The Core of Life Program—Tasmania’s Indigenous Early Childhood Development Strategy Partnership

Christine Goonan¹, Ann Sweeney²

¹Youth & Family Education Resources Pty Ltd, ²Pulse Youth Health Centre, Tas

Core of Life (COL) program is now a national unique culturally inclusive life-education program designed for youth, focusing on the realities of pregnancy, birth, infant feeding and early parenting. Interwoven throughout the program is the exploration of strategies to support the ongoing strengthening of family relationships within local communities, and in 2012, YFER embarked on a partnership with Tasmania’s Population Health as part of the ‘Closing the Gap’ National Partnership Agreements Indigenous Early Childhood Development Strategy for activities throughout communities in Tasmania, Australia.

Tasmania has one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in Australia, second only to the Northern Territory. The Tasmanian rate of births for 15–19 year olds is 27.1 births per 1000, significantly higher than the national average of 16.1. Additionally, communities in southern Tasmania such as Derwent Valley, Brighton and Glenorchy, are recording rates significantly higher than the Tasmanian average. The proportion of students who had experienced sexual intercourse has increased between 2002 and 2008 surveys of Australian secondary students. In 2002, 35% of students reported having sexual intercourse, with this proportion increasing to 40% in 2008. The COL program is targeted at young people at a stage when they understand the relationship between actual and possible events and may be experiencing their first sexual encounter.

COL is a targeted early-intervention program aimed at youth in grades 9–10, involving both male and females, and is part of a multifaceted approach that has been integrated with local service provision, and involved other key players currently addressing teenage pregnancy in Tasmania.

This presentation will explore the role out of the COL training program to over 60 Tasmanians working with youth and the flow-on provision of youth education sessions to male and female youth all throughout communities of Tasmania. The strengths of the program will be explored, including the Indigenous components of the program and also the advantages of having funded a local central ‘champion’ at the regional level via a COL Coordinator role for ongoing mentoring and support.

Photographic imagery will be included in this presentation to enable participants to view the rich experiences the youth and local facilitators explore and share together in promoting healthy, strong and respectful relationships while aiming to support the decrease of teenage pregnancy amongst youth in Tasmania.