Make a mark: using art to educate youth about problem gambling

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This paper will outline the process taken to develop, implement and evaluate a project for young people using art as a medium to address the social determinants of problem gambling. Data will be presented to demonstrate emerging statistics that warranted this project: the successful outcomes; the evidence that highlights how resilience against problem gambling by young people can be built into school curricula; and how the arts can effectively be used as a tool for engaging, mentoring and educating young people about decisions that affect their health.

Bendigo Loddon Primary Care Partnership implemented an upstream integrated health promotion project in 2012 that addressed the social determinants of problem gambling—specifically the development of protective factors such as financial education, social connectedness and community engagement. The Bendigo Loddon Primary Care Partnership is a system of autonomous health and community service organisations and local governments in Greater Bendigo and Loddon, Victoria. This partnership of organisations came together in 2000 to improve the health and wellbeing of people in the area by working with one another, supported with funding and a policy framework of the Victorian Government. Our partnership covers a broad landscape of 9700 square kilometres of rural and regional Victoria. Our service system provides services to over 108 000 people within our catchment.

The project, funded by the Department of Justice, was in response to emerging evidence that young people, particularly young males, are engaging in internet gambling, with evidence stating that this can lead to problem gambling. Problem gambling affects individuals, families and the community. From relationship breakdown and financial crisis, to individual anger, anxiety and depression, the effects of problem gambling are vast and varied.

The project was a cross-curriculum approach, to educate students about the effects of problem gambling. It also aimed to enhance their social connectedness using the arts as a medium to provide an alternative to unhealthy financial activities and opportunities to think creatively. Participants were mentored, not only by a professional artist experienced working with young people, but also by a Gambler’s Help community educator, the class teacher, and mentors from a local youth group. The culminating outcome was an exhibition of the participant’s artwork—a reflection of their journey—displayed in a prominent position within the Bendigo Bank Central bank foyer, coinciding with Responsible Gambling Awareness Week in Victoria from 14–21 May 2012.

Results from participant surveys highlighted an increase in participants’ confidence in their ability to think creatively and to manage their money. Young people indicated they knew what to do if they or someone else was affected by problem gambling and felt more assured about making a positive mark on life. Further to the surveys, qualitative data collected from the participants indicated that this project had made a significant difference to their life.
To highlight the success of this project and commitment to this approach, the Bendigo Loddon PCP is creating a Resource Kit during 2012–13, which packages the project to enable transferability to other communities. Professional education will also be offered with this kit.