

STUDENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMMES

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on a
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OVERVIEW

It has been known for a long time, but not often appreciated, that if one's goal is to make an impact on "the drug problem," it is not enough to focus attention solely on the student involved with substances, nor solely on such young persons as a group.

The drug-related problems of youth - individually or collectively - neither begin nor progress in isolation. Attempts to cope with these problems which avoid addressing the environmental context, are both short sighted and inadequate. The Student Assistance Programme model can be thought of as being aimed primarily at the environment as the best direct means of helping the individual.

WHAT WORKS

Whether one looks within the narrow confines of the school building or at the wider global setting, the history of past decade's attempts at "prevention" was in many ways a catalogue of the things that we now know do not work.

Many strategies were either flawed in principle, or because any one of them by itself was insufficient.

Before examining the contribution Student Assistance Programmes can have in reducing the incidence and severity of problems associated with alcohol / drug abuse, it is important to look at other strategies which have been tried.

Many of these continue to be implemented in this country.

Strategies found as having minimal or no impact on alcohol/drug use by young people were (Anderson, 1993):

Strategy 1 - Denying the Problem Exists:

Not recognising that such problems could exist, when youthful drug use is seen as either an individual, or a social phase, which like other "fads" will pass. Many adults observe that: "we drank when we were kids and it didn't do us any harm."

Most school systems will admit that they have a few students who abuse drugs but the school itself does not have "a problem". Inadequate information, lack of awareness of the true nature, the scope and the consequences of alcohol/drug abuse by young people are all elements of denial. That this strategy has not worked is often obvious to the casual observer, and it is understandable to anyone familiar with the dynamics of denial.

It functions to protect the sense of self-worth, whether it is an individual, a family or a school system.

Strategy 2 - Scare Tactics:

The utter failure of scare tactics - one of the earliest active strategies to be employed - taught the first lessons about coping with alcohol/drug abuse by young people. Educators and other adults frequently projected their own irrational or exaggerated fears of alcohol/drugs upon young people. Many educators reasoned that effectively communicating the horrors of alcohol/drugs to youth would be enough to prevent them using.

It failed because it contradicted the day-to-day experiences of youth - kids kept on using and educators lost credibility.

Strategy 3 - Objective Information:

Millions of dollars were spent on prevention programmes designed to teach kids objectively about drugs - what kind there were, what they look like, what they're called, and how they affect the mind and body etc.

The objective approach failed for a practical reason that was utterly unforeseen. Many students had been afraid to try drugs other than alcohol. But providing them with objective cognitive information about these other substances merely reduced their anxieties and liberalised their attitudes and practices. The approach was based on the following false assumptions:

Kids use chemicals because of ignorance and cognitive knowledge.

Objective information is sufficient to prevent alcohol/drug problems.

Strategy 4 - Responsible Drinking:

Responsible drinking initiatives target behaviour change as the goal of prevention by addressing the value system which students bring to their decisions about whether or not to use drugs. While it appeared to be a major step in the right direction, the "responsible use" approach was also fraught with complexities. It had the effect of condoning drug use if it was done "responsibly". Young people don't need to be taught how to use responsibly.

They do need to be taught how to make healthy and responsible decisions about drug use.

Strategy 5 - Getting Tough:

To some schools it became clear that more effective measures were needed. Often a "drug bust", an overdose, a traffic fatality, or a community alarmed by the results of a survey on teenage alcohol/drug use prodded a school into a reactive stance. The result was a "get

tough" policy designed to move the problems out of the school.

Such policies in schools forced the suspension or expulsion of any student who became involved with alcohol/drugs in any way. This approach enjoyed some apparent short-term success but failed in the long run because it drove the problem underground, made parents and staff afraid to ask for help, and created an environment that prevented students from accepting help if it was offered.

Such a punishment-only policy was like the proverbial rain dance: it doesn't make it rain, but it allows everyone to feel better about the drought.

Strategy 6 - Dogs and Stars:

Many schools tried other "quick fixes": drug-sniffing dogs, massive locker searches, or the celebrity expert. In the latter case a single charismatic speaker came into the school and aroused in students an intense but momentary conviction against alcohol/drug use.

But by all reports student alcohol/drug use always returned to its former level within days when such approaches were one-time only events, and lacked long-term school-wide follow-up.

Strategy 7 - Hiring an Expert:

Another common solution was to employ a full-time alcohol/drug counsellor or specialist in the school who could deal with such problems expertly, or the school formed a working relationship with a community alcohol/drug counsellor who visited the school for a few hours each day or week. At best the counsellor could only see a fraction of the students who had alcohol/drug-related problems. Counsellor turnover meant that working relationships with all concerned constantly had to be re-established.

More serious was the implication that others in the school or the system itself did not have to examine or change the factors that were allowing alcohol/drug problems to continue or worsen.

For a school to expect an outside expert to solve its alcohol/drug problems made about as much sense as a family expecting that merely having a professional counsellor available would be sufficient to solve problems in the household. As if the family wouldn't need to make profound changes in its whole way of living.

Strategy 8 - The Designated Driver:

No "prevention" strategy is more perverse or indicative of our social desperation and schizophrenia about youth alcohol/drug use as the "designated driver" campaigns. It has the perfect rationale - it saves lives - yet it usually evokes profound disturbances in parents and other concerned adults. Students hear its pro-drinking message accurately: it is all

right to get as drunk as you like - so long as someone else drives. The "designated driver" stance forces educators and parents into a terrible and confusing loss of credibility.

It condones use and non use at the same time.

Strategy 9 - Skills:

Skills-based prevention strategies teach students how to make decisions, how to behave "responsibly", how to resist peer pressure, and so on. While there is nothing intrinsically wrong with any of these, the global manner in which they are employed often reduces their effectiveness. They are a part of a generic prevention strategy which assumes that similar risk factors underlie many kinds of problems.

To date, neither research nor social results support these approaches. For skills-based strategies to be effective they must ask: "Which student needs which skill in what circumstance on what day?"

