

Parent Links Peer Education Project

Project Report, July 2005 – May 2006



Funded by the NSW Government

Notation

This project has been funded by the NSW Government.

As the coordinator of the project, Youth Solutions is solely responsible for the content of, and views expressed in this report and all material associated with this project.

Please note that every endeavour has been made by Youth Solutions to ensure the accuracy of information provided within this report. Positions and organisations referred to in this report were correct at the time of their participation in this project.

Foreword

This report will provide interested parties with an outline of the process used in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the *Parent Links Peer Education Project*.

It is intended to be a guide that may be used as future reference for parties wishing to duplicate this peer education process, as well as a source of information for those interested in the issues surrounding parents and youth drug use.

For more information regarding this project please contact:



Debbie Roberts
Manager
Youth Solutions

Suite 19, Level 4
Macarthur Square Shopping Centre
Gilchrist Drive
Ambarvale NSW 2560

PO Box 112
Macarthur Square NSW 2560

Phone: 02 4628 2319
Fax: 02 4626 7844
Email: info@youthsolutions.com.au
Website: www.youthsolutions.com.au

For more information about Youth Solutions or to download a PDF version of this report please log on to:

Web: www.youthsolutions.com.au

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Michelle McMillan	Uniting Care Burnside
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Phillip Matthews	Pastor Uniting Church, Outreach Youth Worker
Lynn Baker	Community Liaison Worker, Eagle Vale High School
Sesilia Latu	Macarthur Diversity Services
Jane McIvor	Macarthur Community Forum
Tracey Binney	Community Project Officer, Camden Council
Erin Greathead	Youth Project Officer, Campbelltown City Council
Debbie Roberts	Manager, Youth Solutions, Parent Links Project Coordinator

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Amanda Pilotto
Angela Rauch
Anna Harrison
Carol Willingham
Debra Berriman
Gill Shilling
Kristen Briggs (nee Carlisle-Jones)
Liz Moore
Maria Jansen
Maureen Gatt
Su Carlisle-Jones
Sue Kendrick
Tanja Richardson

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Executive Summary

The *Parent Links Peer Education Project* involved linking parents, community members and services and ultimately young people. The project had a focus on alcohol; however the project also addressed other drug use by young people. Parents/carers (parents) of young people 12-17 years living in the Macarthur region were trained and mobilised as Parent Peer Educators.

The project aimed to build on existing parental networks, eg: through junior sports clubs, churches, performing arts, which would increase the likelihood of recruitment of parents as Parent Peer Educators and ensure sustainable and repeatable outcomes.

Project Aims

1. An increase in the knowledge of alcohol and other drug issues by parents in the Macarthur region.
2. An increase in knowledge of Alcohol & Other Drug (AOD) services by parents.
3. Increase the opportunity for parents to discuss alcohol and other drug issues with their children and other parents.
4. Increase the modelling of appropriate drinking behaviour of parents to their children.
5. Increase the level of parental monitoring of adolescent drinking.
6. Increased awareness of the risks of teenage drinking at risky levels.
7. Increased awareness of the links between early onset of risky drinking and problematic behaviours.
8. Increased awareness and implementation of parenting strategies to prevent and reduce alcohol and other drug related harms among young people.
9. Increased confidence among parents about addressing alcohol and other drug related issues with their children.
10. Increased importance of the need to delay the onset of alcohol and other drug use among young people.

A Regional Advisory Committee was formed with representatives from a broad range of local services and stakeholders, including parents. The Regional Advisory Committee assisted with the: promotion and development of the project, dissemination of the parent survey, recruitment of parents for the focus group, recruitment of Parent Peer Educators as well as evaluation of the project.

The Regional Advisory Committee also ensured partnerships were formed at the local level and increased the level of awareness of local services.

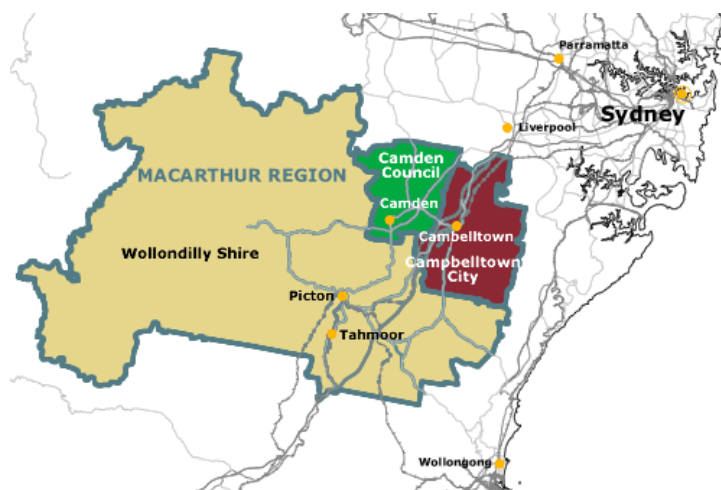
The project was funded as a demonstration project. From the outset, Youth Solutions understood that the project needed to model the organisations' philosophies of *whole of community participation* while promoting *harm minimisation* strategies, while also measuring the effectiveness of using parents as peer educators. Additionally, that the structure and methodology of the project needed to be flexible enough to meet the needs of the target group and reflect what was learnt through focus testing, surveys and evaluation.

From its inception in July 2005, the project included an extensive needs assessment, recruitment and training of Parent Peer Educators, implementation of action by Parent Peer Educators, the inclusion of a Parent Links page on the Youth Solutions website and a community awareness campaign.

This report will provide the background to the project, the processes involved, challenges experienced and also recommendations.

Background and Identifying the Need

The Macarthur region includes the local government areas (LGA's) of Camden, Campbelltown and Wollondilly covering 3067 square kilometres with a total population fast approaching 240 000 residents . Located less than an hour drive south-west of Sydney, the Macarthur region is a diverse community embracing rural through to metropolitan living.



(Map sourced from www.macroc.nsw.gov.au)

Identifying the Need

Preventing harmful drug use among young people is a priority for governments and communities across Australia. The patterns of adolescent drug use that lead to economic and social harms include regular tobacco use, alcohol abuse and alcohol dependence, frequent cannabis use, illicit drug use and poly drug use. In Australia, alcohol consumption is associated with significant levels of harm among young people, which contributes to a range of negative health, social and economic consequences. The majority of alcohol consumed by young people is drunk at levels that far exceed the recommended level for adults. The 2002 National Drug Strategy Household Survey, found that the majority of alcohol consumed by males and females aged 14-17 years was done so at risky levels for acute harm, with approximately a quarter of young people doing so at least monthly.

A number of literature reviews have examined the risk and protective factors influencing young people's drug use and harmful drug use (Hawkins, Catalano & Miller, 1992; Hawkins, Arthur & Catalano, 1995; Kandel et al, 1986; Loeber, Stouthamer-Loeber et al, 1991; Newcomb & Felix-Ortiz, 1992; Newcomb et al, 1987; Werner & Smith, 1992; White, Pandina & LaGrange, 1987). Risk factors were organised according to their influence in different developmental settings, including communities, families, schools and peer groups, and within individuals.

Family attitudes and behaviour were important predictors, as were parental child-rearing practices. Parental substance use, parental substance use problems, family conflict and sexual abuse were identified as family-level predictors from early in a child's life. Parental attitudes in early adolescence appeared to predict frequent alcohol use and alcohol abuse. Low family attachment in early adolescence predicted poly drug use and frequent

cannabis use. In some cohorts parental permissiveness in adolescence predicted illicit drug use.

