Process Evaluation of the Youth Drug Peer Action Project

Community Report No. 3
July 2003

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Acronyms

NCAOD Noarlunga Community Action on Drugs
SACHRU South Australian Community Health Research Unit
YDPAP Youth Drug Peer Action Project

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**Introduction**

Noarlunga Community Action on Drugs (NCAOD) is an intersectoral community based action group operating in the Onkaparinga local government area in outer-metropolitan Adelaide, South Australia. The NCAOD Forum was established in 1997 and aims to prevent and reduce the harm caused by drug use to the community living and working in the City of Onkaparinga. It has a flexible membership, comprised of a wide range of representatives from government and non-government services, and a number of community members. NCAOD is established under the umbrella of Healthy Cities Noarlunga and attempts to operate in accordance with the principles of the Healthy Cities movement (Baum 2002) and the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (WHO 1986).

The Youth Drug Peer Action Project (YDPAP) is a joint venture of NCAOD, The Second Story Division of Child and Youth Health and the Drug and Alcohol Services Council and is funded via the National Illicit Drug Strategy’s Community Partnership Initiatives Program. The idea for the initiative arose from a group of young people associated with the local Second Story Youth Health Service (Child and Youth Health) who saw a need for young people to be involved in genuine consultation about drug related issues that affect them. The YDPAP aims to use peer education strategies to engage young people and reduce the harm associated with drug use among them in the community of Onkaparinga.

The South Australian Community Health Research Unit (SACHRU) and the Department of Public Health, Flinders University conducted an evaluation of NCAOD from November 2000 to May 2001, with funding from the World Health Organisation. The South Australian Department of Human Services then funded a further evaluation of NCAOD and the Youth Drug Peer Action Project from May to December 2001. Since that time the South Australian Community Health Research Unit has continued its association and support to evaluation of the YDPAP.

This purpose of this report is to provide information from the short-term evaluation of YDPAP to the people and communities with an interest in YDPAP, NCOAD and Healthy Cities Noarlunga.

**Project Goal and Objectives**

The goal of the Youth Drug Peer Action Project was to work in partnership with young people and service providers to reduce the harm caused by drugs to young people living in the Onkaparinga region.

The objectives of the project were:

- To increase the effectiveness of strategies designed to prevent harm arising from drug use by young people in Onkaparinga
- To increase young people’s involvement in raising awareness and knowledge of drug issues in a range of government and non-government community organisations
- To assist young people to be partners in developing the youth drug strategy
- To increase awareness and knowledge about drug issues in young people and the general community
- To increase co-ordination of services for young people
Strategies

The objectives were planned to be achieved through:

- Working in partnership with young people on drug issues
- Consulting young people on their views about current drug issues, effectiveness of current strategies, ideas for improving services and programs
- Involving young people in the analysis of results
- Recruiting and training peer educators
- Setting the stage for future service and program improvement for young people

The project officer established a project advisory group with eighteen members made up of community members (including young people) and service providers from a broad range of sectors. This group acted as a resource and support for the project and enabled an exchange of views between young people and service providers.

The YDPAP project officer developed relationships with a number of service providers in the local area to establish the project as a broader and more sustainable intersectoral community initiative.

Focus groups and questionnaires were used to discover young people’s knowledge of drugs and of local support services that assist young people with drug related issues and to understand their level of involvement with drugs. They were also designed to find out what young people would like to learn more about in relation to drugs and how they would like to receive this information. Information collected from the focus groups and questionnaires was used to inform the development of the peer education program and the training of peer educators. These data collection exercises were also used to generate interest in the program in order to recruit young people to be involved as peer educators.

Eighteen young people were recruited and trained in roles of peer education, peer support and peer research, and attended a two day training program held at the Second Story. Local service providers were consulted and the young people attended a community drugs forum and completed modules on communication, confidentiality, values and drugs. They were provided with ongoing support and training. The young people gave positive feedback regarding their involvement in the project through means of a survey, and commented on having increased confidence and improved objective knowledge.

