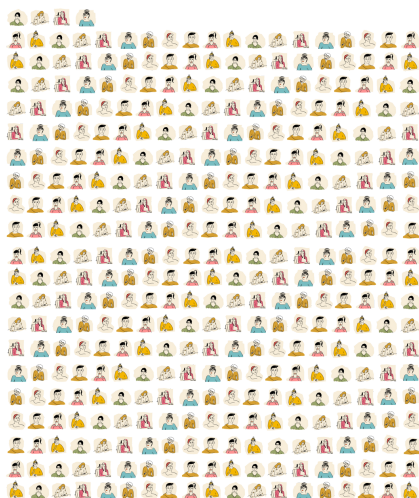
Real Talk made videos where different people got together & had conversations on topics like online dating, birth control, consent, STIs, love, and such.



# Important Numbers

Real Talk Report  
2017-2022

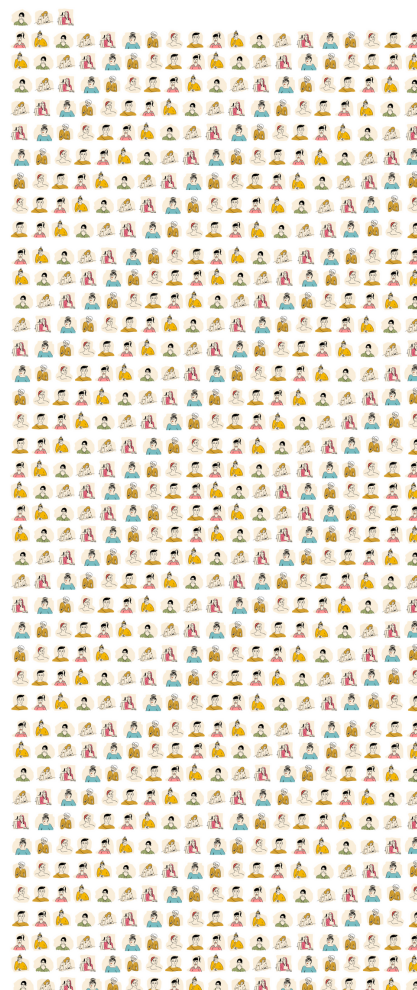
How many  
people came to  
our workshops?



We told PHAC we'd try to get

# 384

people to our workshops  
from 2017 to 2022



In the final count

# 793

people came to our  
workshops from 2017 to  
2022

# Important Numbers

Real Talk Report  
2017-2022

How many  
staff did we  
train?



We told PHAC we'd  
try to train

400

staff from 2017 to 2022



In the final count,  
we trained

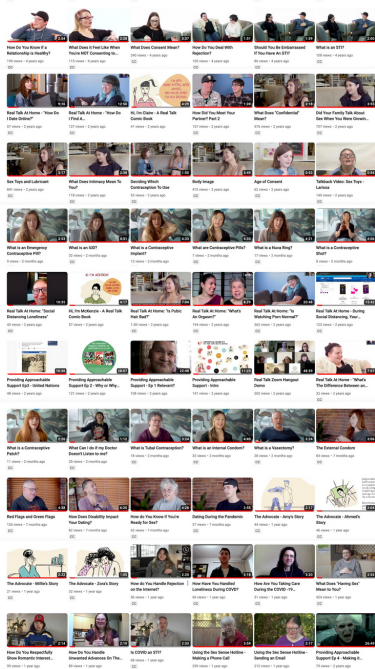
865

staff from 2017 to 2022

# Important Numbers

Real Talk Report  
2017-2022

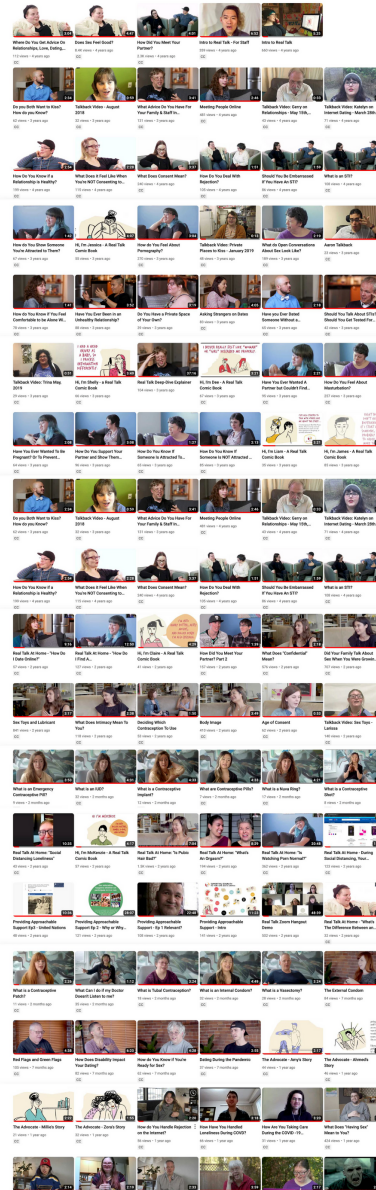
How many  
videos did we  
make?



