Good News about Drug Education

Offered and taking drugs

Compared with decades ago, school children are much more likely to encounter illegal drugs - and are much more likely to have taken them. Looking at young people's encounters with drugs - whether they have been offered drugs, and whether they have taken them - we see a dramatic rise in the ten years between 1987 and 1996. In the eight years of data since then (1997-2004), reports of ever having tried drugs dropped significantly, then levels recurred to around the same level as the 1995-1996 peak, wobbling around the 25-30% level for Year 10 pupils.

Trends

One of our latest publications, "Trends: Young People and Illegal Drugs 1987-2004" shows evidence of drug education working. If we look at young people's understanding about the dangers of illegal drugs, we find that many more pupils in 2004 say that amphetamines are always unsafe to use. This is a little misleading, because most pupils in 1987 said that they had never heard of them. But even if we look at just those who express an opinion - that is, the ratio of those who say amphetamines are always unsafe to use to those who say they are safe if used properly - we also see a greater custom in recent years about amphetamines, and some other drugs.

Overall, we can say that young people know much more about different sorts of drugs they have heard of more types of drug, are able to give a view about their dangers, and are more convinced about the risks of using drugs.

Helen Lee

Young people challenging the culture of binge drinking

Peer education is an excellent way of involving and empowering students at the same time as prioritising alcohol education. Tacade is working with over thirty secondary schools to develop effective models.

T cade is a leading voluntary sector organisation in the field of personal, social, health and citizenship education, with over thirty years of experience supporting alcohol and drug education with young people.

Tacade (www.tacade.com) provides support for professionals, professional groups, parents and carers by delivering effective training, consultancy, project management and publications.

Alcohol education

The organisation is working with over thirty secondary schools to help them develop peer education projects focusing on alcohol education. Young peer educators in these schools recognise that alcohol use is a major issue for many teenagers. They want to help challenge the culture of binge drinking.

For many years the focus of drug education in schools has been on illegal substances. Yet alcohol is the most commonly used drug amongst teenagers. The Tacade project aims to increase the focus on alcohol education.

Effective models

In July 2003 Tacade was funded by Diageo Great Britain to work with four secondary schools in England and Wales to develop effective models of alcohol peer education.

The work with these four pilot schools, in Carlisle, Melbourne, Leicester and London, was informed by a review of relevant literature and a scoping activity to identify existing examples of alcohol peer alcohol education work with young people. The substantive work with schools began in January 2004 and much of the peer educator's work continued into the Autumn term 2004.

Lancaster School

The work at the Lancaster School in Leicester is described here as an example of how the effective models of alcohol peer education were developed.

The Lancashire School is an urban comprehensive with 1,350 male students from a variety of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds including white, south Asian and Somali. The school had not previously been involved in any peer education work.

Boys on Booze

The students created the BOB (Boys on Booze) peer education team. A variety of staff, particularly the Assistant Head and the Head of Year 9, supported the peer educators. The school also had strong support for the project from the Leicester City Advisory Teacher for Drugs.

The BOB team has met twice a week after school to carry out research. They feel that they are reliable, represent a range of personalities and have 'street cred'. They have designed and distributed 'Pink Elephants' factual leaflets about alcohol to staff and students.

In September 2004 the peer educators started the year with a PowerPoint presentation to Year 7 students in Assemblies. They have been followed up by interactive peer education activities. The BOB team plans to be involved in training new peer educators during 2005 and want to set up an information point in the school.

The BOB team

The peer educators enjoyed being part of...