



SMART CHOICES



NSW Police Force
www.police.nsw.gov.au



CESSNOCK
CITY COUNCIL



cycos
Cessnock Youth Centre & Outreach Service

SETTING THE SCENE

- Building Partnerships. In developing the Cessnock LGA Crime Prevention Plan 2009-2012, a partnership was formed between Cessnock City Council and New South Wales Police Force.
- As the partnership formed it was identified that students aged 12-13 years were at risk of increased risk taking behaviours and crime prevention education targeted towards young people was lacking in the community.
- Based on the experience of those in the partnership, delivery of a crime prevention program within the school environment was thought to be preferable, as it was found to be challenging to deliver education programs to young people after school hours and on weekends.

SETTING THE SCENE

- The project was implemented within the Cessnock Local Government Area.
- It is located approximately one hour from Newcastle and two hours from Sydney.
- Historically, the area has been a mining community, however in recent times growth has been evident in the tourism and hospitality sector.
- The estimated total resident population of the Cessnock Local Government Area is 50,834. The 2006 Census advises that 1,437 people are aged 12/13 years.



NEW SOUTH WALES

CESSNOCK

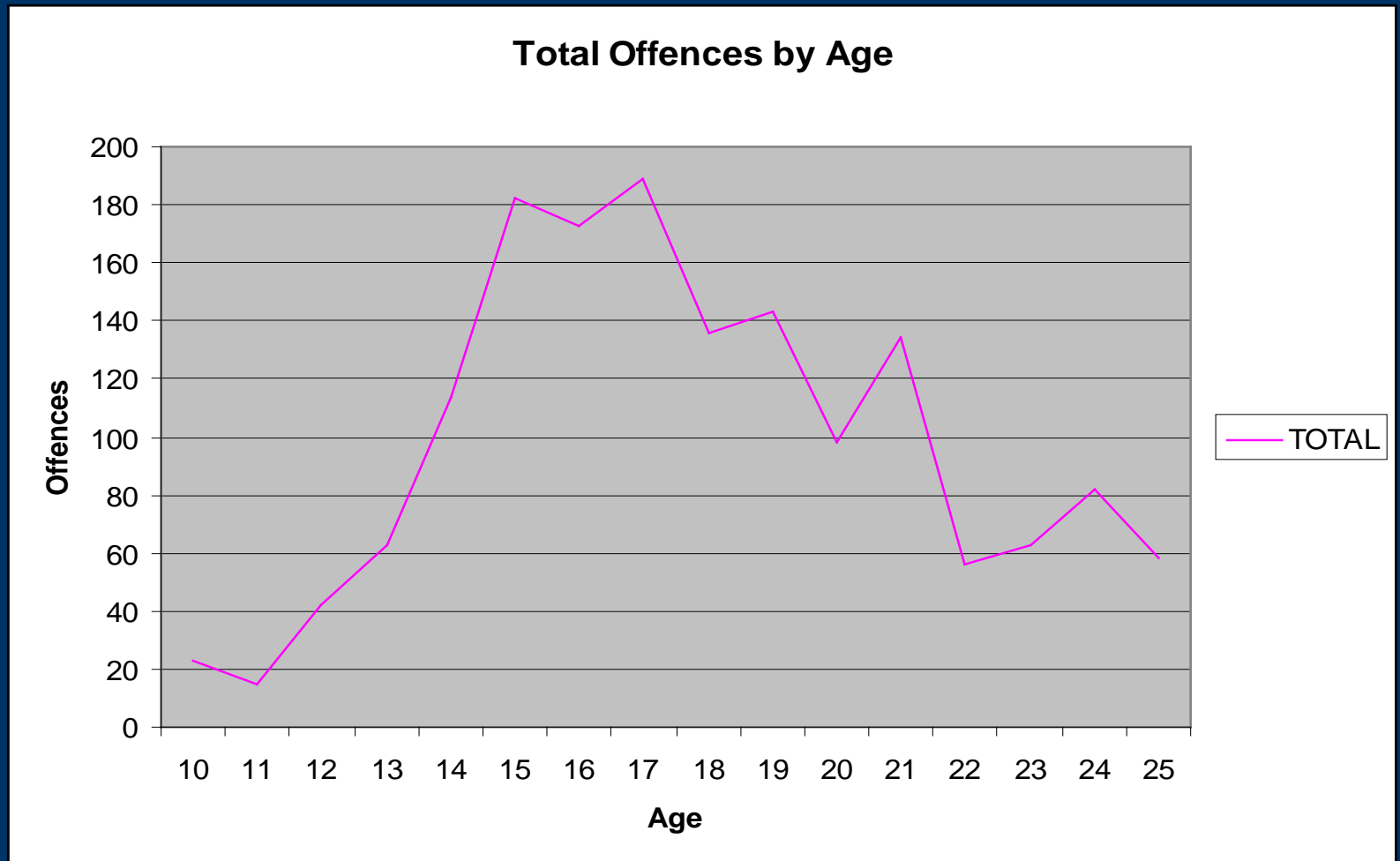
Pacific Ocean

LITERATURE REVIEW

In developing an approach to early intervention crime prevention education, the professional literature was consulted. It was noted that:

- There was debate as to whether universal crime prevention programs are an effective intervention model, or rather is it best practice to adopt a more targeted approach, working with young people already at risk of offending behaviour.
- Prior to youth offending behaviour, the early adolescent years were suggested as a good time to engage youth in crime prevention education.

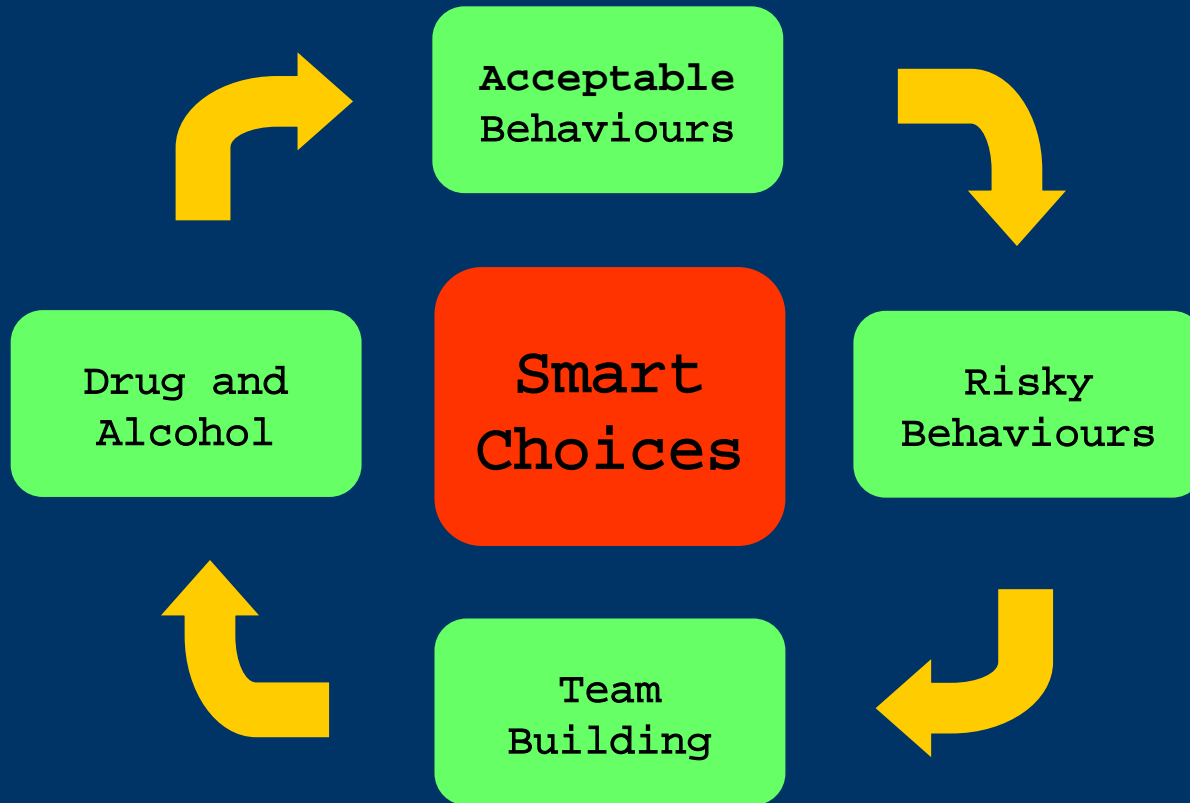
WHY EARLY INTERVENTION?



