

## Keeping up the NSP Hum



Marketing and promotion of NSP was nominated by delegates as a priority area for action at the National Meeting of NSP Workers held in Melbourne in 2002. From the local community level to wider state, territory and national contexts, promoting the public benefits of NSP and the work that they do helps to maintain a supportive environment that ensures the continued viability of NSP. But how is this achieved?

Petra Fisher, hepatitis C educator and NSP project officer at the Northern Territory AIDS Council tells a story about a really nice guy, with a good job. He went to the gym three times a week. One day someone offered him some steroids. Being an adventurous kind of bloke, he decided to give it a try. This was in 1995, so he had heard about not sharing needles, and he and his mate each had their own syringe. One drew up and then the other, and since there was some left, they each did it again from the same vial.

'Of course, the one who dipped first got some blood into the mix and he was HIV positive,' said Petra. 'Neither of them knew because supposedly only gay men and injecting drug users get HIV, and they had shown no symptoms. After that first experience with steroids, the guy decided that he didn't really like it so he stayed clear of it. Meanwhile he married a lovely girl and they had a child. And so now we have this young man with a beautiful girl and a baby and all three of them are HIV positive.'

This scenario really hits home that HIV affects the whole community, and that the NSP - through the provision of equipment and safe injecting information - aims to protect the whole community.

During 2001/2002, Petra spent considerable time and effort conducting community

education and consultations prior to the establishment of an NSP outlet in the Palmerston area just outside of Darwin. The objective was to try to shift people's thinking to focus on HIV, hepatitis C and hepatitis B as public health issues, instead of the illegality of injecting drug use. Petra approached members of the local shire council, and other organisations such as school councils, churches and rotary clubs.

'It was mainly to get the message across about what NSP is all about and what it does for the community,' she explained. 'I knew that the Palmerston community

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wasn't going to want an NSP, so I thought if I can get any of the local Councillors on side and they can address it, then it would come across a lot better than if it was just coming from me.'

It was a long process which involved lots of talking: to the users' forum, the police, and the health department about different models (fixed site, mobile, foot patrol) and the pros and cons of each. But her efforts paid off. In August 2002, the Palmerston NSP was established and began operations.



Anex End of Year Party 2002

Promotion of NSP occurs across the country in many different guises. There are the 'syringe litter crews' - the NSP outlets that conduct daily clean ups of syringe litter in their local communities. And the 'foot patrol pairs' - outreach workers with backpacks filled with injecting equipment and information - who walk the beat in specified areas. While doing their rounds, staff sometimes stop to chat with traders and other local community members, and tell them about the work that they do.

Then there are the 'festival stall holders' - NSP outlets that have a presence at local

festivals and fairs. People almost always stop to stare and - sometimes - to talk to staff on duty. They are drawn by the bright yellow disposal containers, and the brightly coloured pamphlets and brochures creatively arranged on trestle tables and display boards. The intriguing packets of sterile injecting equipment on display invariably play a part in drawing the public's attention.

There are also the 'collaborators' - a group of NSP workers who have good

working relationships with workers from other organisations. They can pick up the telephone and 'fast track' the referral process for service users.

Then there are the 'earnest educators' with their bags of Powerpoint tools, who present at schools, universities, conferences, in-service training and information nights for local groups.

And finally, the 'powerhouse hobnobbers' - NSP managers and co-ordinators scattered across Australia who network, advocate and lobby within the corridors of power with local government, police, policy makers, and public health officials.

But among all of these are the 'little moments' that make up the building blocks for NSP promotion: the story that is told in the staff room between colleagues in a health centre, a tidbit of information that is shared about injecting drug use and role modelling of open, non-judgemental behaviour towards people who inject.

## Welcome to Anex Bulletin!

We are grateful for the opportunity to be able to bring this publication to you and hope that it will continue to be interesting and relevant.

With over 850 outlets in Australia, the Needle and Syringe Program is an extensive infrastructure for the provision of health and referral services to people who inject drugs. We would like to thank the NSP workforce for their dedication, commitment and passion in making NSP one of the most successful public health initiatives in the world.

### 4 the ins and outs of safe disposal

Most used needles and syringes are discarded appropriately most of the time. Infrequently and on occasion, they are not. Of these occasional instances, some are left in public places and potentially cause great concern to public health officials, local government, NSP, service users and the community. There is the concern and then there are the strategies that make a difference.

### 4 NSP innovations rollout

\$30.5 million was allocated by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) as part of the Illicit Drug Diversion Package - Supporting Measures relating to NSP. The extra funding has made it possible for NSP to meet both old and new challenges. South Australia, Northern Territory and National projects.

### 6 the methamphetamine market in australia

As heroin becomes more difficult to obtain, research and feedback from workers in the field suggest that many people are using methamphetamines. Known by various names on the street (speed, ice, whiz, shabu) methamphetamine use presents its own brand of challenges for NSP workers.