

Peer Education Alcohol Project

July 2011

About Mentor

Mentor prevents drug and alcohol misuse and promotes the health and well-being of children and young people.

www.mentoruk.org.uk



Acknowledgements

Mentor Scotland would like to thank all the peer educators who gave their time and enthusiasm to deliver the peer education sessions, the project leaders of the youth groups we visited, and the youth participants and practitioners that were trained. We would also like to thank Comic Relief who enabled this project to happen with their funding, the stakeholders who assisted us during the scoping phase, and Partners in Evaluation Scotland who provided expertise and support with the evaluation and this final report.

Gez Lawson, Project Officer
Mentor Scotland
Edinburgh, May 2011

LONDON

4th Floor, 74 Great Eastern Street

London EC2A 3JG

t: + 44 020 7739 8494

f: 020 7739 5616

e: admin@mentoruk.org

Charity Registration No. 1112339

Company Reg No.5609241 (England and Wales)

EDINBURGH

c/o Circle, 18 West Pilton Park

Edinburgh EH4 4EJ

t: +44 013 15528660

e: admin-scotland@mentoruk.org

Scottish Charity No. SC041210

Executive summary

About the Peer Education Alcohol Project

In February 2009 Mentor was awarded a two-year grant by Comic Relief to develop a peer-led alcohol education project. The project aimed to reduce harm and increase access to help for young people who have alcohol problems, increase skills to deliver services targeted at young people who have alcohol problems, and build closer working relationships between alcohol agencies and young people's services.

Mentor also wanted to evidence the effectiveness of our peer education model as i) a method of engaging hard to reach and excluded young people in different Scottish communities; and ii) of supporting and training practitioners to deliver better services to hard to reach young people at risk of alcohol misuse.

Peer education uses already established channels of communication. In this project, it also required young people to develop their own resources and training on alcohol to deliver to peers and practitioners. Involving young people in

the development of their own alcohol education programme is in alignment with the health and wellbeing outcomes outlined in the Scottish Government's Curriculum for Excellence (in schools) directive.

Key findings

- Peer educators showed increased protective factors including positive commitment to school, positive family relationships, and significant reduction in levels of general anxiety
- Young people who received a peer education session increased their knowledge around alcohol and a third changed their attitude towards it.
- 90% of professionals attending the peer education training increased their knowledge around alcohol. They also gained understanding of the peer education model and confidence in how to replicate it.



Conclusions

Involvement in an alcohol misuse peer education project has myriad benefits, some of them unique, for the peer educators and the people they work with.

Peer educators became more informed about the risks and harm alcohol misuse can cause, more able to make informed choices and less likely to put themselves at risk. They felt able to talk to their peers socially as well as in training sessions about alcohol and how to stay safe. In the two years they were involved in the project, their happiness levels and confidence both rose considerably. They were able to change attitudes amongst many of the young people participating in the training sessions.

Practitioners working with young people with alcohol problems need no convincing that peer education is an effective model. What they want is the expert knowledge and materials so they can set up these projects themselves.

There is a significant gap in service provision and in good quality services that could be met cost effectively and rapidly with small scale funding to continue our to support peer education around alcohol.

Recommendations

- Peer educators are recruited from as diverse group as possible
- That there is a wide age range for educators
- Ways to evaluate the long term impacts on participants' attitudes and behaviour are developed and tested.
- Mentor seeks partners to roll out this project on a larger scale and undertake a cost benefit analysis
- That future iterations of the project are made sustainable by linking with youth information points in schools



Introduction and Background

Mentor

Mentor helps children and young people make the most of their lives and to live happily, healthily and productively by preventing them from misusing drugs and alcohol.

Mentor has over 15 years of experience delivering national and international projects with a focus on vulnerable and disadvantaged young people.

Evidence of need

Mentor's previous work with young people has included our national CHAMP Awards and our Youth Involvement projects to improve our understanding of how to address the risks of alcohol related harm to young people. They told us that young people:

- want and need clear, honest and factual information about how alcohol affects their minds and bodies and how they can make healthier lifestyle choices.
- want access to services, which they

have chosen, and which are open to their views. They want to receive advice and support from professionals who have some understanding of their experiences and who know how to communicate with them and “speak their language”.