A recent literature review on the role of parents with respect to adolescent alcohol consumption suggests that parents have a key role to play in influencing young people's alcohol use. A study in the patterns of drug use among young Victorians found there was a relationship found between parental support and substance use. Students who had used any illicit substances indicated lower levels of parental support. Significantly one of the strongest correlates of substance use was frequency of nights out without adult supervision.

Youth Solutions firmly supports the philosophy that parents have a role in reducing risk factors in the lives of young people; this is supported by the Principles that guide the service, in particular the *Whole of Community Approach*. Parents provide the framework from which their children learn about alcohol and other drugs. This includes their own modelling of alcohol consumption and other drug use, their attitudes towards alcohol and other drug use and young people, the level of monitoring of their adolescent's alcohol use and the boundaries they establish in regard to youth alcohol consumption. Young people report drinking at lower risk levels if their parents have very strict boundaries or rules about alcohol use. Young people also report lower levels of alcohol use when there is adult supervision at parties.¹

It is clear that parents are well placed to positively influence young people's choices and behaviours in regard to alcohol and other drug use; however they need to be supported in this role. Shanahan, Hewitt and Elliot elaborate on this point by suggesting that parents currently feel alienated and powerless in their role.²

Various studies³ have reported that parents tend to be more concerned about illicit drug use and may not recognise the harms associated with alcohol use. They also feel uncomfortable or find it difficult to talk to their children about alcohol use possibly because of their own alcohol consumption and the risk of setting a double standard, despite the fact that young people report the benefits of knowing what their parents consider to be acceptable levels of alcohol use. Parents often report they are unaware of how to address the issue of youth alcohol use and are looking for advice and strategies that they can effectively utilise. In particular parents are reporting confusion in regard to the legalities of providing alcohol to underage young people at private celebrations.

Various forums and summits (NSW Alcohol Summit, Thinking Drinking Conference 2005, and Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy (MCDS) Forum on Underage Drinking) have recognised the importance of strategically involving parents in the prevention and reduction of harmful alcohol use among young people, however there appears to be minimal strategies being implemented despite parents being identified as a priority target.

¹ 2005b, King, Taylor, Carroll Research for Australian Government Department of Health & Ageing, *Parenting opinions and behaviours regarding teenage alcohol consumption, 2001-2004*

² 1999, Shanahan, Hewitt, Elliot and Shanahan Research *Development Research for a National Alcohol Campaign Summary Report, p14-15*

³ 2005b, King, Taylor, Carroll Research for Australian Government Department of Health & Ageing, *Parenting opinions and behaviours regarding teenage alcohol consumption, 2001-2004*

Applying for Funding

Opportunity arose for these concerns to be addressed, when Youth Solutions was given the opportunity to submit an expression of interest for funding to the NSW Government.

The proposed project involved piloting a peer education project with parents across the Macarthur region. Following an interview with NSW Government representatives, Youth Solutions was asked to submit a complete funding submission which was successful in receiving funds in July 2005.

Coordinating Service – Youth Solutions

Youth Solutions was established in 1988 (as Macarthur Drug and Alcohol Youth Project), and is a non government community based, youth drug prevention charity. Youth Solutions provides a youth drug and alcohol prevention service in the south western Sydney regions of Macarthur and Wingecarribee. Youth Solutions is a Quality Improvement Council Accredited Service and is funded by NSW Health and Sydney South West Area Health Service.

Peer Education

What is Peer Education?

“Peer Education involves sharing and providing information about alcohol and other drugs to individuals or groups. It occurs through a messenger who is similar to the target group in terms of characteristics such as age, gender or cultural background, has had similar experiences and has sufficient social standing or status within the group to exert influence”.

Source: Peer Education: From Evidence to Practice-an alcohol & other drug primer 2003. National Centre for Education & Training on Addiction.

Types of Peer Education

- Informal, unstructured group discussions
- Dissemination of resources and advice at events
- Activities that draw on popular culture, such as music, drama, art
- Spontaneous everyday conversations with friends, acquaintances, family, or even strangers

Source: Peer Education: From Evidence to Practice-an alcohol & other drug primer 2003. National Centre for Education & Training on Addiction

The Project's Process

Delivery of the project included:

- Recruitment of a Project Coordinator
- Establishment of a Regional Advisory Committee
- Identification and recruitment of a Research Consultant
- Development of a project implementation action plan
- Facilitation of Parent Focus Groups
- Conducting surveys with parents of teenagers
- Establishment of a website for Parents
- Recruitment and training of Parent Peer Educators in the Macarthur region
- Parent Peer Educators initiating action in their community
- Development and implementation of a Community Awareness Campaign
- Final evaluation report written
- Dissemination of project information

Recruitment of Project Coordinator

The Project Coordinator required a high level of organisation and communication skills, experience working with parents and young people, as well as training experience.

Recommendations from a previously implemented Youth Solutions Parent Peer Education Project clearly highlighted the need for the Project Coordinator to be highly skilled and available full time.

Major roles of the Project Coordinator included project management, budget management, maintaining the website and other communication mediums, liaising with the Funding Body, writing reports, liaising with the Researcher, implementing and coordinating research, liaising and communicating with Regional Advisory Committee, training and supporting Parent Peer Educators, presenting project outcomes to community and at conferences.

To address this, Youth Solutions employed additional project staff which allowed an experienced staff member to be released from existing projects so that they could coordinate and manage this project.

Recommendations

1. Project Coordinator needs a high level of skill and knowledge to coordinate and manage a project of this calibre.
2. Administrative support to the Project Coordinator was instrumental in all stages of project development, implementation and evaluation.

Regional Advisory Committee

The project sought substantial involvement from a diverse Regional Advisory Committee membership, including: other drug and alcohol services (treatment and prevention), family services, local business, local governments, churches, non government organisations, parents and the general community.

The collective experience and network contacts of Regional Advisory Committee members informed and shaped the nature of the project at each stage, and in particular enabled the greater distribution of resources to parents.

Regional Advisory Committee members were interviewed by independent research company, Micromex, as part of a comprehensive project evaluation.

Recommendations

1. The establishment of a Regional Advisory Committee, as described, is important to support and guide the project.
2. Representation from a broad range of key service providers, government, non-government, and community members is crucial to the success of such a project, demonstrating whole of community commitment.
3. Participation on the Regional Advisory Committee by the target group, ie parents, provided input into and assisted with the implementation of the focus group and surveys, recruitment of parents, and dissemination of the project promotional material.

Project Evaluation

Prior to this project, no research had been conducted specifically in the Macarthur region about the main issues of concern surrounding alcohol and other drugs, parents and young people. To ensure that the project met the needs of parents, it was imperative to consult with them about their concerns.

Youth Solutions explored appropriate research companies who had conducted similar research. Micromex Research was contracted to conduct the project evaluation as follows:

- Pre evaluation interviews with steering committee members
- A pre evaluation focus group with the target group (parents)
- Survey of local parents
- Post evaluation interviews with steering committee members
- A post evaluation interviews with the target group (parents)

Pre Evaluation

Following are the key findings of the survey of local parents, the pre evaluation interviews with steering committee members and the focus group with steering committee members and the target group (parents).

