

# Guide

## Running a regular event for young people

### Community action

Young people don't turn to alcohol and other drugs (AOD) because they want to develop problems. They are often bored and may want to connect with their peers. Instead of focussing on telling them not to drink, communities can make sure young people have access to a variety of engaging activities. These activities can keep them socially active and healthy, help form and strengthen friendships, can increase a sense of belonging, and create a space for positive role modelling from supportive adults.

#### THE BEST APPROACH

Although there is no easy answer explaining why people develop problems with AOD, the evidence indicates that the more 'protective' factors in a person's life, the higher the likelihood that problems will not occur.

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#### 'Protective' factors:

- Quality of relationships, including family
- Mental health
- Social group and interests
- Access to positive adult role models
- Cultural and peer attitudes to AOD
- Engagement in education

Primary prevention is about strengthening these factors by building a stronger and more inclusive community, which includes improving community facilities and increasing access to a variety of recreational activities. Regularly engaging young people also provides an opportunity to match them up with services that might help them, like mental health support.

Measuring the success of prevention can be difficult because the results are seen in the long term. But this is a great space to work in, because you're dealing with the underlying factors that may lead someone to develop problems with AOD instead of catching them after it's already happened. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure!

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#### Outsmarting alcohol advertisers

It's hard to swim upstream against years of exposure to alcohol marketing and a grog-loving culture. Contradicting those messages by trying to make responsible drinking and maybe even sobriety 'cool' through one-off events or AOD harm awareness-raising campaigns aren't the best tactics. Instead of trying to beat alcohol marketing at its own game (where you're out-funded and starting years behind), change the game.

People who have a strong support network, a sense of belonging in a community, and some feeling of purpose in their life (family, employment, sport) are less likely to develop problems with AOD. Running or supporting an ongoing activity for young people is therefore a great way to make a difference in your community.

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## An ideal youth event is:

- Consistent: one-offs don't have the same impact as something that happens regularly. It gives young people something reliable to look forward to being a part of while providing a dependable alternative to using AOD for entertainment.
- Timed to reduce harms: events in the late evenings and over school holidays are great, so young people go home sleepy and having been occupied during times they might have used AOD.
- Provides positive role modelling: mentoring and support from responsible and caring adults can make a big difference to a young person, especially if that's something they are missing.
- 'In-touch' with young people: Talking to the people you're trying to reach is absolutely necessary to find out what they're interested in. For example, if the 'at risk' kids aren't interested in sport, think about running music or computer gaming events for example.
- Linked to other services: like mental and physical health, academic assistance, and family support. Consider inviting your local youth workers to attend regularly, and/or provide information on the various services and how to access them.
- AOD free: just state the no alcohol and other drugs policy and stick to it, then focus on making the event as fun as possible. Ideally the young people won't even think of it as an 'alcohol-free event', it's just such a great event that no one thinks to add alcohol.

## RESOURCES

Some pearls of wisdom from community members who have lots of experience in running youth events:

- Give the respect you want to receive. A relationship built on mutual respect is a strong one – this is an opportunity to be a great role-model in a young person's life.
- Show, don't tell, that you don't need AOD to have fun. Teenagers are pretty savvy and preachy messages can make many young people shut down – who likes being told what to do? Providing alternatives is a better route.
- If you give young people the option to make a good choice, they often will.
- Partnerships and wide networks are key to making sure your program keeps running. It means that when someone isn't available there are others there to step in, and it keeps fresh ideas and energy flowing into the project.
- If you want to talk specifically about AOD, be honest about the positive and negative effects. Acknowledge that people do drink alcohol for a reason. Lots of young people are quick to see through scare tactics – they discredit the person using them and the program they're trying to run. Honesty is the best policy, and establishes you as a trustworthy source of information and guidance.

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## Inspiration

**YACROCK café:** a regular Friday night music event for young people run for eight years in Byron Bay by BUDDI CDAT with help from the Byron Bay youth services.

**Worn out worn art:** an arts and fashion program that's been running for the past 10 years in Mundaring, WA, via a network that includes the Mundaring Arts Centre, the local drug action group, schools, and local artists.