Strategy 10 - Community Solutions:

In many places it was recognised that alcohol/drug problems were, after all, community problems that required community-wide solutions. Often, however, such community-wide efforts failed because they didn't develop an action agenda. Membership and involvement declined as the group was exposed to an endless round of speakers, panels, and films but took no action. People were given nothing to do so attendance declined. The agenda developed was inappropriate.

Youth centres, alternative programmes, recreational opportunities, and other projects were implemented but couldn't be sustained or had little effect on youth alcohol/drug abuse. The energy of community members was dissipated in piecemeal projects. They often didn't seek the help of professional consultants who would lead them in developing a total programme. Professionals failed to provide appropriate technical assistance and guidance.

Specialists overestimated the level of community knowledge about alcohol/drug issues and community members consequently went off on their own tangents and developed unworkable and inappropriate strategies.

Lessons Learned:

The reasons why many alcohol/drug programmes haven't worked, however, have two encouragingly positive aspects:

1. The struggle to solve alcohol/drug problems in schools has revealed the wide arena of concerned and dedicated people who have been combating these problems.
2. The struggle has taught something of the depth and complexity of the problem and therefore indicates possible solutions.

- It has been learned that alcohol/drug-related problems have taken decades to develop and that therefore we must not expect any one person or policy to solve them.
- It has been learned that every individual has been affected in some way by alcohol/drug abuse: either by personal experience or by growing up in a society whose ignorance, judgmental attitudes, and fears about such problems have impaired their ability to be helpful.
- It has been learned that individuals and the systems in which they live and work have been affected in ways which make them ineffective in helping young people who have alcohol/drug problems.
- In other words, an all-important lesson has been learned that alcohol/drug problems are systemic - and that it will take systemic efforts to deal effectively with them.

THE CLASSIC TENSIONS

Schools react in various and often unpredictable ways to drug-related behaviour demonstrated by students. This arises from a number of factors, which may or may not be minimised by the existence of school policy on the subject.

Teachers, like the rest of society, have personal value judgements on drug behaviour:

- One teacher may see smoking cigarettes as a minor issue but respond with disgust to cannabis use.
- Another may regard cigarettes as a major personal and environmental health hazard but turn a blind eye to a student's alcohol use.
- Some will equate experimentation with illegal drugs to experimentation with legal ones.
- Others will see any use of illegal drugs as a major disaster and a scandal.

It is not uncommon to find some degree of tension between staff responsible for discipline and those whose primary orientation is toward welfare. Students involved in parallel incidents may receive very different responses depending upon which arm of the system handles them.

School leaders are especially likely to be vulnerable to "community expectations". The fear of being misunderstood or condemned by local media, parents, spokespersons for community groups, or other local schools can pressure the school into taking no action (to avoid acknowledging that there is a problem), or into over-reacting (in an attempt to show that the problem is under control). Tensions may also exist between the various agencies and organisations that traditionally have had a role in addressing school concerns about youthful alcohol/drug use.

ENABLING IN THE EDUCATION SETTING

What is enabling?

It is a complex concept. Put simply, it consists of those ideas, feelings, attitudes and behaviours that can unwittingly allow alcohol/drug problems to continue or worsen.

Some examples of enabling in the school setting can be:

- Failing to include alcohol/drug-related questions as a routine part of discussions with troubled or problem students.
- Failing to involve others, e.g. classroom teachers and parents, in managing the alcohol/drug-involved student.
- Adopting a school policy that is so punitive in tone that students, teachers and parents alike are afraid to co-operate with it.
- Believing in or relying solely upon over-simplified responses to the "drug problem" (e.g. ridding the school of "drugs" by employing police dogs to sniff lockers).
- Taking disciplinary action which seeks only to punish, rather than providing students with choices that involve addressing their unacceptable alcohol/drug-related behaviour.
- Students protecting, covering up, or lying for a student who uses or who has an alcohol/drug-problem for fear of the consequences.

THE VENTURA EXPERIENCE

THE EDUCATION PICTURE - THE CALIFORNIA PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

State Level:

The California State Department of Education is the body which determines school curriculum, does the accreditation of schools, oversees the state university and community college systems, provides educational support to local and county schools, and controls the "purse strings" for funding of the schools throughout the state.

Local Level:

At the local level, schools within a town or city form what is called a school district. There are two types of school districts:

- A unified school district includes elementary (primary), middle (intermediate), and high (secondary) schools.
- A non-unified district may be only elementary schools or only high schools.

Each school district has a School Board - a governing body that makes policy decisions and hires the Superintendent of schools and other School Board Staff. The residents of the city elect the members of the School Board.

Individual school districts are organised under a County Superintendent of Schools office, which also has a governing board. Residents of the entire county elect that board. The county school board has no jurisdiction in the individual school districts, but makes policy for the county-run schools, which largely serve the needs of special needs students, i.e. children with severe handicaps or severe school problems. School districts, however, may also have their own programmes for a wide range of special needs students.

Ventura City:

Ventura is a city with a population of about 80,000. It is ethnically mixed with approximately 62% Caucasian, 30% Hispanic, 3% African American, and 5% Asian, American Indian, or undeclared. The city is situated about 1 1/2 hours north of Los Angeles on the California Central Coast and tends towards a middle to lower class population mix.

Ventura City has a Unified School District and sits within the Ventura County School Districts. It serves over 12,000 students. There are 17 elementary schools, four middle schools, two comprehensive high schools, and two special high schools as well as an adult

education division.

Student Assistance Programmes:

At this time, Student Assistance Programmes are occurring in almost all of these schools at some level. Ten years ago the school district administration made a commitment to setting up Student Assistance Programmes with Federal Government Funding.

The Federal Government has traditionally had a very limited role in schools. It makes laws that schools must follow and provides some additional funding for programmes that are usually compensatory, i.e. for students who are educationally disadvantaged because of poor economic backgrounds, for drug and alcohol prevention/intervention, and violence prevention, etc. These funds are accessed by states and school districts applying to the government for grants for a variety of programmes.

