

Key ingredients for youth alcohol diversion programs

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The YOUthinc project

- Youth alcohol diversion pilot program
- Partnership between Victoria Police, Cobaw Community Health (CH) and Castlemaine and District Community Health Service (CHS)
- Developed in response to mutual concerns regarding the misuse of alcohol by young people in the region
- Funded by the Victorian Law Enforcement Drug Fund (VLEDF) and the Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation (AERF)

Project aims

- Develop a diversion model that provided a referral pathway between police and AOD programs at local CHSs
- Target young people (<18 years) in contact with police through alcohol possession, use or intoxication
- With consent, divert the young person and their parents to an alcohol education session

The alcohol education session

- Two-hour group or one-to-one session at the local CHS
- Information and education:
 - Effects of alcohol on the body
 - Alcohol-related harms (personal, social etc)
 - Harm minimisation strategies
 - Legal issues



Education session cont...

- Dispelling myths about alcohol
- Standard drinks, beer goggles and harm ranking exercises
- 'Show bag' with info re alcohol, party safe strategies and local services



Parent component of session

- How to communicate with young people
- How to minimise risk at parties
- Legal responsibilities of parents



Throughput

- To Sept 2007, YOUthinc sessions were provided to:
 - 53 young people
 - 36 parents
- A further 25 young people were diverted but did not participate:
 - 10 young people failed to attend
 - 15 referred to other diversion programs



YOUthinc evaluation

- Process and impact evaluation, including:
 - Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders (N=11)
 - Online police survey (N=24)
 - Review of project documentation
 - Pre-post participant survey (Cobaw CH)



YOUthinc client profile

- Young people (where n=46):
 - 70% male
 - Average age of 15 years
 - 57% attending school
 - 41% had prior police contact
 - High levels of alcohol consumption on weekends



The impact of YOUthinc

- Young people reported the session was:
 - Interesting (64%)
 - Very interesting (23%)
- And covered:
 - *Some* information that was new to them (66%)
 - *A lot of* information that was new to them (22%)
- Alcohol knowledge scores increased post-session (6.6 - 9.3/10)

The impact of YOUthinc cont...

- 58% of young people reported intent to change their behaviour
- 75% reported behaviour change at 3 month follow-up (but N=8)
- Among parents:
 - Alcohol knowledge scores increased post-session (7.8 – 9.4/10)
 - Appreciated an opportunity to exchange experiences and ideas with other parents

YOUthinc: Other outcomes

- YOUthinc reached beyond clients to:
 - Organisations involved
 - Local community
 - Region
 - State
 - Alcohol and other drug and allied sectors



Other outcomes cont...

- Greater inter-organisational interaction:
 - Stronger individual and organisational relationships
 - Invitations to presentations/ seminars/ committee meetings
 - Enhanced opportunities to network and liaise re a variety of issues



Other outcomes cont...

- Enhanced awareness and discourse about alcohol issues among young people
- Greater confidence in positive gains that can be made through partnerships and alcohol interventions
- Encouraged others to address alcohol use by young people (and other issues)



Other outcomes cont...

- Forum funded by AERF in Jan 2008 to bring together Victorian youth alcohol diversion providers
- YOUthinc is a finalist in the National Drug and Alcohol Awards



How were these outcomes achieved?

- Key features of YOUthinc model
 - The partnership approach
 - Community development approach
 - Quality staff
 - Suitability for replication/adaptation

Key features: The model

- Provided police with a new management tool for dealing with young offenders
- Filled an existing gap by establishing a referral pathway between police and CH
- Offered young people a choice
- Provided an opportunity for services to link with parents/guardians
- Was conceptually strong



The partnership approach

- A true partnership characterised by:
 - Shared ownership of project (and processes)
 - Commitment from leaders
 - Communication and involvement in all facets of YOUthinc development and delivery
 - Robust feedback mechanisms
 - Use of local safety committees to establish a dialogue between police and other agencies
- Based on local, mutual needs

Community development approach

- Development of intra- and inter-sectoral linkages with:
 - Other CHSs
 - Council youth services
 - Police youth resource officers
 - Schools
 - Youth networks
 - Safety committees
 - Regional public event organisers

Community development approach cont...

- These linkages developed via:
 - Secondary consultation
 - Development of information packages
 - Dissemination at community events
 - Broad-based awareness-raising activities (media, conference presentations, formal and informal liaison, public launch, web postings)



Community development approach

She wasn't just doing education programs with young people who have been referred, but she was integrating herself in the community and getting involved in the local youth events and programs, and working with the local workers, and I think that made it (the program) successful (Key informant).



Quality staff

- Project worker:
 - Youth AOD expertise
 - Communication skills
 - Skills in engaging others
 - Problem solving skills
 - Commitment
 - Tenacity
- Supported by management

Replication

- Value of the model has been recognised and acknowledged
- Significant level of interest in the program
- Appropriate for replication
- Particularly suitable where community events attract young alcohol users
- May be suitable for adaptation (retain key features)

Implications for the field

- This is an example of leadership and innovation
- True partnerships require substantial and sustained engagement
- Programs can have a positive impact far beyond the program itself
- Need to consider the potential for broader impact

Implications for the field cont...

- Explore the breadth of community, institutional and structural changes that a single program can produce
- Address these through multi-layered approaches
- Embed these approaches across and beyond program delivery
- Consider how enhancing others' capacity can contribute to the achievement of your goals



Limitations

- Lack of data at 3 mth follow-up
- Absence of rigorous measures of impact
- No quantitative pre-post data re community awareness of youth alcohol issues



Further research

- Quantitative outcome measures
- Rigorous follow-up of participants
- Incorporate measures of community development work
- Explore measures of partnerships
- Examine transition from pilot to ongoing programs



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