**Midnight basketball:** organised by a harm-prevention charity, communities invite the tournament to run in their local area. They operate across the country and have lots of opportunities to get involved as a volunteer.

There are other awesome initiatives from across the country that we'll be showcasing in the newsletter soon, and we'd love to have more stories to inspire others! Tell us about your event through your SCDO so we can keep on sharing and learning from each other.

## MAKING A PLAN

Following the 'Six steps to planning community alcohol and drug projects' helps guide your CDAT towards creating the most effective initiative.

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### Step 1: Networking

Talk to local groups and organisations who might already be running youth initiatives. Maybe they need some more volunteers to keep their program going, expand, or just some fresh blood. They might also have some thoughts on programs that are missing from the community, and other people that you could join forces with. Also talk to groups like Lions and Rotary clubs who might be able to help out later when you might be looking for volunteers, a space to run your program, or donations of materials.

Find out what's been done in the past and what made it successful (or not). Did it target the majority of kids, or specifically those who are at risk? Some programs might have a higher number of one gender, age bracket, ethnic background, or socio-economic group participating.

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### Step 2: Gathering statistics

This step will not only tell you if your perception of the problem is on track, it will also help you tell the story of why your program is necessary. This step is about demonstrating that harms are occurring, then presenting how (with community support) you're going to do something to address them.

So what are the harms? Ask your SCDO for the statistical summary for your local area. Local police, councils and universities might also be able to help you get good facts on what's going on in your community.

Having a sense of what's already running will also help direct you. Is there lots of opportunity for sport, but not much for art or music? Think about filling in the gaps of what's provided. Talking to youth workers, community centre staff, your local schools, and the young people themselves can help draw the big picture of available services so your CDAT can spot the holes and target the at risk kids.

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### Step 3: Engage with your community

Talking to the young people you want to reach is important! What do they want to do? What type of interests are being catered to, and what aren't in your local area? Some interests like video gaming, table-top gaming, or photography might fall outside the box of what's typically considered for a community program. But that's an unreached demographic of young people that could be more involved with each other and with their wider community if the opportunity was there.



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## Step 4: Identify the best approach

Using the information you've gathered from talking to people in your community and the young people you're hoping to reach, discuss where you think your efforts could be best directed. Consider the resources you have available when deciding if you should support or expand an already-running program, or start up something new. You might find that the best thing to do is support already existing, but perhaps understaffed or under-resourced, initiatives.

If you're thinking of starting a new initiative, it's important that the program be ongoing, so join forces with others so you can do more than run a one-off event.

Getting young people involved in creating and supporting the initiative can be a great way to foster feelings of 'ownership' over the program and increasing engagement with it. It also gives them the opportunity to develop leadership and organisational skills. Think about asking some of the older teenagers to help run the program and encourage them to be positive mentors for the younger kids.

Talk to the other groups and organisations that you're thinking of supporting or involving in your initiative. Think about what your CDAT has to offer in terms of skills, experiences, and interests as well as what skills you'd be needing to bring on board. Once you identify what your needs are in terms of volunteers, materials, space, etc. think back to your networking and brainstorm who might be able to help meet those needs.

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## Step 5: Plan the best way to take action

### Write a plan detailing:

- The problem or behaviour you are trying to influence, with any statistics or evidence you have
- Information on your target audience
- A clear overall aim
- Objectives detailing how you will achieve your aim, which are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-frame specific
- A strategy detailing how you will achieve your objectives through creative ideas and tactics
- How you will evaluate to what degree each objective is achieved

When articulating your overall aims and setting your objectives, remember that setting achievable objectives can be great for team morale and allows you to learn what works and what doesn't as you go. Programs can often start out small and then grow over time.

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## Step 6: Evaluate what you do

Good evaluation begins in the planning stages with measurable objectives. It allows you to reflect and improve your initiative for next time. You could get young people involved to talk or write about their experience with the program, such as what they loved the most and what they'd like to work on in the future.

Sharing your success through your SCDO can also inspire other teams across the state! Remember to take lots of pictures (and gather the consent forms for them), document your wins and your challenges, and debrief with your team about how you'll do it even better next time.