

IMPLEMENTING CREATING CONVERSATIONS

Eleven case studies of
Good practice in schools





Acknowledgements

Authors

Glenda Johnson
Bob Bellhouse

Creating Conversations Working Party

Pam Blackman Senior Program Officer, Western Region
Paul Bowman Senior Program Officer, Western Region
Louise Dingley Senior Program Officer, Northern Region
Robyn Ramsden Targeted Initiatives Unit, Department of Education and Training

The schools included in these case studies:

- Braybrook Secondary College
- Casterton Secondary College
- Chaffey Koorie Open Door Education (KODE) Campus
- Killester Secondary College
- Lauriston Girls' School
- Mentone Girls' Grammar School
- Montmorency Secondary College
- Mount Clear Secondary College
- Rainbow Secondary College
- St Brigid's College (Horsham)
- Sunshine Secondary College.

Editor

Steven O'Connor – Targeted Initiatives Unit, Department of Education and Training

Graphics

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CREATING CONVERSATIONS

Introduction

Creating Conversations is a school-based program that involves year 9 and 10 students facilitating parent evenings about drug issues. Students use interactive strategies to engage parents in conversations about alcohol and other drugs. The program's main aims are to:

- enhance communication between parents and adolescents about drug issues
- provide opportunities for students to develop a range of skills that build resilience and connectedness
- strengthen partnerships with communities to address local issues about drug-related student wellbeing.

The Creating Conversations activities have been translated into eight other languages in order to provide support to schools catering for culturally and linguistically diverse parent populations. The Creating Conversations manual and the translated activities can also be found on the Student Wellbeing website at: www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/wellbeing/index.htm

Evaluation

A recent evaluation of the Creating Conversations model revealed an overwhelmingly positive response from participants. The model was found to be an effective program for parent education about drug issues. It was assessed on the basis of four benchmarks that are indicative of effective parent education:

1. To be strategic in nature: by implementing a planned strategy that is linked to an ongoing broader program that may involve the community sector.
2. To involve parents: by adopting inclusive practices that are sensitive to needs, and that are responsive to the knowledge and skills of the target audience.
3. To involve students: by offering diverse opportunities to participate, and by providing comprehensive training and tangible acknowledgement.
4. To be sensitive to cultural and linguistic diversity: by being aware of the needs of diverse populations, by being flexible enough to respond to these needs and by being available in different languages.

Key findings of the evaluation

1. Students, parents, teachers and community representatives participating in Creating Conversations events express high levels of satisfaction with the experience.
2. The Creating Conversations program is widely seen by schools as supportive of their ongoing policies and programs.
3. Participation in an event using the Creating Conversations model improves communication between parents and their adolescent children about drugs and other wellbeing issues.
4. Student facilitators improve their knowledge, skills and confidence when they participate in the training and delivery of a Creating Conversations event.
5. Students who participate in the Creating Conversations program have more conversations about drugs and drug-related behaviours.

6. Students with a variety of competencies can participate successfully in the staging of a Creating Conversations event.
7. Student facilitators improve their relationships with classmates and their sense of connectedness to school.
8. The Creating Conversations model reduces parent stress about drug issues and builds a parent's trust and respect for their adolescent child.
9. The Creating Conversations model is flexible enough to be responsive to local needs, that is, the needs of the school, the students, the parents and the local community.
10. The development of a training manual has improved the level of satisfaction with the training program.
11. Support from regional staff members (Senior Program Officers with the Department of Education and Training) is considered important, especially when schools are staging an event for the first time.
12. The average preparation time required to stage a Creating Conversations event is six to eight weeks.
13. Most schools use existing school and community-based groups and processes to identify parent needs.
14. The Creating Conversations program requires further development to fully reflect the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse communities.
15. School administration and staff are generally supportive of a Creating Conversations event.
16. Satisfaction with the Creating Conversations program has led it to being implemented in a significant number of Government, Catholic and Independent schools.

Case studies

The case studies have been chosen to reflect the diversity of the program. Implementation may take many pathways and outcomes can vary. However, as the case studies indicate, the results are consistently positive for all those who participate, whether they be parents, students, teachers or community representatives.

Descriptions of each case study focus on aspects of a particular school's experience that reflects an exemplary or unique aspect of their event. The case studies vary from the broad involvement and meticulous planning of Mentone Girls' Grammar School to the inspirational story telling of the students from the Mildura Koorie Open Door Education KODE School, and to the complex multi-campus approach of Sunshine Secondary College. Each school used the program in a way that reflected the needs and resources of their school populations.

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BRAYBROOK SECONDARY COLLEGE

Case study 1



Key message: *the ongoing engagement of parents from diverse communities.*

Braybrook Secondary College has implemented Creating Conversations on a number of occasions and in a range of ways.

Creating Conversations was first implemented at Braybrook in 2000 as an elective for years 9 and 10 Home Economics classes. Students were trained in the model and facilitated it in English as an evening event. Later in 2000, Creating Conversations evenings were provided for Vietnamese and Somali families. Students from years 8 and 9 were trained for these events.