Micromex also provided Youth Solutions with recommendations on the organisation and implementation of the Parent Links Project, based on the key findings.

Objectives

The objectives of the interviews, focus group and survey included but were not limited to:

- Identifying and prioritising alcohol and other drug related issues of importance
- Assessing local requirements
- Assisting in the development of the training program and potential initiatives
- Assisting with methodologies for effective recruitment of Parent Peer Educators, as well as follow up, support and program coordination
- Assisting with the development of the website

The interview and workshop format included specific analysis of these objectives.

Methodology

Focus Group Workshop

A workshop was conducted with Regional Advisory Committee members and the target group (parents) on 13 October 2005, from 7.00 pm to 8.30 pm in Youth Solutions offices in Campbelltown, NSW.

Attendees to the workshop included: a university student/young person, six parents, local high school community liaison officer and Youth Solutions Project Coordinator.

Key Stakeholder Interviews

Prior to the focus group workshop, ten Regional Advisory Committee member interviews were conducted.

Community Survey

Surveys were self-completed by respondents on a paper hard copy.

A total of 187 surveys were completed. 56% (105) of these surveys were completed at the Camden Food, Wine and Music Festival. The remainder were completed within the various social networks of Regional Advisory Committee members.

Following is a summary of the key outcomes of the workshop and key stakeholder interviews.

A sample size of 187 responses provided a maximum sampling error of plus or minus 7.2% at 95% confidence.

Micromex Research and Youth Solutions designed the questionnaire.

Following is a summary of Key Recommendations from focus group, surveys and key stakeholder interviews.

Key Recommendations from focus group, surveys & key stakeholder interviews

	Recommendation	Achieved	Comments
1	<p>Training of Parent Peer Educators to specifically concentrate on identified issues of concern including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Binge drinking ▪ Drink driving ▪ Mixing of alcohol and other drugs ▪ Drink spiking ▪ Home parties ▪ Ease of access ▪ Identified low levels of knowledge parents have with regards to drug and alcohol issues ▪ Identified low levels of knowledge young people have with regards to drug and alcohol issues ▪ Complacency amongst the community with regards to alcohol use by young people 	✓	Extent of workshop content was limited by the time available to train Parent Peer Educators
2	Specific information regarding local drug and alcohol usage issues by young people to be developed for Parent Peer Educators	✓	<p><i>Links to Information about Drugs and Alcohol for Parents Booklet</i> developed.</p> <p>Difficulty in obtaining 'local' information regarding usage of drugs and alcohol by young people.</p> <p>Local referral information included in booklet</p>
3	Information and education to include strategies for discussing drug and alcohol issues and dealing with drug and alcohol issues	✓	Limited time to intensively discuss drug and alcohol issues during workshop, however Parent Peer Educators had opportunities to discuss these issues with Project Coordinator and each other throughout the course of the project
4	<p>The training program must meet the parameters identified by participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Easy to follow ▪ Sensitive to different cultural groups participating 	✓	All Parent Peer Educators had varying levels of skill and confidence which created difficulties for Project Coordinator to meet individual needs

	Recommendation	Achieved	Comments
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Confidence building and information rich ▪ Skills building with regards to Parent Peer Educators approaching parents 		
5	Potential initiatives identified by participants to be discussed and considered with Parent Peer Educators	✓	Development and implementation of Community Awareness Campaign. Evaluation of <i>Links Card</i> by Parent Peer Educators
6	Training and information to contain as specifically as possible 'localised information' on alcohol and drug use issues	✓	
7	Define the Parent Peer Educator role to allow for ease of understanding by potential candidates regarding the roles requirements	✓	Role clarified but still difficult for some Parent Peer Educators to grasp
8	Identify and approach suitable candidates amongst current networks and from suitable community groups	✓	
9	Follow up and support Parent Peer Educators on an 'individual needs' basis	✓	
10	Utilise local newspapers and the local radio station C91.3FM in the promotion of the program	✓	
11	Highly prioritise the development of the website with a strong focus on local issues and information	✓	
12	Ensure relevant information from the website is downloadable and printable	✓	
13	Include an interactive chat room on the website. Strongly publicise this tool in all program marketing Organise a dedicated moderator and close monitoring of the interactive chat room to ensure appropriateness of use	✗	Chat room not feasible as most Parent Peer Educators were not very computer literate or this was not their chosen means of communication
14	Identify a more acceptable title for the Project to be used by Parent Peer Educators	✗	Parent Peer Educators unable to decide on a substitute title
15	Further investigate the development of parent education programs allowing for the creation of informal Parent Peer Educators	✓	

Post Evaluation

Background

Youth Solutions also contracted Micromex Research to conduct evaluation of the project. The project evaluation was conducted as follows:

- Review of project outcomes
- Interviews with steering committee members
- Interviews with Parent Peer Educators
- Review of the project website and website access statistics

The following outlines the key outcomes of the evaluation and provides recommendations on the continuance or expansion of the project, based on the key outcomes.

Objectives

The objectives of the interviews included, but were not limited to:

- Allowing for an evaluation regarding the achievement of the project objectives
- Assisting in the modification and development of further strategies to improve the project outcomes

Methodology

Key Stakeholder Interviews

Nine Regional Advisory Committee Member Interviews were conducted. Eight Parent Peer Educator Interviews were conducted and included seven active educators and one non active educator.

Micromex Research developed the interview templates. The interview templates worked through the identified key stages of the project.

Key Stages

1. Recruitment of Parent Peer Educators
2. Training of Parent Peer Educators
3. Development and use of project resources
4. The Project Website
5. Project Management
6. Promotion of the project
7. Project outcomes

Inclusive within the interviews was an analysis of the project's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT).

Following is a summary of the key outcomes of the key stakeholder interviews.

Post Evaluation Key Outcomes

Recruitment of Parent Peer Educators

Summary

Thirteen Parent Peer Educators were initially recruited and trained. Recruitment was conducted via existing networks, promotion at community events, mail-outs to key community organisations and advertisements/editorial in local newspapers.

The majority of Parent Peer Educators were sourced from existing contacts, with a smaller number responding to advertisements in the newspaper.

Parent Peer Educators were from a variety of backgrounds, however culturally they were quite similar and not representative of minority cultural groups.

Six Parent Peer Educators withdrew from the project with the majority citing family reasons. Seven remain active in the project, all at varying degrees.

The timing of the recruitment was September through to November 2005, which presented significant problems regarding moving forward with the project due to the Christmas holiday period. For this reason the next stage of the project was delayed until the end of January 2006.

Conclusion

1. The use of existing networks was the key factor in the project successfully obtaining, in the first instance, 13 Parent Peer Educators.
2. A drop off of 6 Parent Peer Educators (46%) is relatively high, but generally symptomatic for a pilot project of this nature, and the retainment of a core group of 7 active Parent Peer Educators is a positive result.
3. The timing of the project and recruitment of Parent Peer Educators in November was not ideal and created significant issues for the project.

Training of Parent Peer Educators

Summary

Thirteen Parent Peer Educators were trained. This training occurred over a one-day period with ongoing training provided on an 'as needs' basis. Further training regarding 'facilitation' was provided to eight Parent Peer Educators.

Overall, Parent Peer Educators report that the training was informative and useful, although the one-day format resulted in a significant amount of information needing to be digested in a short space of time.