It was just such a grant, which coincided with an expressed community concern about the level of alcohol and drug abuse by young people of the district, and the consequent loss of educational opportunities, which triggered school-based student assistance in the Ventura Unified School District.

The Process:

A committee was formed at the outset before anyone was trained. It was made up of teachers, community leaders, parents, administrators, and board members. Its purpose was to establish the direction the district would take.

The Committee decided on the Core Team Model of Student Assistance Programmes (SAPs). The School Board supported it, the Superintendent directed it, the co-ordinator of health services initiated it (i.e. she set up training, co-ordinated use of funds etc.) and schools implemented it.

Gary Anderson, then considered to be the "father" of Student Assistance Programmes in the United States, was hired to come and train staff members within the school district area. Teams of two to four people from each school site were trained in groups of about 45 people, beginning with high school personnel in the first year, middle school and high school in the second year, and elementary staff in the third and subsequent years.

School sites were able to choose who they wanted to send to the training courses: teachers, counsellors, psychologists, secretaries, parents, administrators, health aides, nurses, in fact anyone with a real interest and concern. Since this approach was a systemic approach, it was felt that "buy-in" from as many segments of the school community as possible would help it take off. These people were then the beginning of "Core Teams" at each school site.

The Student Assistance Programmes training model has now been expanded to the entire county, which encompasses many school districts. They no longer contract Gary Anderson - it is a funding issue and he lives quite some distance away. He also has a lecture approach and the Ventura Schools staff now prefer a more experiential approach.

Jeanne Surber is an Educational Psychologist with 18 years experience. She works with the Ventura Unified School District and is based at Saticoy Elementary School. She is now the primary trainer for Student Assistance Programmes in Ventura and will train anybody and everybody who wants training. She trains welfare workers, parents, police officers (from the community), treatment facility workers, and School Board members - but the main audience is composed of teachers, counsellors, psychologists, speech therapists, nurses, health aides, and security officers, i.e. those that are school-based. Since there are more teachers at any school site, the majority are teachers.

It was important that treatment facility workers (who already had extensive background in alcohol/drug issues) were trained, to ensure that everyone connected to the SAPs operated from the same basis of information, keeping a consistency of approach, and sharing the same basic assumptions about what they were doing.

The School Site:

School sites in the district have pretty much total control over how they proceed and what they do. Consequently different schools have slightly different degrees of the programme being done in different ways. However, they are all operating from the same model and within the same context (i.e. they all speak the same language.) The way groups are run at one school is not markedly different from another, but who is doing it, and how and when may not be the same in every school.

The Superintendent of Ventura District Schools has maintained the expectation that SAPs will be set up and implemented and will continue to do so over the years.

It was important that it did not just become a "Programme of the Year".

Classroom teachers are trained to lead groups. They are the backbone of the programme in elementary schools since there is limited access to counsellors at this age level. At the middle school it is a mix of teachers and counsellors and at the high school it is both, but mostly counselling/support staff (since the purpose of each group is to provide information and support). Teachers can do this very well - they do not do in-depth counselling.

Student Assistance Programmes are not treatment programmes - they offer information and support.

If a student needs treatment, the schools have various arrangements with local treatment facilities that do free assessments with students and their families. Schools can make the referrals.

The school focus is on the student and how they are doing at school. They are not there to intervene directly with the family, although they are there to support family members if they are needed.

"Our focus is first and foremost the student at school. That helps with teachers too. Rightfully, teachers often feel this is not their job. We cannot solve the family's problems. But the student at school is our "problem" and to be most effective we need to

understand how the alcohol and drug factor affect a student's ability to function at school." Jeanne Surber.

At some schools, the Principal or other teachers take the teacher's class on the day they have an SAP group to run (about 1/2 to 1 hour). At some schools, they pay for a half-day substitute teacher to come in and take the teacher's classes. At the Secondary level some teachers give up their preparation period to cover a teacher's class while he/she runs a group.

Schools have found that teachers who believe deeply in the efficacy of the programme and who have supportive administrators will find all kinds of creative ways to enable them to take an SAP group. Most of the support groups happen during the regular school day. After-school groups often fall apart for lack of consistent participation by students.

Students are told that if they participate in the group they will still be responsible for any work they miss in the classroom.

Often the groups at the secondary level have a rotating time from week to week, so that the students don't miss the same class every week. At the elementary level, the groups often do happen at the same time every week - usually in the afternoon when the class is not doing basic academic curriculum such as reading and maths.

Parents do not take part in Student Assistance Programme support groups. Schools have had limited success in getting parents involved in programmes. They have tried many ways to get parents in for "parent information" nights. If the topic is solely SAP most will not come for fear that others may think their family has a problem. What has been more successful is having SAP presentations as part of the regular "back-to-school night" programmes, or in conjunction with some other parent programme.

School Policy:

The Ventura Unified School District Education Office is the body which develops the policy language that deals effectively with student alcohol or other drug-related problems. They develop policy guidelines and put out information, but do not force issues on schools.

It is the SAP Core Committee or a working sub-group (including a District Education Office representative) which often takes responsibility for:

- Examining current alcohol and other drug policy.
- Evaluating the effectiveness and appropriateness of current policies.
- Examining current patterns of enforcement of Alcohol and other Drug policies.
- Looking at examples from other districts with Student Assistance Programmes.
- Drafting new policy language to be recommended to the District Education Office later.

The development of an appropriate policy statement can be a time-consuming task given the complexity of alcohol and other drug issues: student needs, legal implications,

community standards, internal values, and the climate of the School Board.

School administrators and student services staff need to devise policies which appropriately combine disciplinary consequences with the offer of help, and many issues have to be examined and resolved to arrive at the appropriate policy. School policies in the area of alcohol and other drugs also need to be regularly examined and revised to meet the changing needs of the school, the community and its students.

