



Youth Substance Use Services – Serving the Communities of Abbotsford and Mission since 1988

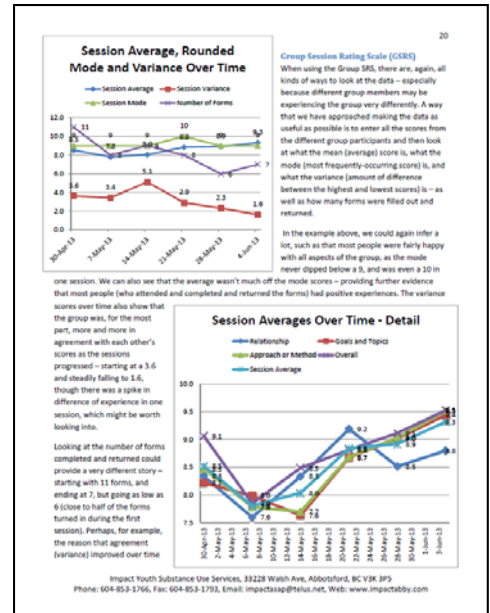
2012-2013 Annual Report: Now Available

Where we've been, where we are, and where we're aiming to go

This year marked a bit of a departure for Impact when it comes to developing our Annual Report. Instead of just providing information on how we're faring on specific contractual requirements (briefly - we're exceeding them), this year's report was an opportunity for us to reflect on our progress – and particularly on how we are doing in relationship to the new vision and mission we adopted in 2010.

Vision: A community where all youth are healthy, safe, engaged, have meaningful opportunities, and feel like they belong.

Mission: To work at the community level to identify and fill gaps in the well-being of all youth, with an emphasis on advocating for and working with substance-involved and substance-affected youth.



The Annual Report (which can be found at [http://www.impactabby.com/pdf/2012-2013 Annual Report.pdf](http://www.impactabby.com/pdf/2012-2013%20Annual%20Report.pdf)) covers our programs for individuals, including one-to-one and family counselling, groups, prevention, and our drop-by and drop-in offerings. It also covers our collaborative programs, highlighting five that are particularly aligned with our vision (YAKE, AYHC, VYPER, SAFE and SWaRH – yes, we like our acronyms around here – you'll have to look at the annual report to find out what they all mean – VYPER is detailed later in this newsletter).

The annual report also covers the numerous professional development activities that our staff and practicum students have been engaged in to keep up with the ever-changing field of substance use services and supports. It provides a sense of the evolving demographics of the youth and adults we serve, as well as detailing the evolution of how our clients are finding and being referred to us.

We also provide details about the various ways that we are measuring the outcomes that our clients are experiencing while engaging in and after engaging with our services. This includes a look at changes in various life areas (substance use/misuse, physical health, mental & emotional health, family, friends, employment, legal and housing) both at discharge and at 6-months following discharge. We also detail the measures we have put into place to gather feedback from clients while they are engaged in services – so we can identify whether clients feel their circumstances (individually, interpersonally, socially and overall) are getting better, worse or not changing, and identify how we can adjust how we are interacting with clients (relationship, goals and topics, approach or method, and overall) in order to contribute to better outcomes. Additionally, we share feedback provided to us by individuals and organizations that have referred youth and adults over the last year, as well as sharing feedback gleaned from a client satisfaction focus group conducted for the first time this year.

Finally, the annual report provides a S.W.O.T. (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis of Impact's position in the community at the end of the 2012-2013 fiscal period.

We'd love to hear any feedback you have – questions you might still have or that arose in reviewing the information, or feedback on gaps or barriers that you may recognize in the services we provide or in the services available to local youth and families contending with substance use-related issues.

Research: Prevention

How we use a growing body of evidence to set course for effective prevention

It's natural, particularly when we know how serious situations involving substance use can become, to try to discover what causes individuals to develop problematic substance use patterns – so that we can work to prevent them.