Parent Peer Educators report that this was alleviated by the ongoing support and training provided by the Project Coordinator.

1. Knowledge levels on the subject matter

Parent Peer Educators report that their knowledge levels were adequate to good after receiving the initial training. Further ongoing support resulted in the Parent Peer Educators perceiving their knowledge to be good to very good.

2. Knowledge levels on the project

Parent Peer Educators report that their knowledge levels on the Parent Links project was good, however knowledge on how to best move forward with this project was not good.

Considerable concern was expressed with regards to development and implementation of project strategies.

3. Confidence levels

Parent Peer Educators report varying degrees of confidence regarding their ability to be effective within the role. Of importance is the fact that Parent Peer Educators unanimously indicate that their involvement within the project has significantly increased their confidence, with regards to communicating on issues surrounding alcohol and drugs.

Confidence levels with regard to developing action plans and project strategies was not high, however the Parent Peer Educators' confidence on the implementation side was.

Conclusion

1. With consideration given to the available resources, training was considered to be good to excellent.
2. Ideally further structured training should have been provided, however significant support from the Project Coordinator alleviated this requirement to a large extent.
3. Training was strong on the theoretical side of the project, however not considered to be as strong in the area of project implementation.
4. Parent Peer Educators report difficulties in developing their action plans and project strategies, and this is regarded as a significant weakness within the project.

Development and use of project resources

Summary

Significant resources were developed within the course of this project. The predominant resources included:

1. The Training Program

Following the development of the Regional Advisory Committee, community research was conducted to ascertain the major information requirements throughout the community, with regards to informing parents on alcohol and drug issues of young people.

The information gathered was then summarised and further workshopped within an organised focus group, to assist in the development of the training program. The training was conducted by two Youth Solutions facilitators on a Saturday in November at an

accessible community venue for all participants. Transport was organised for one participant.

Content of the six hour interactive training program included:

- Introductions
- Parent Links Project overview
- Values
- Risks and behaviours
- Statistics
- Harm Minimisation
- Australian Alcohol Guidelines
- Standard Drinks
- Where to get help and information
- What is a peer education?
- Types of peer education
- Role of parent peer educator
- Action plan
- Communicating with Youth Solutions
- Where to from here?

2. [Links to Information about Drugs and Alcohol for Parents Booklet](#)

In consultation with the Parent Peer Educators, an information booklet was prepared titled *Links to Information about Drugs and Alcohol for Parents*. This booklet was developed for use as a reference point for Parent Peer Educators and for distribution to interested parties. Parent Peer Educators report that this booklet was of significant use to them during the course of the project (available to download from the Youth Solutions website www.youthsolutions.com.au).

3. [Parent Link Cards](#)

Custom cards were developed to be used as a resource for Parent Peer Educators to provide to individuals they had spoken to, or who had requested further information. The cards detailed further access points for interested groups or individuals. The Parent Links Cards were initially designed as a means of measuring the reach of the Parent Peer Educators. Parent Peer Educators' attitudes to the Parent Links Cards differed significantly. Some report that distribution of the Parent Links Cards was difficult and refrained from distributing them at all. Others organised for the Cards to be left on counters of relevant services/organisations, while a proportion of Parent Peer Educators were comfortable to personally distribute them (Appendix 5).

4. [Parent Links bottles of water](#)

500 bottles of water branded with the Parent Links information were sourced and distributed through the course of the project. Distribution occurred at various community events including the *Camden Food, Wine & Music Festival*, *Narellan Chamber of Commerce Trade Expo* and *Macarthur 24 Hour Cancer Walk* (distributed by Rotary Club of Narellan).

5. [Youth Solutions and Parent Links Website](#)

A Parent Links web page was developed to provide internet based information and resources. The original concept of the web page was to include a Parent Peer Educators' forum section allowing for use exclusively by Parent Peer Educators. This concept was

deemed to be inappropriate after further discussions with the Parent Peer Educators, as they could not envisage using this resource.

The Youth Solutions website with the Parent Links web page was reconfigured and launched in May 2006. The website includes a summary of the Parent Links Project, its aims, a project timeline, critical fact sheets relevant to young people and parents, local referral phone numbers for help or further drug and alcohol information, as well as links to other services and sites.

Conclusion

1. Significant resources were developed for the Parent Links Project.
2. The training resource and Links to Information about Drugs and Alcohol for Parents Booklet were evaluated particularly highly by Parent Peer Educators and were consistently utilised.
3. While the Parent Links Cards were used by Parent Peer Educators, their value was deemed to be significantly lower.
4. Parent Peer Educators were largely not high users of the internet, and as such reported little use of the project website, however did report significant referrals to interested parties to review the site.

The Project Website

Summary

Feedback from Parent Peer Educators and from Regional Advisory Committee members was highly positive with regards to the website. Interviewees rated the look of the website, its ease of use and content very highly. It should be noted that approximately half of the Interviewees had not yet viewed the website and were unable to provide input.

1. Web-Site Evaluation Worksheet and Website visits

Micromex Research used a standardised website evaluation worksheet which they had developed. This worksheet covers the key identified criteria in developing and utilising an effective website. These include:

- Performance and Usability
- Web Design
- Content

A standardised rating scale from 1 to 5 is utilised where 1=very poor, 2=poor, 3=neutral, 4=good, 5=very good.

The new website has been live since 8 May 2006. This period of time is insufficient for a statistical analysis on website visitation. For the month of May the website received an average of 17.25 visits per day.

It would be expected that as the website was fully completed and further promoted, website visitation would increase significantly.

Conclusion

1. Overall, the ratings on the key identified criteria are very high.
 - ✓ Performance and Usability Rating = 4.75
 - ✓ Web Design Rating = 4.8
 - ✓ Content Rating = 4.6
2. One area of improvement is with the use of the website to further develop Youth Solutions' email database. It is suggested that the home page should include a link, where visitors can register to receive the Youth Solutions newsletter and other relevant information.
3. Earlier development and promotion of the new website would also have been beneficial to the project's outcomes.

Project Management

Summary

Feedback from the Parent Peer Educators and Regional Advisory Committee regarding the management of the project was extremely positive.

Parent Peer Educators specified the importance of having significant support from Youth Solutions and the Project Coordinator, reporting unanimously that this support was of the highest order. Any concerns, queries and requirements were reported to have been met effectively and efficiently by the Project Coordinator.

It is important to note that Parent Peer Educators stated that they required significant amounts of support. They concede that in most areas, their skills sets and experience did not allow for effective autonomy and independence, and there was a very high reliance on the Project Coordinator for support. This was identified as a significant drain on the resources of the Project Coordinator.

Conclusion

1. As a pilot project in its development, the project was considerably labour intensive.
2. This was not alleviated by the fact that the Parent Peer Educators required significant amounts of support and assistance through the course of the project.
3. Participant feedback indicates their satisfaction with the project management was very high.

Promotion of the project

Summary

A broad cross section of promotional activities was undertaken over the course of the project. These included:

1. The use of existing local networks and other services databases

Regional Advisory Committee Representatives, Chambers of Commerce, Rotary Clubs, Community Forum, Youth Services, High School newsletters, Area Resource Centre, Local Community Services Association (LCSA), Campbelltown City Council, churches, McDonalds' Restaurants.