Consensus needs to be arrived at regarding, among other things:

- Confidentiality as it applies to students and parents.
- The involvement of law enforcement.
- Conditions under which suspension and expulsion will be recommended or held in abeyance.
- The interaction of the school's alcohol and other drug policies with referral to the Student Assistance Programme.
- Provision for self-referral.
- Provision for parent information and/or consent for students' involvement in support groups.
- The interaction of the Student Assistance Programme, sports, and other extracurricular activities.

In addition to a policy stance, it is also recommended that the school system devote some time to developing a statement of its philosophy regarding student alcohol and other drug abuse. Policy consists mainly of "if/then" statements. Philosophy is a statement of the school's values and beliefs, e.g. the role of the school in this issue, the nature of drug use as opposed to chemical dependency, abstinence from alcohol and other drug use as the norm for school-aged youth, and so on.

Emerging from the policy development process should be a provisional document which is shared with as many other key segments of the school system as possible for input: teaching staff, students, parent representatives, community groups, youth service agencies, etc. This provisional policy is then submitted to the District Education Office for its examination and approval.

Funding Issues:

School districts receive approximately 80% of funding (\$18.80 per day per student) based on Average Daily Attendance, or ADA. It is the actual attendance of each student each day of the school year plus excused absences. They do not receive ADA funding for unexcused absences, which include school suspensions and trancies.

The State of California determines the criteria as to whether a student's absence is excused or unexcused (a good reason one might suspect to intervene with a student's alcohol/drug problems, or other concerns).

Current Funding:

Currently there are somewhat smaller amounts of Federal Government funding available for schools and school districts to continue the maintenance of Student Assistance

Programmes.

The School District Office will receive an amount of funding and schools will apply to them identifying their ongoing needs. It may be that the school has lost some of its trained staff, they may wish to incorporate a new focus group into their Student Assistance Programme, or pay for substitute teachers, e.g. Saticoy Elementary School in the 1997/98 year is seeking a sum of \$2940 to continue its programmes:

Substitute Teachers	\$1280
Babes Group Training	\$360
Core Team Training	\$700
Safe School Initiative	\$200
Primary Intervention Programme Group Training	\$400

Many Student Assistance Programmes within the United States have been funded initially with Federal and State grant money. It is important therefore that planning is undertaken early in the development process to ensure the permanence of the programme. Funding grants will not always be available and ongoing maintenance may require some costs being built into the regular school budget.

THE SCHOOL-BASED SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO STUDENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMMES

NEW ZEALAND BACKGROUND

- Traffic crashes are a major cause of death in 15 to 24 year olds. Approximately 1/2 of these crashes are alcohol-related.
- Alcohol and drug use is the most common characteristic of youth who attempt suicide.
- Alcohol and drug use is a major factor in teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.
- Alcohol and other drug use is a major factor in intentional and unintentional injury.

The use of alcohol and other drugs is now commonplace among teenagers and pre-adolescents. For many, alcohol/drug use begins prior to secondary school and at least 25% of all school children are seriously affected by either their own or parental alcohol/drug abuse. Common sense is supported by statistics about the degree to which students' drug use hampers attendance, academic achievement, and school conduct.

Alcohol/drug abuse compromises any school system's primary function: to educate. Yet school systems are also in the best position to intervene, to help individual students, and create safe climates within which alcohol/drug issues and concerns may be addressed. Therefore, in order to answer "What can schools do to help?" it is necessary to ask, "How do I help just one student?". To do this, answering three basic questions is imperative:

- What problem does this student have?
- What does this student need?
- What must I do to get him/her what he/she needs?

It is only after we have answers to these questions that it makes sense to focus attention on changing the various systems within which young people interact and then ask:

"What aspects of the system need changing?"

- (a) In order to get students what they need.
- (b) In order to help as many as possible.
- (c) In order to remove obstacles to (a) and (b).

TARGET GROUPS - UNITED STATES

School-Based Student Assistance Programmes recognise that the "drug problem" is not as singular or homogeneous as the phrase implies. Not every drug problem is the same. Alcohol and other drug abuse affects students in different ways. This means that they have different needs for prevention, intervention, or support. No one strategy is likely to

meet the diverse needs of troubled students.

Chemically Dependent Students:

These students suffer from a primary progressive and chronic problem. Only early identification, competent diagnosis, and treatment will be effective in changing their behaviour.

Consequential Abuse:

Around 15-20% of secondary-aged students abuse alcohol or other drugs in ways which directly create problems in daily living for them: at home, in the community, and in their psychological, emotional, and social development (Anderson, 1993).

Because they are not dependent these students can respond to traditional preventive measures. To be effective however, Student Assistance Programmes must provide school staff with a well-understood hierarchy of prevention/intervention tools, which can be selectively employed based on the needs of the individual student.

Affected Others:

Approximately 25% of all school-aged youth are seriously affected by other people's abuse of alcohol or other drugs. Many are children of chemically dependent parents. These students suffer in various ways from problems in school performance, classroom conduct, and developmental deficits. They are also at risk of developing alcohol or other drug problems of their own.

An effective Student Assistance Programme provides opportunities for these students to understand more clearly how they have been affected by someone else's alcohol/drug problem, and shows how they can adopt more life-enhancing behaviours for themselves.

Recovering Students:

Students returning to school from alcohol/drug dependency treatment have high rates of relapse - a return to alcohol and/or other drug abuse. Not only do they need to remain drug free, they also need to have a support system within the school that understands and supports their efforts to deal with their alcohol/drug concern.

Non-Abusing Students:

Most students do not have serious problems related to alcohol or other drug abuse. These are students who have never used, who have experimented a few times, who were regular users who have quit, or who have not progressed beyond casual, infrequent, or light use.

These students are most open and responsive to traditional prevention strategies. The lesson of this group is:

“What works for them definitely does not work for those in the other target groups”.

Students with Other Problems:

In addition to alcohol and other drug abuse, today's students can be affected by a myriad of problems including child abuse, sexual abuse, divorce and separation, early pregnancy, depression, and suicide - the list appears endless.