In 2001, Braybrook joined with Maribyrnong Secondary College and Gilmore College for Girls to present a local School Community Drug Forum in four languages using the Creating Conversations model. Some of the previous Braybrook Secondary College Creating Conversations students (including English, Vietnamese and Somali speaking students) helped to train the new students for the forum.

Subsequent Creating Conversations events have been offered in English and other languages for interested students as an extra-curricular activity. It provides an opportunity to target students who would benefit from the experience, including students considered to be experiencing some difficulties. While this is the model expected to continue, as it is most suited to the school's structure, some staff firmly believe that the sustainability of Creating Conversations could be further enhanced if it was built into the curriculum as an elective or as a component of other subjects, such as drama.

Getting started

Braybrook first implemented Creating Conversations in 2000 after the Student Welfare Coordinator attended a presentation at St Columba's College. She considered it to be a highly effective way to open up communication between students and their families. Creating Conversations also appeared to be a flexible model; it could be used to discuss drug issues but could also be adapted to facilitate discussions about other teenage issues, such as sexuality.

Planning process

For each of the school based events, the Braybrook training team remained fairly consistent, comprising the Student Welfare Coordinator, the school health nurse, the school's Drug Education contact person, the Equal Opportunities Coordinator and the Senior Program Officer from the Western Region Office of the Department of Education and Training.

Addressing specific culturally and linguistically diverse needs

In line with the school's Individual School Drug Education Strategy (ISDES), parents were surveyed each year to determine what drug education they would like to see provided by the school. These findings supported staff perceptions that key cultural groups (Somali and Vietnamese) would welcome a Creating Conversations event.

The school utilised the multicultural education aides and workers from local agencies such as the Victorian Co-operative on Children's Services for Ethnic Groups (VICSEG) and the Vietnamese Women's Welfare Association to help identify what would assist families to attend a Creating Conversations event. Key factors

included the provision of information in their first language, free transportation, childcare and culturally appropriate food. The aides also made phone calls to parents in their first language to encourage them to come.

Bilingual drug education facilitators were utilised to assist with the event. At the time, the Department trained bilingual facilitators to conduct parent drug education sessions and to assist with the provision of information in other languages at drug education events. The facilitators also supported students to conduct the Creating Conversations activities in their parent's first language and to generate discussion. The input of the bilingual facilitators at these evenings was important as parents perceived them to be 'more expert' than the teachers.

Training

A Senior Program Officer from the Department's Western Region office and the coordinator of Creating Conversations from the Department's Central Office supported the Braybrook team in the planning, training and implementation phases of Creating Conversations. VICSEG also gave the school the support of a Somali community advocate in planning and presenting the event.

Training for students was planned over one and a half days – one day the first week, half a day the second week but extra time was required prior to the event. Student facilitators performed some of the activities at a year 9 assembly, where they invited the students to attend the Creating Conversations event and encouraged them to bring other family members.

The events

The school Principal attended all of the Creating Conversations evenings to welcome parents and provide opening remarks.

The library was set up theatre-style but there was room to move to areas set up for more interactive activities. The program was very well received. Show bags containing drug information, local agency contact details, and lollies and novelties were given out to take home.

Evaluations

The training team used the evaluation form from the Creating Conversations manual to evaluate each event and provided translated versions to Vietnamese and Somali parents. Overall, the feedback was excellent, with many comments focussing on the school's acknowledgement of the parent's first language.

The students also filled in a feedback sheet that asked:

- What worked well?
- What did you enjoy?
- What didn't you enjoy?
- What should we change next time?

The students reported that the Hot Seat and Hypothetical activities worked well and were the most enjoyable. They felt the Agree-disagree Continuum did not go well and believed a teacher should help with this activity next time.

Benefits

Staff at Braybrook Secondary College reported that participation in Creating Conversations had many benefits for the students. It was viewed as a successful strategy for working with a diverse group of students on an important issue.

The experience led to a development in leadership skills in students and has allowed students to talk about drug issues among themselves and with their parents, teachers and other adults. Participation also gave the students a chance to work as a team to facilitate an event.

Students contributed to the training program through activities such as brainstorming and writing scenarios for the event. These activities particularly helped to develop critical and analytical thinking among the students. Students also reported that they were now able to make better decisions about drug-related issues.

The teachers attending the Creating Conversations events reported being extremely impressed with what the students had achieved. It was felt important to encourage even greater student participation in future.

The parents felt it had been a powerful experience for them. Many reported that it opened up discussions in areas previously out of bounds and led to discussions about numerous issues.

Parents who had previously felt isolated from the school said that they now believed that the school wanted to support them and valued parent involvement. They felt that the experience created important links and they felt more comfortable in coming to the school to talk to teachers.

The future – maintaining the momentum

Strategies to further enhance the involvement of Vietnamese and Somali parents within the school community are being developed. The Department trained bilingual parent drug education facilitators will continue to be utilised to facilitate discussion in the parent's first language. The school will continue to make use of local community agencies to help create valuable links for students and their families.

