



Ben Birks Ang

Odyssey and NZ Drug Foundation

1A: The PeerCrowd youth research project: implications for services

Ben Birks Ang, Odyssey and NZ Drug Foundation

Understanding young people is a fundamental, yet often overlooked, part of promoting wellbeing among young people. Too often young people are either seen as a homogenous group or by groups defined by their gender, age or ethnicity, without appreciating anything more about who they are, who they identify with, and what really matters to them. During a life-stage when identity development and “fitting in” is at its most prominent, using a more youth-relevant and effective methodology is crucial to understand how to best support young people. There are still young New Zealanders who do not see schooling, support services, and wellbeing messages as relevant to them and the impacts of this can last a lifetime.

A group of health and social support organisations, led by the AOD Provider Collaborative, worked together with Rescue – a behaviour change agency – to undertake research into peer crowds primarily in Counties Manukau with teenagers (13 to 18 years) and young adults (18 to 25 years). Peer crowds are the macro-level connections between peer groups with similar interests, lifestyles, influences and habits, shared across geographic areas. Come along to hear the findings, and be involved in discussing how we can use these findings to better engage young people.

Ben has extensive experience working with young people using drugs and alcohol, and has led the development of treatment and early intervention services for young people in New Zealand. This includes establishing and overseeing school-based, community, and residential drug and alcohol treatment programmes.

He works as the National Youth Services Adviser for the New Zealand Drug Foundation and Odyssey Trust, and is also the Deputy Chair of dapaanz, the Addiction Practitioners’ Association of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Ben is passionate about empowering communities to create space for young people to grow and develop.



Helen Lockett

Wise Group



Candace Bagnall

Te Pou o te Whakaaro Nui

1B: Using research to inform the actions of the Equally Well collaborative: an evidence update

Helen Lockett, the Wise Group, and Candace Bagnall, Te Pou o te Whakaaro Nui

In 2013, Te Pou o te Whakaaro Nui published 'The physical health of people with a serious mental illness and/or addiction: An evidence review' (Te Pou, 2014). This drew together for the first time, the NZ and international evidence on the extent of the mortality and morbidity gap between people who experience mental health issues and/or addiction and the general population, identified the major contributory factors to this health disparity, and the evidence on how to effectively address this gap.

At the same time, the Equally Well collaborative was launched. Now a network of more than 100 organisations, predominantly from NZ but also including organisations from overseas, who are all committed to taking action in their sphere of influence to address this health disparity.

Four years on, Te Pou are in the process of updating that initial evidence review. This workshop will be the opportunity to hear the findings from the evidence update and an opportunity to discuss what this means for practice and policy.

Helen has been working with Te Pou o te Whakaaro Nui over these four years to initiate and sustain the Equally Well programme of collaborative action. She works on this on a part-time basis alongside her job as strategic policy advisor to the Wise Group.

In working on the initial literature review, the evidence for the relatively poor health outcomes for people who experience a mental illness and/or addiction became very clear, and through Equally Well, she is committed to working with others to find ways to improve outcomes.

Helen's interest and the focus for much of her work is on connecting research, policy and practice and in particular to address the systemic barriers which create inequalities.

Helen has been working in mental health services for nearly 20 years, starting her career as a support worker in a small day service in England, where she saw the positive impact getting a job had on people's lives and learnt how we could offer better support to enable people to fulfil their vocational aspirations. She became interested in service development and research after that and specialised in understanding the evidence base for implementing effective employment support programmes. She has a degree in psychology and a Masters in Business Administration and is currently a doctoral student at the University of Auckland.

