

Category: Making Prevention Everybody's Business

Title: Aboriginal Youth Sexual Health Didgeridoo Project

Abstract

This unique Aboriginal youth sexual health didgeridoo and craft project developed because the Aboriginal community of Goulburn identified a need to educate and promote important health issues impacting on young Aboriginal men and women within their community. Areas addressed included: drug and alcohol harm minimization; safe sexual health practices as well as promote other important health matters.

Other community youth programs had been run, but failed to attract Aboriginal participants. The Aboriginal Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS worker implemented a program combining Aboriginal culture and health education. This mode of delivery appealed to Aboriginal youth who regularly attended the program. Youths established networks with health workers, developed skills and strategies that assisted them in accessing health services; additionally they connected and/or reconnected with their Aboriginal culture through art, craft and music.

Aim

The program aimed to engage Goulburn Aboriginal youth in meaningful activities that were grounded in culture yet informed them about sexual health and drug and alcohol in real and meaningful ways.

Nature of the problem

Aboriginal youth in the Goulburn community have had limited opportunities to learn about the impact of unsafe sex practices or the short and long term impacts and effect of drugs and alcohol.

It was deemed necessary to listen to what Aboriginal youth were saying about their needs and wants. The youth decided they would like to meet and talk with health workers to learn about health matters that were important to them. They also wanted to make connections with workers so if and when they, their family members or friends wanted to access health services they had contacts and knew the processes.

Extent of the problem

The program ran weekly with two hour session, out of Greater Southern Area Health Service's Bailey's Place Youth Centre, which opportunistically linked participants in with other activities and programs that were offered out of this centre.

The project was supported by a range of health and community agencies who responded to the expressed needs of the youth. This collaboration increased the likelihood and capacity for ongoing work with the participants into the future.

The program allowed and facilitated participants linking with their Aboriginal culture, a definite request from participants in the initial consultation process. To achieve this goal, the program used Aboriginal music, art and story telling. Additionally, the youth made Didgeridoos, including cutting them back, sanding and painting. At project end the youth keep the didgeridoos they made, which act as triggers for them in relation to health matters.

Strategic importance

This program relates to the goals and strategic directions of NSW Health:
Sexual health

Improve sexual health through strategies targeting community awareness, increased use of condoms, and increased screening for sexually transmitted infections within priority groups. P.13

Additionally it relates to the Chief Executive's Performance Agreement:

- Make prevention everybody's business
- Healthy People Strategy
 - Chronic Disease Prevention Strategy. Including obesity, smoking, nutrition, alcohol, and physical activity
 - Communicable Disease Prevention and Control strategies. Including immunisation, HIV/AIDS, sexually transmissible infections and Hepatitis C
 - Aboriginal Health Strategies. Including National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal Health, Two Ways Together, Smoke Check
- Australian Better Health Initiative. Commonwealth/State program to focus resources on prevention
- Community Drug Strategies
- Youth Alcohol Action Plan

GSAHS Performance Agreement 2006-2007 p.1

Planning and implementation solutions

The first stages of the program involved meetings and consultation with the Aboriginal community and a wide range of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community organisations, GSAHS health staff (Sexual, Drug & Alcohol, Women's Health, Aboriginal Health, Population health Public Health Unit), the high school and art gallery.

A working party enabled input from a wide sector of the community. Meetings were held to design, implement and evaluate a 12 week program within the allocated budget. Resources were purchased, venue booked and transport arranged.

Participants engaged in social activities with other young Aboriginal people through Aboriginal art, culture, health promotion and other social activities. These interactions and sharing of information and experiences had the potential to reduce behavioural problems that had previously lead to police action.

Sustaining change

Throughout this program the Aboriginal Sexual Health worker gathered anecdotal evidence through informal discussions with the participants. Overall it indicated participants were very happy with the program content and delivery.

Needless to say participants did offer suggestions about how the program could be improved i.e. at times they would have preferred to continue to work on their didgeridoos rather than attend information sessions, although they did comment that they had learnt a great deal from the guest speakers.

Future Scope

Using the philosophy of combining cultural connectedness and health education and promotion is a strategy that has the potential to engage young Aboriginal people throughout GSAHS and NSW in a range of health topics that impact upon Aboriginal youth.