The college's attention to goal four of the Individual School Drug Education Strategy has contributed to the sustainability of Creating Conversations. Goal four of the Individual School Drug Education Strategy – Review Guidelines (1998) states:

Provide a supportive environment that involves parents and the wider community in drug-related curriculum and welfare. (P. 25.)

The college willingly accepts invitations for students to showcase the program elsewhere. This provides further opportunities for students to hone their skills and to keep the interest and momentum going. Students have regularly been involved in helping to train staff and students from other schools and in providing demonstrations of activities at regional training days for schools, school nurses, police school resource officers and community agency personnel. Some students have also demonstrated the model in Vietnamese to visiting doctors from Hanoi and to multicultural education aides at a professional development course focussing on the engagement of parents from non-English speaking backgrounds.



CASTERTON SECONDARY COLLEGE

Case study 2



Key message: a small rural school.

Getting started

Casterton Secondary College wished to create a supportive environment at the school and find a model that could be used to engage their parent community. The community nurse from the local hospital and the college's Youth Education and Support Worker heard about Creating Conversations and after attending the Portland Secondary College event with two students, decided to implement Creating Conversations at Casterton.

Planning process

To prepare for the event, the support worker and the school nurse enlisted the support of the school welfare committee, the community nurse and the students. Previous school surveys indicated parents were concerned about adolescent health issues, and staff believed that alcohol use was a significant issue for the school community.

It was decided that Creating Conversations would be an extra-curricular activity with all year levels invited to participate. The training occurred once per week for six weeks. Class periods used for training were rotated through the timetable to minimise disruption. Some lunchtimes were also used as the event approached. Students participating were mainly from years 8 to 11.

Support was gained from various subject areas within the school. The Art Faculty helped with advertising and provided childcare support on the night. The Home Economics Faculty catered for the event.

The students decided what activities they wanted to use and how they would conduct them. They modified existing activities and also created some new ones. The students made the invitations, chose the food and wrote an article for the school newsletter.

The event

Though the school only has 60 students, 80 people attended on the night. Participants were arranged in groups around tables in the school hall. The activities were interspersed with a three-course meal. Extra information was provided by local alcohol and other drugs service workers at the end of the Creating Conversations event. These workers also handed out resources during the night.



Benefits

The parents reported that they were very surprised at what the students already knew and what they had achieved. They enjoyed the experience, especially the discussions they had with their children. These discussions continued on the way home and for some time after the event.

The students reported that they:

- had a ball
- felt like they were stars
- were able to show lots of leadership
- developed confidence
- learnt more about alcohol and other drugs
- learnt what to say to a friend in trouble
- loved working with students from other year levels – especially with the older students.

The staff were surprised at the turn-out of parents when so many other attempts to involve them had failed. They felt the parents had been very honest in the activities.

They also learnt more about what their students thought, and gained an understanding of the pressures on young people.



CHAFFEY KOORIE OPEN DOOR EDUCATION

(KODE) Campus

Case study 3



Key message: helping kids to tell their stories.

Getting started

A leading teacher and Grade 6 Health and Wellbeing teacher attended Creating Conversations training and presented the model to the staff. They felt it would be a good program for years 9 and 10 classes on Monday afternoons. Monday had traditionally been a day of poor school attendance and the curriculum had been altered to address this issue. The day started with breakfast and then Home Group and continued in the afternoon with a 'Travelling KODE Show' session, so named because students were often asked to present aspects of their culture to other schools. The Creating Conversations program was considered to be a way that students might expand their repertoire when asked to present at other schools.

Planning process

The two Creating Conversations trained teachers consulted other staff about this idea. An implementation plan was written and approved by the Campus Council.

Training

A class comprising about fifteen students from years 9 and 10, the two teachers and a parent helper worked with activities from the draft training manual. The parent helper was shy at first but over time enjoyed the health focus and the opportunity to help the students. The students adapted scenarios to match their own situations. The students used their own style and experience to act them out and were very sharp and funny in how they captured issues in their community.

These scenarios were pretty close to home – the whole drunk-driving thing – Student.

The event

The students first performed the Creating Conversations activities in a hall at the CROC Festival in Swan Hill. (Over three days the CROC festival provides a range of performances and an expo focussed on careers, health, the arts and sport. The festival aims to bring indigenous and non-indigenous students together in a spirit of reconciliation.) The audience consisted of students and teachers from schools around Victoria, including the Glenroy and Kurnai KODE campuses and Swan Hill Secondary College.

The event went well and the students felt very positive about their performances. One student said, 'You told us we could do it, but we were all shamed-up. But in the end it was good!'

Benefits

Trust was built between the students and the teachers through the students sharing their stories about drug issues within their families. Many of the students described domestic concerns in relation to drug misuse and family upheaval.

The students' depth of knowledge about drugs around the town had been confronting for the teachers. Through the Creating Conversations experience, the students were more open about the non-Koorie teachers coming to their mission community and were less inclined to cover up what was going on there.

The drama approach was a natural way for non-reading students to participate. The Koorie culture is considered a great talking culture and the story-telling aspect appealed to the students.

