

# SHADOW

SHADOW (Sexual Health and Drugs Outreach Work) is a partnership initiative between Coventry Teaching Primary Care Trust and Coventry Youth Service. The project consists of a team of nine staff and a Project Manager. It focuses on education and prevention work with young people in the fields of Sex and Relationship Education (SRE), sexual health; teenage pregnancy; drug education including alcohol and smoking and Healthy Lifestyles in a range of settings including schools, youth clubs and other youth settings.

## Funding

Coventry Teaching Primary Care Trust:	£150,000
Coventry Drug and Alcohol Action Team:	£81,000
Coventry Youth Service:	£60,000
Teenage Pregnancy Funding:	£27,000
<b>Total:</b>	<b>£318,000</b>

Coventry Teaching Primary Care Trust and the Youth Service fund the project until March 2009 on a three year rolling programme. Funding for the drug education programme comes through the local Drug and Alcohol Action Team and is provided on an annual basis.

## Staff Team

- 1 Project Manager
- 1 Administrator
- 1 Sexual Health Programme Coordinator
- 1 Drug Education and Healthy Lifestyles Programme Coordinator
- 1 Sexual Health Worker
- 3 Drugs Workers (Inc. Alcohol and Tobacco)
- 1 Healthy Lifestyles Worker
- 1 Male Sexual Health Worker

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Back in 1997, health officials in Coventry were worried. The city had one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in the country – and they faced a challenge of a new Government looking for new ideas on strategies for dealing with both this and drug abuse.

The solution was to give responsibility for young people's health education to the youth service. A decade later and the SHADOW project has ten full-time staff, eight of whom are delivering sex, drugs and healthy lifestyle education sessions not just in youth service settings but in every secondary school, college, special school and pupil referral unit in the authority. They also cover the care system, training providers, youth offending service and Connexions. Staff come from a range of a health and youth work backgrounds. Demand for its services are such that the project has grown from 18,000 pupil hours in 2002 to 39,000 pupil hours in 2006

Brian Mason, manager of the project, is funded through the youth service but the bulk of the rest of money comes through a commission from the Primary Care Trust.

"SHADOW is unique – I'm still not aware of any project quite like it," says Mason. "The picture back then was of very little sex and relationship education in schools – the teachers weren't happy doing it and young people could find it difficult to engage on sensitive issues with someone in authority,

hence the decision to go with young youth work staff."

Mason acknowledges that the early focus on seven priority schools did cause some discomfort in the rest of the youth service.

"People saw resources seemingly taken away from traditional neighbourhood approaches and into schools. Over the last four years we've tackled that and we've got the health educators to look at how they can complement – not take over – the health curriculum for the youth service." Each team member is now partnered to a number of local youth projects carrying out informal needs analysis and coming up with potential structured activities.

One such activity SHADOW uses which we observed is "Wicked Night Out", a school-based drugs information session. After first establishing ground rules with a group of 15-year-olds the worker uses cards with images and information about drugs that young people needed to match: "That's not cannabis, that's just a bush!" complained one young man. The teacher stayed in the room but mainly in the background, helping a little with small group forming, collecting cards and crowd control if needed. A second card exercise raised issues such as spiked drinks, emergency contraception and what can be done to make risky situations safer. There was plenty of banter and swagger, but



Careful listening to the small groups showed that there was also more serious discussion too.

On the same day a workshop on sexual attitudes with another group of year 10s followed a similar course. In the first activity small groups were asked to consider a scenario from a newspaper agony column featuring an anguished mother trying to curtail her 16-year-old daughter's sexual activity. An early response of "I'd tell my mum to eff off!" quickly leads to agreement that the best way forwards is open discussion. Most of the groups feedback with excellent advice – though one pair of quiet, shy boys are reluctant to join in. Middleton makes it clear she can talk to them privately later, encouraging them to feel their opinions are as valid as everyone else's.

A second activity has three groups write down all they know about pimps. Another three do the same for "prostitute". The discussion then questions the impact of opinions and prejudice, and takes on some of the received wisdom passed on through rap songs and videos.

