

‘EVERYDAY’ Interactive Discussion in Schools - Recasting a Wheelchair Presenter Program with an Evidence-Based Approach to Injury Prevention

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Biography

Duncan Nisbet is the Presenter Program Coordinator for Youthsafe, a non government organisation committed to reducing serious injuries in young people aged 15-25 years on the roads, in the workplace and in sport and recreational settings. Duncan has been instrumental in ensuring that Youthsafe’s presenter program is progressive and embraces an up-to-date evidence based approach while still retaining some of the popular features of the original Spinesafe wheelchair presenter program. Duncan has a strong background in public speaking and presenting.

Abstract

There remains a strong interest in wheelchair users presenting injury prevention messages to school students. To date there has not been good evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of this in changing behaviours of young people. This paper reports on the development of an evidence-based approach in revamping a wheelchair presenter program to address risk-taking and injury prevention for school students aged 12-14 years.

The Spinesafe Education Program in NSW began a spinal injury awareness and prevention program in 1982 with wheelchair presenters attending schools across NSW. The program remained very popular with students and teachers for over twenty years. However in 1998 an evaluation of the program against the evidence for preventing injuries in young people indicated changes were needed for the program to truly impact on risk-taking behaviours. The findings indicated that for effective delivery the program needed to:

- Be linked to the school curriculum
- Use a variety of teaching and learning strategies
- Be able to be delivered by teachers
- Not be delivered as a stand-alone session.

By partnering with the Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) and the NSW Department of Education (DET) an innovative new program was developed as part of the Youthsafe program. A feasibility study was conducted which included piloting the session in 10 metropolitan schools.

The new ‘EVERYDAY’ interactive session can be delivered by either Youthsafe presenters or teachers. The ‘EVERYDAY’ session incorporates a range of teaching and learning strategies and is part of a comprehensive RTA Stage 4 road safety resource package available to NSW secondary schools.

1. INTRODUCTION

EVERYDAY young people take risks. EVERYDAY young people are injured as a result of dangerous risk taking. EVERYDAY is the title of the current program of interactive discussion sessions facilitated by Youthsafe wheelchair presenters. The EVERYDAY sessions comprise 60

minutes of facilitated discussion and small group work exploring risk, the consequences of dangerous risk taking and strategies for young people to better manage risk, particularly on the roads. The use of scenarios assists students to think about practical application of concepts discussed. The sessions target students in Years 7 and 8 in NSW high schools, that is 12 to 14 year olds. The program has been developed in consultation with the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET), the Catholic Education Commission, the Association of Independent Schools and the Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) to support the 'Personal Development, Health and Physical Education' curriculum and it also slots into the RTA's road safety resource for NSW high school students (Stage 4). Youthsafe wheelchair presenters are available to facilitate the sessions in Sydney, Central Coast, Blue Mountains and Illawarra areas. The session plan can also be used by teachers and is promoted in particular to rural teachers through various education networks. Easy access to the session plan is available through the Youthsafe website.

The current Youthsafe presenter program is progressive and embraces an up-to-date evidence based approach while still retaining some of the features of the original Spinesafe wheelchair presenter program which helped maintain its popularity in schools for over 20 years.

2. STIMULUS FOR CHANGE

In 2000, as the Youthsafe program with a broader youth injury prevention focus emerged from the Spinesafe Education Program, there was a consciousness of a changing environment and need to work from a stronger evidence based foundation. Dr Jane Elkington's report – 'A systematic review of the evidence on preventing injuries to young people (15 to 24 years)' was a key stimulus for change in the presenter program and provided direction for change. The report comprised a systematic literature review which aimed to:

- Inform Youthsafe of the scope of educational approaches alongside other strategies in promoting safety and reducing injuries to young people.
- Identify the proven and promising educational approaches reported on in the literature and their potential alongside other strategies to create change regarding the safety of young people.
- Identify those educational approaches for which there is evidence to suggest that they are ineffective or harmful to the health and safety of young people.
- Provide the evidence for decisions to expand, discontinue or supplement the Spinesafe Education Program.
- Assist Youthsafe and its partners to plan future collaborative efforts to address the safety of young people – with an emphasis on spinal cord injury, road trauma, occupational injuries, water and sports related injuries.
- Summarise the major findings and recommendations with respect to the evidence of effective educational and other injury prevention strategies targeting young people.

Key findings influencing the type of changes made to the presenter program included recommendations that educational programs for young people should:

- Be conducted over multiple sessions (5 to 12 lessons suggested).
- Be focused on single issues.
- Be delivered by teachers who were trained by experienced health educators.
- Be delivered in concert with community involvement and/or legislation.
- Be based on inter-active sessions and/or relevant learning theories.
- Emphasise developing the skills of identifying and choosing a safer alternative to risk situations.

