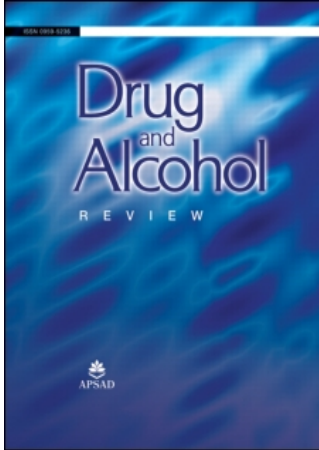


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Keeping them connected—reducing drug-related harm in Australian schools from a Catholic perspective

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Keeping them connected—reducing drug-related harm in Australian schools from a Catholic perspectivePETER NORDEN^{1,2}¹Jesuit Social Services, Melbourne and ²School of Social Sciences and Planning, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

In this Harm Reduction Digest, Father Peter Norden of Jesuit Social Services (Australia) summarises the findings of a report of a consultation into how Catholic schools in Australia address substance use by school students. The report showed that while in the past the ‘zero tolerance’ approach had been the norm, more recently there had been a growing awareness in Catholic schools that it is possible to respond to the needs of drug-using students while being respectful of the duty of care to other students. Moreover, harm reduction was accepted as a serious objective for drug policy and practice in Australian Catholic schools. The paper canvases the key issues that emerged from the consultation and suggests what ‘good practice’ looks like, providing useful guidance for both Catholic and non-Catholic schools alike. For those of us outside the Catholic school system, the paper provides an enlightening read about how substance use can be best addressed within schools.

SIMON LENTON
Editor, Harm Reduction Digest

Introduction

This paper reports on a national study [1] to inform how Australian Catholic secondary schools can best respond to incidents of illicit drug use by students—a difficult and complex issue. Recognising that the use of illicit substances by young people is not uncommon, no school principal these days remains unaware of how such activity can impact on the behaviour, performance and interaction of a student within the school context.

While recent surveys (e.g. [2]) indicate that there is a significant group of young people who have used illicit substances, often such use is situational or experimental and does not represent compulsive or seriously problematic behaviour. Nevertheless, serious addictive behaviour by young Australians usually has its foundations in early teenage years. Therefore, it is important for educational authorities to be able to distinguish and identify such behaviour from an isolated incident that

does not call for an intervention leading to formalised drug treatment.

In earlier years, a ‘zero tolerance’ approach was often seen to be the best response by Catholic secondary schools, in that it sent a clear message to all students and to the wider community that schools must remain a ‘drug free zone’. Students detected in possession of, or using, illicit substances in a school context were transferred to other schools or expelled. However, in more recent times there has been a growing awareness that a more fitting focus for Catholic secondary schools should be how best to respond to the interests of the student concerned, while respecting the duty of care to other students.

For these Catholic secondary schools, foundational Christian principles such as respect for the dignity of every individual, preferential option for the poor and the disadvantaged, willingness to forgive and to seek reconciliation, need to be central to upgrading policies and improving practices in this area. These underlying

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value positions could become important distinguishing characteristics of Catholic independent schools and Catholic systemic schools which would distinguish them from other independent or government high schools in their task of shaping the lives of young Australians through their ministry of education.

Reducing the harm of illicit drug use in schools

The Catholic education system is responsible for over 650 000 primary and secondary students in Australia, representing approximately 20% of all students nationally. Like other Australian school systems, the Catholic education system applies the *National Framework for Protocols for Managing the Possession, Use and/or Distribution of Illicit and other Unsanctioned Drugs in Schools* [3]. The national framework was established consistent with the *National School Drug Education Strategy* [4], setting the goal of no illicit drugs in schools and incorporating three integrated approaches to drug use in schools: (i) supply reduction strategies; (ii) demand reduction strategies designed to prevent the uptake of harmful drug use; and (iii) harm reduction strategies for individuals and communities. These three key elements are central to the *Health Promoting Schools Framework* that has been adopted widely throughout the country. Individual States and Territories have applied this framework in their own particular situations. However, while there is a consistency of approach there is certainly no uniformity.

In 2004, as a result of the Australia-wide consultation with educational personnel in the Catholic education system reported here, it was found that 'harm reduction' was accepted as a serious objective for drug policy and practice in the sector. Moreover, the methodologies adopted generally reflected principles of 'harm minimisation', with the ultimate goal being the reduction of drug misuse. Australia's national drug strategy is also guided by harm minimisation incorporating supply reduction, demand reduction and harm reduction strategies [4].