In order to promote the YDPAP and recruit participants, an event called ‘Synapse’ was held in collaboration with another local youth agency and was run by youth participating at Reynella Enterprise and Youth Centre. This event catered for 15-25 year olds by providing music, art, food and entertainment, but did not manage to recruit any participants as it appears they were distracted by the entertainment and hence it was difficult to gain their attention.

A peer education literature review (Bament 2001) was conducted by a SACHRU researcher to examine the various means whereby health promotion programs are carried out under the banner of ‘peer education’ or similar terms. It also attempted to explore various justifications given for adopting a peer education model and arguments for and against doing so.

During a Community and Service Provider Forum, held on 6th December 2002, at the Hackham Community Sports and Social Club, the project officer, Brad McCloud, discussed the progress of the YDPAP and reported on the findings of the project. The peer educators took part in the Forum by
talking about what it was like to be part of the program and discussed the achievements they had made both personally and professionally.

A range of service providers attended the Forum including members of the SA Police, Second Story, Drug and Alcohol Services Council, Noarlunga Health Services, Mission Australia, Department of Education, Family and Youth Services, as well as a number of high-school teachers.

The Forum provided young people and service providers the opportunity to consider future prevention and intervention strategies to address drug use amongst young people. In doing so, some of the young people formed groups with the service providers to consider these issues and report back to the rest of the Forum participants.

In addition to the Forum, the YDPAP and its outcomes were presented at the following conferences:

- 3rd International Conference on Drugs & Young People – Sydney 2002
- South Australian Premier’s Drug Summit 2002
Evaluation Methods

Observation

Notes were recorded during the Community and Service Provider Forum regarding the interaction between the young people and the service providers.

Questionnaires

Two questionnaires were designed to gain feedback from people who were either involved in the project directly or had attended the Community and Service Provider Forum to hear the findings of the project. The purpose of the questionnaires was to gauge how successful people felt the project had been, whether the objectives of the project had been met and how the project could be improved. There was one questionnaire for the young people and another for the service providers and these were distributed at the Forum and collected on the day or later through the post.
Results and Discussion

A total of 10 young people and 16 service providers filled out the questionnaires. A number of the questions involved scaled responses with 1 representing “not at all” to 5 representing “a lot”.

Young People

Ten young people filled out the questionnaires, although not everyone responded to every question.

Involvement and Knowledge of the Project

Firstly, young people were asked about their involvement and knowledge of the project. Most of the young people (8 out of 10) were involved with the project through the peer education training. One person was involved through an earlier workshop, and one person stated ‘I was asked by Brad to do it’. Less than half of the young people (4 out of 10) believed they had a lot or moderate knowledge of the project. The rest rated their knowledge as ‘some’ or ‘little’ (Fig 1). Despite most of the respondents having taken part in the peer educator training they were not very confident about their knowledge of the broader project.

Next, young people were asked to rate the overall success of the project. Half of the respondents (5 out of 10) thought the project had been moderately or very successful. The other five were not able to decide if the project was successful or not (Fig 2).
Generally, comments suggested the project had been successful within a small local context, but needed to be more widely promoted and implemented. Comments included:

‘People are coming more aware of drug problems in the community but most are not acting upon them’

‘Needs to be more advertised’

‘I think it has been successful because even if we had helped one person, that has made a difference’

‘It has been successful within our school because we have our health room up and running, but it could also be even more successful’

‘Political profile of drug and alcohol issues in the South has been raised. Accordingly, the South has attracted new services’

‘DASC has put more services into the area. Again, this may not have happened in the way that it did without the support of the group’

