

7. HEALTH OUTCOMES

The sponsorship objectives of the Department of Health and Ageing are to reduce the prevalence of smoking, drinking and other drug use in the community and to promote healthy lifestyles by increasing levels of awareness of the benefits of not smoking, not drinking excessively and not using other drugs, and increasing levels of awareness that a healthy lifestyle requires positive choices and personal decisions. There are clearly limitations on the ability of an annual event to significantly influence behaviour with regards to alcohol and other drug use, given that a wide range of social, economic and environmental factors have an impact on alcohol and other drug use. As well, changes in behaviour and identifying cause and effect relationships are difficult to measure. Therefore, this section on health outcomes addresses the objectives of raising awareness and influencing attitudes and intentions with regard to healthy lifestyles and alcohol, tobacco and other drugs use, as well as providing an overview of the health expo based on observational research and feedback from students, activity supervisors, and teachers.

Overall, as in previous research, it was clearly acknowledged that the Croc Festivals™ are one of many health education platforms that students are exposed to. The benefits of the health activities were that children would *“remember things without knowing they are remembering”* through the relevant health messages relating to drugs and alcohol, and healthy living messages through nutrition and fitness (sports activities). These messages were seen to be effective as they are communicated outside of the classroom, by someone other than a teacher and not delivered as a lecture. This helps students to be more receptive to these messages as they are delivered in a positive and different way. The fun and interactive environment of the Croc Festival™ itself was viewed to be positive and to encourage students to engage more readily with these messages.

7.1 OBSERVATION RESEARCH

The health expo at the Festival, in-line with the Department’s objectives, is designed to increase students’ awareness of health-related issues and services available. Each of the health expos had representatives from Drug and Alcohol services that spoke to students about the harmful effects of alcohol, cigarettes and (where appropriate) other drugs. There were also a range of other organisations included in the health expo that focused on healthy living, such as nutrition and hygiene. In addition to this, the Festival itself is an alcohol and cigarette-free event, and many of the other activities (such as sports and dance) also promote healthy lifestyle messages.

Analysis of the Croc Festival™ schedules found that around 650 students in Alice Springs visited the health expo (approximately 34% of students), 700 visited the expo in Moree (approximately 26% of students), and 820 visited the expo in Port Augusta (approximately 29% of students). Care should be taken with these figures as they are based on the schedule, rather than actual attendance at the time, so do not account for

changes during the Festival. However, they do indicate that a significant number of students are not being exposed to the health messages directly through the health expo. These results also show that there was a higher likelihood of students at the Alice Springs Festival visiting the health exhibition due to the presence of fewer students and less activities at the Festival. It could be argued that as the Festivals get bigger, as in the cases of Moree and Port Augusta, fewer students are exposed to the health expo.

All of the activities that were part of the health expo aimed to educate students about health issues and promote healthy lifestyles. This was achieved through practical, hands on activities designed to engage and inform students. The following examples are the result of the in-Festival observation research of the health expo.

Pika Wiya Health Service used a theme for the health expo at the Port Augusta Croc Festival™ of “Get Your Body into Gear” and used various parts of a car or car-related symbols to represent different parts of the body, for example headlights were eyes, tyres were feet etc. This was seen as an excellent way of using an interesting theme and props to engage students and help explain concepts in a simple way. For example, mental health was explained through comparing the messages in your brain to those of traffic lights. The facilitator used the prop of traffic lights and explained that just as a car depends on the correct signals from traffic lights in order to drive safely, your body requires the right messages from your brain in order to function properly. This was an effective way to introduce students to an adult topic in a simplistic and interesting way. The theme of “Get Your Body Into Gear” was also used at the health expo at the Alice Springs Croc Festival.

In Moree, there was no consistent theme throughout the expo, although the activities were linked by a stamp collecting exercise. Students had to collect stamps from at least ten activities, and when they had collected all of these they could select a prize. This appeared to work well, it encouraged students to visit and engage with a range of activities.

A number of teachers commented on the successful way the health expos demonstrated practical examples of healthy living through interactive activities. As part of the dentistry display students were invited to place a liquid on their teeth that showed where plaque was on their teeth. Facilitators then spoke to the students about where plaque gathers most frequently, oral hygiene and brushing their teeth. This activity engaged students by capturing their attention with interactive and practical activities that informed them of how to avoid tooth decay.

In the ear care workshop, students were able to view what the inside of their ear looked like through the use of a microscope. This was often something that students had never seen before and they were engaged while the facilitator explained the parts of the ear (ear drum, ear wax) and the importance of keeping ears healthy for hearing. This message was delivered interactively as students volunteered to see the inside of

their ear under the microscope, and through an exercise where students had to blow their nose, which was linked to keeping ears clear and healthy.

Similarly, students attended an eye care workshop where their eyes were tested. The workshop was sponsored by OPSM and the facilitators were trained optometrists who were able to provide glasses to those students who required them at no cost. Anecdotally, it has been reported that some Indigenous students from remote communities abandon the use of their glasses due to teasing from others. However, IFA recognised this and on the performance night at the Alice Springs Festival Kyle van der Kuyp, who was the guest MC, told the audience that he wears glasses and how important they are to him to enable clear vision.

A number of health support services and organisations were present at the health expo to raise awareness of their organisation. For example the HEP C Council of S.A. had a stall at the health expo in Port Augusta to raise awareness about HEP C. As the students were often too young to be able to understand the disease or how it is transmitted the facilitators gave students fake tattoos with the HEP C Council of S.A. logo on the tattoo. The facilitator of this station said that it would help students to recognise their service if they ever needed the support of their organisation.