There is enormous potential in our school for this concept in drug education and we all saw that for the first time really. We were, as you planned, just starting a conversation and there was no judgement – Teacher.



KILLESTER COLLEGE



Key message: *engaging parents from diverse communities.*

Getting started

Killester College is an all girls school. The Killester College Personal Development Audit Committee had heard of Creating Conversations and considered it to be perfect program for use with year 9 students in their Personal Development Unit. The head of Health and Physical Education and the year nine Personal Development teacher attended a training session for Creating Conversations and reported that they could see it working at the College.

Staff were concerned that few parents had attended parent information nights previously held. It had been particularly difficult to involve parents from Asian cultures who tended to leave education matters to the College. Creating Conversations was seen as worth trying to better engage parents from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Planning process

A team of three was formed, comprising two year 9 Personal Development teachers and the Student Development Coordinator. The school administration was supportive of the initiative. All teachers were informed about the program at staff meetings.

The director of the Springvale Indo-Chinese Mutual Support Association attended the event and discussed issues with the planning team before and after the night.

Addressing parent needs

Students and parents were surveyed prior to implementing Creating Conversations. This helped the school to identify the languages parents spoke and whether the students could interpret for their parents. The main community languages spoken by parents were Vietnamese, Cambodian, Spanish, Eritrean and Croatian. Show bags containing information in eight different local community languages were prepared for parents. The Senior Program Officer from the Southern Region Office of the Department of Education and Training helped the team to gather the material for parent information show bags.

Every student wrote their own personal invitation to their family. Invitations were translated into some local community languages, for example, Vietnamese and Cambodian. During their training, students were encouraged to choose activities they thought their parents would gain the most from.

Childcare was arranged for the event as the survey indicated that it would be useful.

Training

Creating Conversations was implemented at the year 9 level as part of the Personal Development curriculum. Each term a different year 9 class implemented the program. Students were encouraged to choose the activities they wanted to participate in and practised their roles at lunchtimes and after school.

From training the students to staging the event took six to eight weeks. The three teachers on the planning team conducted the student training program. Students from other Creating Conversations schools also helped in the training.

The event

For the evening, a room at the school was set up with round tables for families to encourage a sense of comfort and informality. Workers from community groups, the Principal and several teachers attended the night and seated themselves at different tables.

The program was well received. The quiz activity led to plenty of discussion at the tables and an activity involving an Agree-disagree Continuum had everybody on their feet discussing complex drug-related issues.

A debriefing session was held the next day in class with the girls involved. They watched the video made of the event and talked about what had worked best.

Benefits

Department of Education and Training feedback forms for students, parents, teachers and community workers were used on the night of the event and feedback showed that parents, teachers and students were very positive about the experience. Follow-up focus group interviews were also conducted with students.

The most successful outcome the school identified from the program was the personal growth in the students. A key benefit of the program was that it more actively involved students in the learning process. Creating Conversations gave the students choice and some control over what they were learning which helped them to develop their self-confidence. The teachers reported that the experience 'enlivened the students' particularly when they presented their learnings to the audience.

Overall, the school identified the following benefits for students:

- an improvement in their public speaking ability
- an opportunity to meaningfully participate in their learning
- an opportunity to work as a team
- enhanced self-esteem
- an improvement in their drug knowledge
- enhanced relationships with classmates.

Students reported their belief that communication with parents had improved. Students typically said they were talking to their parents about things they had never talked about before.

Parents talked a lot about the night with their daughters. Many parents told them how well they had performed and one mother later said, 'Dad was kicking himself that he didn't come'. Parents said it was good to hear how their girls felt and what their opinions were. The event helped them see their children's friends as sensible young people making reasonable decisions. The night was also described as 'a relief for parents' as it gave them the opportunity to bring up the topic of drugs and have a natural discussion about it instead of a lecture. One student said, 'my mother showed my Personal Development book to my young sister and we all talked about it'.

The school also made some worthwhile contacts with community agencies, such as the Police Schools Involvement Program and the Springvale Indo-Chinese Mutual Support Association.

Follow up evaluation

One of the teachers involved in the program conducted two focus groups two months after the event in order to ascertain longer-term outcomes. These groups included students whose parents had not attended the event.

All students reported that they still felt very positive about the night. They felt good about themselves, as they received compliments about their performance from parents and teachers. The girls whose parents had attended reported that the night opened up new communication channels for them and made it easier to talk about drug-related issues to their parents and to each other. It was agreed that it was great for their parents to see and hear that their friends were well informed and sensible and that 'not all young people from Springvale are on drugs'. All of the students whose parents were not able to attend believed their parents would have learned a lot if they had been able to attend.

LAURISTON GIRLS' SCHOOL

Case study 5



Key message: creating policy – building support and understanding.

Getting started

Creating Conversations was identified by the school as an effective way of involving students, parents and staff in the development of drug education policies and protocols. The school had no drug policy and staff were aware that inconsistent decisions had the potential to cause conflict and create other problems. Using Creating Conversations within the School Community Drug Forums Initiative was considered to be a useful starting point for developing a drug policy. (These forums were Commonwealth funded and were aimed at engaging students, parents and the wider community in drug-related student wellbeing. They allowed schools to develop partnerships with the local community to strengthen their response to managing drug issues in the school community.)