**Achieving the project objectives**

The next set of questions asked young people to what extent each of the project objectives had been achieved. Respondents were asked to rate achievement on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (very well). The number and percent of responses are shown in Table 1 and then the results are explained with examples of comments on each objective.
Table 1. Achieving the project objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>not at all/little</th>
<th>some</th>
<th>well/very well</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working in partnership with young people on drug issues</td>
<td>10 (100%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulting with young people on their views</td>
<td>1 (10%)</td>
<td>3 (30%)</td>
<td>6 (60%)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involving young people in the analysis of results</td>
<td>1 (10%)</td>
<td>5 (50%)</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruiting and training peer educators</td>
<td>1 (10%)</td>
<td>8 (80%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raising awareness of drug issues amongst young people</td>
<td>2 (20%)</td>
<td>8 (80%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involving young people in raising awareness and knowledge of drug issues</td>
<td>3 (30%)</td>
<td>7 (70%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting the stage for future service and program improvement for young people</td>
<td>2 (20%)</td>
<td>7 (70%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing the effectiveness of strategies designed to prevent harm arising from drug use</td>
<td>4 (40%)</td>
<td>4 (40%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing awareness &amp; knowledge about drug issues in the general community</td>
<td>8 (100%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing coordination of services for young people</td>
<td>2 (20%)</td>
<td>5 (50%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most successful aspects of the project were thought to be working in partnership with young people on drug issues, and increasing awareness and knowledge about drug issues in the general community. Least successful was involving young people in the analysis of results, and increasing the effectiveness of strategies designed to prevent harm arising from drug use.

All ten young people considered the objective of working in partnership with young people on drug issues had been achieved well or very well. Comments were that the project had brought young people and service providers together in an environment where people could work together and feel their opinions were valued.

‘Everyone can say what they think and everyone does what they can’

‘Young people have been involved in peer education training, surveys etc’

‘I felt very included’

Six of the ten respondents considered the objective consulting with young people on their views about current issues, effectiveness of current strategies, ideas for improving services and programs to have been met well or very well. Respondents stated they were given the opportunity to have a say, although it was acknowledged that it can be difficult to get young people involved in these sorts of initiatives. Typical comments were:

‘Not enough young people get involved in these types of initiatives’

‘We try to get the young people’s opinion but it is not always easy’
Eight people responded to the question concerning the extent to which young people had been involved in the analysis of the results. Only two believed this objective had been achieved well or very well. Most gave a neutral response. This may be because this stage of the project had not occurred at the time of the survey. One comment was that the outcomes of the consultations were not reported back.

Eight of the nine respondents felt that peer educators had been recruited and trained either well or very well. The training was reported to be worthwhile, well-conducted and fun. Respondents stated that they enjoyed it and learned a lot. One person wanted more training time and one thought more people should have been involved.

Most (8 of the 10 young people) considered the project had raised awareness of drug issues amongst young people well or very well. The project officer was praised for his approach, thus one respondent commented ‘Brad was competent and streetwise’. Two people commented that it was often difficult to get young people to listen and discuss drug and alcohol issues.

Seven of the ten respondents felt that the project had involved young people in raising awareness and knowledge of drug issues in a range of services and community organisations either well or very well. Some described how they had been involved:

- ‘We have set up a program at school but getting others involved is hard’
- ‘I got to talk to other people and adults about drugs’
- ‘The course day at Second Story proves this’

Seven of the nine people who responded considered the project had set the stage for future service and program improvement for young people either well or very well. Good ideas had been generated and people were enthusiastic as evidenced by these comments:

- ‘Heard a lot of good ideas on this subject at the workshop’
- ‘Everyone is doing the best’

Half the respondents (4 out of 8) felt that the project had increased the effectiveness of strategies designed to prevent harm arising from drug use by young people in Onkaparinga well or very well. It would appear the young people found it hard to respond to this objective. Only one comment was made ‘All ideas were put to use as quickly as possible’.

