

# PEER ALCOHOL EDUCATION PROJECT WITH SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

Tacade worked with over thirty-five secondary schools in Barnsley, Manchester, Salford, Portsmouth and West Sussex helping them to develop peer alcohol education projects during the academic year 2004/5. Tacade also worked in partnership with Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to provide training, resources and ongoing support for the schools. The project was funded by Diageo Great Britain and independently evaluated by Research Works. This briefing paper is designed to provide an outline of some of the key findings from the project. Briefing paper No.1, which describes the key learning from the pilot phase in 2003/4, is available on the Tacade website [www.tacade.com](http://www.tacade.com)

## SCHOOLS' MOTIVATION

A variety of factors motivated schools to join the project. Some schools were particularly interested in the alcohol education aspect of the project, others the peer education element, while several schools were particularly keen to receive the free alcohol education resources provided through the Diageo Great Britain funding. The involvement and commitment that schools could make to the project varied due to factors such as school priorities and staff commitments. Partnership working with the LEAs was vital to the success of the project as support from LEA staff helped to establish the credibility and sustainability of the project. Interest in peer education was high, but concerns about the level of commitment involved in

setting-up and maintaining the project were barriers for some schools.

Within the school a range of staff took part in the projects. In several schools Learning Mentors took a key role in co-ordinating the project, training, supervising and supporting the peer educators along with help from the Personal, Social, Health Education (PSHE) co-ordinators. In other schools senior teachers, heads of year, deputy heads and youth workers took the lead role co-ordinating the project. School nurses were involved in several of the schools.

## WHY FOCUS ON ALCOHOL EDUCATION?

In some schools alcohol education has not been a priority compared to education about illegal drugs and yet alcohol is the most commonly used drug amongst young people. In the United Kingdom (UK) young people are now drinking twice as much as they were ten years ago and more young people are drinking alcohol. About a quarter of 11-15 year olds drink alcohol on a weekly basis. Drinking increases sharply with age. Over 50% of 15 year olds in Wales (56%) report drinking alcohol on a weekly basis, closely followed by young people in England (52%) and Scotland (43%). Binge drinking is common amongst young people in the UK and is on the increase amongst young women.

While most young people drink alcohol safely and sensibly more than 3,000 11-15 year olds are treated in hospital for alcohol related illnesses every year and every year some young people will die as a direct result of consuming alcohol.

*"I feel that alcohol misuse is a very important issue for our students. It affects so much, learning and personal development. I think it is as great an issue, if not greater, than drug education."* (PSHE co-ordinator)



## WHY PEER EDUCATION?

Research from the Tacade project and from international research indicates that peer education can make a valuable contribution to a whole school approach to alcohol education. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) publication 'Drugs: Guidance for schools' (2004) acknowledges the value of peer alcohol education when stating that: '*Peers are often seen as a credible source of information and advice*'. It was apparent from Tacade's pilot peer alcohol education project, carried out in 2003/4, that a dual approach of peer led and teacher led alcohol education is most effective. This was confirmed by the work with schools in 2004/5.

## WHAT MOTIVATES YOUNG PEOPLE TO BECOME PEER EDUCATORS?

Peer educators were very positive about their own experiences of the project. Their reasons for taking part included:

- ❖ *an interest in learning the new skills involved in teaching a class*
- ❖ *an opportunity to add a positive entry to their school record*
- ❖ *an opportunity to impart their experience to those younger than themselves.*

Staff were consistently surprised and pleased with the volunteers and their motives for taking part.

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF PEER EDUCATION?

Peer alcohol education can have a tremendous impact for schools in terms of alcohol education, but also more widely empowering students, including those who may be struggling, to engage and achieve at school. Peer education can help to develop a supportive ethos within a school.

The students that benefit most from peer education are often the peer educators themselves. It is important that schools are aware of this when they select students to take part as peer educators. Several of the schools in the project included students who may be more vulnerable to alcohol misuse, such as those disengaged from school.

