



Carroll Communications
social marketing and research consultants

Evaluation of National Cannabis Prevention and Information Centre

Communication Strategy Initiatives

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Contents

1	Introduction	6
2	Background	7
3	The NCPIC Strategic Plan 2010-2014.....	7
3.1	<i>Goals.....</i>	7
3.2	<i>Activities.....</i>	8
3.2.1	Goal: An Australian community well-informed about cannabis use and related problems	8
3.2.2	Goal: A reduced level of cannabis use and related problems among the Australian community, in particular, amongst young Australians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.....	8
4	Evaluation of the <i>Clear Your Vision</i> resource.....	9
4.1	<i>The Clear Your Vision resource</i>	9
4.1.1	Target audience/s for the <i>Clear Your Vision</i> resource	9
4.1.2	Fit within the NCPIC Strategic Plan	9
4.1.3	Fit within Activities of the Strategic Plan for Young Australians.....	10
4.2	<i>Research questions</i>	10
4.3	<i>Research methods</i>	10
4.4	<i>Results.....</i>	11
4.4.1	Self-completion survey	11
4.4.2	Group discussions.....	13
4.4.3	Counsellors' views of the resource.....	18
4.5	<i>Discussion.....</i>	19
5	Evaluation of the <i>Cannabis: It's Not Our Culture</i> Indigenous Project components.....	20
5.1	<i>The Cannabis: It's not our culture project</i>	20
5.1.1	Target audience/s for the <i>Cannabis: It's not our culture</i> project.....	23
5.1.2	Fit within the NCPIC strategic plan	23
5.1.3	Fit with Activities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.....	23
5.2	<i>Research questions</i>	24
5.3	<i>Research methods</i>	25
5.4	<i>Results.....</i>	26
5.4.1	Orders of <i>Cannabis: It's not our culture</i> resources from the project website: www.notourculture.org.au.....	26
5.4.2	Online survey of people who had <i>Cannabis: It's not our culture</i> resources from the project website www.notourculture.org.au.....	26

5.4.3	Community visits	33
5.4.4	Interviews with Indigenous Music Competition participants and organisers	38
5.5	<i>Discussion</i>	39
6	The GP Education Package <i>Is Cannabis the Missing Piece?</i>	42
6.1	<i>The GP Education Package</i>	42
6.1.1	Target audience for the GP Education Package	43
6.1.2	Fit within the NCPIC strategic plan	43
6.2	<i>Research questions</i>	44
6.3	<i>Research methods</i>	44
6.4	<i>Results</i>	44
6.4.1	General Practitioners.....	45
6.4.2	Other health professionals.....	48
6.5	<i>Discussion</i>	52
7	Conclusions	54
8	Recommendations	56

Tables

Table 1: Perceptions of the content of the Clear Your Vision resource	11
Table 2: Perceptions of the utility of the Clear Your Vision resource	13
Table 3: Distribution of Cannabis: It's not our culture resources	26
Table 4: Breakdown of occupations of survey respondents	27
Table 5: Awareness of fact sheets	28
Table 6: Most useful fact sheets	30
Table 7: Location selection for community visits	33
Table 8: GP Education Package online survey sample	45
Table 9: Perceptions of usefulness of the GP Education Package components amongst GPs	46
Table 10: Usefulness of package for screening and referral amongst GPs	48
Table 11: Perceptions of usefulness of component of the GP Education Package amongst other health professionals	50
Table 12: Usefulness of GP Education Package for screening and referral amongst health professionals	51

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1 Introduction

In February 2011, Carroll Communications was commissioned by the National Cannabis Prevention and Information Centre (NCPIC) to assist in the evaluation of a number of the Centre's Communication Strategy initiatives. The aim of the evaluation project was to gain an assessment of these communication initiatives against NCPIC's Strategic Plan's outcomes and goals with an emphasis on:

- Reaching young people with complex needs - through the *Clear Your Vision* resource which had been developed in collaboration with the Youth Off The Streets organisation;
- Reaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities – through a range of *Cannabis: It's not our culture* resources and projects including the Indigenous communities project, the cannabis fact sheet series and the Indigenous Music competition; and
- The Centre's ability to 'enhance capacity of health, human service and criminal justice systems to deliver evidence based interventions' – through the *GP Education Package* which comprises a set of resources designed to encourage GPs to screen for cannabis use with their high risk patients, and resources and information to treat and refer patients with problem cannabis use.

