

PEER POWER :

PEER DRUG EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

KEALBA COLLEGE IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE GALAXY PROJECT, THE SALVATION ARMY - CROSSROADS

Peer Drug Education Facilitators :

**Josh Maddern, Bongo Malatji, Natachia Onisiforou,
Angie Elsoukmani, Robyn Graham, Meghan Chircop, Julie Celik,
Matthew Iuliano and Ibrahim Hamzic**

Further information :

**Jim Dowie, Student Welfare Co-ordinator, Kealba College 9366 3444
Lyn O'Grady, Galaxy Project worker 9372 1877**

INTRODUCTION

This Peer Drug Education Program was initiated by members of the district student group from Kealba, Brimbank and Copperfield Colleges. The students were interested in establishing a drug education program using student peer education facilitators.

Following an initial meeting with Lyn O'Grady from the Galaxy Project – The Salvation Army Crossroads, plans were made to hold further planning meetings with school representatives and then to organise training days for the facilitators.

The peer education model recognises that young people learn from, and are influenced by, each other. It is important then that accurate information is passed on during this process.

This model allows younger students to have the opportunity to learn from older peers who they can relate to. The peer facilitators have a unique opportunity to consolidate their own knowledge and pass it on in a structured way.

The model recognises the complexities of alcohol and drug use and is one part of a school drug education curriculum.

A manual has been developed which provides not only an outline of the lesson plans and information dispensed during the training days but also further background information that students requested.

The role of the Wimmera Connect Project needs to be acknowledged as it provided a model which was able to be adopted for this Program. The session plans were also utilized for the current Program.

HOW IT STARTED ...

Robyn

In 1999, noticing that there was a drug problem in the community and not enough education about drug minimisation and the harms of drugs, I decided to raise the matter at our next district Student Representative Council meeting. We soon decided we needed a program to help our younger peers become aware about drug harms and the minimisations. We felt that peers would be able to get this message across more clearly than teachers as a lot of peers look up to us older ones.

We chose about 10 people who we thought had the personality to be able to deal with the program. Lyn helped and guided us through the whole program. Together with Lyn, the group chose a class that we thought would be mature enough to understand our program. From there, we decided to undertake some training.

TRAINING :

Natachia

Our training was with two other secondary schools. It went for two days then had an extra 1/2 day just with our school. In the training, we learnt about what drugs there are and what harms they can do to people. We went through a number of activities that we would be doing with the Year 8s.

With the Year 8s we spent one period a week for 4 weeks and basically what we tried to do was just tell them about the harm that drugs and alcohol can do. Not only that, we also told them that if they chose to use alcohol and drugs how to be safe. During the 4 weeks we tried not to make it all so boring so we played games, had lollies and we also had discussions.

In our first session we basically talked a lot about the group rules and included the students in making the rules and they agreed to keep the rules during our sessions. That's a brief summary of what our training was all about.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Angie

One of our achievements was going into the Year 8 classes and getting the students to listen to us, which was fairly hard because they knew us as peers and not as teachers.

Getting the message through to the students was another achievement. The Year 8 students informed us that they now understand what to do in a drug and alcohol situation. We also taught them to say No to their friends if they're asked to do drugs or drink alcohol, which was another achievement.

We didn't just teach the students. We also taught ourselves, while doing the training and going into classes. Although we already knew the main facts about drugs and alcohol, we still learnt how to cope in a situation which could affect our future.

Going into a class of Year 8 students isn't easy. Yes, we did have achievements but there were some problems with the students. Examples are students who would get distracted among their friends or a particular student would make a silly remark to get the class's attention.

We are now looking forward to the future as we will be introducing the program to other schools and teaching other facilitators.

EVALUATION

A range of evaluative processes were implemented during the course of the Program. Written feedback was obtained from facilitators following the completion of the 2 days training. The overwhelming response in terms of what the facilitators enjoyed about the training related to meeting new people.

A range of comments in relation to what the facilitators had learned during the training were received including :

“That listening to people is really important and not just listen I mean listen and understand.”
“How to tackle a class a bit better without telling them my life story.”
“I learned how to approach younger kids so they feel more comfortable.”
“How to calculate standard drinks.”

When asked how they felt about becoming a drug education facilitator comments such as “confident” and “good” were received as well as “I actually feel really good because I know I can try and help others.”

Whilst no formal evaluation processes were put in place during the running of the sessions, weekly meetings were held with the student welfare co-ordinator and facilitators. These meetings provided a monitoring role as well as support in planning the following sessions.

At the end of the implementation of the program with Year 8 students (i.e. the four sessions during health classes) the younger students were asked to complete a written evaluation in relation to what they had learned during the sessions. Responses included :

What things did you like about the program?

*"Learning the consequences of getting drunk."
"Good/helpful educators"*

Name one thing that you learnt or thought about :

*"Side effects of drugs/alcohol"
"Not to drink a lot."
"How alcohol calms you, then changes you."
"Alcohol is a drug."
"You don't have to have alcohol at a party."*

What will you do differently now that you have completed the program?

*"Be more careful about my decisions before using drugs."
"Drink less."
"Think differently about taking drugs."*

What message would you like to give to the student educators?

*"You did a good job to make us understand about the dangers of drugs and alcohol."
"Thank you for coming and sharing your knowledge."
"It was great – thanks."*