- should be central to developing solutions to alcohol misuse among their peers.

Nationally the evidence for addressing alcohol misuse amongst young people is well established, *The Health Behaviour in School Aged Children* survey of Scottish young people indicates that even amongst 11 year olds, 3% are drinking on a weekly basis. By the time they reach the age of 15, weekly drinking is reported by over a quarter (27%).

One in five (20%) of all Scottish young people has been drunk on at least two occasions, and by the time they are 15 years old this has reached 43%.

About the Peer Education Alcohol Project

In February 2009 Mentor received a grant from Comic Relief to develop a peer-led alcohol education project in order to reduce harm and increase access to help for young people who have alcohol problems, increase practitioners' service delivery skills and build closer working relationships between alcohol agencies and young people's services.

Mentor wanted to explore if peer education could ensure that young people have access to alcohol-based education that the recipients accept as relevant, credible and useful in reducing serious harm from alcohol misuse. Involving young people in the development of their own alcohol education program is in alignment with the health and wellbeing outcomes outlined in the Curriculum for Excellence directive and we hoped to promote peer education as a method of engaging hard to reach and excluded young people in a cross section of Scottish communities.

The project had two components. The first was recruiting and training the peer educators so that they could devise and deliver a curriculum to their peers. The second component was to provide training to practitioners who work and support young people at risk of harm from alcohol misuse.

Aims and Objectives of the project

Project Aim

To develop a peer education project that will raise young people's awareness of alcohol related harm.

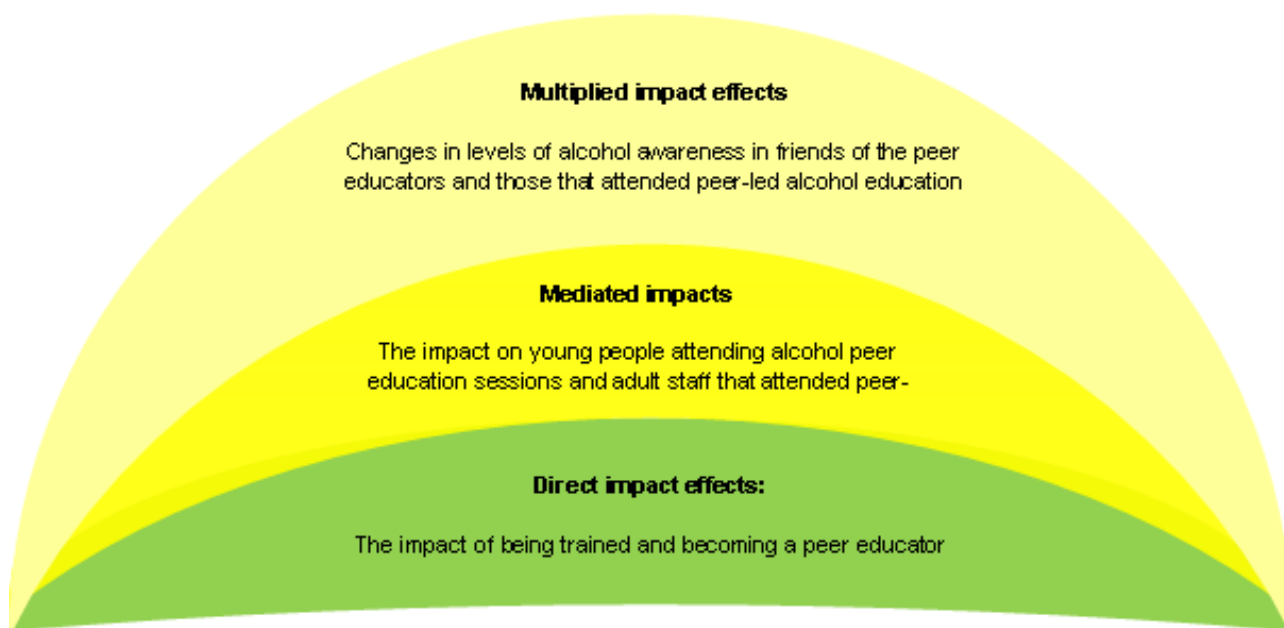
Project Objectives

To recruit, train and support a group of 12 young people (aged 14-16) as peer educators. Enable them to provide training across Scotland to young people at serious risk of harm from alcohol misuse and to professionals working with young people at serious risk of harm from alcohol misuse.