An effective Student Assistance Programme should be for any student, with any problem (i.e. “broad brush” in nature), without sacrificing an appropriate emphasis on alcohol and other drug abuse.

Students in the first three target groups are affected by alcohol and other drug abuse in the most serious, lifelong and often irreversible ways. An adequate Student Assistant Programme will establish as its goal the implementation of services designed to meet the distinct needs of students in all six of these target groups.

SHOULD SCHOOLS BE INVOLVED IN SUCH ACTIVITY?

The issue of the school's role in addressing alcohol and other drug-related problems of youth is a philosophical concern and it is an issue that is large enough to merit its own discussion. Most often one hears this issue being raised in black and white terms. Should schools be involved in such activity or should they not? The question should not be decided on the basis of whether or not the school has a role to play, but on what the nature and scope of its role should appropriately be.

Limitations:

In any deliberations over whether or not to implement a Student Assistance Programme, the school should keep the idea of limitations firmly in mind. As professionals, as people, as a system, the notion of limitations is a positive rather than a negative concept. Realistically no one person or system can be all things to all people. Nor do school systems or their staff possess unlimited resources. The recognition of limitations permits energies and resources to be focused more intensely in key areas rather than being dissipated on an infinite field. Schools also have limited responsibility.

Despite common misconceptions, the school is not to blame for causing the drug problems of its students. Neither is the school solely responsible for eradicating them. The school system has a role, not the role, and is responsible only for its own enabling. Schools have an ideal opportunity - rather than obligation - to help.

Opportunity:

The following are among the most obvious arguments in favour of the school having a

role to play in addressing the alcohol and other drug concerns of young people:

- The school has an obligation to create an environment that supports healthy growth and development.
- The school setting is the most practical setting within which to implement preventive and intervention programmes because of the opportunity it has to observe student behaviour.
- Student Assistance Programmes have a positive impact on academic performance. It allows schools to carry out their primary task - to educate.
- Student Assistance Programmes have a positive impact on general school performance. Alcohol and other drug abuse have been implicated as causative factors in truancy, absenteeism, classroom misconduct, vandalism, dropout rates etc.
- The school system performs a dual function - as a reflection of community values and attitudes, and as a change agent. If a community is concerned about youth alcohol/drug problems, the school is one segment of society in which healthy attitudes and practices can be reinforced, as well as initiated.
- Historically, schools have been involved in public health problems that affect young people, as well as the community, including everything from dental care to childhood inoculations for diseases such as measles.

“Broad Brush” or Alcohol/Drug Specific:

Student Assistance Programmes appear to exist in one of two forms. Some are alcohol and other drug specific, concentrating primarily (if not entirely) on alcohol/drug-related concerns. Others may describe themselves as “broad brush” in character, designed to help any student with any problem, and they deal with wider wellness issues - concerns such as pregnancy, suicide, family violence, sexual abuse, bullying as well as alcohol/drug problems. There are however, good reasons for preserving a strong alcohol and other drug emphasis within a Student Assistant Programme, despite the fact that students may indeed have other problems as well.

Taking a “broad brush” approach is not a form of denial, or a resistance to acknowledging alcohol and/or other drug abuse.

The School Context:

With rare exceptions these other problems do not occur in school, but in the student’s home or community. However, alcohol and/or other drug use can be passed on through strong environmental influence not only to student peers, but also to younger children. The same is not generally true with other problems.

While one rarely hears of school staff ignoring instances of rape, sexual abuse, or suicide within the school environment, school staff have tended to ignore alcohol/drug-related behaviours, except to impose measures such as short term or indefinite suspension from school.

Effectiveness:

If a school becomes effective in recognising and dealing with alcohol/drug-related problems, the same skills and structures will enhance its effectiveness in dealing with

other problems faced by students. History shows that the reverse has not been true. Schools have implemented various counselling and pupil services programmes over decades only to remain relatively ineffective at managing alcohol and/or other drug problems.

Staff Awareness:

No other problem affects school personnel as much as alcohol and drug-related problems. Many school staff are not immune to the impact alcohol/drugs have had on their personal lives, within their own family settings, parents, siblings, spouses or other close family members. They are not isolated from the communities in which they live. Many others admit concern about colleagues in the school system.

Raising the alcohol/drug issue within the school environment may well identify a need to also examine these issues for school staff.

A Model:

All of the above argue for a programme model that is "broad brush" in its focus and scope, but which also recognises the appropriate dimensions of alcohol and other drug-related issues. The argument is not whether the Student Assistance Programmes are "broad brush" or not. Most existing Student Assistance Programmes have begun where the greatest need was originally perceived to be – only to develop into broader programmes soon afterwards.

A Student Assistance Programme is not a single activity, such as peer refusal skills training, curriculum, or intervention initiatives might be.

A Student Assistance Programme is best regarded as "the umbrella" covering any and all activities that:

"Help students deal with all the ways they can be affected by their own or someone else's drinking or other drug taking, and those issues which are impacted upon by the misuse and abuse of alcohol and/or other drugs."

- A Student Assistance Programme is not to promote responsible drinking or other drug use, but to promote responsible decisions and behaviour concerning alcohol and other drugs. This includes promoting responsible behaviour toward those with alcohol and other drug problems, by students, staff, the school, and the community as a whole.
- Schools contain a cross section of youth representative of the community as a whole and are the only place where behaviour can be monitored and evaluated by minimal standards of acceptable performance that are uniformly applied.
- The diagnosis and direct primary treatment of chemical dependency falls outside the proper role of the traditional school, as does the treatment of any other illness.
- A Student Assistance Programme is a joint school/community effort. Meeting the drug-related needs of youth is neither the sole responsibility of the school nor its primary one. The co-involvement of school systems, service agencies, and the community at large is necessary at all stages of a programme's development, including design, implementation, operation and maintenance.