2. Information stalls at community events

Food, Wine & Music Festival, Business & Lifestyle Expo, Parent Teacher nights

3. Direct mailing and emailing to Youth Solutions database

Mail out of Parent Links information regularly to 240 high schools, businesses, sporting groups, churches, performing arts, councils, service clubs etc.

Promotional articles about the project in Youth Solutions newsletters distributed quarterly to 653 individuals, businesses and services.

4. Presentations to relevant individuals and organisations

NSW Community Drug Strategy Team, local Legal Services, South Western Sydney Regional Council of Department of Education and Training (DET) schools, local Women's Health Service, Department of Housing representatives, NSW Member of Parliament and Federal Member of Parliament, Local Health Service, Church Representatives, Police Youth Liaison Officers, Youth Justice Conferencing Convenors.

5. Distribution of the Parent Links Cards and *Links to Information about Drugs and Alcohol for Parents* Booklet

Approximately 416 Link cards (216 via Parent Peer Educators/200 via Macarthur McDonalds Charity Night) and 517 *Links to Information about Drugs and Alcohol for Parents* Booklets were distributed to friends/acquaintances, parents, hairdressers, Doctor surgeries, TAFE students, mother's group, schools, Department of Housing, local gym etc.

6. Media Promotions

Paid advertising in one regional newspaper during week 8-12 May 2006.

Parent Peer Educators involved as voices in radio advertisement.

Liaison with regional newspaper and local commercial radio station regarding Community Awareness Campaign.

Parent Peer Educators and Regional Advisory Committee Representatives who were interviewed were very positive with regard to the promotion of the project. Promotion through local networks and services was viewed as particularly valuable and well conducted.

While the media promotion was also viewed positively, the timing of the media promotion in May was deemed to be too late for the maximum benefit of the project.

Conclusion

1. The promotion indicates strong usage of local networks and services, which is a positive outcome for this community based project.

2. The promotion is broad based without an over reliance on traditional media.
3. The media campaign conducted may have been more effective was it to be run earlier in the year.

Parent Peer Educators

Summary

Eight Parent Peer Educators were interviewed during this evaluation. Seven were deemed to be active and 1 no longer active.

Overall, Parent Peer Educators were highly complimentary with regards to the Parent Links Project and the project management and coordination by Youth Solutions.

The majority of Parent Peer Educators were enthusiastic for the project to be continued, or for their relationship with Youth Solutions to be continued in another way.

Parent Peer Educators were asked to rate their opinion of 5 key criteria with regard to the project. The rating was on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1=very poor, 2=poor, 3=neutral, 4=good, 5=very good.

Key criteria 1)	Recruitment of Parent Peer Educators	4.0
Key criteria 2)	Training of Parent Peer Educators	4.4
Key criteria 3)	Project management and coordination	4.6
Key criteria 4)	Project promotion	3.8
Key criteria 5)	Overall effectiveness of the project	4.0

A review of the Parent Peer Educators' ratings for the key criteria indicate that all criteria, with the exception of 'project promotion', were rated in the range 'good' to 'very good'. Project promotion was rated in the range 'neutral' to 'good', with Parent Peer Educators indicating that increased promotion would have assisted their endeavours further.

The point must be made that Parent Peer Educators understood the financial limitations of increased promotion, but with this in mind still felt that further promotion would have been of benefit. They also would have preferred the May media campaign to have occurred earlier in the year.

Of concern to Parent Peer Educators was their own confidence and ability to develop and implement their own programs. This was a major theme in the interviews. Parent Peer Educators were of the opinion that being given a choice of more 'pre-prepared' actions, would have significantly improved their actions and outcomes.

Getting the word around

An aspect of the interviews was having Parent Peer Educators approximate the number of individuals they may have spoken to about the project.

Seven Parent Peer Educators were able to provide an approximation with numbers ranging from 15 to 200.

The average number of people a Parent Peer Educator spoke to about Parent Links during the course of the project was approximately 70.

Conclusion

1. Parent Peer Educators were complimentary on all aspects of the project.
2. Parent Peer Educators believed further promotion would have been beneficial, and that the May promotion should have been conducted earlier in the year.
3. Parent Peer Educators believe that significantly more guidance with regards to actions would produce improved results.
4. On average, active Parent Peer Educators spoke to approximately 70 people about Parent Links during the course of the project.

Parent Peer Educators Attitudes

A summary of the Parent Peer Educators' attitudes regarding the project's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are following.

Project Strengths

- Project provided a unique position to target parents at a community level
- Further connected local services to the community
- Representative of 3 separate Local Government Areas (Campbelltown, Camden and Wollondilly)
- Flexibility in dealing with Parent Peer Educators
- Regional Advisory Committee included a broad representation of community representatives and services, which allowed different perspectives and views to be heard
- Project coordination and management
- Raising awareness of the roles parents can play
- The ripple/word of mouth effect of community based education
- Use of local networks and community groups
- Quality of information
- Catering to a ready need
- Self sustaining, as once parents are educated they retain the knowledge

Project Weaknesses

- The timing of the project, especially over Christmas holidays
- Too short a timeframe for completion of project
- Not enough parents trained as Parent Peer Educators
- The loss of 6 trained Parent Peer Educators
- Difficulties in supporting Parent Peer Educators as a high level of support was required
- High skill level required of the Project Coordinator
- Parent Peer Educators not representative of minority cultural groups and no males represented
- Limited funding for promotion
- Lack of a clear role definition for Parent Peer Educators
- Responsibility of Parent Peer Educators to develop own actions
- Ability to reach and engage large numbers of people
- Limited time for training

- High levels of project administration required
- Parent Peer Educators on their own at times felt isolated

Project Opportunities

- Training templates are now developed
- Opportunities to provide training with less emphasis on the after training role
- A coordinated approach is now available to target sporting clubs
- Opportunity to organise for a Parent Peer Educator at every high school and have further access into sporting clubs
- Parent Peer Educators could be volunteers with Youth Solutions on other projects
- Opportunity to work more intensively with other services on parent AOD issues eg Lifeline, Mental Health, Area Health Service, Local Government, Police
- Expand the project locally
- Provide a clearer definition of the Parent Peer Educators' role and improve recruitment
- Have Parent Peer Educators implement programs with a 'buddy'

Project Threats

- Cessation of funding
- Maintaining motivation and momentum of Parent Peer Educators
- Parent Peer Educators may go beyond their role after project finished if they do not continue to be supported by Youth Solutions eg may think they are counsellors
- Staff changes, the reliance of the role on the Project Coordinator
- Time constraints of Parent Peer Educators
- Community apathy

Conclusion - Project Outcomes

Summary

Measurement of specific outcomes is very difficult with a pilot project such as Parent Links. With the aims of the project related primarily to increasing the knowledge and awareness of alcohol and other drug (AOD) issues, as well as AOD services by parents/carers in the Macarthur region, a summary of actions has been developed.

It is important to note that this summary is not conclusive, with the Parent Peer Educators' action plans still occurring.

- Training templates now developed for further use
- 13 Parent Peer Educators trained on AOD issues and services
- 7 Parent Peer Educators active within the project
- Development of the Regional Advisory Committee (12 members)
- Development of the Parent Links web page
- Development and distribution of the Links to Information about Drugs and Alcohol for Parents Booklet
- Development and distribution of the Parent Links Cards
- Development of the Youth Solutions and Parent Links website
- Development and implementation of the Parent Peer Educators action plans
- Significant promotion of the project
- Increased links with Youth Solutions and other service providers within the community

- Increased links with Youth Solutions and other organisations (public and private) within the community

When analysing the effectiveness of a pilot project such as Parent Links it is not possible to measure pure outcomes ie reduced prevalence of teenage drinking, increased level of parental monitoring.