Planning process

A core planning team was established with the following members:

- the Student Counsellor
- the Social Education teacher
- the Head of Middle School
- the Assistant Principal.

Feedback about the proposal was also sought from the Student Welfare Committee, the Principal, the Assistant Principal, the Heads of House, the Director of Learning, the Human Resources Manager, the Head of Junior School and a program coordinator from junior school.

Once the core planning team had established a commitment to proceed, they invited the regional Senior Programs Officer and the local School Focused Youth Service Coordinator onto the planning team. While parents were not directly involved, their views were sought in the course of informal discussions with core team members.

The events

Two events were held, one for parents and one for staff. Students facilitated both events. In the staff forum, the Principal indicated that she supported the Creating Conversations initiative and would take a leadership role in the development of a drug education policy.

The staff event was considered critical to the sustainability of Creating Conversations and to the development of a school drug education policy. While the discussion between teachers and students was always friendly and respectful, at times it was also frank and challenging. The students gained a great deal of satisfaction from the experience, the staff were impressed by the competence of the students, and the resulting level of debate about a drug education policy was considered supportive and well-informed.

The Welfare Coordinator believed the quality of the training was critical to the success of the teacher event. The structure of the program and the activities helped to keep the discussion moving ahead, while the training students received helped them to develop their own considered opinions. As one student commented, 'It just makes you think more – you think about every consequence.'

The parent event was also highly successful. It was well attended and students were really positive about the opportunity to talk with their parents about drug issues.

Future events

Creating Conversations has gradually evolved and it is now an integral part of the core year 10 health curriculum. All year 10 girls receive their drug education through the Creating Conversations model and are involved in presenting a Creating Conversations event to their parents.

Students have seven 75-minute classroom sessions, plus one lunchtime and one after-school practice session to prepare for an event. Each year, the girls develop their own versions of the activities and present different combination of activities. Some students from the previous year help with the training.

Benefits

General benefits

The general benefits included a greater awareness for students, their parents and staff about drug issues and a new commitment to the development of health and drug education policy by the school. There was an acceptance by the school community that drug education should be an important part of what the school offers.

Creating Conversations also acted as a trigger for running parent forums on a wide range of issues. Four additional parent forums were provided on the following topics:

- understanding adolescent risk-taking behaviour
- safe partying
- effective communication with children
- healthy body image.

Benefits for students

Specific benefits for students included an increased awareness and knowledge about drugs. This was achieved through the writing activities. Many students reported that the Creating Conversations experience made it easier to talk to parents about drug issues. It also provided opportunities to build a team and develop organisational skills. Students also reported feeling more connected to their teachers.

I think parents listen more when their kids do it [conduct a learning forum]

I get shy when I go to speak in public and it just made it easier

You now have the confidence to go and tell someone and to help someone you would have condemned beforehand

You can't just think of them as teachers when you're in a forum with them and you talk about drugs – Students.

Overall, students felt it was fun and a break from academic assessment.

Benefits for staff

Staff reported viewing the abilities of students more positively, for example, they saw them as more knowledgeable and articulate. Staff also developed a greater awareness of drug issues, particularly through the open and honest discussions with the students. Finally, following the experience, staff expressed a greater support for the school's drug education policy.

Benefits for parents

Parents also reported that the experience was positive.

The night was interactive and we could talk

This is the best program that the school has run – Parents.



MENTONE GIRLS' GRAMMAR

Case study 6



Key message: meticulous planning and broad involvement.

Getting started

Teachers at the school decided they wanted to raise the parents' and students' awareness about the safety issues arising from binge drinking. Creating Conversations was identified as an effective approach as it would provide parents with the opportunity to talk with other parents, students with the opportunity to set the agenda and facilitate the event, and the school with the opportunity to promote its approach to drug education.

Planning process

Three staff attended a Creating Conversations training day and then briefed the staff who taught Human Relations at year 10 level. It was decided to use these classes to prepare for the event.

A working party consisting of school staff, parents, students and community representatives was formed. A broadly representative working party was considered to lead to a:

- sharing of knowledge prior to the event
- better understanding of the issues
- broad based ownership of Creating Conversations
- consistent message
- sharing of responsibilities
- common goal.

Training

Creating Conversations was offered to all year 10 students in the school's Human Relations and Peer Support programs. Students considered to be potentially vulnerable to risky behaviours were encouraged to attend.

Training occurred during Human Relations and Peer Support classes and fine-tuning sessions were conducted at lunchtimes. Students wrote their own hypothetical scenarios and presented them to students at another local high school. (The students from this other school were enthused and Creating Conversations later became a part of their own curriculum.)

As Creating Conversations required a large time commitment, the support of the broader staff was considered critical; hence all school staff were briefed about the program.

The event

The event was staged six months after the teachers had attended the original training day. The venue was believed to be critical to the success of the event and an inviting venue was chosen. Round tables were used and students developed a seating plan with a view to making parents feel as comfortable as possible. Friends were seated with friends and food and non-alcoholic drinks were provided.