*"The students we've got as peer educators really lack confidence and this has given them a real boost - they've got standing in the school and a sense of responsibility."* (Learning mentor)

The projects brought a lot of benefits to the schools and particularly to some vulnerable students:

*"It brings the kids closer together and they are all equals in this. It also proves they don't always have to be the trouble makers, they can be the role models for younger pupils."* (PSHE teacher)

*"It's given them the chance to mix with girls they wouldn't usually socialise with and it's worked really well."* (School nurse)

Hilary Pollard, the Drug Education Consultant for Salford LEA, describes the benefits for students in the four Salford schools that took part in the peer education project:

*'The impact of the project was fantastic in so many ways with positive outcomes for everyone involved. Obviously the main aim of the project was to increase the knowledge and understanding of alcohol and alcohol-related issues for the Year 7 pupils (and the Year 10s to some degree as they had to develop their own knowledge in order to have the confidence to deliver lessons to the Year 7s).*

*As part of the evaluation process, the Year 7 pupils carried out a questionnaire to measure what they had learnt, whether they had enjoyed the lesson and how they would change the lesson in order to improve it. Every evaluation sheet was positive with every pupil stating at least one thing that they had learnt as a result of the lesson. The enjoyment level was*

tremendous - again every pupil gave really positive feedback. The main comment of how they would improve it was that they wanted more lessons like that or a longer lesson!! Praise indeed!!

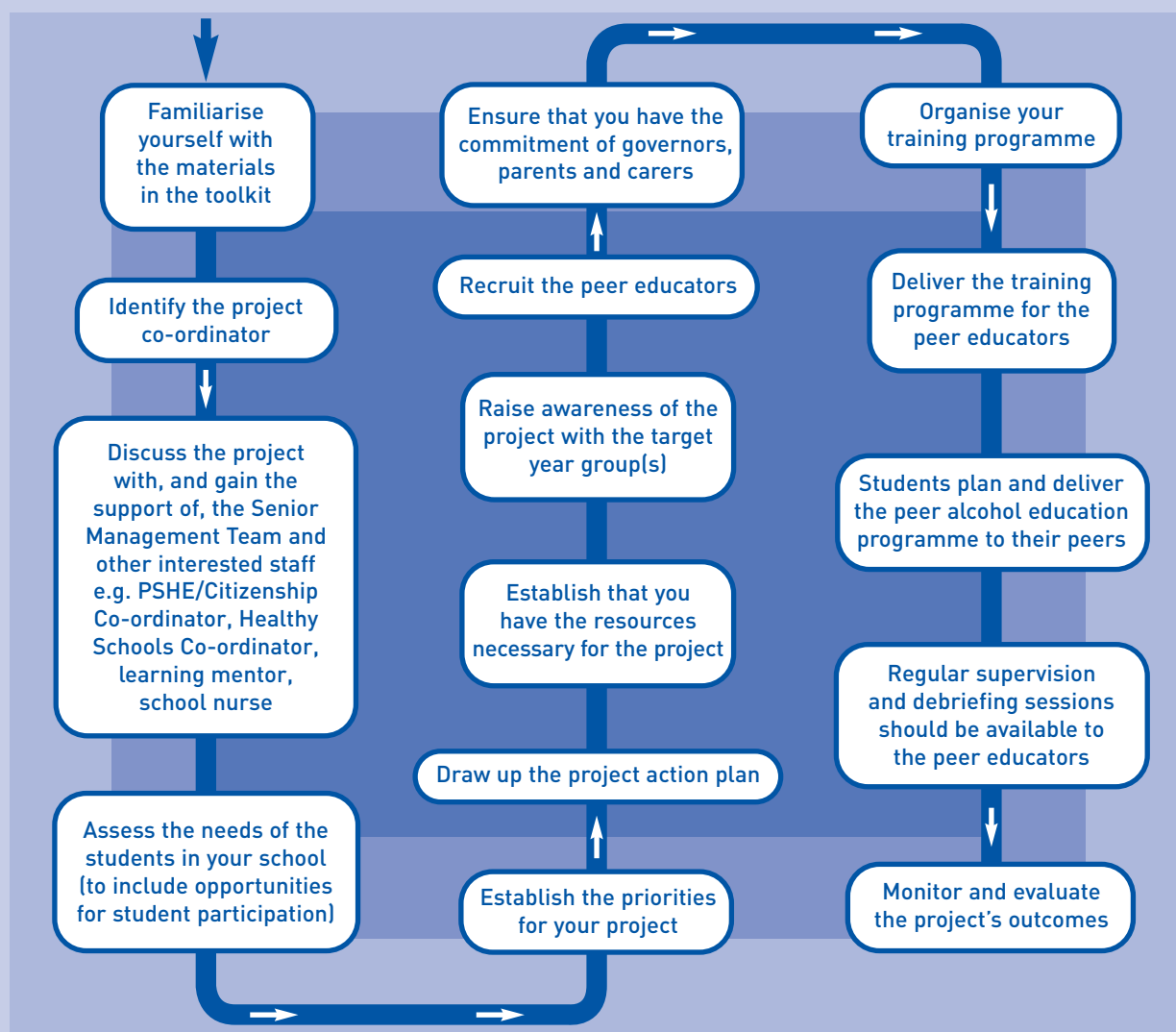
For the peer educators, the outcomes were amazing. They certainly increased their own knowledge around alcohol issues and changed their views, attitudes and opinions in a positive way. I could see their confidence grow as they delivered more lessons. (They delivered one lesson to each of the eight Year 7 classes).