What is possible is to review the project's actions in relation to the project's aims, and identify whether these actions were appropriate and most likely to have an affect on the achievement of the project aims.

Project Aims

1. An increase in the knowledge of alcohol and other drug issues by parents in the Macarthur region.
2. An increase in knowledge of Alcohol & Other Drug (AOD) services by parents.
3. Increase the opportunity for parents to discuss alcohol and other drug issues with their children and other parents.
4. Increase the modelling of appropriate drinking behaviour of parents to their children.
5. Increase the level of parental monitoring of adolescent drinking.
6. Increased awareness of the risks of teenage drinking at risky levels.
7. Increased awareness of the links between early onset of risky drinking and problematic behaviours.
8. Increased awareness and implementation of parenting strategies to prevent and reduce alcohol and other drug related harms among young people.
9. Increased confidence among parents about addressing alcohol and other drug related issues with their children.
10. Increased importance of the need to delay the onset of alcohol and other drug use among young people.

Upon reviewing the project's actions in relation to the project's aims, it is apparent that these actions were appropriate and were likely to have an affect on the achievement of the project aims. The project had considerable success in engaging the local community both through the network of Youth Solutions and the networks of the Parent Peer Educators.

An analysis of the project indicates that while it possessed many strengths, its opportunity to be successful relies heavily on the number and quality of Parent Peer Educators recruited.

What is apparent is that the Parent Peer Educators had significant problems developing their own action plans and coming up with ideas for advancing the project. Future Parent Links projects should identify this as a key barrier to success and address this specifically.

The role of Parent Peer Educator lacks definition, and is therefore very difficult to implement. With the experience gained in this pilot project, it is recommended that a specific educator role be defined and action plans developed. Parent Peer Educators would then be recruited to fill this role. Resources could then be developed around the action plan rather than around a number of separate and different action plans.

Importantly, this pilot project has now developed the majority of the tools to maximise the opportunity for the success of the Parent Links project, should the decision be made that it be extended and expanded in the Macarthur region.

Community Awareness Campaign

Newspaper Advertisements/ Editorial

The media reach focused on local print and radio which was possible through the existing contacts of Youth Solutions. Target group included parents and general members of the community, primarily promoting the Youth Solutions website.

Paid ½ page advertisement for a one week period was placed in a local newspaper, the *Macarthur Chronicle* with a readership of 109,000. Editorial was achieved in the two local newspapers, the *Macarthur Chronicle* and the *Campbelltown Advertiser* (55,000 circulation) during the course of the project. Two Parent Peer Educators were also interviewed and photographed, for an article which was published in the *Sunday Telegraph*.

Radio Commercials

Three Parent Peer Educators and one male parent member of the Regional Advisory Committee were involved in providing the voices for the radio commercials that ran for one week during May 2006. After recording of the advertisement parents were given a tour of the radio station and a meet and greet with the C91.3FM staff.

The 70 x 30 second radio commercials were placed breakfast, morning, afternoon, drive and evening on local commercial radio station C91.3FM.

Further Message Delivery

Publications

Youth Solutions has been approached by a number of organisations to provide editorial for their publications including:

- Camden Area Resource Centre Newsletter
- Local Community Services Association Newsletter
- Campbelltown City Council's Health Tips Newsletter
- Youth Solutions Newsletter *Solutions*
- High School Newsletters

Presentations

In an effort to promote the project, a number of presentations/workshops have been conducted, including:

- October 2005, Claymore Interagency
- December 2005, NSW Community Drug Strategy Team
- February 2006, Youth Solutions Board (presented by 2 Parent Peer Educators)
- February 2006, Regional Advisory Committee (presented by 1 Parent Peer Educator)
- May 2006, Youth Justice Conferencing Convenors (presented by 1 Parent Peer Educator)
- June 2006, Creating Synergy 3 Alcohol & Other Drug Conference (presented by Project Coordinator and 3 Parent Peer Educators)
- June 2006, Foster Carer's Support Network Workshop (facilitated by Project Coordinator and 1 Parent Peer Educator)

Web Page

The web page file contains information about alcohol and drugs and parenting as well as local services which can assist parents, young people and interested people in our region. It also provides as a reference point for further information

Originally the fact file was going to be printed, however initial evaluations concluded that there was a need to reach all members of the community in both the Macarthur region. And a web based resource was the most cost effective way to reach members of the community.

The website has been actively promoted through all campaign resources.

Youth Solutions Commitment to Parent Links Peer Education Project

The outcomes of the project have already been promoted through presentations and publications. Youth Solutions will continue to take advantage of opportunities to promote the project and the project report through internally produced publications: the Services' website www.youthsolutions.com.au, newsletter *Solutions* as well as the *Annual Report*.

Youth Solutions is committed to the ongoing maintenance and promotion of the website after the conclusion of this project.

The 6 active Parent Peer Educators have become volunteers for Youth Solutions and will support the Service in the development, implementation and evaluation of future campaigns and appropriate activities.

Conclusion and Reflections

A number of people have reflected on the successes and challenges of this project, including: participating parents, Regional Advisory Committee Members, local services and the coordinating organisation, Youth Solutions. Intrinsicly important to the entire process was the participation and input of the target audience in influencing the project directions.

Parents have now become a major focus of Youth Solutions activities as they are the critical influence in supporting our young people to prevent or reduce alcohol and other drug harm. Youth Solutions has made a commitment to support the interested Parent Peer Educators to remain connected to the service in the capacity of volunteers.

Having funds available to employ an external researcher was essential in transparently evaluating the project.

Also imperative to the project was the ability to be flexible enough to meet the needs of the target audience.

This pilot project has now developed the majority of tools to maximise the opportunity for the success of the Parent Links Project if funded in other areas.

Project Coordinators' Recommendations

Following are recommendations of the Project Coordinator.

Timeframes

The project timeframe of ten months from August 05- May 06 (inclusive) was too short. Implementation and support of the project over the December – January period was difficult as parents were too busy with children being on school holidays and with family events. This meant that the project lost momentum for a period of 6 – 8 weeks. The project would have been best implemented from January to December.

Recommendation for future project timeframe:

Timeframe	Comments
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruitment of staff, planning Engagement of Research Consultant
February- March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of Advisory Committee Survey and focus groups Project promotion – including website promotion
April- May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruitment of Parent Peer Educators Develop training program Project promotion
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Train Parent Peer Educators Project promotion
July – September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent Peer Educators initiate action
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Showcase parent action OR parent group project/activity as designed by Parent Peer Educators
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final report
January and Beyond	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support of Parent Peer Educators maintained post project completion.

Financial reporting timeframes need to better match internal (YS) and external systems ie Youth Solutions had at times difficulty producing financial reports for NSW Government due to mismatch of financial reporting systems.

Budget

The budget needs to be flexible enough to change according to project needs eg Community Awareness Campaign instead of consultation/showcase/feedback forum. The budget also needs to consider allocation of funds for support of Parent Peer Educators post project, possibly in the form of a seedling grant eg \$5000 - \$7000 to be expended in

the twelve months following project completion. Suggested activities could include parent peer educator development and dissemination of resources at community events.