The sexual health station in Port Augusta and Moree had a similar form of information delivery as facilitators did not attempt to engage each student that passed through (as often they were too young), but rather they clearly displayed pamphlets and information was on display. Facilitators would speak one-on-one to students who required further information. This form of delivery is necessary when dealing with such sensitive health areas and is also an effective way for organisations to raise their profile with young people in the community should they need to use their services in the future.

Students spoke positively about the health expo and most said it was interesting and that they learnt from it. As well, the health expo provides examples of how the Croc Festival™ can enhance social capital in two ways. Firstly, it is opening up students to *“networks of social relations that serve the purpose of enabling groups and individuals access to a pool of resources and supports^{iv}”* that are conducive to healthy living and positive life choices. The research showed that this has already lead to positive developments such as students feeling less awkward about approaching health care professionals at Pika Wiya health service in Port Augusta and some students doing work experience and placements with this health service. In Moree a facilitator at the sexual health stall commented that numerous teachers approached the station for information about their service and this has already lead to the organisation visiting two schools outside of Moree. Secondly, the research in all locations found that many of the activity supervisors have developed and enhanced their networks as a result of their involvement, and have benefited from these networks.

7.2 AWARENESS

The Department of Health and Ageing has a range of sponsorship objectives with regards to increasing awareness. These include:

- To promote awareness of the sponsorship theme ‘Respect Yourself, Respect Your Culture’ and the tagline ‘Croc Festivals are a 100% Alcohol and Smoke-free celebration’;
- To increase awareness that a healthy and enjoyable lifestyle requires positive choices and personal decisions;
- To promote awareness of negative health consequences of smoking, excessive drinking and other drug use;
- To promote awareness of the benefits of not smoking, not drinking excessively and not using other drugs; and
- To increase awareness of the connection between choices, consequences and being in control.

These objectives are addressed through the Croc Festival™ by creating an opportunity to deliver drug prevention and education messages and by promoting healthy lifestyles. This section looks at levels of awareness (qualitatively) based on the in-Festival and post-Festival research.

The research showed the Festival clearly promotes awareness and education across a range of health areas such as nutrition, mental health, sexual health, hygiene, fitness and alcohol, cigarettes and other drugs. The Festival also promotes awareness about local organisations and health services available to young people, enhancing their capacity to access support if needed. These health-based activities aim to equip students with the information and tools necessary to make positive life choices.

Students and teachers were asked to give their feedback on the health-related activities in order to gauge whether the main health messages were being heard. In the post-Festival and in-Festival research many students made reference to the health expo activities in relation to drugs (including alcohol and cigarettes), nutrition, healthy living, and general and dental hygiene. These were both prompted and unprompted responses. Students responded positively to healthy living messages when asked why it is important to be healthy:

“Because you can get unfit and then can’t do as much stuff.”

“You don’t need drugs and alcohol to have fun, respect yourself and your culture.”

“To look after yourself and keep your body healthy.”

As previously mentioned, the health-related activities of the Croc Festival™ were seen as effective as they enabled both students and teachers to gather information from the health expo, as they learn in a new, fun and interactive way. The environment of the Festival was seen to encourage engagement with health activities and messages as these workshops are unlike classroom learning and not delivered in an

authoritative way. Teachers in particular believed that students' awareness of a range of health issues and organisations was markedly increased.

“The Festival is definitely a good way to inform students about health messages because if they have problems or issues they might not go to the health centre, whereas here they can approach information as a whole group and take information home.”

“It’s a good way to inform kids because they are enthusiastic at the Festival and are therefore a captive audience.”

In the post-Festival research recall of the health expo was encouraging with responses noting a range of different activities such as receiving healthy food and wearing ‘beer goggles’ as part of the drug and alcohol exhibition. Students also recalled the dental and general hygiene activities where a liquid was applied to the teeth and hands that enabled plaque and germs to be identified under a special light.

It is also worth noting that there appeared to be very high levels of awareness of the ‘Respect Yourself, Respect Your Culture’ message among students, and this resonated very strongly with many of the students we spoke to. Students and teachers also spoke positively about the fact that the Festival is alcohol and smoke-free.

The Department of Health and Ageing is interested in promoting awareness of the negative consequences of smoking, drinking alcohol and other drug use, and conversely, promoting awareness of the positive benefits of not engaging in these activities. The research with students suggests that these messages are being delivered effectively to students. The following quotes demonstrate this:

“I know that they’re bad – even a little bit is bad, so you shouldn’t think that you can have some and it won’t hurt you.”

“Don’t do it, it really can damage you....smoking affects feet, ‘cause your cuts won’t heal.”

“I know about liver damage (from alcohol) and damaging lungs when smoke.”

“Given direction on which way to go, instead of making bad choices.”

Significantly, several students also spoke about the importance of making positive choices, and although this was identified less often than more general messages about the negative health consequences of alcohol and other drugs, it does indicate that for some students messages about taking control are being delivered effectively.

“I’m not going to do any of that stuff anyway – it’s good that Croc Festival™ is 100% alcohol and smoke-free.”

“I know what can happen inside of me. I wouldn’t go and get addicted to anything.”

Overall, the results suggest that many students who participate in the Croc Festivals™ receive messages about the positive benefits of a healthy lifestyle, and the negative consequences of using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Research conducted over the last three years suggests the awareness objectives of the Department of Health and Ageing are being met, but it is difficult to assess the extent to which the behavioural objectives are being achieved. It is also important to acknowledge the limitations of an annual event to influence long-term behavioural outcomes.