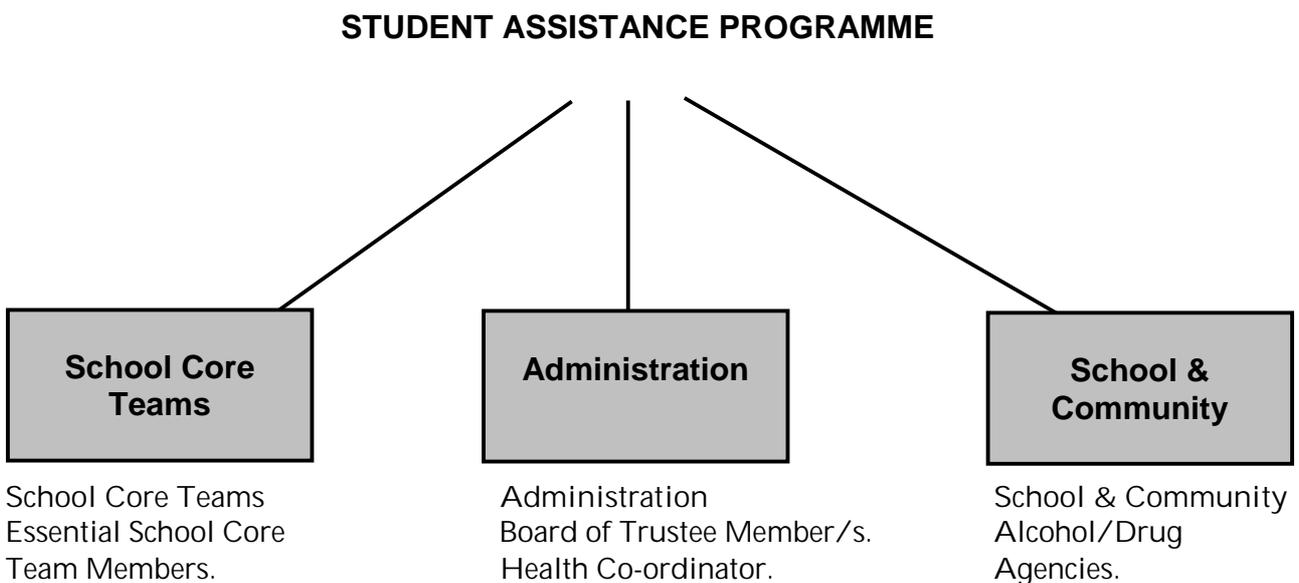
- A Student Assistance Programme represents a long-range commitment by the school to deal with alcohol and drug-related issues of students, staff, and itself as an organisation. That is, a programme should not be a “short term, band-aid” solution, or seen as “the programme of the year”.
- A Student Assistance Programme is rooted in “ownership” and self-sufficiency. Its programmes belong to the school, not to any person or outside agency. The success, continuation, or failure should not depend on continued outside funding, or upon staffing by any outside agency.
- The responsibility for the implementation, operation, and maintenance of a Student Assistance Programme is not lodged solely with one person, but is supported by the energy, enthusiasm, and commitment of teams of individuals within the school system. Thus while an individual may co-ordinate or direct programme efforts at the school site, and/or within a school area, ownership, roles and responsibilities should be broadly shared.
- An effective Student Assistance Programme “plans for permanence”. While grants and seeding money can assist in beginning a programme, these funds will eventually disappear - and SAPs with them - if care has not gone into ensuring the programme’s continued financial support. Steps should be taken to integrate the programme costs into the routine school budget.

PROGRAMME STRUCTURES

An effective Student Assistance Programme organisational structure appears to emerge spontaneously as the programme develops. However, it is useful to have some idea of how it may be structured, either within an individual school site, or within a cluster of schools.

In the most effective programmes a wider organisational base achieves a consistency between schools but it is also balanced by a degree of autonomy and freedom for the individual school.

A School/Community Structure could be:



Other interested School Staff.
Senior Staff Member/s.
Health Co-ordinator.
Guidance Counsellor/s.

Guidance Counsellor/s.
Principal, or senior staff member.

Truancy Board.
CYPS.
Youth Aid.
Youth Justice.
Parent Organisations.
Service Clubs.

The role and function of such an organisational structure may:

- Oversee the implementation, operation and maintenance of the programme.
- Evaluate the programme effectiveness, or recommend changes.
- Provide a link to the community, which allows for community responses to alcohol/drug problems to be initiated.

Within such a structure the programme can achieve a joint school and community involvement.

The School Core Team Structure may be:

Essential Core Team Members:
Principal, Deputy Principal, Counsellor,
Health Co-ordinator, Form Deans, HODs.

Expanded Core Team Members:
Interested Teachers, Sport Coaches,
Nurses, Special Education Staff, Office Staff,
Extracurricular Advisers etc.

SAP Roles:
SAP Co-ordinator, Group Leaders,
Contact Persons.

Core Team Tasks:
Screening, Intervention, Groups,
Education Awareness, Implementation,
Maintenance.

PROGRAMME SERVICES

Education:

An important part of any Student Assistance Programme involves providing students with concrete alcohol/drug information. To some degree, Drug Education Programmes that are part of a school's Health Education Programme provide this. In many programmes however, staff involved in Student Assistance Programmes have found it necessary to educate about wider alcohol/drug issues. They give students appropriate information on how mood-altering substances interact with lifestyles to create potential problems, or on how they can identify when they, or others begin to develop problems and where they can go for help.

Education is also provided to staff members through in-service courses conducted by core team members and/or alcohol and drug specialists from the community. Parents and other segments of the community are also invited to information meetings designed to increase public awareness of student alcohol/drug-related problems and the school's attempt to address them.

Procedures:

Explicit and often detailed procedures for the step-by-step management of students with alcohol and/or other drug-related problems are a major component of the Student Assistance Programme design. Student Assistance Programme procedures (as opposed to policy), are necessary to:

- Integrate the target groups - programme functions, roles, structures, and services that are to be provided to individual students.
- Assure due process to students and parents in the implementation of school policy on alcohol/drug-related problems.
- Assure due process to staff. Any staff member can ask about the outcome of a particular procedural step taken on a student's behalf.
- Reflect decision points made about the programme functioning.