We told PHAC  
we'd try to make

60

videos from  
2017 to 2022



In the final count,  
we made

107

videos from  
2017 to 2022

# What we Hoped Would Happen

Real Talk Report  
2017-2022

Being able to talk openly with someone in your life about dating, love, relationships, and sexuality makes it more likely that good things will happen, and less likely that problems will happen. Knowing where to get sexual health information and services, and knowing how to prevent STIs are important for health. Here's what Real Talk helped with:

## 01

### Comfort

**27%** of people with learning disabilities and **64%** of staff and family members became more comfortable with discussing sexual health topics after coming to our workshops.

## 02

### Resources

**24%** of people with learning disabilities and **64%** of staff knew more about where to get sexual health information and sexual health services in their communities after coming to our workshops.

## 03

### Safer Sex

**24%** of people with learning disabilities knew more about safer sex and how to prevent STIs after coming to our workshops.



# Important Collaborations

Real Talk Report  
2017-2022

Real Talk collaborated with a lot of other organizations from 2017-2022. Here are some of them.



Public Health  
Agency of Canada



# Important Collaborations

Real Talk Report  
2017-2022

Real Talk collaborated with a lot of other organizations from 2017-2022. Here are some of the most interesting projects we joined in on:

1



Real Talk worked with Community Living Society and the Center for Inclusion and Citizenship to create a **play** called **Romance, Relationships and Rights** at the Anvil Center in New West and at the Inclusion BC conference in Victoria.

2



Options for Sexual Health runs a free information hotline called Sex Sense. (You've probably seen ads for it on the bus.) Real Talk worked with Options to make some **commercials** showing people with cognitive disabilities calling and emailing the hotline.

3



Real Talk and Building Caring Communities made a three-week-long online **sexuality expo** for people with disabilities called **SIXpo**. We're going to do it again in person at Heritage Hall in 2023 with money that CLBC gave us.

4



Real Talk added our **workshops as online experiences** on the Curiko website. This helped learners and their supporters see sexuality as a worthwhile thing for a curious person to learn about.



# Important Collaborations

Real Talk Report  
2017-2022

Real Talk collaborated with a lot of other organizations from 2017-2022. Here are some of the most interesting projects we joined in on:

5



Real Talk and the abOUT group supported self advocates to deliver **conference presentations** about being LGBTQ and disabled. We also ran LGBTQ **social nights** where we went to Pride events and drag shows.

6



Real Talk taught **community service work students** at local colleges about how to provide sexual health support to people with learning disabilities.

7



Real Talk taught sexual health to **Gateway to Employment** students in the Vancouver and Burnaby School Districts.

8



Burnaby Public Library librarians brought some **sex education books** to Real Talk pizza parties. Participants **borrowed them to take home and read**.



# Key Learnings

Real Talk Report  
2017-2022

From 2017-2022 we learned important things that changed how we work:

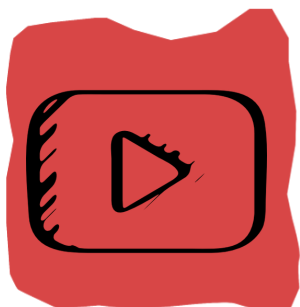
## Lots and lots of people want info about this.



People asked us to travel all over British Columbia to do workshops and train staff.



People came from all over Canada to our Zoom workshops.



People from all over the world watched our videos - over 23000 views!



More than twice as many people used Real Talk as we expected.

# Key Learnings

Real Talk Report  
2017-2022

From 2017-2022 we learned important things that changed how we work:

## Different workshop formats work better for different people.



Some folks prefer one-time-only workshops, and some prefer a series. Some people like to follow up afterwards to get more info.