The focus of the evaluation project was on the level of target audience reach for these initiatives and on target audience response to the communication approaches and materials.

The tasks for Carroll Communications in this project were:

- To develop an evaluation framework for the evaluation project;
- To provide guidance and technical support to the Centre's staff for the design of the study methodology, instruments, and implementation of the specific research studies; and
- To prepare an outcomes report analysing and summarising the project findings and formulating recommendations for future communication strategies and activities.

The evaluation project commenced in February 2011 with the design of an evaluation framework and the research was conducted from April to June 2011. A combination of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies was employed within the project. These methodologies included community visits, meetings with youth health services and Aboriginal health services, individual telephone and face-to-face interviews and group discussions, and online surveys. The approach was to apply this range of methodologies in order to address the evaluation project's research questions as comprehensively as possible within the project's limited time frame. All community visits, interviews, group discussions and online surveys were undertaken by NCPIC's staff. This report outlines the research questions to be addressed for each NCPIC project,

methodologies employed and findings from each study. Recommendations are provided regarding these projects and future Communication Strategy projects for the Centre.

2 Background

Cannabis remains the most widely used illicit substance in Australia, with approximately 5.5 million Australians aged 14 years and over having tried cannabis at least once during their lives, and 750,000 having used cannabis in the past week¹. The Australian Government opened the National Cannabis Prevention and Information Centre (NCPIC) in April, 2008 in recognition of the emerging importance of cannabis use and related harms, and the need to bring together a group of expert individuals and organisations to focus on addressing this issue.

While many people use cannabis only occasionally, those who use regularly and heavily and then experience related problems are more likely to have used cannabis at an early age. Community groups more likely to use cannabis and experience the associated harms are young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, those with mental health disorders such as psychosis, and those involved with the criminal justice system.

The mission of NCPIC is to prevent and reduce the use of, and problems related to, cannabis in Australia. NCPIC's goals in the areas of prevention and treatment are to be achieved by providing the community, in particular young people, with high quality, evidence-based information on cannabis use, and by building the capacity of service providers to respond to cannabis users and their families.

3 The NCPIC Strategic Plan 2010-2014

3.1 Goals

NCPIC's prevention goals outlined in the NCPIC Strategic Plan 2010-2014 are to achieve:

- An Australian community well informed about cannabis use and related problems; and
- A reduced level of cannabis use and related problems among the Australian community, in particular, amongst:
 - young Australians; and
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

NCPIC's treatment goals are to achieve:

- Improved access to, and delivery of, interventions for individuals experiencing dependence and other cannabis related problems; and

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2008. 2007 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: detailed findings. Drug statistics series no. 22. Cat. no. PHE 107. Canberra: AIHW.

- Enhanced capacity of health, human service, and criminal justice systems to deliver evidence-based interventions to prevent cannabis use, and related problems.

3.2 Activities

The activities outlined in the Strategic Plan to achieve these goals are as follows.

3.2.1 Goal: An Australian community well-informed about cannabis use and related problems

Activities:

- Raise awareness of the patterns of use and harms associated with cannabis use;
- Develop and update high quality, well targeted resources that disseminate the evidence base on cannabis and related harms;
- Improve access to evidence-based information about the harms associated with cannabis use via telephone and web-based information services; and
- Influence the public debate concerning cannabis.