Specifically to:

- recruit 12 young people from Edinburgh and the Lothians;
- conduct a training needs assessment with the 12 young people and provide them with residential training to skill them to deliver training to young people and professionals;
- develop training courses based on *First Measures*, Mentor's guide to alcohol misuse prevention work with children; a training course for young people at risk of alcohol misuse, and another for professionals working with young people.
- young people to deliver training to 120 young people across 18 venues in Scotland;
- young people to deliver training to 120 professionals across 18 venues in Scotland;
- the project to be evaluated from the outset and an evaluation report and final project report published identifying learning and making recommendations for future training concerning young people and alcohol misuse.

Figure 1: Overview of outcomes of the Alcohol Peer Education Project



Project outcomes

The outcomes for the various stakeholders are summarised below.

Outcomes for peer educators

- increased knowledge of alcohol and related harm
- increased skills: communication, facilitation of group work, team work
- increased personal development: confidence and self-esteem
- accredited awards: Youth Achievement and Millennium Volunteer Awards

Outcomes for those attending peer education sessions

- increased knowledge of alcohol and related harm
- increased personal safety

Outcomes for friends of peer educators and those who attend peer education sessions

- increased knowledge of alcohol and related harm

- increased personal safety

Outcomes for adults who work with young people

- increased knowledge of alcohol based peer education
- increased knowledge and understanding of alcohol related harm
- increased knowledge of activities used to increase young people's awareness of alcohol issues

Project planning

February-April 09

Meetings were held with several schools, youth groups and other statutory services to scope the recruitment of peer educators and identifying potential groups of vulnerable young people who might benefit from the education sessions.

The Project Officer met with a range of front line agencies in order to gauge what

current alcohol education was taking place across Scotland. We identified gaps in service provision and variable quality during our scoping exercise.

We joined the Scottish Peer Education Network (SPEN) which gave us access to a wide range of organisations involved in peer education across Scotland. This gave us a valuable insight into the services that were being delivered to young people around alcohol education and enabled us to find organisations who would be interested in working in partnership with the project.

Evaluation support

We worked with a senior consultant at Partners in Evaluation Scotland (PIES) . We also devised a strategy for ongoing evaluation of all the key elements of the project work. The external evaluation support included baseline questionnaires with the peer educators and a follow-up after a year with the project.

Evaluation tools included the well-being questionnaire devised by New Philanthropy Capital, and evaluation wheels that measured the development of soft outcomes such as communication, confidence, empathy, teamwork, responsibility and positive interaction. The evaluation consultant planned to observe the delivery of two peer education sessions and conducted a focus group with the peer educators after they had been delivering courses for six months.

In April 2010 the evaluation consultant trained 10 of the peer educators to develop an evaluation follow-up session for groups that had participated in the peer education sessions. They developed key questions to ask young

people who had participated in the sessions and practiced running follow-up focus groups. They received certificates for attending this training.

An on-line follow-up questionnaire was also devised for the adults from the projects where the peer education had been delivered.

The findings of our initial scoping

We visited several agencies across Scotland including Streetbase in South Lanarkshire and HYPE (a young people addiction service in Edinburgh), to examine the alcohol education provided amongst the voluntary and statutory services.

We identified gaps in service provision; for example, some schools do not offer any alcohol education. Where it is offered, the level of alcohol education, its scope and delivery varies.

Delivery

Recruitment

March - July 09

To help recruit peer educators we developed a leaflet which was sent to all secondary schools and community groups across Edinburgh. As well as generic youth services we specifically focused on agencies that specialise in working with young people at serious risk of exclusion.

We planned to over-recruit knowing there would be a drop-off as the project got underway. We were able to interest an initial group of 24 young people who were interviewed. Following a period of induction, 15 young people were consistently attending weekly meetings. Table 1 shows the backgrounds of the 15 active peer educators.

Table 1: the demographics of the active peer educators

Male	3
Female	12
BME	2
White Scottish	13
LGBT	1

One group member left prior to the initial residential and six left over the summer of 2010. The eight remaining educators stayed to the end of the project and six remain involved with Mentor to date.