3. PRESENTER PROGRAM CHANGES

In recasting the Youthsafe presenter program the content, delivery, presenter skills and partnerships were all reviewed.

Content moved from the 'personal story' of individual presenters to a structured lesson plan with clear teaching objectives.

Delivery is now to small class size groups and interactive in nature, incorporating appropriate learning strategies for the target age group.

Presenter skills have received much more attention through recruitment and orientation processes, continuing education (both in-house and external) and evaluation processes including self-evaluation by the presenters, feedback from the program co-ordinator and student and teacher evaluations from a random sample of schools attended.

Partnerships have been considerably strengthened with the education sectors and the RTA, which has ensured a strong link to the current NSW school syllabus and places the EVERYDAY program resource within the wider RTA road safety resource package for NSW schools. This assists in providing greater incentive for teachers to use the EVERYDAY program and puts it in a context where the messages can be reinforced. Youthsafe has also kept the Road Safety Education Consultants up to date with developments and they have been very supportive in promoting the program to schools in their respective areas.

4. PROGRAM PILOT AND FEASIBILITY STUDY

Prior to implementation of the EVERYDAY program in schools it was piloted and a study was undertaken to gather feedback from students, teachers and presenters about the new program as an educational tool and to identify issues that could influence uptake in the secondary school system. Kate Hunter of Regan and Daley Consultants undertook this study.

Ten schools across Public, Independent and Catholic school sectors were involved in the study. A Youthsafe presenter delivered the new session plan to six classes and class teachers to four classes. Survey instruments were developed to obtain feedback from:

- Students who participated in the lesson.
- Presenters who led the session.
- Teachers who observed the lesson.
- PDHPE Co-ordinators who had gone through the lesson/lesson plan and were in a position to comment on uptake of an external resource/presenter.

Overall the results were favourable.

- 86% of students indicated they would recommend the lesson to peers and the majority identified that the lesson was about risk, safety or the consequences of dangerous risk taking.
- Student comments about their 'likes' and 'dislikes' tended to reflect their various learning styles, abilities and preferences.
- Presenters were generally happy with the lesson with comments focusing on minor adjustments to timing of different parts of the lesson, reviewing scenario content to more closely reflect student issues and winding up of small group work.
- Teachers observing the session were very positive indicating that:
 - The session was closely linked to the Stage 4 PDHPE syllabus.

- The session encouraged student participation.
- The students responded well to the presenter.
- Teachers provided supportive commentary to assist in improving the resource and better cater for varied learning styles, abilities and experiences of students eg role plays, games, more visually attractive overheads, greater use of technology.
- PDHPE Co-ordinator feedback addressed uptake issues such as:
 - Potential barriers with a user pays system.
 - Equity of access to the resource.
 - Need for staged delivery of information to teachers.
 - Promotion of the program to co-incide with timing of school programming – primarily mid term 3 to mid term 4.

Amendments in keeping with the evaluation were made to the EVERYDAY program before offering it to schools at the end of 2002.

5. CONCLUSION

A need for change and to develop a stronger evidence based approach for the wheelchair presenter program model that had been used in NSW schools for over twenty years was recognised if the program was to be effective in influencing the behaviour of young people.

A comprehensive literature review provided substantial information and assisted determination of the directions for change in the program. Changes were accordingly made to the program, particularly in respect of:

- The program being more focussed on a specific target age group and using learning strategies appropriate to that age group.
- Developing more structure in the session plan and moving to a focus on 'risk' rather than the personal 'story' of the presenter.
- Engaging students better with an inter-active approach, small group work, scenarios and problem solving activities.
- Better training and ongoing support for presenters as well as more flexible working arrangements.
- Stronger partnerships with the different education sectors and the RTA.
- Seating the program in the context of other supportive/complementary risk management strategies.

The new program was pilot tested and a study undertaken to assist refinement of the resource before making it available to schools. Also embedded in the program are review systems to ensure ongoing improvement.

Schools have responded positively to the program. Those who used the Spinesafe wheelchair presenter program in the past have accommodated the changes well, particularly the move to smaller group work. New schools have also responded to promotion of the program. There are confirmed presenter bookings scheduled through to the end of 2003 and already tentative bookings for 2004.

For a copy of the report '*A systematic review of the evidence on preventing injuries to young people (15 to 24 years)*' please check the Youthsafe website www.youthsafe.org or contact Youthsafe on phone (02) 98094615 or email coord@youthsafe.org.

Keywords

Injury prevention, risk, School curriculum,