Some folks prefer workshops that are just for women.

Some folks prefer workshops that are just for LGBTQ people.



Some folks like Zoom workshops because they're more private, safer for COVID, and easier to get to.



Some folks prefer workshops that are just for men.

Some folks are new to these discussions, or shy, and want to learn the basics with other beginners.



Some folks like in-person workshops because they don't have a smartphone or computer at home, or they miss seeing people.



# Key Learnings

Real Talk Report  
2017-2022

From 2017-2022 we learned important things that changed how we work:

## People's life experiences can make it hard for them to understand consent.

Lots of people who come to our workshops get told they have to do things: They have to get in the van and go bowling because it's on the schedule. They have to eat chicken because that's what their dad made for dinner. They have to spend their days with certain people because of funding.



Lots of people who come to our workshops say that during personal care, or assistance with other daily activities, or doctor's visits, people touch their bodies without first asking if they're okay with it. Some folks also say that staff or family members look at private information about them without asking if it's okay, or don't give them privacy to have conversations with doctors & other professionals. Sometimes they don't get privacy to fill out forms that are supposed to be anonymous.



# Key Learnings

Real Talk Report  
2017-2022

From 2017-2022 we learned important things that changed how we work:

## **People's life experiences can make it hard for them to understand consent.**

If people don't get much privacy or choice in their lives and get touched without being asked, they may struggle with the idea that they have the right to say 'yes' or 'no' to sexual touching. People with cognitive disabilities are most likely to be abused by a family member or staff - someone who they may feel they have to obey. It's important that we ask for people's consent about more things - what they want to eat, where they want to go, who they want to be with. It helps them understand consent, and reduces the risk of abuse. It's more important than talking about 'stranger danger'.



# Key Learnings

Real Talk Report  
2017-2022

From 2017-2022 we learned important things that changed how we work:

## People who experience abuse don't get good support.



People with cognitive disabilities experience sexual abuse & assault way more often than the general population.

Fears about the risk of abuse and assault mean that some people who want to date are told 'no' by their families or their staff.



People often share at our events about having been abused.

We are not professional counsellors, so we're not able to give as much support as we'd like. This can be hard for the people who share these experiences, hard for our facilitators, and hard for the other people at the workshop.



Survivor support organizations in Vancouver can have long waitlists for services, and are not always disability confident.

This lack of support is a problem. It's a service gap that our organizations should work on.



# Key Learnings

Real Talk Report  
2017-2022

From 2017-2022 we learned important things that changed how we work:

## LGBTQ people with cognitive disabilities are having a tough time.

When we first started doing LGBTQ workshops, hardly anyone showed up. We thought that maybe there weren't enough LGBTQ people with cognitive disabilities for us to keep doing them.



When COVID happened, we started doing these LGBTQ workshops on Zoom, and lots of people joined in. They told us they couldn't come to our in-person events because they needed help to get there, but their families or staff didn't know they were LGBTQ, and they didn't feel safe to tell them. They liked Zoom better because they could join in privately from their room using their phone or computer.



Real Talk joined with the abOUT group to help self-advocates give talks on LGBTQ rights at conferences, and to host nights out where LGBTQ people could meet & spend time together. We only had the time and money to do this once in a while, but LGBTQ people with cognitive disabilities keep telling us they feel lonely and want to spend more time together.

# Big 'Aha!' Moments For Us

Real Talk Report  
2017-2022

## Many people didn't have anyone to talk to about sex.

About 30% of people who came to our workshops reported having no-one in their life who they could talk to about sex.



## Many staff thought their employers didn't want them to provide info about sex.

At our trainings, the number one reason staff gave for not wanting to provide sexual health support was that they thought they would get in trouble with their organization for talking about it. Even when organizations had policies and procedures on how to provide this support, staff were usually surprised to learn they existed, and were even more surprised to learn what these policies and procedures actually said.



## Many folks didn't expect privacy, and didn't get it.

Real Talk gave participants questionnaires to fill out before workshops. They were supposed to be anonymous & private, and they said so right on the first page. Even so, staff often didn't tell people they were private, and watched as people filled them out. Sometimes they even contradicted participants' answers - saying things like "That's wrong, you *do* feel comfortable talking to me." Participants didn't seem to be bothered by this or to find it unusual.