3.2.2 Goal: A reduced level of cannabis use and related problems among the Australian community, in particular, amongst young Australians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Activities:

For Young Australians

- Raise awareness of the patterns of use and harms associated with cannabis use;
- Implement targeted prevention activities including those delivered in schools and other educational settings;
- Improve awareness of interventions for cannabis use and related problems;
- Provide brief and early interventions via the Web; and
- Provide evidence-based materials to those working to prevent or reduce cannabis use among young people.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

- Raise awareness of the patterns of use, harms and interventions associated with cannabis use among the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;

- Implement community development projects targeted to the prevention of cannabis use among the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- Implement collaborative development and evaluation of improved screening, assessment and provision of brief and early interventions and referrals for cannabis related problems among health care providers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- Facilitate development of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group; and
- Provide evidence-based materials to those working to prevent or reduce cannabis use and the families of cannabis users among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

4 Evaluation of the *Clear Your Vision* resource

4.1 The *Clear Your Vision* resource

The *Clear Your Vision* resource (printed booklet) was designed in collaboration with Youth Off The Streets (YOTS) with the objective of assisting young people with complex needs to quit cannabis use. It is specifically designed for young people (14 – 24 years) who live out of home and/or are not at school and have multiple and complex needs, for use in both group and individual settings. The booklet format was chosen because the young people and counsellors involved in its development felt this medium was the most appropriate and most likely to be used by the young people it was designed for.

By February 2011, ten thousand copies of the booklet had been printed and were available to order through the NCPIC website's online order form. In order to prevent the resource being inappropriately distributed without the necessary input and guidance from a trained alcohol and other drug (AOD) worker or counsellor, NCPIC developed five questions which people are required to respond to before they can be deemed eligible to be sent copies of the resource. NCPIC plans to develop an online version of the resource that young people will be able to work through with a counsellor. The printed resource was the focus of the evaluation described here. While the resource was available from the NCPIC website, at the time of this research it had not been widely promoted.

4.1.1 Target audience/s for the *Clear Your Vision* resource

The designated target audiences for the *Clear Your Vision* booklet are:

- Youth with complex needs; and
- Alcohol and other drug counsellors, youth workers.

4.1.2 Fit within the NCPIC Strategic Plan

This initiative fits under the NCPIC Strategic Framework goal of achieving:

- A reduced level of cannabis use and related problems among the Australian community, in particular, amongst young Australians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

4.1.3 Fit within Activities of the Strategic Plan for Young Australians

This initiative fits under the following NCPIC Strategic Plan Activities:

- Raise awareness of the patterns of use and harms associated with cannabis use;
- Improve awareness of interventions for cannabis use and related problems; and
- Provide evidence-based materials to those working to prevent or reduce cannabis use among young people.

4.2 Research questions

The evaluation project sought to address the following research questions regarding the *Clear Your Vision* resource:

- How do young people in the target audience perceive/value the resource?
- How useful is the resource in assisting young people to reduce their level of cannabis use and related problems?;
- How do counsellors perceive/value the resource?; and
- How useful do counsellors perceive the resource to be in assisting young people to reduce their level of cannabis use and related problems?

4.3 Research methods

A total of 35 young people from the target audience for the resource completed an individual response survey and took part in group discussions regarding the *Clear your Vision* resource during May 2011. These young people participated from:

- Eden College, Macquarie fields, Youth Off The Streets (6 males, 2 females);
- Key College, Surry Hills, Youth Off The Streets (3 males, 3 females);
- Chappel School, Merrylands, Youth Off The Streets (8 males, 2 females); and
- OASIS, Surry Hills (5 males, 6 females).

Groups of young people at Eden College and Chappel School were aged from 14 to 17 years while the other two groups at Key College and OASIS ranged from 16 to 21 years. Experience with cannabis use varied across the groups. Familiarity and experience with using the resource also varied across the groups. The majority of young people from Eden College and around half of the young people from Chappel School and Key College had already worked through the resource, but none of the young people in the OASIS group had seen the resource before. While the Youth Off The Streets

organisation had developed the resource with NCPIC, none of the young people who participated in this study had been involved in the development of the resource.

