

# **THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY & CULTURE IN WORKING WITH YOUTH OF GREEK BACKGROUND**

**PROJECT: ILLICIT DRUG PREVENTION & EARLY  
INTERVENTION PROGRAM  
GREEK WELFARE CENTRE  
FUNDED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND  
AGEING**

**Maria Petrohilos  
Pettie Filladites  
Jim Giann**

# OVERVIEW

- PROFILE OF THE GREEK COMMUNITY
- MIGRATION HISTORY
- ROLE OF THE FAMILY
- ILLICIT DRUG PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION PROJECT- two key areas:
  - ATTITUDES TO DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE
  - SEEKING INFORMATION / SUPPORT



# PROFILE OF THE GREEK SPEAKING COMMUNITY IN N.S.W

- There are 109 988 people born in Greece in Australia and 252 226 Greek speakers.
- The Greek community in N.S.W. also includes people born in Australia from a Greek speaking background. There is a sizeable second and subsequent generation with 40% born in Australia
- Members of the Greek community are predominantly Greek Orthodox as shown in the 2006 ABS, indicating that 95% of Australian residents born in Greece are Greek Orthodox.



# MIGRATION ISSUES

- Process of leaving country of origin and associated losses
- 'XENITIA' 'Life in a foreign land'(Kanarakis, 1987)
- Connotations of bitterness, grief and enforced separation
- Longing for homeland and loved ones



# ROLE OF THE FAMILY

- In the Greek culture, the family is seen as the most important and valuable institution, and devotion to the family lies at its core. The family is thought of as being one whole unit- where the welfare of one person is the concern of all members.
- Family values and needs have precedence over individual needs.
- The family not only shares identity and name but also material assets, achievements/failures, decision making and is responsible for the care of the family.
- Dependence on the family is not only seen as desirable but is a culturally entrenched expectation.



# PROJECT BACKGROUND

- The Greek Welfare Centre is the Sydney based welfare and community services arm of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia and has been providing services to the Greek community since 1975.
- In 2007, the Greek Welfare Centre received funding from the Department of Health and Ageing to develop a programme for youth of Greek background aged between 14 – 25 years, and targeting the following geographic areas: St George, Marrickville, Newtown, Canterbury /Bankstown, Parramatta and Eastern Sydney.



# PROJECT OUTLINE

## PHASE 1

- Consultations with Service providers (including Greek GP's, Greek health/welfare workers and Greek Orthodox priests) to gauge the role of culture from their experience with youth of Greek background.
- Due to time restraints I will briefly refer to these.

## PHASE 2

- Consultations with youth of Greek background to develop an understanding of their attitudes towards drug and alcohol use and where they access information and support.
- Education and skills development sessions for youth of Greek background.



# FINDINGS FROM CONSULTATIONS

## **PHASE 1: The following were consulted**

- 12 Drug and Alcohol services
- 6 Greek speaking GP's
- 2 Greek Mental Health workers
- 12 Greek Welfare Centre staff
- 11 Greek Orthodox priests



# FINDINGS FROM CONSULTATIONS

## **In brief, the findings were:**

- 1. Greek youth were not a significant number in their current client groups (1-2%) not necessarily current.
- 2. Experience with youth of Greek background was similar with the mainstream.
- 3. Greek families were identified (in small numbers) as being more strict, having greater expectations, particularly for success. For some this was seen as a protective factor. Others thought it might lead to drug/alcohol use.



## PHASE 2:

(A) Students from two Greek Orthodox Colleges (All Saints Grammar, St Spyridon) were consulted:

- Two focus groups (15 students in each)
- Surveys (289) – 6 questions asked
- Age range 14-18 years
- Approximately equal numbers of males and females

- (B) Surveys 18-25 years (38 completed)
- Posted on-line via Greek City website
- 'O' week Sydney University
- Other social networks



## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS (A):

- **ONLY ONE PERSON RESPONDED WITH 'TO HAVE A GOOD TIME'**
- Other responses included illegal, naming particular drugs, addiction
- A significant proportion (33%) responded with dangerous/ dumb/death



# QUESTION 1. WHAT COMES TO MIND WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORDS ILLICIT DRUGS?

- **ONLY ONE PERSON RESPONDED WITH 'TO HAVE A GOOD TIME'**
- Other responses included illegal, naming particular drugs, addiction
- A significant proportion (33%) responded with dangerous/ dumb/death



## QUESTION 2. WHAT MAKES A PERSON CHOSE TO TRY DRUGS?

- - Peer pressure (41%)
- - Curiosity (20%)
- - Stress management (17%)
- - To feel good (5%)



# QUESTIONS: WHAT INFLUENCES A YOUNG PERSON FROM A GREEK BACKGROUND TO CHOOSE NOT TO USE DRUGS AND /OR ALCOHOL?

- Family values - 44%
- Religion – 13%
- Seeing negative impact on people affected by drug /alcohol addiction –13%
- Education about drug and alcohol – 10%
- Reputation – 8%
- Culture – 6%
- Friends /role models –6%



QUESTION 1. IF YOU WANTED RELIABLE  
INFORMATION ABOUT DRUGS WHERE  
WOULD YOU GO/ WHO WOULD YOU  
TALK TO?