INTRODUCING SMART CHOICES

- In response, **Smart Choices** was developed and is a universal Crime Prevention youth education program targeted to young people aged 12-13 years old.
- The funding for this program was made possible through the Cessnock LGA Crime Prevention Plan 2009-2012.

HOW THE PROGRAM LOOKED



HOW THE PROGRAM LOOKED

Smart Choices is a one day (6 hour) program, comprising four core topics. Each topic was presented by experienced human services professionals. The topics are as follows:

Topic	Overview
<i>Assertiveness in Refusing Alcohol and Drug Substances.</i>	Students are engaged on the effects and consequences of alcohol and drug use for both society and themselves. Students learn skills around assertiveness in refusing alcohol and drug substances.
<i>Interactive Team Building Exercise.</i>	This is an interactive team building activity that encourages social connections within the peer group as well as team work.

HOW THE PROGRAM LOOKED

Topic	Overview
Risky Behaviours.	Students are addressed by several individuals from 'Head Start'. The students hear an account from each individual about how they acquired a brain injury and how the choices we make in life, can greatly affect their futures.
Acceptable Behaviours.	Students engage in education and discussion regarding acceptable behaviours when in shared public space. The session focuses on the Youth Offenders Act and includes a discussion on the negative impact of property theft and malicious property damage as well as detailed discussion on crimes such as cyber bullying, illegal trail bike riding and steal-by-find.

INTENDED PROGRAM OUTCOME

The 'Smart Choices' Program has four core outcomes.

- Within a supportive environment, engage young people in the prevention of crime, in particular the prevention of criminal offences for malicious property damage, vandalism, misuse of public space, bullying and alcohol and drug use.
- Promotion of social responsibility by encouraging young people to think of the consequences of their actions.
- Foster positive connections between Young People and Police.
- Encourage young people's involvement in already established locally based youth services and youth drop in centres.



SAMPLE GROUP

Smart Choices was delivered to three secondary schools, to a total of 265 students, aged 12 and 13 years. Of the secondary schools, 2 were state funded schools and the other was a private provider. Table one reflects the distribution of the sample.

School	School Type	Sample Size
School A	Government	92
School B	Private	70
School C	Government	103
		TOTAL 265

PROGRAM DELIVERY

- Given the large sample size for each pilot, as well as four concurrent sessions happening throughout the one day program, there was a need to hold the program outside the school.
- This enabled the school to continue utilising their school hall for already programmed activities and also reduced distractions for the students completing Smart Choices.
- It should be noted that locating the program at an off-site venue did add substantially to the programming costs (i.e. transport, venue hire). The venue also needed to have links to open space.



DATA ANALYSIS & FINDINGS



EVALUATION TOOLS

- As Smart Choices is a pilot program, it was decided that comprehensive evaluation and analysis should be built into the program design. As a result, students were asked to complete both a pre-program survey and a post-program survey.
- Both the pre-program and post-program survey were developed and analysed in consultation with The University of Newcastle (Newcastle Innovation, Newstat). Both surveys were completed by the students on the day of the program.

EVALUATION TOOLS

The questions in the pre-program survey were repeated in the post-program survey to ascertain changes in knowledge and understanding.