Various hypotheses have been put forward, including:

- The **self-medication hypothesis** says that youth who don't feel good take drugs to feel better, such as through the production of pleasure-inducing dopamine in the nervous system. This can lead to reliance on drugs if other ways of coping with negative feelings aren't developed, particularly if youth feel helpless to influence the circumstances that may be provoking negative feelings. **This could also be called the "trauma/mental health" hypothesis.**
- The **impaired functioning hypothesis** argues that drug use causes youth to feel bad by complicating brain development or interfering with activities that foster supportive relationships and help youth gain skills and knowledge to succeed in school or work. It argues that drug use interferes with supportive relationships and competency, leading to feeling hopeless, worthless or sad – and to escalated drug use. **This could also be called the "gateway drug" hypothesis.**
- The **conformity hypothesis** suggests that youth who struggle with issues that make them feel "out of step" with their more-conventional peers feel attracted or pushed toward "deviant" peer associations that require conformity to behaviours (including substance use) that can interfere with healthy development and limit or seem to limit future opportunities. This, again, can lead to negative or hopeless feelings and escalating drug use. **This could also be called the "peer pressure" hypothesis.**

These three hypotheses, while not being exhaustive of the ideas people may have about the development of adolescent substance use problems, do represent some of the dominant ideas that we encounter in the community. They have also been the subject of various research projects, one of which we want to introduce to you in this newsletter as an example of how Impact uses research to direct our work with youth – in this case, our prevention efforts.

The 2010 study (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2981131/>) we are reviewing used a general population sample of 429 rural families from the Midwestern United States. Unlike many previous studies, it also collected information at multiple points between age 11 and 18 to explore, generally, the following questions related to the three hypotheses:

- Do youth who feel bad end up taking more drugs?
- Do youth who take drugs end up taking more drugs?
- Do youth who have deviant peers end up taking more drugs?

The study also sought to determine if the gender of the youth or the education level of the youth's parents correlated with these changes in substance use, feeling states and peer deviance over time.

While this one study, on its own, doesn't provide a definitive answer to these questions – in the sample studied, the only statistically significant finding fell in line with the self-medication hypothesis – that youth who feel bad are more likely to take more drugs. There was no indication that prior drug experimentation or deviant peer relationships, on their own, led to higher-than-average risk of problematic drug use over time (within the period studied – from age 11 to 18). Nor were there statistically significant correlations found related to gender or parent level of education.

What do these findings mean to us? Combined with convincing data from other studies, including the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (www.acestudy.org – based in San Diego, California) and the McCreary Adolescent Health Survey (www.mcs.bc.ca/ahs - with data from BC youth), we come to two conclusions:

- Our approach should be **weighted more toward “gateway feelings and circumstances”** than “gateway drugs,” focusing on building opportunities that may provoke positive feelings.
- Our approach should **focus more on fostering positive, inclusive connection and health-affirming messages among peers** (and with adults), than on trying to address negative “peer pressure”.

This isn't to say we should ignore the impaired functioning and conformity hypotheses. But we should definitely not ignore the role negative circumstances or mental health issues and the feelings they can provoke play in the development of problematic substance use – because that is what a convincing body of evidence supports. And, if possible, it means we should help to add to research being conducted on these and other hypotheses to improve the knowledge base from which everyone can work.

Where this article focuses on the research findings guiding our prevention efforts, our fall newsletter will focus on the research underpinning our approach to supporting youth who are already encountering significant difficulties that involve substance use. So stay tuned!

Adults can be in the habit of working from good intentions, based on what they think will be most helpful for youth. Youth can be in the habit of passively engaging in programs – or in tuning out or just quietly disappearing when programs don't feel meaningful or relevant to them – rather than feeling empowered to speak up, make suggestions and take on a proactive role.

The only statistically significant finding fell in line with the self-medication hypothesis – that youth who feel bad are more likely to take more drugs. There was no indication that prior drug experimentation or deviant peer relationships, on their own, led to higher-than-average risk of problematic drug use over time.

It Takes a Village: VYPER

Interactive, sustained, collaborative – growing. Will you be bitten next?

VYPER stands for “Valley Youth Partnership for Engagement and Respect.” The name only developed over the last year, but the concept and the activities have been developing organically over the last 4 years as more and more organizations in the Fraser Valley have become collaboratively involved in programs aimed at engaging

youth, and as we have exposed ourselves to more and more evidence that HOW we engage youth is at least as important as WHAT we try to engage youth in.