An afternoon session at City College sees SHADOW's drugs workers working with a group of design students, mainly aged around 17. Several have come across SHADOW at least once before in their school days. The hour long session starts with discussion based on "the drugs box", a case full of realistic samples of drugs and paraphernalia, both legal and illegal. In the main part of the

up a "murder mystery" style thriller concerning a wild night out involving drink, drugs, sex and a mysterious death. It's a fun but complex and demanding job to find the links and come up with a plausible theory but our students stick closely to the task, with SHADOW workers listening in, prompting and dropping in suggestions as required

Back in the SHADOW office healthy lifestyles worker Jordan Rix goes over the "shopping list" of sessions he can offer partners – such as anti-bullying workshops, stress management, conflict resolution and healthy eating and a "Body MOT". "Young people respond to sex and drugs sessions quickly – but you have to sell other issues harder," says Rix.

Willenhall youth worker Kirstie McElroy, who teams up with SHADOW worker Francesca Middleton, is enthusiastic about the impact the team has made on the youth service: "As youth workers we used to have to be the font of knowledge, but we don't always have the time as face to face workers. Francesca can come in as just another youth worker playing pool, but can then maybe throw some sexual health playing cards in the mix and from that we'll start building a programme based on their needs."

McElroy will sit down with Middleton and plan what interventions are required over the coming few



## SHADOW's Top 10 Tips for Developing a Youth Work Health Curriculum

- **Partnerships** – Develop good relationships with key health partners – know what services they offer and how young people can access them.
- **Involve Young People** – Find out what they know, what's important to them, and what they need to know.
- **Accessibility** – Ensure the work is appropriate for the target group. Have you considered the age and size of group? Gender and sexuality? Race, ethnicity and faith? Literacy issues? Learning styles?
- **Impact** – You can't change the world in 45 minutes – four or five key messages is more than enough during a session. Follow the 5 x 3 rule = 5 messages, repeated 3 times.
- **Target** – Know what you want to achieve, make it realistic and break it down into manageable chunks – like eating an elephant sandwich.
- **Share** – If it's good, pass it on – it will benefit and one day it might save you reinventing the wheel too!
- **Report** – Keep partners and stakeholders regularly updated – and share challenges. Measure what you can and don't blag what you can't evidence.
- **Relevant** – Make sure you use resources that young people will engage with – don't be afraid to design your own.
- **Know Your Stuff** – Ensure you give up to date and accurate information.
- **Fun** – If it's enjoyable it's usually engaging – make it so.

months – for her it's a case of booking what time she can and making the most of what SHADOW can offer. Recently they have been targeting 15 to 19-year-olds with resources such as the Sexopoly board game and "Wicked Night Out", structured but still voluntary sessions. "Young people can get advice at drop in clinics but bringing this kind of thing into their own centre where they feel comfortable works really well," says McElroy.

SHADOW's size and quality have started making waves well beyond Coventry. Richard McKie, senior development officer with responsibility for health at The National Youth Agency, is particularly impressed: "Three

cheers for Coventry for investing in this approach. It is far and away the biggest youth service health response we've come across – it indicates that here's a service confident and ambitious enough to offer programmes not just for itself but across other educational sectors too."

Also significant for McKie is that the team works on prevention but will also be in touch with those who are drug users, have STIs and so on. "It's a very interesting model in context of the requirement for targeted youth support. What's more the joint funding arrangements put SHADOW exactly where the youth service needs to be right now – cheek by jowl with the health service and with mainstream education."

So has SHADOW made a difference? The Project is part of a multi agency approach to tackling unintended teenage pregnancy and the most recent figures for Coventry show that having stayed static for around five years the partnership has been encouraged by a 9.6 per cent reduction in the last two years. Evaluation also shows a 9 per cent increase in knowledge for those that have done SHADOW workshops. But Brian Mason is keen that they develop a broader range of measures: "I don't think we're as canny as we could be yet about measuring the impact of the change in softer areas – confidence, self-esteem – that are just as important. The approach needs to be very different to youth work and the challenge is to operate in both worlds – I really enjoy the enthusiasm of our staff to rise to this."

### Project Contact Details

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**A new website which includes a number of the project's activities and session plans will be available from April 2008.**

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