Procedures will have to distinguish between such things as violation of school policy, suspected drug involvement based on a pattern of declining school performance or behaviour, or dealing.

Self-referrals are handled differently from discipline-linked referrals.

There are many other issues that require clear and definite procedural guidelines:

- Early identification processes.
- Referral procedures.

- Assessment tools etc.
- Communication with parents.

The Ventura Training Model:

The Ventura Training model developed by Jeanne Surber now consists of an intensive four day Core Training Programme followed some time later by a four day Group Facilitator training course.

The Core Group Training:

The Core Training addresses such topics as: the nature of alcohol and drug abuse; how families are affected by alcohol and drug abuse; denial and enabling; how to develop intervention strategies and set up a Core Team; legal issues; and confidentiality. Usually Core Team training is limited to 40-45 participants and is a mix of didactic and experiential activities.

The Group Facilitator Training:

This is an intensive small group (12-15 participants) training programme which teaches and develops the skills needed to set up and conduct student support groups. The four-day course is almost entirely experiential. In addition, training can be tailored to the particular needs of the school, district or county in regard to an overview of the SAP model. It includes how to support Student Assistance Programmes within the school site, the impact of alcohol and/or drug abuse issues on student behaviour, and school life, conflict resolution skills and mediation.

Training is arranged through the County Superintendent of Schools office and made available to staff members from multiple school sites as well as individually to a school district or school site for their entire staff. Ten years ago, training also involved the offering of a "model" to schools and their communities in dealing with student concerns and learning how to deal with the classic tensions which emerge when addressing alcohol/drug issues, particularly as they relate to the school environment.

Evaluation:

Some degree of programme evaluation must occur. The scope of that evaluation should be made during the programme design and phase of implementation. It will depend on the size of the district involved - a single school site, or a cluster of schools, and the resources available in terms of staff time and funding. Evaluation is necessary since sources of funding and other support typically require some degree of accountability. It should measure the programme process, the programme impact, and the programme outcomes.

Evaluation of the efficiency of SAPs involves a variety of "cost/benefit" analyses. It basically involves comparing the resources devoted to the programme with the various measures of impact or outcome.

DISCUSSION

The Ventura City Setting:

The reasons for exploring Student Assistance Programmes as they exist in the Ventura Unified School District were:

- Ventura City is a contained area of the United States, which has a population equivalent to many of New Zealand's Provincial Cities (approximately 80,000).
- The city has a population mix of a number of ethnic groups, each with their own cultures, values and languages.
- Ventura City has a largely middle to lower class population mix.
- School-based Student Assistance Programmes using a Core Team Model of delivery have been a part of the school system for over ten years.
- They were not "one off" events and strong systems of maintenance, commitment to the programme, and ongoing training were put in place during the early development of Student Assistance Programmes within the Ventura Unified School District, following the initial Federal Government funding.
- Four of the early initiators and advocates of Student Assistance Programmes are still employed within the Ventura Unified School District.
- Jeanne Surber, the primary trainer for Student Assistance Programmes in the Ventura Unified School District, is an Educational Psychologist with 18 years of experience in working with young people experiencing educational difficulties within the education system.
- Programmes continue to be updated and developed in the light of current research and changing social conditions.
- A commitment exists within this school district to all young people and their education, even those displaying concerns when alcohol and/or other drug use by themselves (or significant others) is impacting on their educational achievement.
- Young people are helped to gain the education credits required to graduate from High School - even those young people experiencing their last chance at education at Gateway Community School. Many of these young people have had major alcohol/drug problems and most are still involved with the Justice System. The education goal is to ensure that they have enough credits to provide options for employment when they leave the school system at 18, should they choose to use them.
- Student Assistance Programmes are not a "soft option" for students in school. They too have to make a commitment to dealing with "life factors" which impact on their educational achievement. The safe school environment allows this to happen. They make up any school work missed through their involvement in a Student Assistance Programme.
- The "safe climate" within the wider school environment, which enables students to reveal very personal issues impacting on their lives, including the fact that they may be involved in alcohol/other drug taking, or that there are family alcohol/drug issues impacting on their lives.
- The enthusiasm of school staff not directly involved as Core Team members about the impact the programme had on classroom management, the behaviour of individual students, and the satisfaction they felt in being able to fulfil their role as educators.

The Possibilities:

New Zealand has developed many innovative and quality programmes aimed at addressing particular concerns which impact on the growth and development of young

people. Programmes which address the prevention of bullying in the school environment, behaviour modification initiatives, the GAIN Family Programme for parents and young people, GAIN Factor (alcohol and drug-specific), sexuality programmes, and possibly many others. These have been developed as a result of concerns impacting on the healthy development and educational achievement of youth.

Most have been developed and implemented in isolation:

- A Student Assistance Programme can provide an umbrella and the framework under which all these initiatives can fit.
- The programme is school-based. It belongs to the school, not to any particular outside agency.
- The programme focuses on the school and its associated community environment.
- It allows for a comprehensive approach to alcohol/drug prevention and intervention.

The Differences:

Student Assistance Programmes were developed in the United States and consequently fit the cultural and educational environment of that country.

- The language of the alcohol and other drug component within Student Assistance Programmes is that which is used within the widespread Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) 'Twelve Steps' Treatment Models which are a part of that country. Language such as "in recovery", although used within AA organisations in New Zealand are not commonly used within the general school and community environment of New Zealand.
- The education system is structured differently, with Education Offices at the District, County, State and Federal level. There is, however, a degree of autonomy and flexibility within each school site.
- Schools are funded on the average daily attendance of students and an Attendance Board at the District Office oversees this funding function for schools. Truancy and suspensions are classified as unexcused absences, therefore schools are not funded for these absences.
- The school leaving age is 18 and graduation from high school is an important milestone event in the lives of young people.