The most effective form of promotion for the event was word of mouth, that is, mainly through students telling their parents they wanted them to attend. This was successful as two thirds of year 10 parents attended on the night.

Wide differences of opinion were aired, with some parents being surprised about the liberal attitudes toward alcohol from other parents. In spite of these differences, a trusting and positive attitude prevailed.

The feedback from evaluation forms demonstrated that parents had engaged in lively conversations with students and other parents.

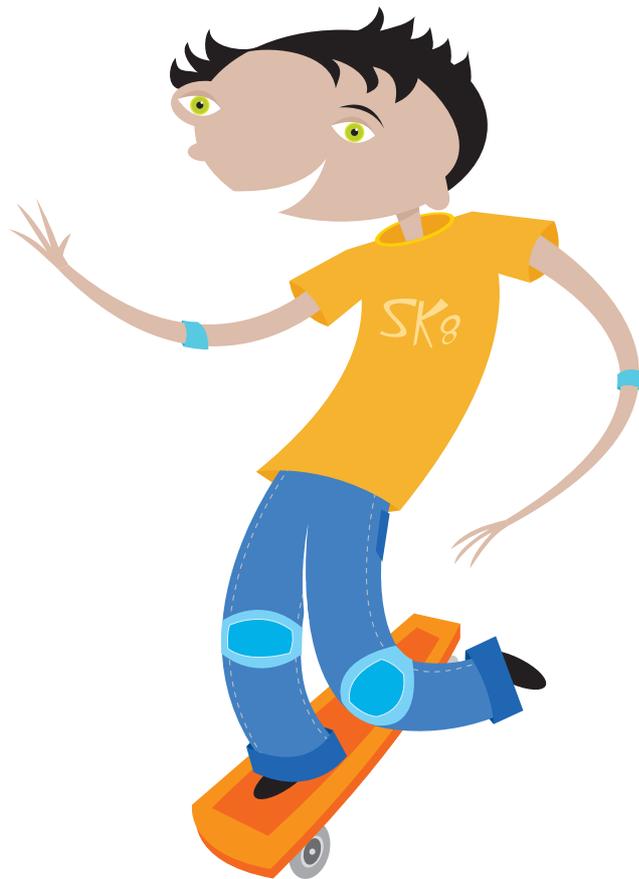
One of the best evenings I've been to – very purposeful and valuable – Staff member.

Benefits

In their Human Relations and Peer Support classes, students reported that the Creating Conversations event opened the way for natural and non-judgemental talks with their parents about alcohol and other issues. These conversations started as early as when they were driving home following the event.

Those students who participated in Creating Conversations further developed their communication, facilitation, organisation, teamwork and leadership skills. They also formed friendships with other members of the project.

Mentone Girls' Grammar is now contemplating introducing the program at the year 9 level. They are also considering using the approach to address other health issues.



MONTMORENCY SECONDARY COLLEGE

Case study 7



Key message: *students taking responsibility.*

Getting started

The Health Coordinator attended training in Creating Conversations provided by the Department of Education. He was interested in the Creating Conversations program but had difficulty developing interest among other staff. The Drama Coordinator agreed to speak with her year 9 students and found they were very keen, so it was decided to conduct the training within the students' drama classes.

Planning process

Support from the Department of Education and Training central and regional staff was considered critical, especially in the early stages of the planning process.

The drama teacher helped the students organise a list of tasks for successfully conducting a Creating Conversations event. The students formed themselves into smaller groups that took responsibilities for carrying out particular tasks. These included:

- writing and modifying scripts
- designing and distributing invitations
- coordinating catering
- making up the educational show bags
- acting as Master of Ceremonies on the evening
- acting as roving reporters on the evening
- choosing and organising sound and the music program
- organising, managing and giving technical support
- organising room set-up.

The event

The students set-up a double classroom with tables and chairs, a small performance space in the middle, a screen for the Quiz and party decorations such as balloons.

The event was attended by the 25 student presenters, 35 parents, 28 grandparents, other family members and friends, and 16 staff (including the Department's Creating Conversations coordinator and the regional Senior Programs Officer).

Benefits

The students significantly benefited from the experience. As the Health Coordinator commented, 'The students even surprised themselves about the level of responsibility they accepted and managed. They were so proud of themselves and so were their parents.'

Other benefits for students included:

- working as a team
- developing a sense of responsibility
- using initiative
- broadening their contacts with people in the community
- developing confidence
- achieving a feeling of success from the accomplishment of a job well done
- improving connections and relationships with peers
- having fun – they really enjoyed themselves.



MOUNT CLEAR SECONDARY COLLEGE

Case study 8



Key message: a major assessment task in year 10 Performing Arts.

Getting started

The College's drama teacher attended a training session for Creating Conversations and decided it could be applied to his year 10 Performing Arts class. He believed it would suit the performance assessment task for Theatre Studies in Term 2.