About the consultation

Rationale

Most Australian Catholic secondary schools have now developed a school drug policy. The rationale for this is straightforward. It is likely that, at some time, drug-related incidents will occur on school premises or involve members of the Catholic school community. A response will be required from the school. A school that has developed a comprehensive drug policy that addresses both prevention and intervention will be well placed to respond to such incidents in a planned and co-ordinated manner.

Focus

The investigation focused upon incidents where students were found to be in possession of, or having used, illicit and unsanctioned substances. This included alcohol, tobacco and non-prescribed medications, as well as illicit substances such as cannabis, amphetamines and ecstasy. Consistent with the pattern of drug use among Australian young people [2], students' excessive use of alcohol is clearly the area of greatest concern for many teachers and parents. There is also considerable and growing concern about the extent of tobacco use by young teenagers and the health implications of this, especially for young female students. Despite this, much of the focus of this investigation was upon the illicit substances. This was primarily because the possession or use of these substances by students raised complex and difficult issues for school administrators and senior staff at Catholic education offices across the country. This was confirmed subsequently by many of the educational staff who were consulted.

This paper attempts to highlight some of the 'good practice' that was found in the Catholic education system in different parts of Australia in the hope that the formulation of this material will be of assistance and guidance for school principals and others, both in the Catholic education sector in Australia and more broadly.

Method

The consultation was conducted on a national basis, including visits and input from all Australian States and Territories. Each Catholic education office arranged a sample of secondary schools in their area for the author to visit during this investigation stage. The schools were not recommended as having encountered difficulties in this area. On the contrary, the schools chosen were ones which the Catholic education office in each State or Territory saw as being representative of the wide range of schools that were responding constructively and positively to this complex area of school management.

In each of the Catholic education offices, consultations were conducted with the Director or with a designated senior staff member with responsibility for the development of policies and guidelines for management of health and safety of students in Catholic schools. In order to maintain consistency, an interview schedule was used to guide the consultations. This is provided in Appendix 1 of the full report of the project [1].

Site visits were made to 19 Catholic secondary colleges in different parts of Australia. The approach taken was to speak with key representatives of the school community, including: (i) interviews with the school principal or deputy principal; (ii) interviews with the school counsellor or welfare co-ordinator; (iii) small

focus group of classroom teachers or form co-ordinators; and (iv) small focus group of senior secondary students.

The nature of the consultation was explained and confidentiality with respect to identifying particular schools or individuals was assured. As with consultations with the education offices, prepared questionnaires were used to guide the interviews (see [1], Appendices 2 and 3).

In addition to the 19 schools visited, the consultant also met with or interviewed 25 secondary principals in Queensland, four principals from the Northern Territory and five deputy principals in Victoria.

Key issues emerging from the consultation

The key issues that emerged from the consultation were identified from the personal interviews conducted by the consultant with staff of the Catholic education offices, school principals and senior staff and student focus groups.

A balanced response

This consultation indicated that the response to illicit drug use by Catholic school students is a matter of importance and sensitivity.

It would appear that while it is important to state clearly that there is no place for the use of illicit drugs in Catholic schools, most respondents indicated that it is no longer possible to adhere to a simple 'zero tolerance' approach to student drug use. A more complex and pastoral response is now required. Generally, students who attend Catholic secondary schools recognise that illicit drugs have no place on the school campus or on any school sanctioned activities. Students, parents and teachers are in agreement that this policy must be upheld.

Reported incidents of illicit drug use by students on school properties or during school organised activities are not common. Senior secondary students generally recognise that there are serious consequences to actions that involve illicit drug use on school properties and on school-sanctioned extracurricular activities. Nevertheless, each year there are instances in many schools when students are identified as breaching these clearly stated policies. Catholic education office staff and Catholic secondary school principals have the challenging task of finding the most appropriate and effective way of responding to these breaches of school policy.

The school's response to such an incident needs to balance a variety of different responsibilities and accountabilities, including those to the:

- individual student and his or her family;
- interests of the wider student population;

- expectations and desires of the parent body;
- requirements of the teaching staff of the college;
- needs of the school council or management structures;
- concerns of the school community, as an organisational entity; and
- perceptions of the wider community in which the school is located.

The consultation suggested that where a school administration has shaped its response to a critical incident largely around only one or two of the above areas of accountability, it would appear that a less than satisfactory outcome was often achieved. The challenge for school principals is to hold in balance each of these different accountabilities. A number of schools around Australia seem to have been able to establish this balance, while dealing satisfactorily with the pastoral needs of the individual students concerned.