Although the recruitment process was a success, we did struggle to engage young people who were perceived to be at serious risk of harm from alcohol. We had hoped at least half of our educators would be from socially excluded

backgrounds in order to have a broad base of young people in the peer education group. In reality we were able to recruit a quarter of the peer educators with this background.

Training

Aug-October 09

Initial group meetings focused on induction. This allowed time for the group to develop a group agreement and to understand the project aims and their role in it. We also used this induction period to complete parental consent forms making sure that parents were aware of the project and our expectations of the young people involved.

We then invited young peer educators from Fast Forward (a national drug and alcohol education organisation) to deliver training to the group. They delivered two two-hour sessions on alcohol awareness and risk-taking behaviour associated with alcohol misuse. This allowed us to carry out a needs assessment with the group. Based on this, we developed a five-week training program to provide the relevant alcohol information as well as the opportunity to explore attitudes and misconceptions around alcohol misuse.

Before the training programme started, the evaluation consultant met the group and collected baseline data.

The five-week training program (held over five evenings) focused on different elements of education, problem solving, passing on information and challenging attitudes. It also encompassed

communication and facilitation, providing opportunities for the group to develop confidence in group speaking and facilitating often heated discussions.

The initial training program was followed by a three-day residential at the Pilton retreat, Ratho. The promise of the residential motivated the group to attend all the training sessions and re-enforced team building, group skills development and session planning.

The initial residential

Objectives

- provide team building and social activities for the group;
- develop a clear understanding of the role of a peer educator, and the skills needed;
- develop group work skills, raise self confidence and self esteem and

encourage participation within the group;

- develop a programme to engage young people in alcohol education.

The group decided that their programme should be interactive and activity-based. They decided to create a new leaflet with basic alcohol information for young people and designed peer educator T-shirts.

Development of the programme to be delivered by the peer educators

The young people developed a four stage programme:

- Stage 1 - ice breakers and energisers.
- Stage 2 - quiz followed by interactive activities (based on the needs of the group) to provide relevant information on health, mind



Table 2: Delivery of peer education sessions

Group	Age range	Participants	Date
West Lothian YAP	12-21	16	25 th Nov 09
Clued Up- Kirkaldy	12-21	7	25 th Nov 09
Clued Up- Kirkaldy	12-17	0	3 rd Dec 09
North Ayrshire Young Carers	13-18	10	19 th Jan 10
Universal Connections, South Lanarkshire	12-15	8	3 rd Feb 10
Alloa Young Carers	11-14	4	11 th Feb 10
Alloa Young Carers 13+	13-16	10	25 th Feb 10
Whitecreek – Clydebank	14-17	7	4 th Mar 10
Kilmarnock Young Carers (11-13)	11-13	14	17 th Mar 10
Kilmarnock Young Carers (13-15)	13-15	10	18 th Mar 10
Kilmarnock Senior Carers	16-18	7	18 th Mar 10
Oban Youth café	13-16	0	19 th Mar 10
Oban Youth Cafe (Edinburgh)	13-16	12	16 th Apr 10
The Shack youth group, Rosyth	14-15	3	22 nd Mar 10
Aberlour Youth Point Glasgow	14-18	7	23 rd Mar 10
Websters High School, Angus x4	12-14	91	3 rd Sept 10
6VT Edinburgh	14-17	6	12 th Oct 10
Gordonstoun School, Moray	15-17	20	16 th Oct 10
Gordonstoun School, Moray	15-17	8	15 th Nov 10
Total		232	

and risks associated with alcohol.

- Stage 3 - quiz revisited – this enabled the educators to recap the information and gauge participants' knowledge compared to the initial quiz.
- Stage 4 - evaluation - at the end of every session each group of peer educators led a brief written evaluation with the group of participants.

The delivery of the programme was planned to take two hours. The different

elements (activities) meant that educators could start off with basic activities and build up to more complex activities. This allowed all the educators an opportunity to be involved in session delivery regardless of their confidence levels.

Delivery of peer education sessions

The peer educators worked a 4:1 ratio where possible. This meant each educator had no more than four participants to facilitate during group work. Often the group size differed from

the anticipated number. Rarely, however, were there more young people than expected. Educators worked in groups of three or four (and occasionally two) and on one occasion the Project Officer had to help deliver when an educator pulled out at the last minute.