Planning process

Before student training began, the regional Senior Program Officers with the Department of Education and Training talked to the class about Creating Conversations and how it had been implemented in the past. The officers showed the students the training videotape and answered their questions about the program.

The students agreed that Creating Conversations would be a good vehicle for demonstrating their performance skills and satisfying their assessment task. The flexibility of this program was seen to be one of the most positive aspects of it.

They decided the performance would have two streams, interactive and performance-based work. This would allow them to demonstrate their own scriptwriting techniques.

The class established a time line to work towards and displayed it on the wall with corresponding work sheets. This gave them a clear understanding of the tasks to be completed. Students were required to record their progress in their journals under the headings:

- What are you writing about?
- Where is the scene set and why?
- What did you do in class today?
- What was your role?

The students decided what activities they wanted to include and devised a running order on the whiteboard. From here the students broke off into groups and brainstormed ideas for each section in the running order. After they regrouped, they discussed what had come from this brainstorm. At this point they also decided what elements of the production they wanted to work on.

The structuring of this Creating Conversations training helped to empower the students to accept ownership of the production and to place their personal stamp on the performance. The students adapted the hypothetical component of the program into a Jerry Springer-style talk-show to allow for greater audience participation.

Students also incorporated film into the production. They wrote a script about a rave party and the consequences of accepting drugs. The film portrayed characters getting ready at home for a rave party. The performance was then continued live on stage and portrayed the characters going into the nightclub. The script was written with two plots and sets of outcomes:

- accepting the drugs
- declining the drugs.

Training

With the planning completed, the following lessons were spent in working groups, work-shopping individual scenes and presenting progress to the rest of the class. The students then watched the training videotape again, took down more detailed notes in their journals and discussed any questions they had. This led to the development of characters and a clarification of student roles and responsibilities. The students chose their roles, which included backstage assistance, costume design, costume creation, set design, set construction, publicity, and acting.

The event

The production was seen as a complete success. Feedback from the staff, parents and friends was very positive.

The student's preliminary work leading up to the event was displayed on the night to enhance participants understanding of the student experience. Local community agencies provided displays and distributed information about their services to participants.

Benefits

The building of self-esteem, confidence and team building skills are all benefits of this program that are readily adaptable to the Performing Arts class.

Students enjoyed presenting to their parents and their knowledge and confidence grew dramatically from when they started rehearsing to when they presented – Teacher.





Key message: *addressing local issues.*

Getting started

The Rainbow community is considered mainly traditional, rural and conservative with few people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

As part of the Rainbow College secondary school nurse's student health plan, she interviewed the Principal, Assistant Principal, Year-level Coordinators and parents about local community health issues relevant to the students. Drug issues were identified as an area of concern, particularly binge drinking. The school nurse had previously heard about Creating Conversations through the Secondary School Nurses Orientation Program and had also seen student training at St Columba's College. She believed implementing the program at the school would help to address the issues identified.

Planning process

The school nurse undertook most of the planning, but upon reflection believes that a team approach would be more appropriate for any future events.

Invitations were mailed to parents and a story was placed in a local newspaper to help publicise the coming event.

The coordinator of Creating Conversations from the Department of Education and Training's Central Office helped to gain interest in the program by conducting a workshop with students. The local School Focussed Youth Service provided funding to enable the provision of supper at the event and to contribute to the purchase of information brochures for parents. Community workers, including the outreach worker from Palm Lodge in Horsham and the community health nurse from West Wimmera Health Service, provided further resources and assisted the school nurse on the night.

Training

Students from years 9 to 12 were invited to participate in the program and some students were also specifically encouraged to be involved.

Training sessions were held between classes and after school. The school nurse conducted all the training sessions. She considered this achievable as the students were motivated and happily worked on activities in small groups while she assisted one group at a time. All students contributed and worked as a team. The training also provided students with something to do at lunchtimes as there were not many lunchtime activities on offer at the school.

The event

The event was well supported by other staff and the evening was a success with approximately 150 people in attendance. There are only 100 students at the school. School staff believe that the student participation encouraged the parents to attend.

The three activities that were most well received by the parents were The Weakest Link Quiz, the Hot Seat and the Hypothetical. The student-developed quiz – a version of The Weakest Link Game Show – saw the Principal voted off first and a parent take out the prize.

Community agencies set up displays on the night to inform parents about the services they provided.

Evaluation

The school used Creating Conversations evaluation forms and found students and parents were very positive about the event. Several parents appreciated being able to explore a 'sensitive and controversial issue' in an enjoyable, non-threatening way. Parents were also positive about the teamwork displayed by the students, their presentation skills, and the pride they showed in conducting the event.

The event was videotaped and shown later to the students for further analysis.

Benefits

Over twenty students were involved on and off-stage. They displayed good teamwork and many other skills. As well as performing, the students were given responsibilities for sound, lighting, information technology and catering.

Despite the apparent chaos at rehearsals, the students put on a polished performance and this gave them a sense of pride.