The central letter in VYPER is the P in Partnership – indicating that our central priority is developing programs with youth as equal partners at the table and in the process. And this is, admittedly, one of those things that is much easier to say than it is to do. A big part of the difficulty is existing habits. Adults can be in the habit of working from good intentions, based on what they think will be most helpful for youth. Youth can be in the habit of passively engaging in programs – or in tuning out or just quietly disappearing when programs don't feel meaningful or relevant to them – rather than feeling empowered to speak up, make suggestions and take on a pro-active role. Of course, these adult and youth habits can reinforce each other – leading to adults who feel they must take control because youth won't, and youth who feel adults aren't interested in their ideas – a sense that programs are take-it-or-leave-it or, in the worst case, beggars-can't-be-choosers.

So VYPER, while being played out in programs and activities, is really about working to intentionally support continual improvement of these adult and youth habits and behaviours to build a stronger and stronger foundation for sustained, interactive collaboration between youth and adults. We believe, and a host of research findings supports the idea, that the results will be healthier, more satisfying outcomes for everyone.



We're delighted to see the idea behind VYPER starting to catch fire in our communities – particularly this summer, where we were able to add a long list of new participating organizations to the VYPER roster. Not only has this improved the number of (free or inexpensive) opportunities youth have had to choose from, but it has also introduced new youth to the programs available in the community, building pathways to further engagement. While the "build it and they will come" idea worked in Las Vegas, we find it isn't always applicable to youth – particularly to those youth who may have

experiences of feeling less-than-welcomed in the community. We hope that VYPER will continue to build these bridges. For now, though, we'll leave you with the organizations that have participated or are slated to participate in VYPER programs and activities this summer, and an open invitation to you to contact Brian Gross at Impact (impactif you or your organization wants to explore how to get involved in future work with VYPER:

- Abbotsford Community Services
 - Abbotsford Food Bank
 - Abbotsford Youth Health Centre
 - Youth Resource Centre
- Bakerview Centre for Learning: Community Garden
- City of Abbotsford: Parks, Recreation & Culture
- Dragonlily Gardens
- Fraser House Society
- Fraser Valley Gleaners
- Fraser Valley Trout Hatchery
- Fraser Valley Youth Society
- HOME Society
- Impact Youth Substance Use Services
- Pipsqueak Paddocks
- The Reach Gallery Museum
- Stó:lō Nation Health
- Suicide Awareness Fraser East
- Valley Permaculture Guild
- Vibrant Abbotsford



Youth Substance Use Services – Serving the Communities of Abbotsford and Mission since 1988

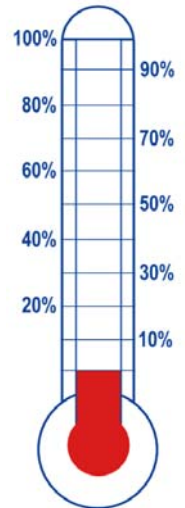
How You Can Help

What becoming a member of Impact means – for you, us, and the community

Impact will be starting its first-ever membership drive this fall (you can always make a donation at any time and we will retroactively process your membership). Our goal is to have at least 100 members by the start of 2014, with annual membership dues starting at \$20 per member.

As outlined in our 2012-2013 Annual Report, Impact’s interactions with clients and community partners have grown significantly over the past 4 years, including:

- Overall number of client and community interventions increased by 58%
- Students reached in school-based prevention workshops increased by 159%
- Community consultations increased by 228%
- Counselling sessions increased by 33%
 - Aftercare sessions increased by 225%
 - Counselling sessions per active client increased by 24%
 - No shows decreased by 88%



All this has been accomplished with only minimal additional expense, some of which has been offset by significant reductions in administrative costs and streamlined workflow that has meant our counsellors spend less time with paperwork and more time with clients (even though we have added various clinical tools and assessments to help us better gauge our effectiveness and adjust to individual needs).

What hasn’t changed, though, is the need for our services and supports. By becoming a member of Impact you can help us stay at the top of our game – always looking at how we can help the entire collaborative community and our own programs to more effectively and efficiently support the circumstances that will help all youth and families strengthen and grow through their challenges, and take on an ever-more-meaningful and confident contributing role in the community.

REMINDER: Real Estate agent Marcus Ortner, in addition to making a donation from each sale he makes with or without a referral from Impact, will donate 25% of his total commission if you mention you were referred by Impact! You can reach Marcus at 604.217.2552 and www.marcusortner.com. Thanks Marcus!



Some of our major funders and donors for 2013-2014. See our website for a complete list:

