



(From left) Katherine Hampton, Jud Domingo Flores, Ivanna Wolfenbarger, Ahmedzai Areej and Sky Siu. Photo: Jonathan Wong

# A creative way to beat substance abuse

**KELY Support Group helps young reach out to their peers through videos**

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Teenagers may not always respond well to parents and teachers lecturing them about the dangers of drug abuse, but what if the advice came in the form of engaging videos made by their peers?

Organisers of a drug awareness programme based on youth leadership believe they have found an effective way to prevent substance use among teenagers.

Katherine Hampton, a programme coordinator at the KELY Support Group, said secondary school pupils joining their "ExCEL" campaign would take the lead and develop resources concerning awareness of drug and alcohol use.

ExCEL is an acronym for express (Ex), connect (C), educate (E) and lead (L). It was launched in 2016 with support from Operation Santa Claus, the annual charity drive organised by the *South China Morning Post* and RTHK.

The three-year project, targeting vulnerable young people

will also receive funding from this year's fundraising campaign.

Students taking part in the programme are expected to develop the skills and knowledge needed to create culturally appropriate drug awareness information and decide how best to promote it to their peers who are more at risk.

"It's a great way to offer students participating in the programme a role where they can design something that they know their peers will be interested in and that they will engage with," Hampton said.

"It's also a wonderful opportunity for the young people participating in the programme to build leadership skills and to develop their own personal confidence," Hampton said, adding that life skills such as peer support and resistance strategies were covered.

Ahmedzai Areej, 17, one of the students who helped create promotional materials for prevention of drug abuse, said she had enjoyed taking part in the project.

OPERATION SANTA CLAUS



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do. They would just listen to you and help you out," the secondary school pupil said.

Fellow participant Ivanna Wolfenbarger said the programme could kindle the creative streaks of those who took part.

"They help you think outside the box and promote positive thinking," the 17-year-old said.

Student Jud Domingo Flores, 16, said he had benefited from the process of making videos. "I learned to be more confident about showing my skills."

While stressing the importance of honing students' creativity and leadership skills, the project has sought to engender a culture of non-judgmental peer support for at-risk young people.

Sky Siu, executive director of the KELY Support Group, noted the difficulty in engaging with young drug users, who were averse to being judged by others.

"In the process of working with young people, we often find that not everyone is in a position to be ready to have a conversation about drugs and alcohol. I think one of the things we have to understand in Hong Kong society is that both of these topics are taboos," she said.

**They help you think outside the box and promote positive**