All of the young people considered the project had increased awareness and knowledge about drug issues in the general community. One commented:

- ‘We spoke to lots of people and they seemed to listen’

Five of the seven responses thought the project had resulted in increased coordination of services for young people well or very well. Comments were about the improved relationship between young people and services, rather than coordination:

- ‘I know how to relate to them’
- ‘They now know how to relate with the youth today’
- ‘We spoke to heaps of people from youth services’
Other aspects of the project

The remaining questions asked the young people about other aspects of the project. All of the respondents felt that the service providers are now either well or very well informed of the needs of young people and can therefore deal with drug related issues better as a result of the project. Asked how the project could be improved, responses focused on getting more schools and young people involved. Thus respondents commented:

‘By getting more younger people aware about drugs’

‘More schools need to improved’

‘I don’t think it needs to improved. It’s a great project and everybody in the team is enjoying doing the project. Maybe more schools involved’

All but one of the young people (7 out of 8) stated that the project met their expectations well or very well. Most comments were that expectations had been exceeded:

‘I wouldn’t have expected so much to happen but it has and it’s great’

‘I didn’t expect this much. They have set this up really well’

‘Don’t know – I didn’t know what to expect’

All respondents agreed that they had gained skills and knowledge from being part of this project. The responses are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Skills and knowledge gained from being part of the project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill/Knowledge</th>
<th>No of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Better Knowledge of Drugs</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to Work in a Group</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Services for Young People</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the ‘other’ responses, one young person stated that they had learnt how to communicate with young people and another stated that they had learnt more about confidentiality issues. Awareness and knowledge of drugs and drug-related issues had increased as shown by these comments:

‘It puts life/drugs into perspective’

‘I know a lot more now about drugs and drug-related issues than I did before I started the program’

‘I know heaps more now’

Peer educators were asked about the adequacy of the training and support to be a peer educator. All of the peer educators who responded (n=9) felt that they had received either adequate or completely adequate peer education training. Benefits from the training included an increase in confidence, communication skills and factual knowledge about drug issues. This is illustrated by these comments:

‘The two-day Second Story course was excellent support and made me a more confident leader’

‘Brad helped with not only factual info but how to deal with people’
‘*Training was really interesting. I felt more confident after*’

Next peer educators were asked to what extent other young people and the community have benefited through the peer education program. Six of the 9 peer educators gave a neutral response, two thought there had been moderate benefit and one thought there had been considerable benefit.

**Fig 3. Young people’s rating of how other young people and the community have benefited through the program (n=9)**

The comparatively negative response to this question reflects that the peer educators had not had much opportunity to try out their new skills at the time of the survey. Most were optimistic that this would happen, thus they commented:

‘*We haven’t done a lot but we will get there*’

‘*At the moment, we have not had the chance to put our knowledge to good use*’

‘*Not many people access our services*’

All the peer educators said they will continue to be involved in the program if possible. All but one said they would recommend their friends to become a peer educator. The young people were happy that they would be able to help others and were pleased to be involved. They believed the project benefited them and others. Typical comments illustrating this were:

‘*It is a great feeling being able to help someone*’

‘*I take comfort in knowing I can make a difference and I’m sure anyone else would too*’

‘*For the rewards you get academically*’

‘*It’s a great learning experience and you benefit a lot from being a part of the group*’

‘*I felt important and it was fun*’

‘*It is the best High School decision I have made*’

‘*I hope so [to continue] but other commitments may decide otherwise*’

‘*It is a great idea and needs as many people as possible*’
Service Providers

Sixteen service providers responded to the questionnaire. They came from a wide variety of services including the following list, that exemplifies the diversity: Second Story, SA Police, Drug & Alcohol Services Council, Mission Australia, Noarlunga Health Services/ Healthy Cities, Department of Education and Children’s Services, Family and Youth Services. This range of providers involved indicates that the project had met its aims of engaging a range of agencies, both state government and non-government, in young people’s perspectives on drug issues. All 16 respondents indicated they had been involved in the project. This included providing support and consultation and access to young people.

Over 80% of the service providers considered the project to have been either successful or very successful (Figure 4). None felt it had been unsuccessful.

