



Going Forward – Deans Community High School Case Study

In May 2018, Going Forward started working with Deans Community High School (CHS) to deliver a series of sessions for pupils attending the Connect base; a provision in the school offering additional support to young people. Melissa Byrne has given us her thoughts on the delivery, and impact, of Going Forward sessions at Deans CHS.

Can you tell us a bit about Deans CHS and the young people involved with the Going Forward sessions?

Deans CHS serves the community of Livingston and Seafield, West Lothian. With approximately 1,200+ students on the school roll, the school also provides gym, community café, swimming and other facilities on site to the wider community. The school values are Integrity, Respect, Inclusion, Compassion and Aspiration.

Young people attending the Going Forward group have had exposure to drug and alcohol misuse, either directly or indirectly, through their communities, where the subjects addressed in the sessions are clearly evident on a daily basis.

Why did you decide to get involved with the Going Forward project?

Fast Forward has an established reputation for delivering quality workshops on subjects relevant to young people. For this reason, I had no hesitation in contacting Fast Forward to see if we could get involved with the Going Forward project.

Deans CHS works with lots of external partners and we were confident that Going Forward would meet the needs of our young people with regard to their personal, social and educational development.

How have the Going Forward sessions integrated with the work that you already deliver?

The programme was full of up-to-date educational content on topics such as smoking, cannabis, drugs (various) and alcohol. Using an informal youth work approach worked really well because it allowed group members to share what they know. The sessions gently challenged some misunderstandings and added to the overall knowledge and awareness of group members.

In terms of my own role in the school the project has helped me to develop relationships with young people. It provided a worthwhile refresher in the subjects discussed (so updating my own knowledge as a worker) and satisfaction that we are meeting young peoples' wider needs. Through delivering a programme that is of genuine interest to them and is applicable to their lives outside of school, I am confident that this group will make more informed choices about their health and wellbeing.

What did you particularly like about the sessions?

The sessions were skilfully put together and facilitated in that they allowed for dialogue, physical movement, flexibility and worked from young peoples' starting point (in relation to behaviour *and* understanding). Through cultivating good relationships and trust with group members, the young people were able to let some of their barriers down and talk about subjects in an authentic way.

Activities were well-paced, informative and fun and the facilitator was able to impart knowledge in a way that was accessible and well received by young people.

From observing the discussions that took place, I think that the young people definitely know significantly more about substance misuse. Armed with this new and improved knowledge, they are more likely to make informed choices in relation to risk taking behaviours.

What sort of impact do you think the sessions have had on the young people that you support?

Harm reduction messages were weaved neatly throughout the weekly discussions and I think the young people are more equipped and able to look after themselves and each other as a result; especially in relation to keeping safe, and being aware of factors that lead to involvement in risky behaviour.

The programme provided them with an increased appreciation of their own actions in relation to risk taking behaviour, and stimulated more empathy and understanding for how individuals can get caught in a negative cycle of drug and alcohol use. Interestingly, some group members showed an aptitude for looking at wider issues, for example, the purpose behind tobacco industry marketing.

Would you recommend Going Forward to another organisation?

Without a doubt. The Going Forward programme got us off to a hugely positive start in terms of opening up an important dialogue with these young people, however I see this being the start of a process that needs to be consistently re-enforced in order to keep them engaged and informed.

Programmes such as this are like gold dust to schools and we definitely hope to work more with Fast Forward in future.

Want to find out more about Going Forward?

To find out more about the Going Forward project, or discuss ways in which Going Forward could work with your organisation to develop and deliver a programme of sessions tailored to the specific needs of the young people that you support, simply e-mail the team, or give us a call:

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