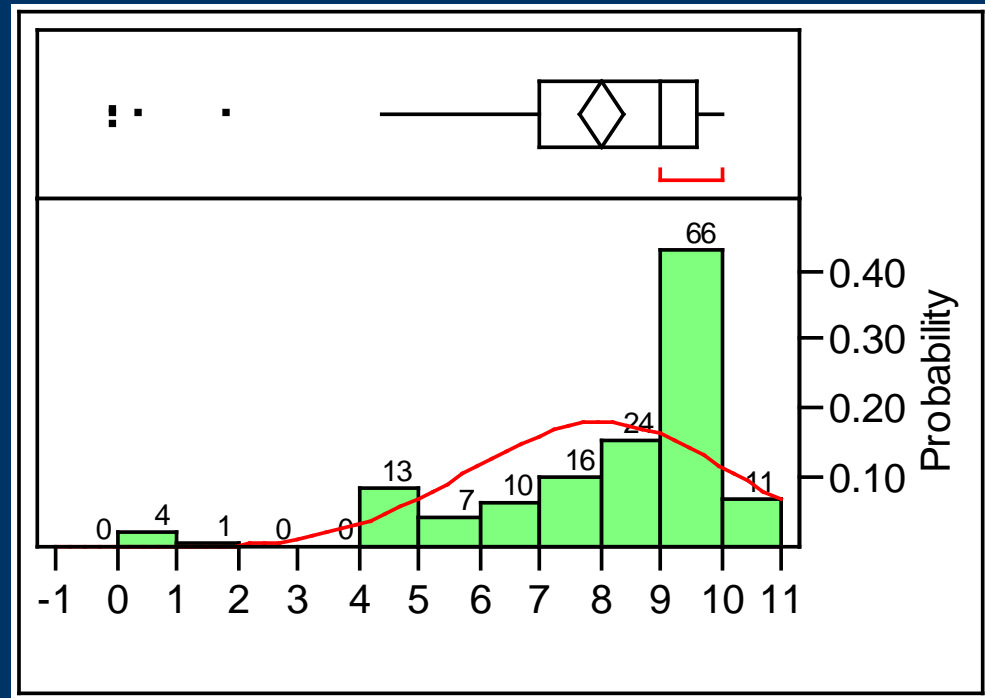
Sample Question:

People who are bullied and harassed by others deserve it.



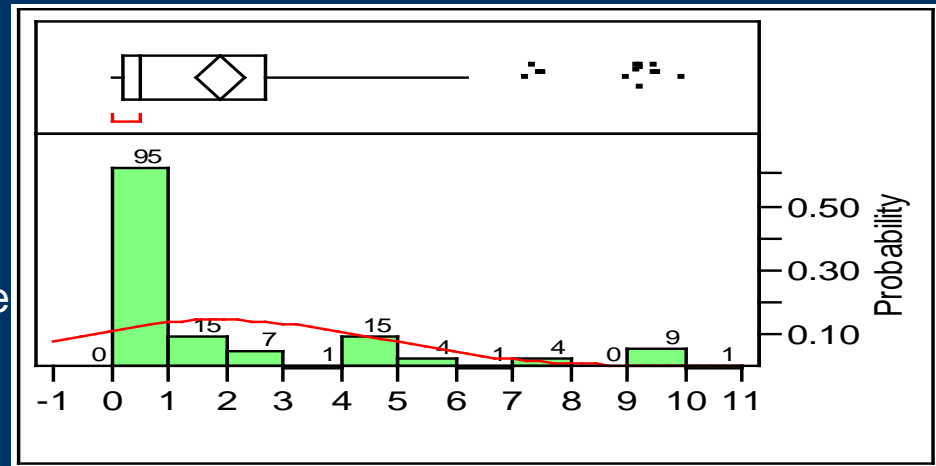
Do you think it is important to learn about Crime Prevention in School?

- Consistently, participants agreed strongly with a Median score of 9.0
- Although both the private and government schools which have been piloted strongly agreed, the private school respondents were in stronger agreement.



People who are bullied and harassed by others deserve it.

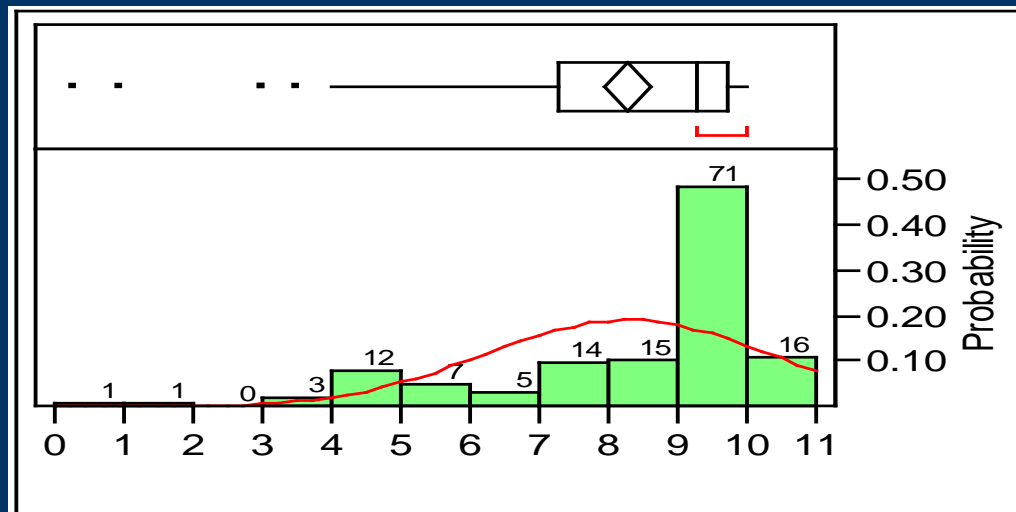
- This chart highlights that for some topics of the program, students already had substantial base knowledge.
- With a median of 0.5, students answered this question positively upon commencing the course.
- It was therefore, difficult to show significant post-program improvement for some questions.