Typical comments about the success of the project included:

‘Utilised young people to deliver health message’

‘Positive young people willing to learn and share their knowledge. Positive role models and advocates’

‘I believe it has made a good start and set a solid foundation but needs now to build on this’

‘Small target group (ie not many schools or young people groups involved). Very Anglo orientated and peer group’

‘Brad has been an amazing resource for service providers and young people in the city of Onkaparinga. The whole project has been very firmly based in research, evidence and evaluation which is vital to the success of any program. This project has been particularly professional and of extremely increased quality’

‘Very positive responses regarding Wirreanda High School and Second Story involvement. Addresses a need in the community’
‘Comprehensive achievement of outcomes. Strong support by agencies and youth group.’

‘What I have heard today is very positive – both from [C] and students at Wirreanda High School. Something that would have been useful is young people talking more specifically to agencies re how we can engage and work supportively with young people re drug issues’

‘Participation/involvement of young people’

‘Objectives have been met through a variety of strategies. Many youth networks explored, established. Needs analysis completed’

The service providers had varying levels of understanding and knowledge of the project. About half believed they understood the project moderately or a lot and two felt they understood the YDPAP little or very little (Figure 5).

**Fig 5. Service provider’s knowledge of the project (n=16)**

![Service provider's knowledge of the project](image)

**Extent to which project objectives were achieved**

The next set of questions asked service providers to rate the extent to which each of the project objectives had been achieved. Respondents were asked to rate achievement on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (very well). The number and percent of responses are shown in Table 3 and then the results are explained with examples of comments on each objective.
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<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulting with young people on their views</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involving young people in the analysis of results</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruiting and training peer educators</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
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</tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing awareness &amp; knowledge about drug issues in the general community</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most successful aspects of the project were thought to be working in partnership with young people on drug issues, and setting the stage for future service and program improvement for young people. Least successful was increasing awareness and knowledge about drug issues in the general community.

Table 3 shows that all but one of the service providers felt that the project achieved the objective of working in partnership with young people either well or very well. Positive comments included:

- ‘Lots of young people involved in the project’
- ‘Diverse consultation’
- ‘Has made significant contact with a group of young people – needs to broaden contact to other schools and groups of young people’
- ‘The feedback from the Wirreanda High School students was fantastic and the methodology behind the project’
- ‘Partnership is very obvious and well done. It is appreciated that Brad made efforts to engage with FAYS youth who are often quite disempowered by not being heard in consultations’
- ‘Efforts have dismissed fears/concerns of the youth re Govt Agencies attitudes and response to youth & drugs. They have seen ‘our’ desire to work and speak openly’

One respondent noted that the project ‘needed more time to consult’.
Twelve of 15 respondents felt the objective to consult young people on their views about current drug issues, effectiveness of current strategies, ideas for improving services and programs was achieved either well or very well (Figure 6).

**Fig 6. Service provider’s rating of the achievement of the project objective “To consult young people on their views about current drug issues, effectiveness of current strategies, ideas for improving services and programs” (n=15)**

Positive comments included:

‘Large consultation was conducted’

‘Brad did an outstanding consultation plan – including young people from FAYS, Reynella’s Soundcove programs, indigenous young people and others’

‘Through structured survey, synapse, informal meetings’

One respondent noted that they felt the project’s consultation had not been “as extensive as originally envisaged”

Ten respondents felt able to comment on **how well young people had been involved in analysis of the results**. Only half of these felt that it was met well or very well, whereas the other half were indifferent. Typical comments included:

‘Young people would have been involved in more research (i.e. conducting and analysing it themselves)’

‘Small number of young people but good intervention’

Most (11 of 15) of the service providers felt that the objective of **recruiting or training peer educators** was met well or very well. Respondents noted that the program was well established in one high school. There was some difference of opinion about the extent of further involvement with these two comments showing the range of opinion:

‘Maybe could have trained more young people’

‘Brad accessed a wide range of young people from different backgrounds to be peer educators – this to me is integral to the success of the project’
One respondent commented on the sustainability of the project by noting that, ‘long term involvement will be the true measure of success!’