Assessing the incident

Central to how a Catholic secondary school might respond to an incident of illicit drug use within the school environment is an assessment of the significance of the incident in relation to patterns of drug use behaviour. In assessing the evidence provided to the consultant, Shafer's model of looking at patterns of drug use and in assessing incidents of student drug use was found to be very helpful [5].

The categories in Shafer's model are defined below.

- *Experimental*: peer influence may be a factor and use often occurs in the company of one or more friends who are also experimenting. Choice is motivated by curiosity or desire to experience new feelings or moods. Use may be once or short-term.
- *Social/recreational*: this pattern describes voluntary drug use on specific social occasions; for example, drinking at a party or at dinner in a social setting. This pattern generally refers to experienced or controlled users who know what drug suits them and in what circumstances, rather than experimenters. If they like the effects, and if the participatory group is congenial, they will use a drug despite legality.
- *Circumstantial/situational*: this pattern is associated with use for specific situations and/or for a set period; for example, a driver using drugs to stay awake on an overnight trip, students drinking coffee during examination periods, a person under acute stress or experience of bereavement.
- *Intensive*: this is similar to the previous category, but borders on dependence. It is often related to an individual's need to achieve relief or to

maintain a high level of performance; for example, drinking alcohol over business lunches, taking large doses of tranquillisers or analgesics to cope or using drugs as a source of meaning, excitement or escape. Major doses are taken daily.

- *Compulsive*: persistent and frequent high doses producing psychological and physiological dependence, where the user cannot discontinue use at will without experiencing significant mental or physical distress. There is also a preoccupation with the need to obtain adequate amounts of the drug.

The consultation confirmed that when an incident of illicit drug use by a student within the school environment is detected, it is important to be able to identify whether the incident represents a single, one-off event, ranging to being part of a compulsive or addictive behaviour pattern. Schools that were able to ascertain whether the possession or use of an illicit substance by a student was experimental or a single stand-alone incident were able to determine a response which fitted the seriousness of the offence. On the other hand, those schools that identified the student's possession or use of an illicit substance as representing a compulsive or addictive form of behaviour needed to be able to assess whether the health needs of the individual student concerned, and the duty of care to other students, were able to be sustained within the school environment in the immediate short term.

Input by school personnel in determining response

The consultation suggested that a change has taken place in many Catholic schools in recent years, in terms of how key members of staff are involved in assessing the incidents and in determining an appropriate response when an incident of possession or use of an illicit substance was identified within the school setting.

Those schools consulted that appeared to implement 'good practice' were those that delayed making an immediate decision with respect to sanctions. Instead, an attempt was made to involve those members of staff who had information or knowledge about the student concerned and their background. This included information about the family that might be relevant to making a more thorough assessment of the incident itself. Such members of staff could include student counsellors, chaplains, home-room co-ordinators, sports coaches or teachers who had personal knowledge and understanding of the student concerned. While a larger number of staff personnel might have been involved in assessing the nature of the incident and its significance for the student concerned, efforts were

made to protect the identity and reputation of the student, their family and others who may be involved.

Sometimes it was appropriate for the student to be suspended for a short period of time while this assessment could be completed. At times this was also seen as required to ensure the health and safety of the student concerned. This immediate suspension was not intended as a disciplinary or punitive sanction, but one that was intended to be supporting the shaping of an effective response to the critical incident.

Student drug use as an indicator of mental health disorder

The consultation pointed to the potential co-morbidity between adolescent substance use problems and other mental health problems. An increasing amount of research evidence and practice knowledge in Australia is concluding that a significant amount of illicit or problematic drug use by young people is one of the clearest indicators of an underlying mental health disorder [6].

Adolescents are one of the groups in the Australian community at greatest risk of mental illness, yet are the most prominent group among those needing mental health services who do not access such treatment services [7]. In many parts of Australia, mental health services designed for the needs of young people are simply not to be found. In addition, young people are extremely reticent in accepting the need for mental health treatment and this reinforces the tendency to find a form of self-medication which attempts to deal with the symptoms, but not the cause, of the illness. For example, serious drug misuse by students still involved in senior secondary studies has been shown, at times, to indicate long-term trauma that has resulted from serious sexual abuse from an early age. If the student's use of illicit substances is interpreted purely as a breach of school discipline, there is a real risk that the school community will be seen to have failed to initiate proper professional responses at a time when the symptoms of such trauma were being communicated very clearly to the school community. Critical incidents of self-harm by either students or even members of staff should always be assessed carefully to determine if they indicate personal trauma or systemic problems within the school community itself.