Participants were provided with a copy of the *Clear Your Vision* resource to read. They were then given a self-completion individual response survey containing questions about their perceptions of the content and design of the booklet and how helpful they thought it was to assist in assessing and reducing cannabis use. Following completion of this survey, the young people then participated in a group discussion about the resource. The self-completion survey is provided in Appendix 1.

4.4 Results

4.4.1 Self-completion survey

All 35 young people (22 males, 13 females) completed the individual response survey about their perceptions of the resource. Initially the survey contained a series of questions about the content of the booklet with a four point agree-disagree scale. Table 1 shows that 94 per cent of the young people agreed that the resource was believable, with around a third (37%) strongly agreeing that it was believable. Similarly, 91 per cent agreed that the resource was easy to understand and 83 per cent indicated that they liked the design of the resource. While almost all of the young people (95%) agreed (and half strongly agreed) that the four young people's stories in the booklet were useful for understanding problems people can have with cannabis, a smaller majority (69%) agreed that the four young people's stories were useful in thinking about their own use of cannabis.

Table 1: Perceptions of the content of the *Clear Your Vision* resource

(n = 35)	Strongly agree	Agree	Total agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total disagree
The content in the resource is believable.	37%	57%	94%	3%	3%	6%
The writing in the resource was easy to understand.	31%	60%	91%	6%	3%	9%
I liked the design of the resource.	20%	63%	83%	9%	9%	18%
The four young people's stories were useful for understanding problems people can have with cannabis.	49%	46%	95%	3%	3%	6%
The four young people's stories were useful for me to think about my own use of cannabis.	29%	40%	69%	11%	20%	31%

Next, the survey contained a series of questions about the utility of the resource with a ten point response scale ranging from 'Not at all helpful' to 'Very helpful'. Table 2 summarises these results by indicating the proportion of young people who rated the resource as 1-3 (suggesting they didn't rate the resource as particularly helpful for this purpose), 4-7 (giving the resource a mid-range rating as being helpful for this purpose), and 8-10 (rating the resource as very helpful for this purpose). Mean 'helpfulness' scores are also provided for each item.

From Table 2 it can be seen that the mean 'helpfulness' rating scores for the resource for each of the items ranged from 6.0 to 7.2 (out of 10). Hence, on average, the booklet was rated as being helpful for each of these objectives. The resource was rated most highly for being helpful for understanding the things that can make it hard to stop using cannabis (mean score of 6.6) and for understanding what you could do to help manage cravings and withdrawals in risky situations (7.2).

Around half or more of the young people rated the resource very highly (8 -10) as being helpful for:

- Understanding the things about using cannabis that are not so good for you (49%);
- Understanding the things that can make it hard to stop using cannabis (51%); and
- Understanding what you could do to help manage cravings and withdrawals in risky situations (57%).

More than four in ten of the young people rated the resource very highly (8 -10) as being helpful for:

- Thinking about whether cannabis may be a problem for you (43%);
- Understanding the reasons why you use cannabis (46%);
- Motivating you about quitting or cutting down your cannabis use (43%); and
- Understanding what you could do to help cut down or stop using cannabis (43%).

Conversely, around a quarter of the young people rated the resource very modestly (1-3) for being helpful for:

- Thinking about whether cannabis may be a problem for them (26%);
- Understanding the reasons why they use cannabis (23%);
- Understanding the things about using cannabis that are not so good for you (26%);
- Motivating you about quitting or cutting down your cannabis use (29%); and
- Understanding what you could do to help cut down or stop using cannabis (29%).