Project Evaluation

External evaluation of this pilot project by Micromex Research allowed Youth Solutions and the NSW Government to transparently evaluate the processes, successes, and challenges of this project which will guide future recommendations.

Project Coordinator

The Project Coordinator should:

- Have extensive knowledge of Alcohol & Other Drug field and parenting and young people's issues eg minimum 5 years experience in Alcohol & Other Drug field
- Be well connected to their community and aware of local issues and events
- Have local media connections
- Be able to provide extensive support to Parent Peer Educators
- Have a high level of organisational skill
- Be able to manage budgets
- Be able to manage support staff eg administrative staff

Parent Peer Educators

Parent Peer Educators require an extensive amount of support to plan and implement action. Educators had varying levels of education, life experiences and confidence making it extremely difficult at times to treat them as a homogenous group. Each educator had to be managed differently dependant on these factors. A more manageable number of educators would have been 7-10 parents rather than 13.

Most educators did not use the internet as a form of communication as it was: too difficult, they couldn't get on the computer because their children were always using the computer, they did not have a computer, they did not know how to email etc.

Communication with educators was difficult at times as each individual educator had a favoured means of communication eg educator 1 by phone, educator 2 by email, educator 3 by mail, educator 4 by SMS, educator 5 by face to face meeting etc.

The Project Coordinator found it easier to record action for educators rather than them completing their own action plans. Most educators appreciated the personal contact with the Project Coordinator as it enabled both parties to build relationships at varying levels, problem solve and gain feedback about the website, Link Cards, Community Awareness Campaign and other issues. Parent Peer Educators needed a lot more training on AOD issues and action planning however time was always an issue.

Organisation/Service

The service or organisation implementing this project needs to:

- Be an active player in their local community
- Be well respected
- Be flexible and innovative

- Be able to meet the needs of the Parent Peer Educators, parents and the community after standard business hours eg weekends, nights etc
- Have established media connections
- Be able to recruit and coordinate an Advisory Committee from a diverse range of services, community organisations, and community representatives
- Have a strong background in promotion, marketing and resource development and dissemination

Appendices

- 1) Advertisement
- 2) Editorial
- 3) Journal Article
- 4) Solutions Newsletter Articles
- 5) Parent Links Card

Advertisement – Macarthur Chronicle May 2006



Are you a parent who wants
info about teenagers,
drugs and alcohol?

...then check out our new website www.youthsolutions.com.au

The banner features a collage of images on the right side, including a young woman in a white tank top, a young man in a blue tank top, and a group of people. The background is a gradient of blue and white.



YouthSolutions
Creating Safer Choices...

Youth Solutions is a non government, community based, youth drug prevention charity that aims to reduce drug use and related harm among young people.

Youth Solutions supports young people to make safer life choices and achieve their full potential. We can not do this alone! We also work with parents, teachers, youth services and others who play an important role in young people's lives.

www.youthsolutions.com.au or phone 4628 2319



The logo is a stylized 'Y' shape with a blue and white color scheme, set against a dark blue background. The words 'Youth Solutions' are written in small white text at the bottom of the 'Y'.



Two young people, a man and a woman, are smiling and standing together. The man is wearing a blue tank top and the woman is wearing a white tank top. They are positioned on the left side of the advertisement.

Solutions Article – The Macarthur Chronicle, Tuesday 15 November 2005, p72



Debbie Roberts (centre) explains to parents Jose Drumond (left) and Nicole Ellis the importance of youth drug and alcohol prevention.

Parents urged to join drug fight team

PARENTS, be part of the solution, not the problem.

This is the message from alcohol and drug prevention organisation Youth Solutions.

On Saturday, November 26, the group will train parents on how to help stop drug and alcohol abuse.

Project co-ordinator Debbie Roberts said the six-hour program was designed for parents who wanted to make a difference in a child's life.

"We are asking for volunteers to be trained to support and

educate other parents about drug and alcohol issues, where to get help, support and information in our community," she said.

The organisation had secured funding to train parents who have teenagers aged 12 to 17 years, educating them about drug and alcohol issues.

"Parents have a pivotal role in supporting and guiding their children to make safer choices about their own lives," Ms Roberts said.

"To do this, they need to be

educated and supported by being taught realistic and effective strategies to address issues around alcohol use, supply of alcohol and underage drinking at private celebrations, among other issues."

The event will be held at the Salvation Army building, Narellan Business Park, on Saturday, November 26 from 9am to 4pm.

For more information, contact Youth Solutions on 4628 2319.



Parent support needed: Volunteering parents Jose Drumond (left) and Nicole Ellis with Debbie Roberts from Youth Solutions. Picture: Luke Fuda

Drug and alcohol abuse tackled by parents

PARENTS in Macarthur are being asked to be a part of the solution to youth drug and alcohol abuse in the area.

Youth Solutions are calling for parents of children aged 12 to 17 who live or work in Macarthur and want to make a difference in teenagers' lives to volunteer for its Parent Links program.

"We are asking for volunteers to be trained to support and educate other parents about drug and alcohol issues, where to get help, support and information in our community," project coordinator Debbie Roberts said.

"We want to work with parents so that together we can provide a safer community for our kids.

"Parents have a pivotal role in support-

ing and guiding their children to make safer choices about their own lives.

"To do this they need to be educated and supported by being taught realistic and effective strategies to address issues around alcohol use, supply of alcohol and underage drinking at private celebrations, among other issues."

Youth Solutions will hold a volunteer Parent Links training day on Saturday, November 26, at the Salvation Army complex, 1 Exchange Parade, Narellan Business Park, 9am-4pm.

Lunch and morning tea provided and RSVP is essential.

**Details: 4628 2319 or
info@youthsolutions.com.au.**

Drugs guide to help parents

By SHARRI MARKSON

PARENTS will be taught how to detect when their children are using drugs under a new State Government strategy.

Health Minister John Hatzistergos said the new package of prevention programs will be aimed at reducing drug and alcohol use, particularly among adolescents.

A booklet, designed to help parents answer their children's questions about drugs, will also be sent to schools, libraries, GPs and community groups.

"I encourage all families to access this information, to help them understand drug issues and feel comfortable discussing these issues with their children," Mr Hatzistergos said.

Under the package, to be announced today, parents will take part in a pilot program, funded by the State Government, giving them training to help recognise drug use in their children.

The trial, which began last week, is the first of its kind and could be extended across the whole of NSW if successful. It is



Seminar: Su Carlisle-Jones

part of a multi-tiered approach to address problems of ecstasy, cocaine and alcohol use among teenagers.

Figures from the National Drug Strategy Household Survey show five per cent of Australians have suffered injuries as a result of drug or alcohol-related incidents in the past year.

Su Carlisle-Jones, of Rosemeadow, attended the first training session last week along with her 15-year-old daughter Nicole, to learn more about the consequences of taking drugs.

"We learn about drugs and the effects they can have and to recognise patterns of how kids behave if they are on drugs," she said.

hometown health

"Health news & events in & around Campbelltown"

Reducing Drug Harm among Younger Residents

Reducing drug and alcohol use and related harm among young people is an important priority for any community and Campbelltown is fortunate to have a unique service dedicated to that aim.

That service is Youth Solutions, a non-government community-based charity.