The Current New Zealand Situation:

- Over the last decade, many groups and organisations have grappled with the alcohol and drug-using behaviour of young people in our schools by providing classroom-based Drug Education Programmes.
- The last two years have seen an increasing number of young people suspended from schools - many of these suspensions related to alcohol/drug use.
- Schools have attempted numerous strategies to address the issue, often using those strategies described earlier in this report as not having any lasting effect.
- The Education Review Office last year published a report, Students at Risk: Barriers to Learning highlighting many of the issues impacting on the educational achievement of young people. The alcohol and drug factor was one issue highlighted in this document.
- A Truancy Project (Ministry of Education) was developed in some areas of the country to decrease the incidence of truancy (unjustified absences and non-enrolment) thereby improving educational opportunities for students who would otherwise be at risk of social and economic disadvantage.
- In the 1997 Budget, the Government allocated funding for "Complementing the Truancy Initiatives" to provide for that group of students outside of and alienated from the school system.

- The Special Education 2000 Project (Ministry of Education) addresses the concerns of young people with “special needs”.

On June 26 1997 the Government announced a \$3 million funding initiative aimed at:

- Reducing the current high rate of drug-related suspensions.
 - Assisting schools to implement relevant drug education and intervention programmes consistent with the new draft health and physical education curriculum statement.
 - Assisting schools to purchase the services of drug education providers (where appropriate).
 - Encouraging drug education providers to provide education services consistent with effective health programmes.
- Other initiatives such as the Safer Communities Councils initiatives funded from the Prime Minister’s Office are a part of many communities and have a role to play in addressing the environment of which schools are a part.
- Alcohol and drug treatment programmes for young people are often spasmodic. Often they are reliant on the skills and enthusiasm of particular alcohol and drug workers employed by an agency at a particular time. There appears to be little consistency or ongoing direction in the development of appropriate services for young people experiencing the impact of either their own alcohol and drug use, or that of others who are a part of their family environment.
- The school-based Student Assistance Programme model has the potential to not only intervene in the alcohol/drug concerns of young people, but also to impact on other issues compounded by the misuse and abuse of alcohol and/or other drugs.

SUMMARY

What can be learned from the Ventura situation to reduce the impact of alcohol and/or other drugs on the educational performance and healthy development of young people in New Zealand?

- Many firms and business organisations within New Zealand value the skills and abilities of their employees, enabling them to reach their full potential by implementing Employee Assistance Programmes that address the health and life factors which impact on the work performance of their employees. Young people within our school systems deserve the same opportunity to reach their potential.
- Student Assistance Programmes in the Ventura Unified School District continue to grow and develop yet they maintain the basic philosophy of the programme - that all young people have the right to education, not just the “good ones”. A publication recently developed by the California Department of Education in conjunction with Alcohol and Drug Service Agencies entitled: Getting Results, Part 1. California Action Guide to Creating Safe and Drug-free Schools and Communities, is being used within the SAP concept.
- A focus on educational achievement and the practice embedded within the philosophy and process of school-based Student Assistance Programmes has the potential to impact upon the healthy development and the educational attainment of young people in New Zealand’s schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The opportunity to experience and research the possibilities of school-based Student Assistance Programmes in Ventura was both enriching and rewarding.

The following is recommended:

- That an opportunity be provided to initiate a New Zealand response to the alcohol/drug issues impacting on the educational achievement of our young people by piloting such a programme within a school, or a cluster of schools.
- That an opportunity be made available to establish a training programme for teachers, other school personnel, interested community people, parents, health personnel, and Alcohol/Drug Agency Workers. It will develop the potential of Student Assistance Programmes and the impact that such programmes can have on reducing the incidence and severity of alcohol and drug concerns of young people in New Zealand.
- That the opportunity be provided through future conferences or other youth-focused discussions to raise awareness of the potential the New Zealand school setting has to intervene in alcohol and other drug concerns, impacting on the educational attainment and healthy growth and development of young people in this country.

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APPENDIX 1

CURRENT VENTURA PROGRAMMES

This list of programmes are those that are currently available at Ventura High School and have progressed from very small beginnings which initially focused solely on alcohol and drug concerns of young people in the school. Current programmes are reviewed regularly to ensure that they meet identified student need. The programme consists of individual, group counselling, peer mediation and peer tutoring services.

<u>Title</u>	<u>Topic</u>
Boys/Girls Insight	Drug/Alcohol Issues
Concerned Others	Children of Drug/Alcohol User
Women's Self Esteem	Eating Disorders
African American Women	African American Women Issues
African American Men	African American Men Issues
Tobacco No Thanks	Stop Smoking
Coalition for Humanity	Racial Relations
Preganant Teens	Expectant Teens and Teen Mothers
Teen Dad	Expectant Teens and Teen Dads
Mariposa	Mexican American Women
Grief & Loss	Death/Dying - Not of Violent Crime
Witness to Crime	Violent Crime
Family Issues	General Family Problems
Latino Leadership	At-Risk Gang Issues
Friday Nite Live	Club to Promote Drug/Tobacco/Alcohol Free Activities

When a teacher is concerned about a student and feels he/she can use SAP Services, an Intervention Services Request form must be filled out. The teacher indicates the type of services needed. However, if the service needed is unknown the students' situation is

described.

APPENDIX 2

IDENTIFICATION CARDS AND ATTENDANCE CHECKS

Schools devise their own systems to ensure that students are not using Student Assistance Programmes to avoid normal classroom work. Ventura High School has developed a cross-checking system with classroom teachers that checks student attendance, and involvement in Student Assistance Programmes.

APPENDIX 3

PATHWAYS OF YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH SCHOOLING

This document has been provided by Don Ferguson, New Zealand Ministry of Education. It provides a picture of those young people who may require the intervention of the Student Assistance Programme.

APPENDIX 4

ORDER FORM FOR *GETTING RESULTS*