- Doctor – 33%
- Internet – 16%
- Family – 13%
- Teacher/ school – 12%



# QUESTION 5. WHERE WOULD YOU SEEK HELP?

- Doctor – 24%
- Family/Elder – 31%
- School /counselor/teacher - 19%
- Service youth/ drug and alcohol – 10%
- Greek Welfare Centre – 5%
- Friend- 2%
- Priest 2%
- Don't know 7%



# QUESTION 6. WOULD YOU SEEK HELP FROM THE GREEK COMMUNITY OR OUTSIDE OF THE GREEK COMMUNITY?

- Greek community - 45%
- Non Greek – 28 %
- No Difference – 19%
- Greek doctor/ priest /family – 7%



## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS (B)

- Responses were consistent with younger age group
- Recreational party drugs were identified (7%)



# QUESTION 1. WHAT COMES TO MIND WHEN YOU READ THE WORDS 'ILLCIT DRUGS'?

- Responses were consistent with younger age group
- Recreational party drugs were identified (7%)



## QUESTION 2. IN WHAT, IF ANY, CIRCUMSTANCES DO YOU THINK ITS OKAY TO TAKE DRUGS?

- Never (52%),
- For medical reasons (39%) Maybe just Marijuana to relieve pain
- Smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol is more socially acceptable (5%)
- “I don’t think it is ok but I still do it (one response)



# QUESTION 3. WHY DO YOU THINK PEOPLE TAKE DRUGS?

- Responses consistent with younger age group e.g.
  - Peer pressure (21%)
  - Form of escape (21%)
  - Stress management (20%)
  - To experiment (13%)



# QUESTION 1: IF YOU WANTED RELIABLE INFORMATION ABOUT DRUGS WHERE WOULD YOU GO AND WHO WOULD YOU TALK TO? WHY?

- Internet (23%)
- Doctor (21%)
- Counsellor (10%)
- Drug service e.g. ADF or helpline (5%)
- “Speak to someone that has taken drugs as they have experience” (5%)
- Greek community 19% e.g. Greek Welfare Centre, Greek teacher, priest/parent



QUESTION 5. NAME THREE THINGS THAT YOU THINK WOULD BE EFFECTIVE IN THE PREVENTION OF DRUG AND ALCOHOL ABUSE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE FROM A GREEK BACKGROUND.

- More education on the effects of drugs (36%)
- Greek specific e.g. via Greek schools, social events e.g. plays/ functions, prominent Greek Australians, bilingual information, church (28%)
- More education to parents (18%)
- Guest speakers who have overcome drug addiction (10%)
- Young positive role models/activities (5%)



# ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

- Significant protective factors as identified by the younger (14-18) target group:
  - FAMILY
  - RELIGION
  - REPUTATION
  - CULTURE



# ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

- One in four students would talk to their family or someone at school if they wanted information about drugs. (The school being culturally specific and attached to the church) Doctors also identified by a significant number.



# ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

- Family and culturally specific forums were identified when seeking help:

26% would seek help from family;

19% would seek help from school;

9% from an elder a priest or the Greek Welfare Centre

- 28% preferred to seek help outside the Greek community

- Even a significant proportion of the older age group identified culturally specific avenues to seek information



# ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

- In the older target group, 46% identified Greek specific strategies or family education in prevention.



## CONCLUSION:

- The findings affirmed that family, Greek culture and religion are central in youth of Greek background who attend school at the Orthodox Colleges.
- Family and connection to community appear to be protective factors in drug /alcohol prevention in this target group.
- Family and Greek institutions are sought for support because of importance of culture.
- Cultural influences remain strong in Greek youth despite being born in Australia.



# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SERVICE PROVISION

In providing support to young people, it is important that services:

- provide education and support to family members affected by drug and alcohol abuse
- make linkages with culturally appropriate networks and support services
- develop treatment options that incorporate traditional family and cultural perspectives



# CONTACT DETAILS

Maria Petrohilos

Pettie Filladites

Jim Giann

Greek Welfare Centre

378A King Street Newtown NSW 2042

PH: 02 9516 2188

E: [greekwelfarecentre@bigpond.com](mailto:greekwelfarecentre@bigpond.com)