Each session was evaluated by participants as described above and educators completed their own feedback sheets.

Table 2 shows the sessions for young people that were delivered over the life of the project.

Our target was to reach 120 young people from 18 areas across Scotland. The actual number of young people the peer educators worked with was 232 individual young people from 14 different areas. 17 sessions were delivered in total. We exceeded our original target due to a request from a rural high school which asked for four sessions that were delivered to all of the S2 pupils in the school (91 young people), and another session request from a private school in Moray that was delivered to 20 young

people within the school. Two sessions were planned but needed to be postponed because no young people attended. Both were successfully delivered at a later date. However, unfortunately our evaluator had planned to attend one and we could not rearrange this.

The findings from the end of workshop evaluations are shown in Section 3 of this report.

Youth Achievement Award

The Youth Achievement Award process provided the group with a formal means of accreditation for their involvement. The Award lends itself very well to peer education as it builds upon the personal development and self evaluation elements of a peer education model through a series of self-identified challenges.

It forms a comprehensive record, in the form of a portfolio, of the work undertaken and the challenges set. The YAA gave the group a chance to become much more proactive as educators, focusing their work in areas or with

Table 3: *Delivery* of adult and practitioner sessions

Session details	Participants	No of participants	Date
Introduction to peer education	Youth workers	12	16 th Feb 2010
Introduction to peer education	Youth workers	11	22 nd Feb 2010
Alcohol and young people	Parents	60	21 st Mar 2010
Alcohol awareness	Youth befrienders	15	22 nd Mar 2010
Alcohol- train the trainers	Youth workers	12	TBC
Total		110	

groups they chose and writing needs-led session plans rather than a fixed session.

Second residential

The second residential was held in November 2010. Seven peer educators attended. The focus of the residential was:

- provide team building activities
- survey 100 adults' views on alcohol issues for young people
- complete stage two evaluation assessments with the group
- allow time for YAA portfolio building.

The group benefited from this chance to spend some quality time together away from the formal setting of the training room. It improved attendance at subsequent training sessions and helped to re-engage the group and focus them on the project work.

Delivery of practitioner training

The initial project concept was for the young peer educators to devise a programme (session) that would benefit workers, parents and practitioners who supported young people who were at serious risk of harm from alcohol misuse.

Despite positive meetings with agencies and marketing, requests for the initial session was so low that it was impossible to deliver.

The group devised a consultation event to get representatives from national agencies together in order to ascertain how best to provide a useful resource for our target group. However, weather conditions that brought transport to a standstill for three weeks meant that the event was cancelled.

In January 2011 the group agreed to

advertise the introduction to peer education course nationally. We offered 12 places to practitioners. The response was overwhelming with 36 requests for places.

The course was run twice in February, once in Edinburgh and once in Lochgilphead. Feedback was exceptionally positive, with many agencies requesting further support. A summary of this feedback is shown in Section 3 of this report.

Table 3 shows the practitioner sessions that were delivered and those sessions that were planned beyond the end of the project.

Since conducting the training we have been approached by the Scottish Peer Education Network (SPEN) with the offer of support to deliver this training nationally.

Evaluation findings

Evaluation findings from the peer educators

Observation of sessions

The evaluation consultant planned to observe the delivery of two peer education sessions, but was only able to attend one. A second session had to be postponed due to lack of turn out. The key findings were:

- the peer educators competently delivered the session
- the fast-paced delivery kept the interest of the young people
- they managed to successfully handle the low-level challenging behaviour that the group exhibited – in fact they handled this better than most adults as they were relaxed and managed to keep control of the group
- it was clear that the participants enjoyed the session and the full content of the session was delivered as planned

Evaluation of outcomes for the peer educators

The findings from the baseline and follow-up wellbeing questionnaires showed that:

- there was an increase in scores on their perception of how they felt about their lives overall (from an average of 7/10 to 9)
- there was a large increase in overall levels of happiness (from an average of 38/50 to 44)

