Health Promotion – An Overview

Over the last few decades, one significant development in working with young people has been in the area of health promotion.

Health promotion over the years has taken many public forms and approaches, from a general population approach, as in the ‘Life Be In It’ campaign of the 1980s that featured ‘Norm’ the overweight couch potato, through to the targeting of specific groups, such as young female smokers or intravenous drug users.

Increasingly, health promotion is being adopted as an effective model of education and prevention in a youth work framework, and as such, is an important part of the youth worker’s practice.

What Is Health Promotion?

Many people assume that health promotion is purely assisting individuals and groups to maintain a healthy lifestyle through diet, fitness and physical well being. However, this is only one aspect of health promotion.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines health as being ‘a state of complete physical, mental and social well being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity’. This universal definition looks at health from all aspects of personal well being and the philosophy of health promotion aims to provide the necessary resources for individuals to obtain and maintain total health.

The main framework for this action is based on prevention, social justice and equitable health for all members of the community. Health promotion is about adopting a holistic approach when dealing with the general health and well being of society and aims to provide individuals with information and strategies to take control of their well being in all aspects of their lives.

You may like to look up the World Health Organisation (WHO) web site, which has a link to health promotion programs being undertaken around the world. The site also gives you an understanding of the WHO philosophy regarding health and well being.

For more information about health promotion, you may want to read the Ottawa Charter paper. There is other information available about this subject within the Village, such as in the Community Centre or Youth Work Agency.