



Bridge to Opportunity

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MEDIA RELEASE

Subject: MURRAY BRIDGE COMMUNITY WORKS CLOSELY WITH PLANET YOUTH PROGRAM

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Murray Bridge SAFE Local Drug Action Team, community leaders and representatives came together on 1 March 2022 to understand local concerns and plan activities to prevent alcohol and other drug harm among young people, as identified by new surveys conducted late last year in local schools.

Murray Bridge is one of four South Australian sites for the Planet Youth pilot project and one of seven in Australia. The program commenced in late 2019 with a survey, exploring behaviours and attitudes of local school students towards drug and alcohol use and their engagement and connection with their families and broader community.

The surveys are a key plank of the Planet Youth Model – an internationally renowned, evidence-based approach to reducing alcohol and other drug use among young people, which is being piloted in Australia by the Alcohol and Drug Foundation, through its Local Drug Action Team program.

Undertaken by local year 10 students, the findings were analysed by the Planet Youth team and presented via a virtual webinar workshop, providing attendees with an understanding of the experiences of young people in Murray Bridge in relation to alcohol and other drugs, as well as opportunities for action.

Since the introduction of Planet Youth in Iceland in 1998, youth alcohol and other drug use rates have transformed from some of the highest in Europe, to among the lowest. The Model has also been picked up by more than 30 countries around the world.

Planet Youth shows that long-term investment in community-led prevention leads to significant reductions in alcohol and other drug use, says ADF CEO Dr Erin Lalor.

“Prevention is an important part of a comprehensive harm reduction approach to minimise the impact of alcohol and other drugs, particularly among young people,” said Dr Lalor.

“Our aim in implementing an Australian version of Planet Youth is to prevent alcohol and other drug harms from occurring, by working with communities to boost known protective factors, such as increasing young people and parent interaction and access to out of school activities.”

During the online workshop, the ADF used the local findings to guide discussion and support participants to set the direction for future alcohol and other drug harm prevention activities.

Interesting observations made from the 2021 Planet Youth Survey included the data surrounding COVID-19 and the impact on young people's mental health with 49% of our young people indicating that they were experiencing a bit worse or a lot worse mental health. Covid has had a major impact on the socialisation aspect of life for both young people and their families.

“We know that lack of connectedness and loneliness are key factors in a deterioration in mental health. This is particularly noticeable for young people, for whom their peer connections are increasingly important in their lives and development” says Suzanne Fuzzard from headspace Murray Bridge.

Other important conversations to come from the data, that demonstrated a high level of parental permissiveness around drinking at home for young people, is the normalisation of alcohol use at a young age among Murraylands' teenagers. As a community, encouraging conversations that challenge the idea and culture that sees drinking as the norm for young people will be needed by us all.

An opportunity identified from the data and due to COVID is the idea of supporting the re-emergence of young people and their families after the effects of COVID. There has been reluctance in community engagement noticeably since that start of the pandemic. Focusing on this would help to rebuild the community, encouraging healthier attitudes towards alcohol and other drugs as the environment for a young person is critical to their success.

Key actions for the future will include small face to face workshops with service providers, community people and other key stakeholders to work through the data and look at which domains they see as crucial to be a focus by the LDAT within our next Community Action Plan.

Mayor Brenton Lewis who attended the forum said “I was impressed with the amount of data and analysis of the statistics unfortunately mostly trending the wrong way. One needs to ask what effect COVID has had on lifestyles and subsequently the statistics?

Two areas I was concerned about were the reported increase in mental health concerns by the participants and it looks like parental tolerance of poor habits is increasing.

There was a very low participation rate in sports as well.

Luckily through the program at least we have knowledge of our trends with youth that need addressing, it is up to us as a community to engage and address the identified issues."

According to Dr Lalor, addressing obstacles and instilling new behaviours among young people and their adult influencers typically requires a concerted, ongoing approach.

"Achieving a solid change cycle can take several years of sustained effort and COVID-19's impact over the last two years cannot be underestimated," she advised.

"What is important is continuing to track trends and to use those trends to guide community action - which is exactly what the Murray Bridge SAFE Local Drug Action Team and workshop participants in Murray Bridge are doing."

Through the existing LDAT Program, the ADF is trialling an Australian version of Planet Youth, which is funded by Wellbeing SA, Government of South Australia.

Managed by the ADF, the LDAT Program is part of the Australian Government's investment of more than \$450 million over six years under the National Ice Action Strategy to help reduce and prevent alcohol and drug harms, including the use of crystal methamphetamine.

For more information about Planet Youth and the Local Drug Action Team program, visit: <https://community.adf.org.au>.

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For interviews and media enquiries, please call the Alcohol and Drug Foundation's media team on 0430 948 380 or email media@adf.org.au.

For questions relating locally or if you would like to join the Murray Bridge Local Drug Action Team, please contact Samara on 0417 761 119

About the Alcohol and Drug Foundation: Celebrating over 60 years of service to the community, the Alcohol and Drug Foundation is one of Australia's leading organisations committed to preventing and minimising alcohol and other drug harms in communities around the nation. The Foundation reaches millions of Australians through sporting clubs, community organisations, health care settings and schools, providing educational information, drug and alcohol prevention programs and advocating for lives unlimited by alcohol and drug harm.