

TWICE AS CHALLENGING

Creating Synergy III grew in both registrations (up to 170), and focus, with comments from previous conference attendees indicating the importance of including Mental Health as a topic in relation to drug and alcohol misuse.

"This is particularly relevant in the Illawarra, as there is a substantial link between the two, said David Hedger

"The most recent conference, *Creating Synergy IV*, attracted several GPs, which was very pleasing to see, as it helps make all those connections that improve outcomes for the community."

Will Temple, former chair of the Illawarra CDAT, commented that the conference had taken on a life of its own, attracting more supporters and delegates every year, with increasing numbers coming from around Australia.

"This is good in keeping a high profile for *Creating Synergy* and drug and alcohol issues in the Illawarra. However it has continued to be a priority for us to make sure the conference remains accessible to the general community, which is why we ensure we can offer scholarships to allow community members to attend at no cost.

"The ongoing success of *Creating Synergy* has been both exciting and overwhelming, and also a lot of work for the organising committee. The evaluations from 2007 are again very positive, so that we are now looking at securing funding to take some of the work away from the organising committee & CDAT volunteers, which will ensure the sustainability of continuing to produce this valued regional conference."

In 2005 Bathurst CDAT organised a forum to identify and investigate local issues facing those with a combination of mental health and substance use problems (co-morbidity).

CDAT chair Trish Horton said members of the local CDAT carer's group who had family members with both mental health and drug and alcohol problems faced particular difficulties in being diagnosed and then finding appropriate help.

"The carers said 'What are we going to do?' That's where all this came from," she said.

The forum brought together around 100 people, including consumers, families and service providers, and many people working in the field heard for the first time the suffering endured by many families.

"We listened to one person speak about what he had been through and how he overcame his problems, and we were all in tears," Mrs Horton said.

Geraldine Brenton, Project Officer for Drugs and Community Action Strategy,

NSW Health, said the forum was a big eye opener for everyone.

"As a result of the forum, four priority areas for improvement were identified. Two years later, with these priorities filtering down, there has been a huge improvement in appropriate services for people with co-morbidity," explained Geraldine.

"For example, in Bathurst a new hospital is now being built with dedicated beds for detox. In the weeks after the forum there began much closer collaboration between Mental Health and Drugs and Alcohol, and happily now they are co-located and have become a related team. One of the Bathurst CDAT members now represents the needs of people with both mental health and substance use problems on an important local committee. All of which just illustrates how CDATs can put important local issues on the public agenda, and initiate changes that make a big difference in their community."

PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE WESTERN ADVOCATE, BATHURST

Guest speakers at the Drug and Alcohol and Mental Health Forum in Bathurst, from left, Dr Rod MacQueen, Darryl Taylor, Maureen Connolly, Leigh Underwood, Floyd Kenny, and front, Reverend Karyn Burchell.





TRACKIE DUCKS

A collaboration of five North Coast CDATs brought the story of the Trackie Duck family to the streets and markets of Ballina, Casino, Kyogle, Lismore and Nimbin in an attempt to bring drug awareness messages to 'everyday' people.

In the off-beat, slap stick performance, it is clear that each of the family members has a different drug issue. As the black comedy develops it emphasises the importance of looking after each other, and that it's OK to ask for help. In the 20 minute performance, the Trackie Duck family also highlighted the effects of various drugs and encouraged harm minimisation.



CREATIVE EDUCATION

NOT TRIVIA

Mixing drug and alcohol education with a fun night out might not seem an easy task, but Orange CDAT has developed a very successful formula with its regular trivia nights.

Supported by various community groups, the Orange CDAT held its first trivia night in 2003, with over 160 young people attending. Big Brother celebrity Kieran Tanner presented the questions, while CDAT members waited on the tables, scored questions sheets and helped with the games between trivia rounds.

Overwhelming demand for a follow up event saw Orange CDAT repeating many of the successful elements of the first night a year later.