Overall, the benefits identified for students through the evaluation process and later discussion included the:

- development of team work
- building of better relationships
- engendering of pride
- provision of something to do, as there is not a lot for young people to do in this country town
- enhancement of self-esteem – their ability to believe in themselves
- opportunity to let them have a go at a large-scale yet realistic task
- opportunity to explore issues through developing scenarios and discussing them.

The students were keen to go to other schools to tell them about the benefits of Creating Conversations. They also expressed a desire to repeat the event at a later date.

The school nurse reported that she now had greater rapport with the students and that they came to see her more frequently about a range of issues.



ST BRIGID'S COLLEGE

(Horsham)



Key message: promoting harm minimisation and building a consistent message.

Getting started

The school's welfare team decided to make drug education a priority and Creating Conversations was selected as an appropriate vehicle.

Planning process

Program implementation occurred over a period of 12 weeks.

The Health and Physical Education (H&PE) Coordinator facilitated the initiative and recorded the process in an organisational change project that contributed to her Graduate Diploma in Student Welfare.

The H&PE Coordinator, Deputy Principal, School Counsellor and a classroom teacher formed the core team. A year 9 health class was chosen to trial the event and the students took an active part in the organisation and decision-making. They were motivated and it was clear from the beginning that there would be a high level of participation.

Spreading the harm minimisation message

Building a common understanding of the principle of harm minimisation is critical for establishing a consistent approach to drug education. Staff were provided with a discussion paper about harm minimisation and surveyed about their views. They were also asked to provide suggestions for the Creating Conversations event after students presented some of the activities at a staff meeting.

Student involvement

The involvement of students in the school's discourse on harm minimisation demonstrated its philosophy in action and was an excellent example of how students can contribute to school decision-making and curriculum development.

The planning of the event also provided opportunities for students to participate at levels appropriate to their interests and skills. For example, two students, who had a poor history of attendance and were yet to complete any assessment tasks for the year, were able to actively participate and gain positive feedback from their involvement. The varied roles of students included:

- deciding on which activities to use
- designing and sending invitations to parents
- promoting the event
- taking photographs to record the training process
- developing a PowerPoint presentation for the night
- organising catering
- preparing 'mocktails' (non-alcohol, fruit-based cocktails)
- organising support materials, for example, the borrowing of a Standard Drinks Kit and blood alcohol simulator goggles
- assembling parent information show bags
- participating in the development of an evaluation design.

Benefits

The most important achievement in the view of the organising committee was the uniting of staff, parents and students around a harm minimisation approach to drug education.

After the completion of the program, there was a more informed and shared understanding of the school's approach to drug education. Staff were surprised at the number of parents that attended the event and were impressed by the quality of the program and the achievements of the students. It was decided Creating Conversations will become a permanent part of the year 9 Health and Physical Education curriculum for all classes.

The following comments from the night are typical:

My mum and I talked about a lot of issues that night

My parents were talking about it when I got home. Now Dad knows how many standard drinks he's had' – Students.

It enabled me to talk about the use of alcohol and safer behaviour

Congratulations. Great preparation by the teachers, great participation by the students and a great opportunity to continue these discussions at home – Parents.





Key message: a multi-campus approach.

Getting started

All four campuses of Sunshine Secondary College were involved in the Creating Conversations program. A science teacher from the Ardeer campus attended a training session run by the Department's Creating Conversations coordinator and was impressed both by the idea of students facilitating an event about drug-related issues as well as the program's strategy for engaging parents. She took the idea to a welfare team meeting where it was decided to implement the program.

Planning process

The team of ten staff involved in planning and preparation consisted of:

- the Student Welfare Coordinators from each campus
- the health education teachers from each campus
- a member of the administration team
- the school nurse.

To minimise the disruption to classes for student training, it was decided to implement the event through a year 9 science class. Volunteers from other year 9 classes were invited to join the group. The organisers also approached some specific students to participate. These young people were identified as those most likely to benefit from the cooperative and practical learning style evident in Creating Conversations. The program was also considered a way of involving a broader range of parents in the school life of their children.

Staff were very understanding and supportive of students being taken out of their classes when necessary. To gain their support, students presented excerpts from a Creating Conversations program. This increased their understanding of what the college was trying to achieve.

Training

Initially, student training was conducted at the individual campuses. Just prior to the event being held, all campuses came together for college-wide rehearsals.

The event

The event was held in the senior campus library that was set up in a theatre-style. Over one hundred people came to the event – parents, staff and students. The parents were very positive.

It's just great to see the kids up there! – Parent.

After the performance a mother thanked the organising teacher for involving her boy:

- The teachers can see a different side of my son.

Benefits

Participating students typically reported the following:

- 'It was a great learning experience.'
- 'We got a lot out of working as a team.'
- 'We enjoyed performing in front of an audience.'
- 'My mum had a great time and was so proud of me.'

Staff said they were very impressed with the students and surprised by the response from parents.

Finally, the personal story of one student's experience is worth relating. A student with a leading role failed to attend on the night and an integration student with a small role took over the leading part. Despite being nervous, he did very well. He was very proud of himself and his parents were thrilled and appreciative of this opportunity for him to shine. The other students were supportive and gave him plenty of recognition for his achievement.