The form tutor of one particular pupil said that she could not believe what a change being involved in the project had made to him. Initially there had been some concerns about him being involved in the project due to his behaviour and attitude with some members of staff. He was often sullen and refused to speak to staff and his peers. The form tutor said that after finishing the project this boy now "shone"! His confidence and self esteem had dramatically increased and he now laughed and had fun with both staff and his peers.

The school also received several phone calls and letters from parents of the peer educators to say how much their children had enjoyed being involved and the motivation that they had shown in preparing their workshops at home as part of their homework.'

Peer alcohol education is not an easy option for schools. It requires staff time and resources, and staff with good facilitation, teaching and management skills to ensure that the project is effective. However, for those schools that make the investment, the rewards are significant for individual students and for the ethos of the school as whole.

## What are the steps in establishing a peer alcohol education project?



# PEER ALCOHOL EDUCATION TOOLKIT FOR USE WITH SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

Tacade has distilled the learning from the peer alcohol education project with schools in England and Wales over two years into a practical, accessible 'Peer Alcohol Education Toolkit'. The toolkit contains background information about what makes peer alcohol education effective, practical tools for planning a project, training programmes, materials and activities to use with students, statistics about alcohol and young people on a CD Rom PowerPoint presentation and case studies from around the UK.

The toolkit contains ideas and activities around some of the challenging aspects of peer education such as selection of peer educators, consulting students about alcohol education, confidentiality, behaviour management, monitoring and evaluation.

**The toolkit is available from Tacade priced £34.99. Please telephone 0161 836 6850 to order a copy.**

All of the schools involved in the peer alcohol education project received a box of Tacade alcohol education resources that could be used to train the peer educators and for the peer educators to use with fellow students. The box included:

- ❖ **Respect It!** - Alcohol materials for secondary schools. This resource contains fifteen lessons and accompanying handouts to use with students aged 11-16.
- ❖ **Alcoshots** - young people in alcohol related situations. This resource was developed by young people for young people aged 14-19. It contains 12 photographs showing young people in alcohol related situations, discussion questions and fact files along with background information about First Aid, the project process and young people's drinking.
- ❖ **Sex, Drugs and Alcohol** - material for use with young people aged 14-19 of all abilities. This resource contains a set of 25 cartoon style illustrations and 15 core activities for use in schools, colleges and informal settings.
- ❖ **DrinkDeal card game:** 48 question cards and 48 answer cards to use with young people aged 12 upwards in a variety of settings.

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