Table 2: Perceptions of the utility of the *Clear Your Vision* resource

Would you say the <i>Clear Your Vision</i> resource was helpful or not helpful to you: (1 = Not at all helpful - 10 = very helpful) (n=35)	Rating of 1-3	Rating of 4-7	Rating of 8-10	Mean rating score
For thinking about whether cannabis may be a problem for you.	26%	31%	43%	6.1
For understanding the reasons why you use cannabis.	23%	31%	46%	6.2
For understanding the things about using cannabis that are not so good for you.	26%	26%	49%	6.4
For motivating you about quitting or cutting down your cannabis use.	29%	29%	43%	6.0
For understanding what you could do to help cut down or stop using cannabis.	29%	29%	43%	6.1
For understanding the things that can make it hard to stop using cannabis.	20%	29%	51%	6.6
For understanding what you could do to help manage cravings and withdrawals in risky situations.	14%	29%	57%	7.2

The young people were also asked whether they would change anything about the *Clear your vision* resource and if so, what they would change and why.

Only three of the 34 young people who answered this question indicated that they would change some aspect of the resource. One person suggested including more information about seeking help and quitting cannabis use, another suggested bringing help numbers and web addresses to the front of the book while a third suggested changing the image on the front of the booklet.

4.4.2 Group discussions

The following section is drawn from the summary of group discussions prepared by Melanie Simpson who conducted each of the four group discussions.

The overall response across the groups was that the resource was viewed positively and seen as a useful resource. Nevertheless, a number of suggestions for how the resource could be improved to make it more useful were also offered.

In some groups, discussing the resource stimulated self-reflection and dialogue about the young people's own experiences with cannabis, their attempts to quit, how they started using, how they are currently feeling about their use, and the impact it has on family, education and friendships. Participants also liked the idea of having a booklet they could take home and work through at their own pace when they were ready. Some thought the resource would be extremely useful for people who are just starting to become heavier cannabis users, before they become too dependent, to let them know what they are about to get themselves into and that it isn't all going to be 'fun and cool'.

Some thought the resource might be a useful tool to give to people who are waiting for a place at a detoxification or a rehabilitation facility as the waiting times can be quite lengthy and the booklet would be useful to have and refer to, particularly for those who are looking to change and those who want to stay out of trouble.

Booklet design

A number of perceived *positive aspects of the booklet design* were noted:

- 'It's funky', 'it's mad', 'it's not boring';
- Liking the front cover smoke design image;
- Liking both the blackness and the colourfulness of the design;
- The images in the booklet were realistic and show young people from a mixture of backgrounds;
- It was simple and compact, easy to understand and without too many pages, appropriate for anybody;
- There were questions and spaces to write answers and comments; and
- It includes the YOTS symbol on the back.

A number of perceived *negative aspects of the booklet design* were also noted:

- The cover of the resource is too dark and not realistic;
- The design is boring/bland or too dull/too dark;
- There's too much text and the writing/font is a bit boring;
- The people in the pictures look sad and depressed;
- The people look a bit too clean cut, too "goody-goody" particularly "Kiah";
- Not enough pictures of dark skinned/black people;
- The Alex character looks like he needs a shower, looks dirty; and

- Not enough pictures of things to show that cannabis is bad.

A number of *suggestions for improving the resource* were offered:

- Include a boy and girl on the front cover;
- Put a more “junkie” looking face on the cover to put you off using cannabis;
- Change the font and colour of the title so that it ‘sticks out more’ and draws your eye to it;
- Make the text in the resource bigger, so it is easier to read;
- Add more pictures of bongs or someone holding a joint or a bong;
- Add a photo that shows someone throwing away or smashing a bong or something drug-related to show that s/he no longer needs or wants it;
- Use different colours, make the resource a bit brighter, but not too bright; and
- Keep the images of Alex the same to make it more realistic.

Overall booklet content

In terms of the overall booklet content, a number of perceived *positive aspects* were noted:

- It is a really good resource with the right amount of information;
- The resource doesn’t just start out by saying “you have a problem” it explains that you need to first acknowledge you have a problem before you can change anything;
- The four stories and characters were believable and easy to relate to and provide different perspectives on using cannabis and what it was like for the different characters;
- It’s helpful for reflecting on what is currently happening in your life at the moment, especially how cannabis might be affecting things like education;
- It makes you think about what can happen or how bad things can get when you start smoking and can also help you understand why you might be feeling more angry and agitated since you started using cannabis when you never felt like that before you started using;
- It helps understand the types of feelings you might get when you stop using the drug. i.e. that it is normal to feel like that, and the danger zones highlight what to look out for and helps understand why you are feeling a certain way;
- The SDS (severity dependence scale) is a good way of helping become aware that you might have a problem;

- The advice on quitting was helpful and useful; the quit/change date was good for motivation and to have a goal to work towards;
- The distraction technique (riding the wave and waiting out the craving) was a good technique and actually worked despite it being quite hard to do; and
- The advice and helpline numbers on the back are useful.

