

Youth initiatives



The National Illicit Drug Strategy Community Partnerships Initiative is a Department of Health & Ageing initiative that provides funding to community organisations to prevent the uptake of illicit drugs. Since 1997, a total of 224 community-based organisations have been funded through four funding rounds across Australia, and at a cost of more than \$17 million, to implement a broad range of drug prevention activities.

Edventures WA Inc. received funding of \$79,000 for the U-Can-2 Project. The project aims to promote positive life choices and reduce illicit substance use for young people living within the city of Perth and the town of Victoria Park.

The Live N Loud DJ program is an activity within the U-Can-2 project, and has proved to be an innovative youth-friendly means of engaging with young people and providing them with an alternative to antisocial behaviours and substance misuse. Although there are many success stories that can be attributed to the program, one stands out above the rest.

Wayne was an extremely troubled young man prior to participating in the DJ program. In speaking with his teachers and the deputy principal of the college he attends, it became clear that Wayne had a deplorable school attendance record and was thought to have been at-risk of substance misuse. Wayne had low self-esteem and at times he would seem very reclusive in class. On other occasions he was extremely aggressive and his behaviour was unpredictable.

When the Live N Loud program came to his school, Wayne was ambivalent about participating. The first few weeks were difficult for him, as he had to learn to participate in a small-group situation and in a one-on-one relationship with the instructor. Gradually he started to participate more in his class work. The teachers remarked that Wayne was starting to behave more positively towards his schoolwork and classmates in general.

Edventures staff organised for the course participants to meet two internationally renowned DJ performers. The students, including Wayne, were escorted to the DJ stars' hotel where they sat in awe as they met the performers. Most importantly,

the performers emphasised to the participants that drinking and drugs, and performing do not mix and explained that they avoided all substances in order to be successful DJs. Wayne was particularly excited by this contact with his idols and asked many relevant questions. It was clear that the lifestyle message was an important one for him.

After this event, Wayne's eyes were open to the possibility of making music a big part of his life. He became more intent on learning as much as he could about the DJ equipment. There was a positive pattern emerging in that Wayne became the leader in the course. He would stay after the class finished to learn new skills and constantly questioned the instructor as to what he could do to better himself. The improved behaviour continued at his school, and teachers commented on his improved grades and attendance.

As the DJ course drew to a close, the students prepared for their nightclub outing. Wayne displayed good leadership skills in organising the food and soft drinks, while also helping to make posters for the drug-and-alcohol-free event. The nightclub event was a great success and saw more than 80 young people attend to support the efforts of the DJ students. The talents of the DJ students were showcased; however, Wayne was outstanding in presentation and selection of music. The instructor commented that if Wayne continued to progress at the rate he was, DJ Funktions would be in a position to offer him an apprenticeship once he completed high school.

Edventures WA arranged for Wayne to appear as a feature DJ at the Rotary Club Changeover night, which is the most prestigious night on the club's calendar. On the night, the DJ company responsible for bringing the equipment forgot to bring headphones, which would see many DJs refuse to do the show. Not Wayne! He stepped up to the turntables and produced an astounding performance. His mastery of the DJ equipment was so good that he was approached by Curtin University to perform at their Open Day in front of an estimated crowd of 10,000 people. The day was a great success.

Wayne's plans are to finish high school, do an apprenticeship with DJ Funktions and then come back and teach other high school students the art of being a DJ. Wayne's grades, confidence, self-esteem, respect for others and respect for himself have improved greatly as a direct result of the Live N Loud DJ course.