"This time we organised for another Big Brother identity, Sara Marie Fedel, to be guest compere," explained Peter Ryan of the Orange CDAT. "She was a great hit with the 200 young people who came along. She entertained them with her stories about the 'big house' and what went on that was not seen on TV. The volunteers who helped on the night also enjoyed her vivacious and humorous personality."

Health related questions were mixed through the general knowledge questions and each table featured info packages describing the risks from misuse of drugs and alcohol.

The Orange Community Health Centre staff made mocktails, and the Daybreak Rotary Club cooked the BBQ. Many local

SO VIVAL

businesses donated food and prizes, and accommodation for Sara Marie.

The recipe for success has since been repeated with a special night for parents.

Pittwater CDAT also held a Youth Trivia Night in Drug Action Week 2005, targeting young people aged 15 to 18 years.

Kerri Lawrence, chair of Pittwater CDAT, explained that the trivia night had grown out of a Community Drug Action Forum.

"The strongest concern of young people attending the forum was that there was limited entertainment for youth under 18 yrs in the area," said Kerri.

"The Youth Trivia night was designed to provide up to date drug and alcohol education through trivia questions and prizes. The education was presented in an entertaining and non-threatening way, with live bands and mocktails adding to the fun."

The peer educators were credible and invaluable for dispelling myths and misconceptions about alcohol and other drugs to their peers. The support from CDAT members (in volunteering their time) was also crucial to the night's success.

What young people said

"The level of enthusiasm of kids attending the trivia night was fantastic"

"We enjoyed the questions but kids 12yrs and up really need this information too"

"People definitely liked the prizes"

"Having peer educators as the MC's was cool"

LIFE FIX – GETTING HIGH ON LIFE NOT DRUGS

In Drug Action Week 2003 Wollongong CDAT supported a Drug and Alcohol Prevention Expo *Life Fix* for young people aged 16 to 24, in partnership with Wollongong TAFE and Illawarra Health.

The event combined information stalls on drug and alcohol issues and services, with entertainment and 'mocktails' to attract and maintain the interest of young people. Seven final year TAFE students completing studies in community services and welfare organised the event, supervised by TAFE teachers.

One of the students, Natalie Lightfoot, commented; "Promoting awareness of the risks of drug taking is very important because unless young people work in the field, a lot of them wouldn't know anything about the dangers.

"A lot of kids who leave school early come to TAFE later on to continue their studies and they have often missed out on drug education at school. At *Life Fix* we focused on particular themes, like concerns a lot of young women have about drink spiking and the effect of mixing drugs and alcohol," explained Natalie.



SYLVIA LIBER/ILLAWARRA MERCURY



PAUSING ON THE BRINK

Recent research showing the dramatic rise of binge drinking in young women aged 14 to 17 prompted Hornsby CDAT to support an educational resource to better inform girls at risk.

The resulting DVD – BRINK – has attracted national media attention, a special screening at NSW Parliament House, and generated demand from as far away as Canada, the UK and the US.

BRINK was developed by young people for young people, with a team comprising 13 teenage girls, from different schools around the Hornsby area. Together they wrote a script for an entertaining seven-minute short film, *Moonshine*, as well as producing an interactive quiz, and, in line with a harm minimisation approach, tips for keeping yourself safe if you are drinking. The DVD was designed as a peer educational tool, but can still be used effectively by teachers and other facilitators.

One of the student scriptwriters, Bec Barrett from Mount St Benedict College, explains “In our research for this film we conducted a lot of interviews with girls our age and we asked them, ‘Why do you binge-drink?’ and the answer a lot of the time was, ‘It is what we do, it is just accepted,’ so I think it is a very big widespread problem.

“My hopes are really that it will generate discussion, that it will make people talk about the issue, and, because we approached it in a more humorous and fun kind of manner, it will be something that people respond to, and actually get something out of it.”

“I think the resources that we see already in school are so serious about binge drinking and we felt that teenagers would respond a lot more to something humorous.”