Twelve of the 15 the respondents considered the project to have raised awareness of drug issues amongst young people. The comments suggested that the respondents had some concerns about the time scale of the project and the extent to which the project had been widespread. Once again the time scale of the project was noted as a limitation.

‘Spoke to lots of young people about harm reduction’

‘Talking to participants it seems as though they have raised an awareness amongst youth’

‘Takes time – project was short but I am sure the work by the youth will continue’

‘The small number of youth involved seemed to benefit and have become more aware’

‘I think it will be difficult to measure how widespread this will be – but due to Brad’s approach to presenting harm minimisation strategies I feel young people will pass this information on to their peers creating a huge awareness of drug issues in the south’

The assessment of the extent to which the project had involved young people in raising awareness and knowledge of drug issues in a range of services and community organisations varied but two-thirds felt it had been successful in doing this. The comments suggest that the extent of this success was limited and acknowledged that time and resources were a considerable restraint.

‘Lots of young people involved in presenting information’

‘Visits to organisations and associated presentations at appropriate level helped’

‘This aspect has barely begun. The workshop was the start’

‘Limitations – small target population and peer group, not enough time or resources’

‘Brad has connected very effectively with school groups and various youth services’

‘Very successful with target groups’

‘Young people have a much greater knowledge of networks – this is fantastic’

All but one of the respondents considered that the project had set the stage for future service and program improvement for young people. The comments below indicate that the respondents believed that the project had made some significant progress but fear was expressed that the momentum would be lost given that the project was coming to an end.

‘Hopefully the project will inform other strategies and improve services for young people’

‘Needs the momentum to continue – needs a “driver” – loss of project officer may impact on this momentum’

‘I think the project has set the stage for significant advances in school drug programs (inc health rooms, peer education etc) and elsewhere’
‘Brad has inspired and educated us all!’
‘Achieved shining support from members of NCAOD’
‘Lots of ideas for where to from here’

About two-thirds of the respondents felt the project had increased the effectiveness of strategies designed to prevent harm arising from drug use by young people in Onkaparinga. Typical comments from these respondents were:

‘Good consultation’
‘The harm minimisation information I have seen Brad present has been hugely informative, accurate and honest’
‘Specific information from surveys/consultations fed back to organisations in area’

About one-third were less sure and the comments below suggest their reservations stem from the fact that the process is at an earlier stage. So that while good foundations have been laid and these indicate much promise the full potential is yet to be realised:

‘Foundations have been laid. Need to continue the momentum’
‘Still an early stage – needs to continue to be sure strategies are implemented. Funding/resources may be an issue’
‘Potential yet to be realised’

Respondents were less confident that the project had increased awareness and knowledge about drug issues in the general community. These comments provide an indication of reasons for this assessment. Again they relate mainly to the time available.

‘Lots of workshops conducted’
‘This may have been unrealistic given the short term nature of the project. We need to ensure that the momentum continues. Support will be available from NCAOD’
‘No evidence of this’
‘I know I have learnt a huge amount personally as a service provider about drug issues from this project and the connection of this project with NCAD has been beneficial for us all’
‘As a group it is probably not ‘noisy’ enough in the public forum’
‘Through media – newspaper articles. Events – synapse, youth forum. Various health education sessions in variety of settings’

Less than half of the respondents believed that the project had increased co-ordination of services for young people. Comments included:

‘Lots of partnerships and collaborations, which improve service coordination’
‘Again nature – short term – can not implement fully’
‘Good start – long way to go’
‘Brad has had all of our services working extremely effectively in partnership with each other, and there is a lot of opportunity to expand and extend these partnerships’

‘Strong focus led by Second Story’

‘Yes – a big area for us all – how to (a) know what is out there & (b) co-ordinate it’

Respondents were also asked how the project could have been improved. The responses suggested the need for a full-time co-coordinator and most significantly in the words of one respondent “Projects need to be more on-going. Short term funding is always an issue for the sustainability of many projects”. Other comments mentioned the need for a wider reach for the project and more involvement of schools. It is significant that the ideas for improvement concerned the need for more resources and time. None were critical of the underlying rationale for the project or of the way it had been implemented.