Communication with police

The consultation found that, without exception, in each jurisdiction visited the Catholic secondary schools had established good communication and a positive working relationship with the local police representatives.

In some jurisdictions, this was initiated by the police school liaison officers who were involved in the school's

broader curriculum, especially in areas of health and safety. In other school situations, the principal or deputy principal had taken the initiative to establish personal working relationships with a senior officer at the local police station.

The decision as to whether the school authorities were required to contact the police in relation to every incident of possession or use of illicit substances by students was affected by differing policies and legislation in each State and Territory. In some jurisdictions, such as Queensland, the police had to be notified if an illicit substance was found on school property. In other jurisdictions, such as Victoria, school authorities could fulfil this requirement without having to pass on identifying details of the students concerned, but were responsible for disposal or the transporting of the substance to the local police station.

Most jurisdictions today do not require the details of the student to be passed on to the local police authorities when the incident is a minor matter. Many State government criminal justice jurisdictions have in place substantial diversionary programmes for minor drug offenders. These programmes discourage the involvement of police representatives in pursuing matters of insignificance, for fear of drawing young people unnecessarily into further contact with the instrumentalities of the criminal justice system when it is not deemed appropriate or required by law.

The question of confidentiality

The issue of confidentiality in relation to student drug use is a difficult and complex one in a secondary school setting. The school has a duty of care for individual students and also for the total student body.

This study was completed in secondary schools where the students' age range was from 12 to 19 years. The duty of care in relation to the question of confidentiality differs for students at the lower end of this age range to those at the higher end. Some State jurisdictions specify what the responsibilities of school authorities are in relation to drug use for children of different ages, in particular those who come under the State jurisdiction of the Children's Court, or diversionary drug programmes that are community-based and avoid court presentation. Issues of confidentiality will also be affected by whether the issue of student drug use has been a matter raised by the student seeking assistance, or whether the drug use is one that is related to school activities or outside of school activities.

Many Catholic secondary schools employ school counsellors or welfare officers. Some have full-time or sessional chaplains as members of staff. The effectiveness of these members of staff in fulfilling their work responsibilities depends upon their capacity to offer a

safe, engaging environment in which the student can seek advice, guidance or help. Their effectiveness often also depends upon their ability to ensure a trusting and open relationship with the school authorities.

Many of the students consulted as part of this research investigation insisted that they would never raise the issue of their illicit drug use with members of school staff for fear of repercussions from the disciplinary arm of the school. Other students reported that they believed that their school was a trusting, engaging environment in which they could seek help or advice readily in this difficult area.

However, given the duty of care of school personnel to the health and safety of the whole student body, there are necessarily limits to the assurance of confidentiality that can be offered in the school setting. It is clearly important that where there is a serious issue affecting the health or welfare of a student the principal needs to be informed, at least on a general level. Consequently, school staff, including teaching staff, need to know when it is appropriate to warn students about the limits of confidentiality when discussing matters of this nature.

School as a nurturing environment

The environment of Catholic secondary schools varies a great deal around the country, in terms of their capacity to provide an engaging and nurturing learning environment for students. Just as this applies to the general level of pastoral care and student counselling that is available, so it also applies to critical incident intervention, such as the protocols and services available following a reported illicit drug use by a student or group of students. This was certainly evident among the more than 20 schools sampled for the consultation described in this paper.

Some schools displayed a capacity to work well with students who possess a strong commitment to high academic performance. However, in such schools students who could not maintain that commitment often left during the middle secondary years to continue their education in another setting. This situation was compounded when the school authorities had to respond to an incident of illicit drug use involving such students.

Other schools communities were composed of students from a broad range of social backgrounds, and were seen to involve students with different capacities and differing learning needs. Such schools did not appear to lack a capacity to foster high academic achievement in their student body. These schools often demonstrated a greater capacity to implement a more inclusive student pastoral care programme that could cope with a greater degree of non-conformity. They were seen to have a high capacity to work through

complex situations with students, and help them to find appropriate solutions to conflict situations.

While the predominant goal of the school environment is to provide a setting for educational achievement, it is also perhaps the only nurturing environment which many students will ever experience. Those who have that environment available at home are fortunate, but it is increasingly beyond the capacity of many parents to provide this during the unsettled years of adolescence.

Schools that presented positively in this area were ones that set very clear boundaries of what was expected and encouraged, in terms of student behaviour and performance, but were able to move with a degree of flexibility and continuing engagement, even when at times these standards were not achieved. This applied especially when the school was dealing with students with special needs.

