

NEW SOUTH WALES YOUTH DRUG SUMMIT

BACKGROUND

The Youth Drug Summit conducted in New South Wales in 1985 was a great success. It was such a success that we publish this report in the belief that other States might wish to consider a similar programme.

It all started early in 1985 when ACPC (New South Wales Branch) held a Youth Forum at Police Headquarters. The Youth Forum was held as part of the Branch's activities for the "International Youth Year". Over 200 young people were invited to the Forum from local high schools. They were invited in order to discuss issues related to drugs.

Lively discussions took place between the young people present and a panel comprising Mr Justice Slattery, Senior Constable Frank Hanson of the Drug Law Enforcement Bureau, Reverend Ted Noffs of the Wayside Chapel and Senior Police from the Community Relations Bureau.

The Youth Forum was such a success that the NSW Branch discussed with its police representative, Inspector Les Thorgood, the possibility of the police organising a follow-up. At about that time, the Community Relations Bureau appointed a Youth Co-ordinator, Maryann Freilich, and the project was referred to her for development. She formed a committee which first met in May, 1985. The committee included police from the Community Relations Bureau and from the Drug Law Enforcement Bureau, the secretary of Lions International, social workers from Developmental Youth Services of New South Wales and a member to promote the support of young people.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROGRAMME

The committee held lengthy discussions before the final programme was produced. The aims of the programme were agreed to be:

- The programme must be for young people, by young people.
- People in authority must listen to the young people and not use it as a forum to express their own views.
- Police should take a high profile at each of the summits.
- The programme should seek long-term results.

It was decided to hold a series of regional youth drug summits in the twenty police districts throughout New South Wales. The plan was that each regional meeting would elect a delegate to attend the State summit meeting. The programme was sponsored by ACPC, the Lions Clubs of New South Wales and the Police Community Relations Bureau. A timetable was prepared and publicity was arranged through the Lions Clubs.

PREPARATION — THE ROLE OF THE DISTRICT COMMUNITY RELATIONS OFFICER

In each of the twenty police districts there is a District Community Relations Officer. The officers are responsible for the implementation and monitoring of police community programmes such as Neighbourhood Watch, Safety Houses, Blue Light Discos and other community based activities. They provided the skills and the local knowledge to organise the regional summits. The Youth Co-ordinator prepared invitations for their use and the invitations led to valuable discussions between the District Community Relations Officers and young people.

PROMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Letterheads and posters were printed. A jingle was produced for use on radio. Media releases were distributed. The sponsors provided funds for printing and promotional material, for catering expenses and for the costs of travel and accommodation.

Many Local Government authorities made halls available and provided catering and staff at local summits. Police Citizens Youth Clubs made premises available for the conduct of workshops. A vital factor in the success of the workshops was the co-operation of welfare, youth and government agencies' personnel.

PARTICIPATION

The local drug summits were attended by 1860 young people. They were asked to complete evaluation forms and the results make interesting reading:

"1. Did you find the workshop useful?

RESULTS 92% Very useful
6% Quite useful
2% All right

2. Did the workshop increase your knowledge on drugs, alcohol use in your area?

RESULTS 85% Greatly
10% Some
4% A little
1% None at all

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3. Would you recommend this workshop to be run again at some future time?

RESULTS 100% of participants answered YES

4. The overall format of the workshop was:

RESULTS 96% Good
3% All right
1% Doubtful

5. Was more time needed in the workshop?

RESULTS 60% Yes
40% No

6. Do you think the workshop will promote an ongoing interest in drug and alcohol issues with you?

RESULTS 96% Yes
2% No

7. Assessment of the content of the working sessions relating to:

Drugs,
Alcohol,
Available Services,
Alcohol and drug use patterns,
and future action

RESULTS 86% Information
11% All right
3% Not sure''

STATE SUMMIT

The State summit was held in Sydney on the 5th December, 1985. It was an outstanding success with 130 delegates attending from the twenty regional summits. The Premier officially opened the State summit meeting.

There was wide media coverage of what was the first formal forum organised within the community for young people to express their views on the drug problem. The morning session consisted of a series of workshops, followed by two sessions in which the young people presented their recommendations. The young people then questioned a group of parliamentarians, government officials and senior police community leaders. It was obvious that the threat of drugs to their lives was a dominant consideration with the young people. Their concern extended from the abuse of legal drugs to the use of illegal drugs.

If the many recommendations could be condensed into one theme, it was that the community must recognise, and place a much higher priority on, education, law enforcement and rehabilitation in the drug area. There was a sense of urgency in the recommendations. They left no doubt that young people are aware and alarmed by the threat that drugs of all kinds pose to their lives and the lives of their friends.

Besides attracting the attention of community leaders, the media and the community generally, a most significant by-product of the summit was the opening of many more channels for co-operation between the police and a wide cross-section of young people.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Space does not permit us to publish all of the many and detailed recommendations put forward for consideration. The recommendations were put forward in a number of different categories. They included education about drugs, the problems of children in isolated areas, a better law enforcement programme, education for parents, media and advertising, the provision of more places for young people to go, recreation and transport, youth support services and the like.

CONCLUSION

The recommendations of the young people were not taken lightly. A special meeting was convened at Police Headquarters to evaluate the drug summit. That meeting led to a number of recommendations both to the police and to government.



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