



Caring for the future growing up today

Youth Engagement DVD

YouthReach South WA Department of Health

The 'Youth Engagement' DVD was intended as a practical tool for clinicians, youth workers and organisations interested in strategies that YouthReach South and its non-government partners use to better engage with young people experiencing mental health issues. The DVD has been circulated throughout the youth sector, Department of Health metropolitan and regional districts, and to anyone interested in using it as a teaching and information tool.

Key to the project's success was the involvement of two young people, aged 19 and 21 years, who participated in the making of the DVD. On camera, they draw on their own personal experience to provide 'tips' on how to positively engage with young people at the outset of their therapy. Youth workers from five different non-government agencies were also interviewed about the communication strategies they found most effective.



The DVD highlights the skills and understandings required to start productive and sustainable conversations with young people experiencing mental health problems.

Chris (youth worker) and Alicia (service manager) at City of Rockingham Youth Service
Photo supplied: Department of Health

Deciding

YouthReach South is committed to involving young people in their own mental health treatment. The service aims to conduct meaningful consultation, interviews and surveys with young people on matters relevant to them and, where possible, incorporate this information into YouthReach South's service delivery practice and process. This two-way communicative approach is reflected in the decision for YouthReach South to make an educational DVD that directly engages both young people and practitioners.

The DVD was planned as an integral part of a pre-existing project aimed at youth participation. Originally, YouthReach South filmed youth workers and used the video segments as part of a presentation at a conference. The videos were such a success the service decided to create a DVD as a training/information tool, and that young people needed to be included.

YouthReach South then canvassed young people to see whether they would like to participate and if they were comfortable with being filmed and therefore being a permanent part of the final DVD.

Preparing

YouthReach South regards 'the voice' and participation of young people as critical to its mandate and therefore approached this project in a manner that both validated and positively supported their involvement.

Participation and consent forms were developed for the young people to sign, which met with YouthReach South organisational policy and procedures. YouthReach South also provides financial remuneration to all young people who give their time as recognition for their expertise as youth consultants.

The locations for the interviews were agreed to by the young people. They chose familiar, quiet and confidential locations that helped put them at ease. YouthReach South were flexible with scheduling, allowing for changes to accommodate the young people's needs and to ensure the interviews took place successfully. YouthReach South provided transport and support throughout the process with additional staff helping out.

The DVD and proposed youth interviews were discussed with all YouthReach South clinicians, who were then asked to nominate young people they felt would be interested in participating. A short list was drawn up from these nominations, and following conversations to discuss the project and gauge interest, two young people were selected.



Young participant being interviewed
Photo supplied: Department of Health

Doing it

The first stage was to ensure that the youth participants were fully informed about all aspects of the DVD – what it would look like, who else was involved, where it would be used, and how their information would be used. In this way transparency was guaranteed. Likewise, the consent forms provided reassurance to the participants that their confidentiality and role was being taken seriously.

It was important that the young people felt comfortable, so relaxed language and humour was used to help reduce anxiety. YouthReach South ensured the young people knew how important their contribution was, and openly acknowledged their courage.

For this communication process to be successful, YouthReach South made informal time together before and after the filming to relax, joke and debrief. Each young person was then shown their interview so they could say whether they were happy with the footage before proceeding further.



Young people were made to feel relaxed
Photo supplied: Department of Health

Following up

The two young people were invited to the DVD launch in September 2011 and given their own copies. Their contributions were acknowledged alongside the other participants. They were able to see first hand that the finished product accurately represented what they said in the interviews.

Feedback from the two youth participants reflected pride and satisfaction. They reported feeling pleased with their participation and how this was represented in the finished product. Importantly, they believed the DVD content reflected appropriate youth engagement.

Since the DVD project, YouthReach South has noticed their youth clients becoming increasingly more interested in 'having their say', through attending reviews and award ceremonies, contributing to forums and co-presenting at mental health conferences.