Co-facilitator of the project, Felicity Garland, who is also Deputy Chair of Hornsby CDAT and a counsellor at Mission Australia’s Clifton Adolescent & Family Solutions (CAFS) said: “The girls wanted to help young people to explore the range of choices that are available to them when it comes to drinking. They didn’t want to judge people’s choices or tell them what to do by saying ‘don’t drink’. They came up with the main message, which was that drinking isn’t always fun.”

BRINK was launched in Youth Week 2006 at Westfield Hornsby with continuous showings at Greater Union, and since

Sequence from the Brink DVD illustrating the consequences of excessive drinking.



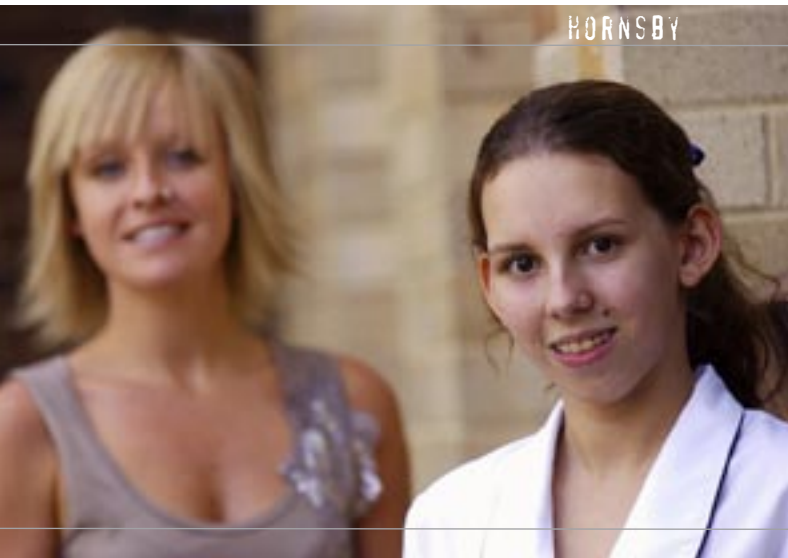


PHOTO COURTESY OF THE HORNSBY ADVOCATE

then it has screened at NSW Parliament House, featured on ABC Stateline, and been presented at the 5th International Conference on Drugs and Young People. *Girlfriend* magazine also ran a two-page feature on binge drinking which included information on the project. Many other CDATs are now using this effective resource in their educational activities.

Hornsby CDAT chair, Michael Colnan, said "We are now looking at a related DVD resource for educating GP's, pharmacists and elderly people on the dangers of mixing prescription drugs with alcohol."

BRINK was a collaboration between Hornsby CDAT, CAFS and Hornsby Shire Council, with funding provided by the Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation (AERF) and NSW Health Community Drug Strategies.

Copies of BRINK are available through every local library in NSW, or by contacting Hornsby Council Community Services on (02) 9847 6536.

Brink project team leader, Felicity Garland, left, with Bec Barrett, one of the student scriptwriters.

REDUCING THA RISK

Frequent questions from young people in the Parramatta area about alcohol and drug issues prompted youth workers to consider how best to address this need, especially as the teenagers came from diverse cultural backgrounds.

In the course of visiting the drop-in and homework programs at Dundas Area Youth Service, youth workers informally canvassed the idea of developing a film.

Out of this an enthusiastic group of young people from Telopea and Dundas came forward. Parramatta CDAT arranged funding from the Drugs and Community Action Strategy to produce an educational video.

All of the content was developed by the young people and focuses on the issues and stresses that affect them, as well as the positive choices they can make to "reduce the risk" of alcohol and drug problems.

It was then decided to use the video as the basis of a resource kit for those who work with young people. The full resource kit comprises the video (or DVD version), an information booklet, an outline of a training program with suggested drug and alcohol education activities for young people, and contacts for a range of support services.

Reducing tha Risk was a partnership between Parramatta CDAT, Western Sydney Area Health Service and Granville Multicultural and Community Centre, with training provided by High Street Youth Health Service and Western Area Adolescent Team.

Young performers at the launch of *Reducing tha Risk*