- there was no change in levels of overall health
- there was no change in levels of self-esteem (from an average score 40/50 to 41)
- there was a large reduction in levels of general anxiety (from an average of 18/25 to 11)
- there was no change in levels of valuing themselves (from an average score of 21/25 to 22)
- there was no change in their satisfaction with their friendship group (from an average score of 21/25 to 22)
- there was a small increase in positive family relationships (from an average score of 20/25 to 22)
- there was no change in levels of satisfaction in the area that they live (average scores 17/25)
- there was an increase in positive attitudes to school (from an average of 17/25 to 20)

Findings from the baseline and follow-up soft outcome evaluation wheels showed that:

- two-thirds of the peer educators showed increase in their communications skills (one third showed a very high increase)
- two-thirds of the peer educators showed increased confidence (one third showed a very high increase)
- two-thirds of the peer educators showed increased empathy



- five-sixths of the peer educators showed an improvement in their team work (one sixth showed a very large improvement)
- half of the peer educators showed an increase in their feeling of responsibility

Findings from the focus group with peer educators

The reasons that the peer educators wanted to be involved in the project were to increase their confidence, learn new skills, to make new friends, to help to change other people's lives and to have fun. These aims were largely met by almost all of the peer educators.

Prior to their involvement in the project most of the peer educators had not been drunk, although most had seen a number of their friends drunk. Several reported that they had tried alcohol but did not like the taste. Two reported that they had got drunk since their involvement in the project but reported that they did not like the experience and thought that being drunk "was over-rated." One peer educator reported that she had got drunk at her birthday party, for which her

mother had supplied the alcohol, and that she had been sick. She reported that "This wasn't a fun experience."

Delivering the Sessions

The peer educators reported that they had enjoyed delivering the sessions. Several said they had been nervous at the start of their first session but once underway they were able to relax.

They reported that delivering the sessions got easier as they got more confident and more experienced.

They reported that every group that they had worked with was different and that they were able to be flexible and adapt the workshops depending on the circumstances:

There are different reasons that we are at each group. Some groups are more quiet and some groups are more noisy. We sometimes have to change the plan when running a session to meet the needs of the group... run more games if they are quiet, or have fewer games if they are noisy.

They reported that on the whole, the young people attending their sessions

reacted positively to the sessions:

They were often complimentary at the end.

It's quite surprising... you would think that they wouldn't listen, but they did!

They [the sessions] went better than expected. The most recent one we did was really good!

Their biggest disappointments were when no young people showed up for the sessions, which happened twice. This was especially disappointing when they had travelled a long distance to get to the workshop (Oban).

They reported that the main benefits to themselves in participating in the project were:

Increased confidence:

I found that I can say much more than I ever thought I could.

I thought I'd never be able to do this.

When doing presentations at my school I would rush through it, trying to get to the end as quickly as possible. Now I am much more relaxed at presenting and I enjoy it a lot.

I can talk to anyone now... before i was more shy in some situations."

Increased empathy:

I've become much more compassionate and understanding... it's horrible to see people who have so much less than you do. I never thought much about poverty before but we met a girl who had to sleep on a sofa.

I've become less judgemental.

When you get to meet people who you think are much different from you and you get to know them a little, you realise

that they are just like you.

They all reported that they had learned a lot about alcohol during the project:

I thought I knew a lot about alcohol, but now I know much more... my knowledge is deeper and I understand the technical bits more... like units.

It was clear that all the peer educators had developed a strong relationship with the project worker and valued their time together working with her. Her friendly and informal style was appreciated by all:

She is like one of us. She tells us about her life. I could talk to her about anything.

She has really been encouraging and helped us to develop the workshops. She doesn't dive in and interfere if things aren't going quite right. She lets us try to do it ourselves and then gives us feedback afterwards.

She keeps in contact with us all the time, texting us, and letting us know what's going on.

During the second residential towards the end of the project, the peer educators were asked to talk about their involvement and what they felt they had gained as a result.

I think I listen more, speaking too, which I think is quite good coz in class we did talks and it helped me with that a lot.

I enjoyed meeting new people, doing the sessions and stuff that helped me develop my confidence.

I think I am a lot more confident, I think I can handle bad situations and I know I can talk to big groups of people now.