A number of perceived *negative aspects* were also noted:

- Some people felt that a book is only going to help someone who really wants to or has already decided they want to change or quit rather than providing motivation to quit;
- Some felt that stating withdrawals or cravings will only last up to a week or 10 days is unrealistic, and that it took longer for a craving to pass – up to an hour; and
- A number of participants thought the inclusion of 'drink water' as part of the 5 DS (p 20 of the booklet) was silly or unnecessary.

There were some aspects of the booklet that the young people *were unsure about*:

- There was some uncertainty about who the booklet is designed for. There was a sense that the stories and characters might not appeal to someone who hasn't used cannabis yet or for someone who isn't really a heavy user;
- There were some mixed feelings about the change/quit date, with some participants thinking it was a 'mad' or 'good idea' or 'a good starting point', while other participants thought it was unrealistic, too hard, and that you always put changing off to another day, because you 'can't just quit';
- While there were also some mixed feelings about the advice to avoid friends who use and whether this was something that they would want to do or could manage very easily, participants did feel that going through something like quitting drugs was a way of finding out who your real friends are; and
- Some participants were concerned with whether the young people and their stories were actually real as they wanted 'real stories from real people'.

There were also some suggestions for *further content in the booklet*:

- More facts about the effects of using cannabis, including how cannabis use affects losing and breaking up families, and on the financial impacts of using;
- Images of what cannabis users look like after using for a long time;

- More about the temptations that you might face and the influence of peer pressure;
- More contact details for youth specific helpline numbers so that you know who to call and who is available 24 hours a day, at times when you might need someone to talk to, and other ways of seeking help such as online or via email or mail;
- Information about what programs are available at detoxification and rehabilitation facilities;
- More information for why the characters in the booklet wanted to seek help; that is, their 'significant moment' that made them realise the need or want to now talk to someone about getting help, and more stories from people that have successfully given up or cut down their smoking;
- More stories from young people and stories from people they could use or relate to and look up to as role models; and
- A notes page so can write down your own thoughts as you work through the booklet.

Some further suggestions for the booklet

In addition, there were some ***further suggestions*** for the booklet:

- For the booklet to reach out a broader range of young people, it might be useful to include a character that hasn't had as many problems with so many things in their life. Suggestions for a new character included someone who thinks s/he doesn't have a problem with cannabis use, someone who doesn't feel that their life is being affected by cannabis use. Then, as the young person works through the booklet, the character begins to recognise that the more they become involved with cannabis use the more negative consequences start to appear and become recognised.
- "Dedicate the back page to a space where you can write your quit/change date (a bigger space than what is already included) and to include your personal reasons for why you want to quit so it is easier to refer to and when you are feeling like having a session, you can easily flick back to it and be reminded of why you have made the decision to quit or change. Having your own personal reasons for quitting easily accessible will help you keep on the right track."
- "Have a sticker or a removable portion of the booklet where you can write your quit/change date and the personal reasons for wanting to quit, that you can remove from the booklet and stick somewhere, that you will see each day and be reminded of what you are doing".

- “Provide a little kit to go along with the resource to help with motivation. The kit could include things like an exercise book (so people have more space to write down their own thoughts and feelings) and a pen.”

4.4.3 Counsellors’ views of the resource

A short survey about the resource was also prepared for completion by youth workers who have used or may use the resource. Within the study period this survey was only completed by five counsellors, two of whom had worked through the resource with a number of young people already and three counsellors who had no experience with the resource yet.