The work of Youth Solutions is based on the principle that all young people deserve the chance to realise their potential and that drug use undermines that process.

Unacceptably high rates of youth suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, homelessness and poverty are preventing too many young people from reaping the benefits of realising their full potential.

Youth Solutions is working hard to help turn this situation around. While the primary focus is on young people, the service also aims to educate, inform and support others who play an important role in the lives of younger residents of the Macarthur region.

To inform the community about the issues relating to young people, drugs and alcohol, Youth Solutions is updating and relaunching their website at www.youthsolutions.com.au

This website provides detailed information about Youth Solutions, the services it provides and current projects and activities. It also provides links to other services and sources of information, as well as outlining strategies for getting involved in

supporting young people.


New to the website is the Parents

Info section,

designed to answer some of the questions that parents have about teenagers, drugs and alcohol.

This section was created as part of the recent Parent Links Project. This project has aimed to build bridges between parents, community members, service providers and young people to address youth drug issues with a focus on alcohol.

With funding from the NSW Government, the project has trained a number of parents of young people 12-17 years of age across the Macarthur region. They have learned to work with and educate other parents about drug and alcohol issues as well as where to get help, support and information in their community.

The project is currently building on existing parental networks within schools and churches to ensure successes can be sustained and repeated. 



For more information about the Parent Links Project in particular or the Youth Solutions charity in general, phone 4628 2319, email info@youthsolutions.com.au or visit www.youthsolutions.com.au

Are you a parent who wants info about teenagers, drugs and alcohol?



...then check out our new website www.youthsolutions.com.au

YouthSolutions
Creating Safer Choices...



Solutions Article – October 2005

Parent Links



Work has begun on the exciting new *Parent Links* Peer Education Project Macarthur, funded by the NSW Government. Just as the title suggests, the project will link parents, community members, services and ultimately young people. Focusing mainly on alcohol, the aim is to empower and train Parents to be Peer Educators.

Manager Debbie Roberts and Junior Project Officer Chris Rule encourage parents to fill in surveys at the Camden Food, Wine and Music Festival, September 2005

Parents are the Link for Drug & Alcohol Info and Support



Parents training to become Parent Peer Educators

The Parent Links Project aims to link parents, community members, services and ultimately young people. The project has a focus on alcohol as well as other drug use and young people.

The project aims to build on existing parental networks eg, through junior sports clubs, churches, performing arts etc, increasing the likelihood of the recruitment and retainment of parents as Peer Educators and ensure sustainable and outcomes that can easily be repeated in the future.

September and October of this year saw the completion of 189 surveys which asked parents/carers of young people 12-17 years, what the issues around alcohol, drugs and young people that concerned them were.

Information from these surveys and subsequent focus groups informed a training program that was written for parents interested in becoming Parent Peer Educators.

Following this, thirteen parents from across Macarthur were trained by Youth Solutions to go back into their communities (playgroups, religious, sporting and school groups) to talk to other parents about drugs and alcohol or run programs or activities in 2006 that will provide information and support to other parents about young people and drug and alcohol issues.

This exciting pilot project which has been funded by the **NSW Government** acknowledges the extensive role parents play in supporting their children; to make safer choices in relation to all drugs, including alcohol. To do this, the project identifies that parents need to be educated and supported by being taught realistic and effective strategies to address issues around alcohol use, supply of alcohol and underage drinking at private celebrations, among other issues.

"We were privileged to have such an enthusiastic group of parents interested in being part of this project. One of the reasons Macarthur was chosen to run this project was because of our communities connectedness and the interest our parents have in supporting our young people" said Manager and Project Coordinator Debbie Roberts.

A recent initiative of the project is the inclusion of a Parent Links page on the Youth Solutions website. Log onto www.youthsolutions.com.au and click on the **Parent Links icon**, to find information that will support all parents when talking to their teenagers about drugs and alcohol.

Information on the site includes already existing resources such as drug fact sheets, safe party information, alcohol and other drug statistics as well as some parenting information. The site also links to support services here in the Macarthur and Wollondilly regions.

Plans of action will be carried out in January, February, March and April of 2006. These plans will be initiated in the communities in which the Parent Peer Educators live or work, with continual mentoring and support being provided by Youth Solutions.

For further information about the **Parent Links Project** or **Youth Solutions**, contact the specialist team on 4628 2319, or email info@youthsolutions.com.au.

Parent Links Project

A Parents Perspective



I joined the Parent Links Peer Educator project after seeing an email circulated at my work. I was attracted to the project as I am interested in the community being assisted to support itself.

At the training session I found the project was more extensive and needed more of my input than I had expected, but I was excited by the possibilities it presented. I hoped to be able to use the information in my work as a Youth Justice Conferencing (YJC) Convenor, but this was not to be as I am not working in the project area.

I have been able to:

- Arrange to do work placement for my TAFE Diploma in Community Service Work

at Youth Solutions (I am working in the office one day a week, assisting with the Parent Links Peer Educator project).

- Pass on information about Youth Solutions to the YJC convenors who work in the Macarthur region so they can use it in their work with young offenders and their parents or carers.
- Arrange to run an information stall at the Parent/Teacher night at my son's high school in April.
- Undergo facilitator training which will be very helpful in this project and in the future

Gill



New Look Website

Includes Parent Info

The month of May saw the successful launching of the new look Youth Solutions Website. The new user friendly website will be ever-evolving and provides a range of useful information about Youth Solutions, including the services we provide and any current projects and activities. The website also provides information linking you to services and knowledge such as:

- Drug information fact sheets
- Parent information
- Other drug and alcohol services
- Other useful websites
- How you can support our young people
- Statistics

Be sure to check it out at:
www.youthsolutions.com.au

Parent Links

Thanking our Volunteers

The Parent Links Project which is currently in its evaluation phase was made possible because of a number of parents who were able to volunteer their time. Parents supported the community and in particular other parents by providing the link to information and support regarding young people and the issues and concerns they have about alcohol and other drugs.

Thank you to all the parents involved in the project, we sincerely hope your friendship with our Service continues for many years to come.

Check out the Parent Links Page of the Youth Solutions website by logging onto www.youthsolutions.com.au and clicking on the 'Parents Info' section.



youthsolutions.com.au

Congratulations!
You are now part of the LINK!

If you require more information about alcohol or other drugs,
contact Youth Solutions:
p:4628 2319 e:info@youthsolutions.com.au

& quote Link Number # _____

The *Parent Links Project* is funded by the NSW Government



Parents play the most important role in supporting their teenagers to keep themselves safer when celebrating being young

Who is Youth Solutions?

We are a non government, community based, youth drug prevention charity. We work with young people 12-25 years who live, work, play and study in the Macarthur and the Wingecaribbee communities. We want to support them to make safer life choices and achieve their full potential. We can not do this alone! We also work with parents, teachers, youth services and others, who play an important role in young people's lives.

For counselling: Macarthur Health Service 1300 669 663
For after hours counselling: Lifeline 131 114
For information: ADIS 1800 422 599
(Alcohol Drug Information Service)

What can we do for you?

We can answer your questions and provide information about alcohol and other drugs. We can find someone who can help you if we can't. We can help you take action on drug related issues in your community. We can refer you to counselling and treatment services.

Contact Youth Solutions
p: 02 4628 2319
e: info@youthsolutions.com.au
w: youthsolutions.com.au



In an emergency ALWAYS call 000