## Staff were surprised that sexuality is relevant.

At the end of our staff trainings, we asked people what most surprised them. The most common answer we received was: *"I'm surprised to learn that people with cognitive disabilities can have sexual & romantic feelings."*

# Big 'Aha!' Moments For Participants\*

Real Talk Report  
2017-2022

**Hakim** learned that his doctor needs to ask permission to touch him, and needs to tell him why she's doing it. Hakim has a hard time with pronouncing words but he learned a simple phrase he can use to advocate for these rights at his medical appointments.



At a workshop, **Sheila** shared that her mum told her group home staff that she needs support to masturbate. She said she uses an adapted toy that her occupational therapist made for her. She needs a bit of help to sit up in the right position - and then privacy. Other people at the workshop learned that people have a right to do this in their home.

**Tammy** learned that she can call the Sex Sense Hotline if she has questions that she's too shy to ask her family or staff.



**Lucy** learned that it's ok to talk to her boyfriend about what feels good and what doesn't feel good for her when they have sex. She learned that it's supposed to feel good for both of them, not just for him.



**Ferdinand** learned that if he wants to have sex with his boyfriend there are ways they can do this that won't pass HIV.



\*Stories are composites and / or names have been changed.

# What's Next?

Real Talk Report  
2017-2022

Real Talk got more money from the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) to keep doing this work from 2022-2027. We want to use what we learned over the past five years to get even better. Here are some things we think we should do:

## Collect information differently.

PHAC makes us give people questionnaires before and after our workshops, to see if anything changed for them. Many folks think these are too long and don't like filling them out. We should convince PHAC to let us make them much shorter, or let us stop using them and figure out other ways to find out what changed for people.



## Learn by doing.

Wait, what!? We know some people learn best by experience, but how would that work when it comes to sex education? Well, at our workshops we talk a lot about STI clinics and sexuality stores and LGBTQ community centres - but so far we haven't visited these places. Some participants tell us they're curious to go but they feel too shy. We should arrange tours.



# What's Next?

Real Talk Report  
2017-2022

Real Talk got more money from the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) to keep doing this work from 2022-2027. We want to use what we learned over the past five years to get even better. Here are some things we think we should do:

## Do more for LGBTQ people.

PHAC specifically wants us to support gay and trans folks - and their staff - to learn more about safer sex, testing and treatment. We think that building more LGBTQ community will help with this, and make people's lives better in lots of ways. PHAC doesn't give us money to build community, so we should find other people who will fund us.



## Ask for more help for people who have experienced sexual abuse.

Right now there isn't enough, and the people who are experts in providing this support often say they don't feel confident working with people with cognitive disabilities. We aren't trained as counsellors, so we can only help a bit at our workshops. We should try to convince community living organizations to find more support for folks who are dealing with this stuff.



# What's Next?

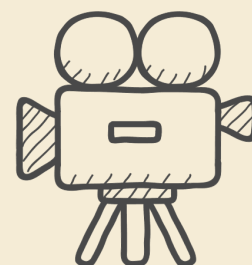
Real Talk Report  
2017-2022

Real Talk got more money from the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) to keep doing this work from 2022-2027. We want to use what we learned over the past five years to get even better. Here are some things we think we should do:



**Talk more about how & why organizations, families, and staff should respect people's consent.** We know that when people don't get asked for their consent about basic things in life like where they're going, what they're doing, what they're wearing, or what they're eating - and when their privacy isn't respected - it becomes harder for them to understand that they have a right to say 'yes' or 'no' to sexual touching. We should:

- **Create a staff training session that talks about this in-depth**
- **Make some videos showing the connection**
- **Show these videos in all of our staff trainings**



**Re-think Approachable Support.** We've enjoyed training staff in how they can provide better sexual health support. The staff teams and student groups we talk to are different from each other. Some of them feel very uncomfortable with this stuff and don't think it's a good idea to talk about it at all. Some of them are enthusiastic and want more tips on how to do this work better, Some of them have specific concerns - for example they may be supporting people who are doing sex work and have questions about that. We have different kinds of workshops for participants. We need to design different kinds of workshops for staff.

# Thank You's

We'd like to thank all of the participants, facilitators, and staff who gave us feedback over the years on how to make Real Talk better. We'd also like to thank **In With Forward** for their service design coaching. We'd like to thank **BACI, posAbilities, and Kinsight** for their ongoing support. Finally, we'd like to thank you for taking the time to read through this. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to reach out to us.

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