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Healthy College Initiatives: Are you thinking outside the boxes or just ticking them?

Students studying A2 in Health and Social Care are expected to complete a health promotion unit. In this demanding unit they not only have to learn about health promotion theory, but they have to plan and implement their own health promotion campaign and evaluate its effectiveness.

Students can choose any target group as the focus of their campaign. In previous years our students have always focussed on their own peer group and carried out their health promotion within the college due to the many safety and organisational implications of undertaking such an activity externally.

During the evaluation of this unit in the last academic year, the vast majority of students felt that it would have been far more meaningful to them if they could have gone into local schools to implement their campaigns.

Peer Education qualification

I made some initial enquiries with the Dudley Schools' Teenage Pregnancy advisor to test out the feasibility of our students going into local schools. Within 48 hours of my initial enquiry, the Dudley Teenage Pregnancy Team (TPT) had secured funding for a number of our students to undertake a peer education qualification in sexual health. They would be taken on a residential weekend and given all the training to achieve the qualification at no cost to the college or the student. All we had to do was provide the students and agree to them becoming peer educators in local schools and our own college!

We initially had 44 students express an interest in undertaking this qualification when the TPT could only offer 12 places. This led me to approach other professionals to see if similar peer education courses could be arranged. A freelance drugs awareness advisor who has worked with the college for a number of years agreed to adapt one of his drugs awareness courses to include a peer education element and agreed to deliver a one day course to our students free of charge. His only condition was that we carefully evaluated it and supported him in trying to get this course accredited and in securing funding to run it again in the future. Other outside professionals involved in health promotion have also enthusiastically agreed to run workshops and support our students in planning their health promotion initiatives.

During the summer months I met with the managers of Dudley Health Promoting Schools who immediately embraced the idea of our students going into local schools as peer educators. We were under no illusions as to the careful planning that will be required but everyone agreed that as this was such an exciting initiative, it was worth putting the time and effort into.

If successful, this initiative will "tick numerous boxes" in terms of Every Child Matters, Youth Matters, enrichment, peer education / mentoring, embedding healthy college activities into the curriculum and working in partnership with outside agencies. But far more important than this is that it will, hopefully, greatly enhance the students' learning experience.

"This kind of initiative would be impossible to implement if we had not already established very strong partnerships with Dudley Health Promoting Schools, Dudley Teenage Pregnancy Team and other professionals working within the Dudley Borough. Stourbridge College is extremely grateful for their enthusiasm and willingness to work with us in improving the outcomes for our students."