All but one of the service providers found that the project met their expectations well or very well. These comments demonstrate the generally positive evaluation of the project:

‘Very positive involvement and outlook’

‘Over and above! The networking outcomes between services in the South has been amazing. From Mission Australia’s perspective, it has been excellent working in partnership with Second Story and other services involved in the project’

‘Reached a large group and was looked up by other services/ schools etc’

‘Networks established and youth involvement’

Comments also suggested the project would have benefited with a little more focus.

Respondents were asked how they had personally benefited from the Youth Drug Peer Action project. Most comments related to the chance to hear young people’s perspectives, to extend their networks, learn more about drug and alcohol issues and then to plan strategies based on this information. The enthusiasm and energy evident in the project was also valued as shown by these comments:

‘Good to see young people taking the lead and being enthusiastic’

‘It has been a privilege to have worked with Brad’

‘I have come to know the South area better – its young people, services and been energised by the commitment of the YDPA members’

Respondents also commented on how their organisation had benefited from the project. These related to stronger relationships between organisations, better understanding of other agencies and young people and establishing a platform for further collaborative work.

Most (70%) of the service providers felt that the project had changed their awareness and knowledge of current drug issues for young people in the City of Onkaparinga either moderately or a lot. Comments included:

‘I learned heaps from the consultation’

‘Reasonably aware before project – work with young people – listen to them’
‘Awareness is better focused rather than expanded’

‘Information has increased by listening to Brad present information to young people in schools’

‘Having teenage children – working in CIB in this area I had a good grasp before. But this project and Noarlunga Community Action on Drugs Forum has increased my knowledge’

Most (80%) of the service providers felt that the project had changed their awareness and knowledge of the effectiveness of current and future strategies either moderately or a lot (Figure 7). This was through review of literature and from the report backs from the evaluation and from discussion at the forum.

Fig 7. Service provider’s rating of their change in awareness and knowledge of the effectiveness of current strategies (n=12)

Only seven of the service provider respondents had attended the Drugs and Health workshop and all found it to be either effective or very effective. Judging from some of the comments made in the survey, this question may have been confusing for some as it appears they may have thought the “Drugs and Health” workshop was in fact the Forum held in December to discuss the findings.

Observation

Interaction at the Forum indicated that some of the traditional barriers between youth and service providers were breaking down. The interaction between the young people and people of authority such as police officers and teachers were relaxed and comfortable. Information from the survey suggests this could be attributed to the project. The Forum gave the young people and service providers the opportunity to talk in a comfortable environment where both parties benefited from working collaboratively.

Peer Education Literature Review - Summary

The most effective peer education programs appear to be those that attempt to enable people to make informed decisions about their behaviour, by providing information and support, rather than trying to directly influence behaviour change. Among these programs, studies suggest that providing information to encourage participants to make informed decisions is more likely to
succeed when peer educators are not (as is often the case) those who are high academic achievers. Rather the greatest success in peer education appears to be when the educators are able to relay personal experience in the areas they are discussing.

Further, the literature suggests that peer education programs tend only to be empowering for the small number of peer educators. This suggests that programs either need to find ways of extending methods that increase self esteem and confidence to those involved in the program outside of the peer educators, or be realistic about what they are actually able to achieve.

As with many health promotion programs, peer education programs appear to benefit greatly when placed in the context of an intersectoral community approach. This enables service providers and the broader community to become involved in the issues presented in the peer education program and work collaboratively to improve health at the community level.

