

## **Communication Campaign: A Major Tool for Social Marketing Prince George Campaigns**

### **Other Campaigns**

#### **Youth Campaign**

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##### **Rationale for doing this campaign**

Alcohol is cheap, readily available and aggressively marketed to youth. It is also toxic and dangerous yet it is the drug of choice for most Canadians who start using it on average, around 12 years old. Childhood and adolescence are naturally times for experimentation and they are also times when youth search for their identity. In this search there can be risk taking with their personal health. The "gateway theory" suggests that early age usage of alcohol or other soft drugs increases the chance of progression to other drug use later on.

An early study in British Columbia, Making it Fit (1991), states that the increases in drinking in B.C. and Canada follow 4 main trends with: an overall increase in the number of young drinkers; an increase in the percentages of young people drinking frequently; an increase in use among young students and a recent leveling off and decline of rates of overall consumption. Similarly, a more recent study of underage drinking in the US reports that 31% of high school students binge drink at least once a month and that underage drinkers (under 21 years) account for 25% of the alcohol consumption in the US. (National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, 2002). In some population subgroups such as street youth the rate of alcohol use was as high as 88% with 9% drinking daily (World Health Organization, 2002).

In response to these numbers, many policy researchers are calling for greater prevention efforts during the child and teen years. Previous marketing campaigns, many coordinated with the Canadian brewing industry, have no evaluations available by which to judge success however marketing in general to teen has shown significant results. In recent years a number of provinces have initiated education programs to encourage the responsible use of alcohol. Efforts have included paid television messages, radio advertisements, outdoor billboards, posters and brochures.

What then does prevention look like in reducing alcohol abuse particularly in Northern Communities where alcohol use is normalized and where there are limits in accessing healthy activities and geographical barriers actually discourage healthy behavior?

Youth will not stop experimenting with substances and there is currently disagreement as to whether any amount of prevention treatment, harm reduction, or "policing" will work in eliminating drug use with this age group. There are a number of reasons for this however perhaps the most significant one is that our societies are becoming more and more "free market economies" (translated as large pools of low paid wages and a growing underclass). Individuals within society, especially the youth, become more detached and "dislocated" from intimate ties between people and groups, from the family to the spiritual community. We know that these connections are essential for every one in every society yet more and more they are formed less and less. In a free market economy where the expectation is that people should move to the jobs and closing down whole communities is just "the way progress has to be", we become more and more dislocated and develop instead superficial connections and lifestyles that substitute relationships for excessive

habits. (Roots of Addiction in Free Market Society, Bruce Alexander, 2001)

How then do we help youth to make decision that can prevent unwanted pregnancies, and especially alcohol affected pregnancies where unknowingly young women and men are engaging in behavior that can produce a fetal alcohol affected child?

When we spoke to young people in a focus group they suggested that drinking and sex are not going to stop and this combination will continue to go together more often than not, so their solution was to ensure that safe sex became a standard for all youth. This would mean greater access to and acceptance of birth control, both male and female condoms, birth control pills, Morning after pill, Depovera shots and any number of interventions to prevent unwanted pregnancies.

Our Campaign, here in Prince George, though individually focused, works toward prevention on a community level as well. The "community" of youth is a powerful influence on young people's behavior and attitudes. Peer approval is most influential during these years and with youth speaking to youth about preventing pregnancy we can begin to address population health principles by increasing the public support for and involvement in actions that improve the health of overall populations.

In the ever-growing gap between the poor and the rich, youth are caught in a health determinants crisis. The very factors that determine their health are those same factors that they have less and less control over or access to. A key health determinant is employment. The higher the socioeconomic status the better a person's health but the vast majority of youth are unemployment or underemployed.

The health determinants regarding social status and social supports have historically been problematic for youth due to ageism and declining extended families. The factor of accessible and affordable education has become non-existent for many low to middle income families as some Universities raise their tuitions to over \$20,000.00 per year.

With the recent Walkerton disaster with contaminated water and B.C. communities reporting questionable drinking water and air emission standards how do youth ensure a safe and clean physical environment?

Each of us arrives on this planet with a given genetic makeup and determined biology. Exercise and low stress living can maintain or improve these uncontrollable factors however with youth activity declining and health services becoming more expensive or inaccessible and with stressful or traumatic childhood development all this will negatively impact youths ability to be healthy.

It is only personal health practices that youth seem to have any personal control over. How then is it possible in this 'economy obsessed' free market driven society to help youth form psychologically and socially integrated relationships and to establish some form of control over health determinants that in turn will help them to make healthy decisions and lead healthy lives?

## **Our Campaign**

In our community we followed some basic principles in addressing youth. First, the tone of our campaign had to be objective, simple, hopeful, positive and non-"preachy". The information had to come from a non-judgmental source of information and our work had to address the issues of self-esteem, empowerment and self-image.

*"I would believe a Doctor if it was about pregnancy but I wouldn't accept my friends necessarily"*

### *Focus Group Respondent*

The campaign itself had to appeal positively to the audience as "fear" advertising immobilizes individuals. We wanted the message to be relevant to their lives, a fresh idea that offered more than hard-hitting logic as logic does not necessarily influence youth.