Overall, the five counsellors described the resource as ‘user friendly’ for young people. Their responses about the appropriateness of the resource for working with young people on cannabis use issues were very consistent with those of the young people in the study. The two counsellors (from OASIS and the Chappel School) who had used the resource described it as very useful. They reported that response to the resource had been positive and that the young people had been interested in the information and had found the reflective exercises productive.

They particularly pointed to the value of using personal stories that young people can compare their own story to and derive support and encouragement from. They also mentioned the resource’s strength in effectively highlighting the relationship between cannabis use and other issues the young people are facing.

The counsellors described the design and language level as appropriate for the young people they were working with and identified the personal narratives, the severity dependence scale and the motivational interviewing format as the parts of the resource they found most useful. No modifications to the resource were suggested by these counsellors.

Three counsellors from the Manly Drug Education and Counselling Centre also reviewed the resource, although none of these counsellors had actually used the resource with young people. They similarly described the resource as youth-friendly, client-centred and useful for providing information, motivational interviewing and strategies for change. Particular mention was given to the value of motivational interviewing in workbook style, allowing young people to explore their own use, and to the introduction to the case studies, effectively highlighting the complexities of some young people’s lives and not just focusing on the cannabis use.

One counsellor suggested the resource may not be useful for some young people with complex needs because it doesn’t address issues specifically or ask questions to encourage young people to look at different areas in their lives and any mental health issues.

In terms of suggestions for improvement, mention was made of including more specific information on how the young people in the booklet made their change; providing more space in the booklet for young people using it to make their own plan; and lack of local numbers in the referral information.

4.5 Discussion

Response to the *Clear Your Vision* resource was generally very positive amongst both the young people in the study and the five counsellors, particularly the two counsellors who had experience using the resource with young people.

Nine out of ten young people agreed that the resource was believable, easy to understand and that the four stories in the booklet were useful for understanding problems people can have with cannabis, while eight out of ten agreed that they liked the design of the resource. Seven out of ten agreed that the stories in the booklet helped them think about their own cannabis use.

The fact that around half of the young people rated the booklet between 8 and 10 regarding the helpfulness of the resource for understanding 'the things about using cannabis that are not so good for you', 'the things that can make it hard to stop using cannabis' and for 'what you could do to help manage cravings and withdrawals in risky situations' also confirms the value of the resource. Similarly at least four in ten of the young people rated the booklet between 8 and 10 on usefulness for 'thinking about whether cannabis may be a problem for them', for 'understanding the reasons why they use cannabis', 'what they could do to cut down their use', as well as actually 'motivating them to cut down or quit their use'. Approximately another three in ten young people gave the resource a mid-range rating (between 4 and 7) on each of these helpfulness dimensions. These ratings are particularly strong in light of the fact that not all participants were regular cannabis users or prepared to admit to cannabis use.

The comments from the group discussion about perceived negative aspects of the booklet design and content do not readily explain the low ratings for the resource by one in four young people for being helpful for: 'thinking about whether cannabis may be a problem for them', for understanding 'the reasons why they use cannabis', for understanding 'the things about using cannabis that are not so good for you', for 'motivating you about quitting or cutting down your cannabis use' or for 'understanding what you could do to help cut down or stop using cannabis'. Perceptions that the booklet was boring or bland may account for some lack of perceived effectiveness but the comment that "a book is only going to help someone who really wants to or has already decided they want to change or quit rather than providing motivation to quit" may suggest that some of the young people may not be at a point where they have decided to cut down or quit their cannabis use. Alternatively, people who are not using cannabis at present may not see the booklet as helpful for them at present because the issue is not relevant for them.

From the group discussions, the researcher concluded that the resource is very effective in prompting and supporting young people to start thinking about their own cannabis use as well as generating dialogue between the young person and a counsellor. While there may be some suggestion that the young people from the Youth Off The Streets colleges and school could be more positively disposed toward the resource since their organisation was involved in its development,