Gaining commitment from service providers to the project appears to have been helped significantly by the links the YDPAP has had with NCAOD, where an environment for community based collaborative work on drug issues already existed.

Observations of the YDPAP’s activities suggest the strategies of the project are in line with current evidence on peer education. A critical part of the project involved recruiting and training young people, in particular students from the Wirreanda High School, to become peer educators. Through peer education, the YDPAP hoped to raise awareness of drug issues amongst young people in the community. Rather than changing behaviour, the YDPAP was centred on educating and encouraging less harmful behaviour associated with drug use among young people.

The project focused on recruiting peer educators with experience of drugs, so as to increase credibility among their peers. The peer educators worked alongside the project officer and key local services to determine prevention and harm minimisation programs. They provided an ongoing community voice on the Drug Action Group and other significant forums. The project officer has also concentrated on consulting with and including a number of young people in the project outside of peer educator roles. Further, through links with NCAOD and the work of the project officer in building up relationships with service providers in the community, the project is becoming a community based initiative rather than an isolated peer education project. This should encourage sustainability for the future.
Conclusion

The results from this process and short-term impact evaluation suggest that the Youth Drug Peer Action Project (YDPAP) was successful in achieving each of its objectives to some extent at least. The project is likely to have enhanced the ability of a variety of agencies to prevent harm arising from drug use by increasing the understanding of the staff in the agency, the co-operation between them and the knowledge and understanding of the young people they work with. There is no doubt that the YDPAP increased understanding of drug issues in the young people involved. There was some concern that more young people could have been involved and perhaps young people from a wider background, including indigenous young people, but it was also recognised that more time and resources would be needed to do this. The YDPAP aimed to assist young people to become partners in developing a youth drug strategy and there is no doubt that this was achieved. Young people were given the chance to develop skills (including presentation and networking) and to come to understand the dynamics behind drug use to a considerable extent.

Each of the agency people surveyed was positive about the project and most felt that they and their agency had benefited from involvement in the project. There was considerable mention of the ways in which the project had encouraged a range of government and non-government agencies to work together and to achieve a better understanding of the benefits of doing so.

The peer education strategy appears to have been generally successful, albeit with a relative small number of young people. The strategy concentrated on providing information and support from peers who themselves had experience with drug use. The project officer was also young and obviously was popular with the young people involved. Agency staff were certainly impressed with the skills developed by some of the young people involved.

The evaluation also raised issues about the funding and implementation of health promotion projects of this type. Most significantly it highlighted the problems associated with short term funding for what is essential a long-term developmental project. Over and over again, respondents to the survey commented that YDPAP had laid the groundwork or foundation for further action, and had succeeded in establishing partnerships, but that more time was needed to reap the benefits from the project. The fear of some respondents was that the lack of continued funding would threaten the potential reward from the existing investment and would prevent the sustainability of the initiative. This observation is not unique to this project and has been previously noted in regard to many other community development projects (Legge et al 1996, Baum 2002). The YDPAP was able to make significant advances in a relatively short period of time. That this was the case reflected the skills and commitment of the project office and the fact that the project was associated with the broader forum of the Noarlunga Community Action on Drugs. This forum meant that the YDPAP could build on existing networks across sectors and act to introduce a stronger youth perspective to this Forum. In turn, the Noarlunga Community Action on Drugs Forum drew on the networks and tradition of collaborative networking and action established by the Noarlunga Healthy Cities initiative. The existence of both this history and framework of supportive forums are important as such aspects of projects can remain invisible yet are likely to be important in accounting for their success.
Recommendations

On the basis of this evaluation we recommend that:

1. A peer youth support worker should be maintained in the Onkaparinga region on an on-going basis

2. This worker should be an active member of the Noarlunga Community Action on Drugs Forum

3. This worker should recruit and support young people to be come active members of the NCAOD Forum

4. An action research evaluation process should continue to be resourced in order to extend the evidence base for peer education and community-based health promotion initiatives.
References