The practice of transferring students to other schools

During the 1990s, it appears to have been a common practice for many Catholic secondary school principals in Australia to arrange a transfer to another Catholic school for students found to have been in possession of, or used, illicit substances in the school environs. While the number of incidents detected may be relatively low, the Catholic school principal exercised an option, often not available within the government school sector, of arranging the transfer of such a student quietly and without public attention. In many situations, this was expressed as providing a 'fresh start' in a new environment. It was often also explained as having been conducted 'with the approval of the student's parents'. This investigation found that there were often serious shortcomings in this common practice by Catholic secondary schools, a practice that was also found to be common within the broader independent school system in each State and Territory.

The opportunity of finding a 'fresh start' can certainly be supported in some situations where relationships have been found to have broken down within the school community between the offending student and other students and the teaching body. However, in many situations this practice was found to simply 'move the problem'. For students displaying 'at-risk' and potentially self-harming behaviour, it increased their level of disconnectedness. They were then placed in a high-risk environment, without the sustaining relationships with familiar friends and trusted teachers.

The consultation suggested that this practice still continues, but in schools that represent good practice it is employed as a last resort and not as a first option. Parents are generally appreciative of the strenuous

efforts that many Catholic secondary schools take to continue to engage their child in the school environment. It is when these relationships break down that an opportunity for a legitimate 'fresh start' actually presents itself.

Our investigation found schools taking this option with great caution and pastoral care for the student concerned, ensuring a smooth transfer between the two schools and looking to the student's own best interests. Good practice identified a real consultation with parents about this possible outcome, not an ultimatum presented without reasonable alternatives. When this practice has been implemented, it seems important for school authorities or Catholic education offices to monitor the future progress of such students at their new schools. Does the practice of getting a 'fresh start' achieve the intended objectives?

Expulsion policy in catholic schools

As with the practice of transferring students, the consultation indicated that the practice of expelling a student from a Catholic secondary school, as a result of an incident of possession or use of an illicit substance, occurs more rarely in recent years than was the practice in the previous decade.

It appears that formal expulsions are generally avoided by most Catholic secondary schools around Australia. The option taken is the transfer of the student to another school, or agreement by the family of the student to withdraw from the school.

In a recent study on suspensions and expulsion of students from non-government schools in New South Wales by Geoff Riordan [8], a significant difference was found between Catholic secondary colleges that were under the jurisdiction of the Catholic education office and those Catholic independent schools, often under the jurisdiction of Catholic religious orders, in relation to their willingness to expel students for drug incidents. While approximately the same percentage of schools from both categories were ready to suspend students for incidents in relation to illegal drugs (68.7% systemic Catholic; 70.7% independent Catholic), a much higher percentage of independent Catholic schools reported that they would resort to expulsions (29.3%) in contrast to Catholic systemic schools (19.4%).

In canvassing Catholic school principals as to what were the indicators that an expulsion might be necessary, as part of this research project it was clear that in schools exercising good practice in this area it was an option being taken 'as a last resort'. School principals reported that expulsion or transfer was resorted to when the student concerned had clearly indicated a lack of willingness to co-operate with school authorities and where there was a clear indication that working relationships had been broken and were not

likely to be repaired easily. It was also seen as an option to be considered when there was a serious threat to the safety and wellbeing of other students and staff. Generally, the option of expulsion applies to situations where a student is a repeat offender in possessing or using illicit substances within the school environment. The sanction applied is more often when the student has been found to be selling or distributing an illicit substance to other students.

Drug testing in schools

Urine or blood testing of students who have been identified as having been in possession of, or used, illicit drugs has been debated hotly in the media in recent years in different parts of Australia, particularly through the Queensland daily tabloid, the *Sunday Mail* [9]. A small number of Catholic secondary schools in Australia are currently undertaking this practice, but it has been identified publicly in a small number of private independent schools in Victoria and New South Wales, and is known to occur in non-government schools in other Australian jurisdictions. Those who support the practice see it as decisive action by the school authorities in response to drug usage by students and as enhancing the image of the school as 'tough on drugs'. It is also seen as a way of promoting the school as a 'safe environment for your child', and a way of identifying those students in need of assistance.

The critical issue for a Catholic school environment is that drug testing in schools has the potential to undermine the relationship of trust and open communication between students and staff which may, in turn, de-emphasise the use of pastoral and alternative disciplinary approaches.

