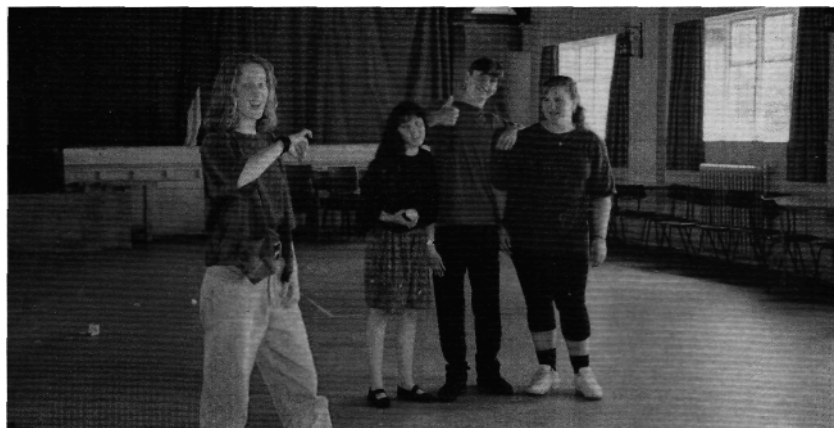


Healthworks

Health issues in youth work

DYFED'S DRAMATIC SUCCESSES

- **Drug-related theatre - in-education**
- **Empowerment through drama**
- **Peer-education in drug misuse**
- *all part of Dyfed consortium's strategy for health in youth work*



Youth workers in Dyfed have joined forces with other education service providers and health promotion professionals to pursue innovative and accessible health education initiatives. In some instances, the successes have been dramatic,

In 1993 Dyfed Community Education Service set up a working group to develop a strategy for the delivery of health education issues through the service. The group consisted of representatives of the Community Education Service, Pembrokeshire and East Dyfed Health Promotion Units, and Health Promotion Wales.

The background to the move was that, while young people in Wales were generally less healthy than their European counterparts, the health of those in Dyfed did not compare well with that of young people in the rest of Wales.

Effective health education offers young people the opportunity to make informed choices about their attitudes and behaviour. Its application to youth work is particularly important because it brings advice and information to young people who might otherwise miss out, either because they have officially left school or because they rarely attend.

Tony Organ, Senior Community Education Officer, says that two developments contributed to the need to establish a more coherent approach to health education among young people:

- An agreed Statement of Intent/Purpose for youth work is now supported by a curriculum reflecting six main areas of work. One is

Health and Related Issues, and a consortium of interested agencies has been set up to facilitate delivery of these issues;

- Previous work had been ad hoc, leading to duplication. Future delivery requires discussion, planning and the need to establish who or what is best to support a given piece of work.

Tony says: "The strategy document provides youth workers with a framework that sets out what we're doing with young people and, through the consortium, gives them the wherewithal to deliver. The consortium also gives a sense of security — people can always call on it for advice and support."

Tony Organ says that use of theatre groups to present health issues to young people had got into something of a rut, with touring groups hired from places such as London, where lifestyles and behaviour were not the same as those in rural Wales. Young people were asking for other things. They were also saying, in at least one case, "we can do that" — and that led to "Face to Faced", a piece of drug-related theatre-in-education seen by more than 1,000 young people in 21 youth clubs and five schools last summer.

The idea for "Face to Faced" arose from activity in East Dyfed around European Drug Prevention Week in 1992.

Pyramid Theatre Company was invited to attend four drug-related workshops at which young people shared their knowledge, understanding and experience of drug use and related issues. Following the workshops and their outcomes, the theatre company and Melanie Perry, health promotion officer responsible for drug education with East Dyfed Health Promotion Department, developed a perfor-

mance synopsis/script for a piece of drug related theatre for 11-14-year-olds.

The aim was to develop a 30-minute piece of theatre using acting, mime, singing and dancing; a "hot seating" session to allow audience members to question and challenge the characters; and a 90-minute workshop/discussion using drama techniques to explore further the issues raised in the programme.

Young people were auditioned to join Pyramid for the duration of the project, and rehearsals were held each week from March to July. The project, Melanie says, became much more peer-led than originally intended — young people's experience and expertise were invaluable in putting together a credible piece of theatre.

