

“Just Ask Us!” A Guide to Consulting With Young People When Developing Injury Prevention Programs

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Biography

Cecilie Dell is the Advocacy & Promotions Coordinator for Youthsafe, a non government organisation committed to reducing serious injuries in young people aged 15-25 years on the roads, in the workplace and in sport and recreational settings. Youthsafe advocates and engages best practice principles in youth consultation particularly when developing injury prevention resources. Cecilie is responsible for the development of resources and communication through newsletters and forums for Youthsafe.

Abstract

Not only do young people communicate differently to adults, young people communicate differently across different sub-groups and in different localities. To enable road safety messages to be communicated effectively to your youth target group it is important that you know your target group well. Conducting youth consultation is an effective method of ensuring your youth road safety program reaches and has impact on your intended audience.

This poster presentation will focus on the findings of research conducted to identify good practice when consulting with young people. The results of this research have formed the basis of a new resource for road safety and health promotion professionals entitled “Just ask us!” Major findings will be presented including good practice considerations for using various consultation methods with young people. Practical examples will be provided with discussion focussing on overcoming the barriers to youth consultation.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is notoriously difficult to have impact on the youth market. This is particularly so when the issue is seen as one of less interest or priority to the young people, as is often the case in health and safety campaigns. Young people live different lifestyles to adults, have different priorities to adults and enjoy different activities to adults. Young people are different to adults and we must take this into account when developing youth-focused health and safety programs.

“The key to effectively reaching a target youth group lies in knowing the target group well and with using images and language with which they can identify¹”

Health and safety professionals have expertise in health and/or safety issues, but rarely have skills in youth issues and in communicating and marketing to young people. With so many sub-groups existing within youth culture, it can be exceedingly difficult to know which messages, images and language will have impact on our particular target youth group.

So how can we know our target youth group well, and use images and language with which they can identify? The short answer is **by asking them**. Consultation allows a program coordinator to get a better feel for the issues affecting their target youth group and to shape the program to be credible and relevant to them.

Just as young people are different to adults, the consultation process with young people must be different to that used with adults. In order to assist health and safety professionals to overcome these issues Youthsafe has developed a guide to consulting with young people. The aim of the project was to seek out the best available information on consulting with young people and provide this in a user-friendly format. The guide was specifically designed for people who develop youth injury prevention programs as part (but not the whole) of their work, and who may have limited skills in working and consulting with young people directly.

2. METHOD

A review of the literature was undertaken and a consultant engaged to undertake key stakeholder interviews. Of the stakeholders interviewed, ten (10) were classified as 'experts' in either youth road safety, consultation or youth issues generally. A further eleven (11) interviews were conducted with representatives of the target audience for the guidelines (either injury prevention professionals or Road Safety Officers). Of those consulted as target audience representatives a mix of rural, regional and metropolitan-based workers were interviewed. There was also diversity in experience amongst those consulted in this group ranging from less than six months to more than 4 years experience.

Telephone interviews were conducted with all stakeholders. Interviews with experts included topics such as: effective consultation methods with young people, identifying and recruiting young people, barriers and success factors in consulting with young people and sources of information to assist those wanting to undertake youth consultations. Interviews with representatives of the guide's target audience covered: whether and to what extent consultation with young people was undertaken and why, how effective the methods of consultation currently used are seen to be, barriers and success factors, and information needs and types.

3. RESULTS

Interviews with representatives of the target audience indicated that there was a definite need for information on effective consultation with young people. Specific areas of interest included:

Information on understanding consultation and why it is important to communicate with young people:

Some of those interviewed had little experience of consulting with young people, despite a desire and willingness to do so. A lack of resources or time and competing priorities for funding were the most common reasons.

Information on identifying and recruiting young people:

For many people interviewed, a stumbling block in consulting fully with young people was a perceived lack of knowledge regarding identifying and accessing appropriate young people. A list of organisations or appropriate avenues that they could access to recruit young people was requested.

Information on consultation and communication options:

The target audience who had consulted with young people nominated the consultation methods they had used, namely focus groups and interviews, but knowledge was limited on the range of consultation options available. There was an expressed need for information on the variety of consultation methods that could be used when consulting with young people. Interviewees also wanted examples of good practice and what other people have found to be effective or not effective. There was also interest in exploring innovative consultation methods.

To meet the expressed need from the target injury prevention audience the “*Just ask us!*” youth consultation guidelines were drafted based on the literature and input from the relevant experts.

Of interest in the development of the content of this resource was the large and obvious gap between what was considered ‘good practice’ and what was achievable in reality for those undertaking the consultations. Good practice in consulting with young people includes using multiple consultation strategies and ensuring a sample that is both large enough and diverse enough to be representative. On the other hand, the injury prevention workers were often discouraged from consulting with young people on the basis that they saw it as time consuming, expensive and difficult. This issue is addressed in the guidelines by indicating that although using multiple consultation strategies and consulting widely will provide more detail about the target group, it is better to undertake even a small amount of informal consultation rather than none at all. This was seen to be an important issue and was reiterated throughout the guidelines document.

4. CONCLUSION

Developing effective road safety and injury prevention programs targeting young people can be a difficult task. Consulting with young people can ensure that the project reaches and has impact on the target youth group, but the consultation process itself can be an even more daunting task. The “*Just ask us!*” guide to consulting with young people has been developed to provide user-friendly, accessible information to assist people who are undertaking youth injury prevention programs. It takes into account both the evidence regarding effective youth consultation and the expressed needs of those working on youth injury prevention programs to provide a comprehensive but practical guide to youth consultation.

To obtain a copy of the “*Just ask us!*” A guide to consulting with young people when developing injury prevention programs, resource please contact Youthsafe on 9809 4615 or email coord@youthsafe.org.

Reference

¹ Shanahan, P., Elliott, B., & Dahlgren, N. (2000) *Review of public education campaigns addressing youth risk-taking*. Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, for the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme, Tasmania.

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Keywords

Injury Prevention, Young People, Consultation