Learning with regards to Drugs and Alcohol

The comparative analysis of both pre and post program surveys found a reduction in student knowledge for understanding of how illegal drugs and alcohol can be harmful.

However, the analysis found that students, overwhelmingly, responded that the course empowered them to say no to drugs and alcohol.



Reasons for this discrepancy are hard to ascertain. Possible explanation could be attributed to the presentation being too complex for the age group. Another possible explanation could be that the young people had a greater assumed knowledge pre-program and realised post-program that potentially this is a more in-depth topic.

Some comments from the students, when asked what they had learned via the post-program survey were as follows:

“Drugs and crime can have a huge effect on your future”

“To stay away from drugs and alcohol and drive safe”

GENERAL FINDINGS

- More than 95% of the students felt they had learned something from the program.
- When asked what they had learnt, 32% of those students indicated 'Drug Education' as their first answer to this question.
- The next highest response was centered around a balance of Fun and Safety within our community setting, including what might be considered acceptable and what might not be.
- Young people completing the program overwhelmingly enjoyed it.

GENERAL FINDINGS

- The involvement of police in the delivery of universal crime prevention education programs is instrumental in increasing students' knowledge of crime and community safety:
 - Two specific areas spoken about within the Smart Choices Program, which were delivered by Police demonstrated the most significant positive increase in student knowledge.
 - These two areas of focus were the Young Offenders Act (1997) and illegal trail bike riding in undesignated areas.

CHALLENGES

- Initially the partnership wished to undertake a three month post-program focus group with a sample of students. This proved to be difficult with regards to commitments from schools. Hence, we were unable to obtain any further evaluation on post-program behavioural changes.
- Although there were definite demonstrated achievements with regards to empowerment to say no to Drugs and Alcohol, the evaluation showed a decrease in knowledge around how Drugs and Alcohol can be harmful.
- There were numerous logistical challenges with regards to the program. These included finding an appropriate venue which suited the application whilst being affordable within budget constraints.

PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

- The findings from the pilot program suggest the school environment to be an appropriate setting to engage young people in early intervention crime prevention education. The school environment is a setting where young people engage in education. Education is a tool that can enable positive decision making.
- A universal, early intervention crime prevention program, that is inclusive of police involvement, can assist young people to increase their knowledge base and ultimately develop skills which lessen involvement in the risk factors associated with youth offending behaviours.
- Delivery of sessions relating to Drugs and Alcohol to 12-13 year olds requires further research and development to understand best how to inform young people on how alcohol and drugs can be harmful.

PARTNERSHIP SUCCESS

- The partnership has worked consistently to deliver the program series.
- All members of the organising partnership share the workload equally and undertake all commitments in a timely manner.
- Each member of the partnership brought with them a range of specialist skills and access to a collection of resources which were all integral to the program's success.
- The partnership has received excellent feedback from the other stakeholders of the project, including the schools and other human services agencies.
- All three of the high schools who have completed the program and the final school which is to receive the program in this pilot series have been encouraging of our efforts and believe crime prevention education for school students to be an important component of their learning.

Future Vision for Smart Choices

It is acknowledged that partnerships have both a beginning and an end, hence there is a need to share our program and its findings.

Our vision is to:

- Submit our work to a professional journal.
- Capitalise on opportunities to implement Smart Choices in other areas.
- Advocate for crime prevention education to be integrated at an earlier age, as part of school based learning.

For Further Information

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