

South Gloucestershire 'Assist' Newsletter - January 2012

DECIPHER IMPACT

Assist arrives in South Gloucestershire...

DECIPHER-ASSIST is now up and running in six secondary schools in South Gloucestershire and is part of a South West initiative to introduce the Assist programme to year 8 students over three years. This is the first Assist newsletter and is aimed at teachers and health professionals working with secondary aged young people. Assist is being managed by Sarah Godsell, supported by the following South Gloucestershire Council and NHS staff; Amanda Davies, Amanda Preddy, Elaine Fiander, Emmanuelle Claverie, Jean Powell, Justin Boulton and Nic Driver.

Background information...

Assist is a social marketing approach to deliver a health promotion intervention in schools. The focus is very much on the positive effects of peer influence (as opposed to the negative effects of peer group pressure).

Research has shown that smoking amongst young people is a group activity and that one of the best predictors of a young person taking up smoking is the smoking behaviour of their peers. The programme encourages new norms of smoking behaviour by training influential Year 8 students to work as 'peer supporters'.

The training...

Last January Amanda Preddy and Sarah Godsell attended the Assist Train the Trainers course in Taunton. This took place over three very long, hardworking and enjoyable days with 22 other participants from across the South West region. Sarah and Amanda completed the course successfully and qualified as Assist Trainers for South Gloucestershire.

It was decided to organise a local Train the Trainers event to create a small bank of trainers to support the programme in South Gloucestershire and the seven people taking part completed the course successfully. Most of the trainers are doing this work in their contracted time in agreement with their manager; a small number are being bought in on an hourly basis. It is also possible to work with neighbouring local authorities and 'share' trainers. This is more cost effective and also a way to share expertise and assure the quality of the training. *For information about becoming an Assist trainer please call Sarah Godsell 01454 868380*

The programme...

The Assist programme runs for about 14—16 weeks and has four stages. Stage one is peer nomination and is a 30 minute session with all year 8 students. Ideally this is organised as part of a year 8 assembly. Stage two is the peer recruitment session when we meet with approximately 18% of the year group as nominated by their peers, tell them all about the programme and ask them to sign up to become Assist peer supporters. Stage three is a two day, off school site, peer supporter training event—great fun and very, very tiring! Stage four is a series of 4 follow up sessions, ideally in tutor or PSHE time, each lasting from anywhere between 30—60 minutes with roughly a two week interval between each session. The school are asked to provide a member of staff at each stage and cover costs are paid to the school.

The pilot...

Hanham High School kindly offered to act as a pilot school for the programme and a meeting was arranged with Jo Postlethwaite just before the February half term 2011 to agree dates and go through the different stages of the programme. Amanda and Sarah requested the help of a Bristol colleague to join them as the training team for the pilot.

Stage 1.

The students gathered in the hall and were asked them to fill in a peer questionnaire. The questionnaires were analysed and the results identified the most influential young people in the year group.

Stage 2.

The group of influential students, as identified by the nomination process met with the trainers who explained the programme to them; that it is about learning to be a peer supporter with the aim of reducing the take up of smoking within year 8 at their school. A few students were concerned that they would not be able to stop pupils smoking and it was clarified that that was not the aim; that they were not expected to infiltrate smoking groups and get other students to give up. A sigh of relief was heard!

Stage 3.

On 30th and 31st March 2011 the students were bussed to Fry's Conference Centre for the peer supporter training. The two days training is an off school site event and the students are accompanied by a member of staff.



Stage 3 continued...

The two days are organised to include a number of activities that enrich knowledge and understanding of the harms of tobacco and the benefits of remaining smoke-free.

There are also a variety of games and challenges that help to develop effective communication skills.

Here are some of the students' comments, when asked what their main achievement during the course was:

"Learning, and remembering all the facts", "Getting the confidence to speak to different people", "Learning the effects of smoking and how much it could harm you", "team work", "Working with people I've never worked with", "Working well in a team for role play", "Learning more skills to prevent people from smoking".



There is an activity on day one that stands out as a 'penny dropping' moment.

"Ready, Steady, Cook" is a practical activity, involving two volunteers who follow a recipe that, unbeknown to them, includes some of the ingredients that are in a cigarette. It is an extremely effective activity and alerts the students to the ruthless tactics of the tobacco industry in the making and marketing of their products. It is one of the most enjoyed learning activities of the two days.

Stage 4.

This proved one of the hardest parts of the pilot. The four follow-up sessions need to be as effective and as positive as possible and aim to sustain the involvement of the peer supporters as well as provide them with more useful facts. It was soon apparent that each session needed to take place during a part of the school day that did not take students out of lessons. In the pilot, students repeatedly said they resented missing classes to attend the follow-up sessions, although that did depend on what the subject was as some students didn't mind at all!

Some students were very committed to the programme; they attended all the follow-up sessions and brought their diaries in which they had recorded different conversations about smoking that they had had with other year 8s at their school. Other students found it very hard to be a peer supporter and therefore did not get as much out of the follow-up sessions.

What the peer supporters said!

"I'm more able to contribute ideas."

"I feel more confident."



"I understand and care more about other people."

"I've got more knowledge about smoking and health."

"I learned to listen to others."

A great deal was learnt from running the pilot and thanks go to the staff and students at Hanham High for taking part in it. With lessons learnt the programme is now being rolled out with the following schools:

Patchway Community College, October—Dec 2010

Bradley Stoke Community School, November—January 2011

Chipping Sodbury School, January—March 2011

Marlwood School, January—March 2011

Brimsham Green School, February—April 2011

Sir Bernard Lovell School, February—April 2011

By July a total of 1233 year 8s will have been involved in the Assist programme in the first year, with 217 students trained as peer supporters.

It's the intention to fund this programme for all secondary schools in South Gloucestershire. A second letter inviting the remaining schools to take part will be sent into schools in the Spring 2012. For more information or to discuss how this could run in your school please call **01454 868380**