*"The more real it is to our life the more we relate with it" focus group respondent.*

Putting a face on an issue worked for these youth.

Overall our campaign had to gain the confidence of young people and speak to their reality.

Using the S.M.A.R.T. criteria (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely) for objective planning, we determined our objective as raising awareness of what is acceptable alcohol use for women in their reproductive years.

Our audience was determined to be women and men between the ages of 14 and 29 years with an average age of 21 years.

A Focus Group was held with 9 youth, average age of 20 years. The purpose was to obtain their opinion on alcohol consumption during reproductive years and to better understand where and how youth got their information in Prince George.

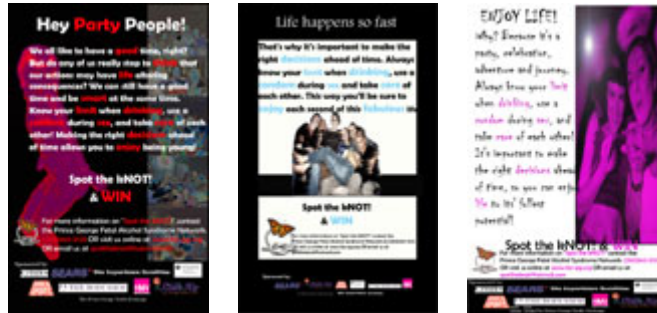
Our message evolved over the course of our planning from "belonging but not indulging or overdoing alcohol use" to "know your limits, use a condom and take care of each other" combined with "enjoy life, be young, have fun, be an individual". This messaging developed based on focus group respondents feedback.

The vehicle for carrying our message was directed to 4 main mediums; advertising, public relations, access to information and creating Networks. The focus groups identified advertising mediums as the radio most listened to, that papers generally were not read as well as the businesses, restaurants and bars most frequented. Public Relations areas seemed to include mostly word of mouth, using facility washrooms and offering freebies. Information was most often accessed through flyers, "rave" posters that could be brought home for "wall papering" and street solicitation. Creating Networks with our University, Community College, High schools, clubs and bars seemed to be the most popular means of connecting with established youth networks.

As the Knot and butterfly are our "brand" we used them in our tagline, "For more information on Spot the Knot, contact the Prince George Fetal Alcohol Network (250)562-2123 OR visit us on line at [www.nfhs-pg.org](http://www.nfhs-pg.org) OR email us at [reception@nfhs-pg.org](mailto:reception@nfhs-pg.org).

T-Shirts with the Logo and Spot the Knot message were made for a "team" of 5 youth who were responsible for dissemination of flyers, post it's and posters over the period of one week.

Posters, Post-it's, and flyers were created for distribution. They were colorful, with fun scenes of youth engaged in social activity.



Measurements of Success were harder to construct. Standard tools like survey and interviews do not work as well with youth so the Spot the Knot contest was set up as a measure. When people spotted the knot they could call into a phone number and be entered to win a draw for merchandise that was donated by our sponsors (youth oriented businesses). They were asked a skill testing question about what they remembered from the posters or promotional spot on Radio. This captured some data in the way of comments as well as addressed a quantitative measure of exposure of information.

### Excerpts from Post Testing Compiled Report by Leah Coghlan

The following is a compiled report on the post testing interviews that took place to conclude the communications campaign "Spot the kNOT!" It took place in the form of a telephone interview between ten youth aged 16 to 24. Six of these participants were female and four were male. Their answers are related as direct quotes from the telephone interview.

The following questions were asked:

1. **When you go to a bar or party, do you feel that you need to drink? Please explain.**
2. **If you were at a bar or party, and you saw a pregnant woman drinking, how would that make you feel?**
3. **What do you consider to be an acceptable amount of alcohol intake?**
4. **Do you know about the Prince George Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Network? If yes, please explain how you came to know about it.**
5. **Were you aware of the communications campaign "Spot the kNOT!" that took place in April 2002, in Prince George, BC? If yes, where did you learn about it from?**
6. **What would you have done differently, if it were your job to make people aware of FAS?**
7. **Do you remember the three main messages that were promoted through out the campaign?**
8. **Did you find anything valuable from its messages?**

### Generally it was found that:

The majority of youths do not feel that they have to drink, while a couple of people say yes, and others say sometimes.

The majority believes that it would upset them to see a pregnant woman drinking, but most of them do believe that it is her choice.

There is an increase of people knowing where the center is and it is evident because they stated

that they saw where it was located from the posters.

All candidates knew about the campaign because they had all entered the contest due to the volunteers coming into their community.

A majority of the participants remembered over 50% of the campaigns message. Only one person knew all three, but that was because she was a volunteer.

All the participants agreed that it was important and valuable to know the messaging.

Though this was small scale messaging on a large scale issue, we feel that there were some benefits from addressing youth in our community. We were able to raise awareness with a number of youth communities. It is a beginning.