I enjoyed meeting different people, I made a lot of new friends and I liked seeing how different people are coz I'm

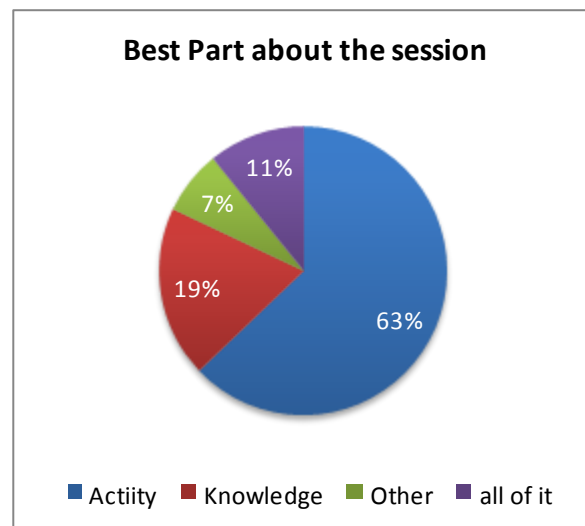
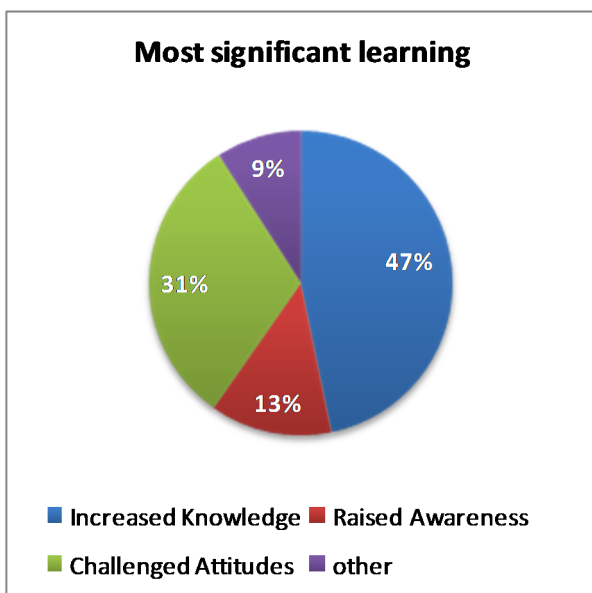
quite lucky. It's good to get a different perspective of other people and their problems. Some of the young people I worked with really wanted to learn, they really wanted to do it which was good to see.

I don't judge people now, it showed me how nice people can be and showed me that it's wrong to have ideas about people without knowing them first.

The group all felt that their confidence had improved as a direct result of their involvement in the project. Their self esteem did not change significantly. All of the group members who completed the second self assessment questionnaires had high levels of self esteem at the beginning and retained those levels throughout the project.

Evaluation findings from the young people who attended peer education sessions

Figure 2 summarises the findings from the end of session evaluation forms completed by participants of the peer education sessions. This shows that the participants enjoyed the sessions and that around a third thought that learning



the facts about alcohol was a highlight, confirming the importance of peer educators making the learning fun.

Conversely, about a third reported that they did not find the activities enjoyable, and a quarter thought that transmission of the facts was the worst part of the workshop.

Around two thirds of participants thought that both the pace of delivery and content were good, while 15% though that the pace was average and 19% thought that the content was average.

Almost half reported that what they had learned most from the session was their knowledge about alcohol, while a third reported that it had changed their attitudes about drinking.

Friends of peer educators and young people attending the sessions

Findings from the focus group with peer educators found that the peer educators were talking to their friends about alcohol-related harm and safety issues:

I notice more about what my friends are doing... but I don't intervene when they are drunk, as I know that this is not the best time to speak to them. I tell them

when they are sober how they made a fool of themselves.

I try to avoid my friends if they are going out to get drunk, but sometimes I might give them advice before they get drunk about making sure that they are safe, staying together and not drinking in any dodgy places.

Findings from adults who supported the young people attending peer education sessions

The adult workers involved in the peer education sessions were asked to complete a short on-line survey. The response rate was 25%.

Of those responding, one-fifth reported major changes in attitudes towards alcohol in some of the young people that they worked with. Similar percentages were reported for differences in the young people's drinking behaviour since the peer educators' session.

All agreed it was better for alcohol education to be delivered by young people instead of adults.