In evaluating a hectic two months of performances, Melanie notes that post-performance workshops seemed more inhibited in school settings than in youth clubs, where the atmosphere was generally more relaxed. The level of support to the project, from both teachers and youth workers, contributed to the success or otherwise of performances. Two schools cancelled performances at the last minute, fearing parental objections. In future, such projects should give priority to venues where there is an existing commitment to drug education.

Post-performance questionnaires, completed by audience members, showed a very positive response to the project.

The greatest strength of "Face to Faced", Melanie says, was its high level of commitment from the young people involved, some of whom have gone on to become youth work volunteers themselves.

"Youth workers are educators, and have considerable experience dealing with personal and social education"

Theatr Fforwm Cymru's work also involves J_ young people in developing and acting the drama — but audiences also get the opportunity to re-direct the action. A small play, involving about 15 or 20 actors, will present a problem, and then the audience is invited to re-direct the play towards a solution.

Theatr Fforwm, based in Cardigan, uses a peer-led approach that "really seems to be working", according to Jill Dowsett, a former teacher who co-organises the group with Anna Gifford, who came from teaching to work with Cardigan Youth Theatre.

The core group of performers, about 12 young people, tackle issues mainly to do with empowerment, and seek to enable members of their audience to make informed choices about health and lifestyle issues. Plays are written by the young people, with Gill and Anna co-ordinating the process and organising exploratory workshops. Local health promotion units lend their expertise.

Theatr Fforwm is usually booked months ahead, and finds particular interest from schools. Gill says that youth workers have a great role to play here. "Youth workers are educators, and have considerable experience dealing with personal and social education, whereas many teachers flounder. We are using youth work skills and experience and taking it into more formal education."

Finance, particularly to pay travel costs, is always a problem and youth clubs and schools have to meet the group's basic expenses. Theatr Fforwm is currently applying for charity status, and seeking grants from projects such as Comic Relief. It is also hoping to

be able to provide a National Vocational Qualification in Theatre and Health and Social Education, so giving its core performers the chance of a qualification, and the group as a whole the opportunity of funding through training.

Training was also central to an initiative by Pembrokeshire Health Promotion in partnership with the youth service during European Drug Prevention Week in November 1992. The aim was to develop a core of young people able to carry out peer education on issues of drug misuse.

The starting point - although a great deal of preparatory work went on beforehand - was a residential weekend which attracted 24 young people. The weekend consisted of workshops, small and large group discussions, role playing, outdoor activities, project development, and free time.

Fifteen of the participants applied to become peer-led educators back in their own youth clubs, and in the months following the weekend attended further training sessions, learn-

ing presentation skills, techniques to trigger discussions, how to deal with disruption and so on. Eighteen months after the initial gathering, seven young people are still acting as peer-led educators.

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Dora Doyle, Health Promotion Officer for Drug Education, says that the young people have learnt from each other throughout the ages. The skill of professionals in health promotion and the youth service was to get them to do that in more formal settings. Peer education was particularly valuable in rural areas, where opportunities for professional contact with young people were limited.

She is "very optimistic" that peer education will take off in Dyfed, but feels that there has

to be a "letting go" in youth clubs, a sharing of responsibility and workload between youth workers and senior members to enable young people to make informed choices. This was why youth clubs had such a valuable role - such a sharing of power is much more difficult in schools.

However, Tony Organ adds that by going into schools, projects such as Theatr Fforwm and "Face to Faced" are raising the profile of youth work. The initiatives may also be helping youth clubs retain senior members — failure to do so is often seen as a weakness of the statutory sector.

Tony says that Dyfed's consortium acted as a catalyst for improving relations between youth workers and making everybody aware of what young people are doing. "The youth service is not just about providing four walls — young people are asking for other things." Through the consortium, Dyfed is able to deliver.



"Face to Faced" in rehearsal

The working group's approach

In 1993 Dyfed Community Education Service set up a working group to develop a strategy for the delivery of health education issues through the service.

The Dyfed working group decided that, as well as developing the strategy, it should devise activities on health issues that could be included in the strategy document, so that youth workers would be able to undertake some health education work.

Packs are currently being completed by group members and some have been trialled at a youth workers' training course held in March.

The strategy document also includes a section on evaluation, as well as information on where youth workers can obtain further resources to develop the work. It is hoped that the document will be ready for dissemination in September 1994.

Health Promotion Wales, which is supporting developments in Dyfed, will be repackaging the strategy document to make it relevant throughout Wales. This revised document will be distributed to the youth service in early 1995.