The Catholic secondary schools which employed drug testing indicated that they were willing to engage young people through the difficult transition of adolescence, but had a zero tolerance approach in relation to illicit drug incidents. The publicly stated consequences of breaches usually related to the transfer of 'the problem' elsewhere and the suggestion that such a practice could create such a thing as a 'drug free school'.

Other Catholic secondary schools maintained the goal of a 'drug free school learning environment', but took the view that in the real world drug incidents would occur and needed to be dealt with in a way that reflected successfully their overall mission of education and shaping the lives of young people. Students in such schools wanted clear boundaries, but they also expected Catholic school authorities to be able to deal with a sense of compassion and ongoing engagement with individual students who encountered personal difficulties of this nature.

A consistent ethic in schools drug policies

The consultation described here attempted to avoid the terminology 'best practice' with respect to Catholic schools' response to student possession or use of illicit substances. This is because it recognised that there is no 'best practice' that applies to the range of different circumstances in the different States and Territories of Australia. Instead, the preferred term that was used is 'good practice', recognising that what applies to one school may not be appropriate in another educational setting. The issue that the report raised in response, however, is the question of the importance of a consistent ethic, in light of the common 'Catholic' identity.

The consultancy identified a shift in policy that has taken place over several years in much of the Catholic education sector, as educational authorities and school administrators have developed a greater understanding and responsiveness to this issue as both a health concern and a significant pastoral concern. It would be unfortunate if this growth in the Catholic secondary schools' response to incidents of possession or use of illicit drugs by students was seen not to apply to some high-profile Catholic independent schools.

A consistent Catholic ethos would be focused primarily on the growth, development and pastoral care of the student body and not upon the school as a corporate entity. Many schools that participated in the consultancy were found to emphasise the former objective, focusing upon the needs and pastoral care of the student body. Some other schools appeared to be more preoccupied with the school's public reputation. A more consistent Catholic ethos in this complex area would strengthen the credibility of the Church's mission in the field of education in Australia.

Conclusion

The critical issue that emerged from this national consultation of Catholic schools in each State and Territory of Australia for those young people involved at some level in illicit drug use or experimentation was the importance of 'keeping them connected'.

This issue seemed to apply to the broad range of students from Catholic secondary schools who were found to be involved in drug use, from those who were thought to be involved in a completely one-off experimental or risk-taking episode to those who had developed a serious problem of drug misuse. Students in both categories needed to know that they were still connected and that there were committed, professional and caring members of school staff who could keep them engaged and were prepared to guide them through the difficult circumstances in which they had found themselves.

The Catholic school environment is potentially one of the most resourceful sources of guidance, direction and support for many students. In many situations around Australia, it would appear that students were able to seek guidance and direction from teachers and school-based staff when they had no opportunity of turning to those closest to them, their family members. While some students reported that they valued an open and honest relationship with their parents at home, where they could talk about any issue of concern, most students reported that in the area of illicit or unsanctioned drug use or experimentation it was simply a taboo topic within the home environment.

During the difficult transitional years of adolescence, especially early adolescence, when most incidents of illicit drug use by students in the school environment actually occurred, experienced and trusted classroom teachers, school counsellors, welfare workers, guidance counsellors and home-room teachers were the ones with the greatest opportunity to be of assistance.

It is important that these skilled secondary education staff, who have strong and positive relationships with the students with whom they are working, have the opportunity of supporting those young people in our schools who are identified as being involved in some level of illicit drug use.

If a school sends out the message that no form of drug use by students attending their school will be tolerated, it denies those students perhaps the only opportunity they have at that stage of their lives to seek guidance and direction in this area of need.

Some schools that were consulted as part of the national research project made it clear that the protection of their corporate reputation was more important. For this reason they were prepared to relinquish the opportunity of allowing their staff to engage the young people enrolled at their school to seek assistance in relation to their drug usage.

Throughout the country there are many highly skilled, knowledgeable and experienced staff working in Catholic secondary schools and as specialist advisers in Catholic education offices in each State and Territory, with particular expertise in this area. This

national consultation study has simply garnered the best knowledge and experience that already exists within this national educational network. Nevertheless, an enormous disparity was found from one part of the country to another and from urban to regional and remote areas, such as those in the Northern Territory, in terms of the resources available and the capacity to deal effectively with this issue.

It is hoped that the findings of this research will provide both the encouragement, information and strategies that might be helpful to ensure that students in secondary schools across the country will find their school environments not only places of learning, but also places of respect, understanding and personal growth which have the capacity to address issues of drug use and associated harm most effectively.

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