Findings from the Practitioner sessions

The initial two practitioner sessions aimed to highlight how peer education could be used to deliver alcohol education to young people at serious risk of harm from alcohol misuse. The participants were youth development workers and project managers from statutory and voluntary agencies.

The overall feedback was very positive. Participants found it very useful to see how peer education could be used in a variety of different locations, to ask the peer educators for their opinions and to see the tools they used.

Participants were asked how the session had enhanced their understanding of how peer education could be used to engage and educate young people in their communities .

Evaluation shows that although many of the practitioners had a good working knowledge of alcohol issues (relevant to young people), half (48%) stated their knowledge had increased a little and a quarter (28%) that their knowledge had increased a lot.

Mentor Scotland has been contacted since the event by two participants requesting further training for both staff and young people, and is planning to provide further training courses for practitioners in 2011.

Key Findings and Commentary

Key findings

- Peer educators showed increased protective factors including positive commitment to school, positive family relationships, and significant reduction in levels of general anxiety
- Young people who received a peer education session increased their knowledge around alcohol and a third changed their attitude to it.
- 90% of professionals attending the peer education training increased their knowledge around alcohol. They also gained understanding of the peer education model and confidence in how to replicate it.

Commentary

Involvement in a substance misuse education project can have many benefits for the peer educators themselves and the people they work with. The evaluation of this project clearly shows that the peer educators increased their knowledge and ability to make informed choices around alcohol, and that their confidence in talking to peers grew.

An interesting benefit for the peer educators was their increased levels of empathy towards young people and the challenges that they face. Many commented that their attitudes towards their peers had changed and that they were now much less judgemental. Giving peer educators the opportunity to engage with young people from a wide range of

geographical and socio-economic backgrounds was a core part of their personal development.

Whilst the project was able to demonstrate an impressive immediate impact on participants' attitudes and behaviour, longer term assessment and evaluation should be written into any future peer education programmes to build, inter alia, a robust economic and social case to potential funders for sustaining the programme.

It is relatively straightforward to assess and report the attitudinal and behavioural changes in peer educators, with ongoing access, a good working relationship and an environment where they can openly discuss substance misuse in their own terms. Training and support can be tailored to the needs of the group as it develops. It is more difficult to evidence longer term change in the young people attending education sessions. There are a range of confounding factors that make judging the impact of the session difficult over the longer term. However, careful planning and a degree of additional investment may make it possible to design a longitudinal evaluation of this group.

The project aimed to provide alcohol training to practitioners working with young people at risk of alcohol misuse. Marketing this as "developing alcohol based peer education" provoked an overwhelming response. Practitioners from a wide range of youth organisations attended the training sessions. Providing them with the opportunity to talk to

experienced peer educators about their motivations, the tools and materials they used and the training they received ranked highly in the feedback.

Recommendations

Peer educators should be recruited from as diverse a group as possible. This will help to reduce the likelihood of 'deviancy training'.

The age range should be widened. Recruiting young people aged 14 -16 for a two-year project meant that the group were often unavailable due to revision and exams, or summer jobs/holidays. This left significant gaps in the programme. More focused recruitment and a wider age range would avoid this.

Having shown that peer education is a viable model for alcohol misuse prevention there is a need to collate systematic evidence of the impact on young people's attitudes and behaviours related to alcohol (on both the peer educators and on those being educated).

Planning a peer education project should allow time to establish relationships with partner organisations that work with vulnerable young people to attract them to the project and support their involvement.

Youth Achievement Awards are a useful and appropriate form of accreditation and should be initiated at the onset of the project.

Consideration should be given to rolling out peer education on a larger, more comprehensive scale which is sustainable. This could be closely linked to youth information points in schools to ensure that young people have access to

information and learning opportunities about alcohol in ways that are relevant to them. Young people should have a key role in developing the information available to them.

Statutory agencies, schools and local community groups should work together to share learning, best practice and opportunities so that as many young people as possible may have access to this type of properly structured and delivered peer education around alcohol misuse.

We therefore recommend:

- Peer educators are recruited from as diverse group as possible
- That there is a wide age range for educators
- Ways to evaluate the long term impacts on participants' attitudes and behaviour are developed and tested.
- Mentor seeks partners to roll out this project on a larger scale and undertake a cost benefit analysis
- That future iterations of the project are made sustainable by linking with youth information points in schools