

# GLOBAL INITIATIVE ON PRIMARY PREVENTION OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE

## ASSESSING AND PLANNING FOR SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION AMONG YOUTH OUR METHOD OR 'THE HEART OF THE MEETINGS'



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## Rationale

A common way to develop knowledge around prevention good practices is by reviewing scientifically controlled experiments of prevention methods. The scientific method of experimentation can be very useful in determining what programme conditions are necessary to produce certain outcomes and in confidently identifying that the programme caused the result and that it was not caused by something else. However, the scientific method is less useful in helping us understand other aspects of prevention activities, such as why or how a decision was made and why it matters. When studying people, their activities and their complex relationships, this method can miss or misinterpret what is going on. The method is also rather costly and complex to implement.

During the experience-sharing workshops, we chose to develop good practice statements that would complement the scientific literature by presenting the "wisdom of practitioners" involved in the *Global Initiative*. To arrive at valid good practice statements that we could all feel good about and defend, we needed to use a method to help us organize the investigation and analyse the information. The method we used - the *Story-Dialogue Method* - was developed by a consultant for this purpose and to also help us with another of our main workshop tasks - to share and get feedback on our experiences.

Few of us can resist a good story, so stories are clearly an excellent way to share experiences. Stories are about people and what they do. Because they can contain emotion and drama, they touch us in ways that theory and statistics cannot. But stories can also be organized in a way that helps to develop valid knowledge on matters such as prevention good practices.

Stories or narratives can provide a strong basis for understanding prevention activities and all the decisions that go into them. Stories can be helpful in better understanding the complexities of what is going on and in examining such questions as, what? why? how? and what does this mean?, in ways that the scientific method cannot. By adding opportunities for reflection, dialogue and role-playing of practices, our approach will lead from a close examination of particular stories to a broader understanding of what works generally, and why.

## The Stories

We asked our participants to share structured stories that they could prepare at the workshop. These stories were personal - like self-interviews - beginning where their responses to the Self-Evaluation Instrument ended, by asking them to further assess what happened, why, how and what it means. We asked our participants to share a story based on their experience, telling what they did and how the local assessment and proposal development unfolded from their point of view.

## The Dialogues

The stories served as a trigger for the dialogues. This was the most rigorous of the process as the rest of the workshop participants would not accept stories just as they were presented. The story listeners asked questions that probed deeper into the kind of information that the story was built on (i.e., what was done, why it was done, what it accomplished or what it means). Dialoguing on these questions was very important to the process because through it we began to see more clearly what happened in the stories. The other participants also could begin to consider what they did and how it was similar to and different from what the storyteller did. It was through the dialogues that we moved from the particular (i.e., the story) to the general (i.e., the good practice statements).

For each of the five questions being investigated, we developed preliminary good practice statements. The same method was used for each investigation. The five investigations are drawn from the line of questioning in the self-assessment instruments. The self-assessment instrument asked for a description of what happened and why. We built on the work done in these instruments by really focusing on these and other questions.

## The Role-Plays

For each of the five investigations, a role-play or other demonstration depicting good or not so good practices was also presented. These demonstrations are important because they helped us look at aspects of

the local assessments and programme planning through a different eye. Seeing an issue or situation portrayed can help to produce new understanding. This gave us a last opportunity to reflect on practices before we presented, discussed and ranked the preliminary good practice statements.

## Process

### Step 1 [10 min]

Introducing the investigation and presenting the results of the self-evaluation instruments.

### Step 2 [10 min]

One person in the group presents their prepared "Story" describing in detail how they handled one of the five activities. The story will generally include: (a) how we approached the task & why; (b) a summary of what worked out well & why and what didn't work so well & why, and; (c) putting yourself in the shoes of others in the community (e.g., the targeted youth), describing how you felt about the process & why.

### Step 3 [45 min]

The story is followed by reflection and dialogues. During the dialogues, the listeners in the small group reflect and respond to the story. Each person, in turn (with no discussion), briefly responds as follows:

Dialogue A [15 min]: listeners ask probing questions (e.g., what did you do, what happened, why, how, what did you learn, why does it matter) about decisions that were made and actions taken.

Dialogue B [15 min]: each listener makes a brief statement: this is what we did that was the same and this is what we did differently, and why.

Dialogue C [15 min]: each listener makes a brief statement: "from what I've been hearing, this is a good practice" or "what I think works best" in a certain situation (or not so well). From this dialogue, each small group produces a preliminary list of good practice statements to be presented and discussed in plenary.

### Break [30 min]

Designated group prepares their role-play or demonstration of good or not so good practices.

**Step 4 [15 min]**

Based on the small group dialogues, the designated group will demonstrate an example of good or not so good practices using a role-play or another non-narrative method. The group will discuss options during the initial planning session and do final preparations during the previous break. Each local partner will have a chance to participate in at least one of these designated groups.

**Step 5 [15 min]**

In plenary, presentation of the preliminary lists and general discussion on what works and what doesn't (reporters from small groups).

**Step 6 [10 min]**

Individual reflection and rating of good practices for this activity (partners).

**Step 7 [15 min]**

Games as needed!