

# “just Be A Brother man, means relax, drink less”

## The Be a Brother campaign

### Snapshot of findings

**VicHealth wants to see a better drinking culture in Victoria. One where people can say no to a drink when they feel like stopping, where drinking to get drunk isn't seen as acceptable or normal.**

The VicHealth Innovation Challenge called for ideas to help change Victoria's drinking culture by either:

- reducing the amount Victorians drink, particularly those who drink a lot, often
- increasing the acceptability of saying no to a drink, or drinking a bit less.

In February 2015, VicHealth awarded start-up funding to four successful projects including cohealth's Be a Brother campaign.

This snapshot summarises the key outcomes and findings from an evaluation of Be a Brother.

### Background

cohealth arts generator recognised a variety of factors linked to heavy drinking among a community of South Sudanese men in Melbourne's west. These factors include:

- stress or trauma before and/or after migration to Australia
- high levels of social dislocation in relation to both family and community
- struggles with integrating into Australian society
- easy, local access to alcohol
- high levels of unemployment
- lack of knowledge about alcohol and health services
- stigma and marginalisation.

In addition, this group of men rarely see themselves represented in the media; when they do, it's typically a negative representation relating to alcohol and crime.

Be A Brother aimed to make it socially acceptable among young African men aged 16–25 in Melbourne's western region to drink moderately. The project encouraged young men to 'be a brother' by supporting their friends to drink less. Brothers were engaged via a social media campaign with young African peer mentors leading the communication through text messaging, offering advice for brothers wanting to reduce heavy drinking.

cohealth worked closely with South Sudanese filmmaker Ez Eldin Deng and young African Australians to create the

campaign, which includes three short films. The campaign was launched in November 2015 at an event attended by 250 community members, and the text messaging support encouraging brothers to drink less continues to be provided through the peer mentors every Friday and Saturday night.

Progress was measured through focus groups conducted at the start and finish of project, and semi-structured interviews with peer mentors and brothers, the project lead, artists and facilitators.

### KEY FINDINGS

- Over 100 young people signed up to the program, the majority of whom were young men from a diverse range of African backgrounds.
- Through interviews and focus groups, the participants spoke of their and/or others' reduction in alcohol consumption as a result of the project.
- The project evaluation also suggested there had been a change in these young men's beliefs about themselves and their ability to create change in this area (i.e. their relationship with alcohol).
- Perhaps the greatest success of this project has been the movement towards a new conversation around alcohol in this community, a 'collective self-esteem' and the creation of a culture of support for change – as evident in feedback from participants.

“

**It brings young people, families and elders together to face these issues which are not normally discussed.”**

Feedback on the Be a Brother symposium held in June 2016

“

**To me it's supportive, like having a big brother telling you you're messing up, telling you to think twice. The part of support that I like, someone is willing to give you their time to try to help you to make a better choice.”**

'Brother' speaking about the supportive SMS messages.

## Participant data (as at 31 July 2016)



**456**

active participants<sup>1</sup>



**38**

involved participants<sup>2</sup>



**106**

registered Brothers

### Cultural background



**99**

from African background



**6**

from non-African background

## Reach of the project (as at 31 July 2016)

Up to 70 members of African Australian communities took part in the making of the three short films as actors, extras and crew roles.



**250**

people at launch

Project launch on 10 November 2015 attended by 250 people.



**3515**

project audience<sup>3</sup>

The project had an audience of 3515 people.



**2864**

website views

beabrother.net website has attracted 2864 views.



**554**

likes

Facebook page had 554 Likes.



**959**

music video views

Be a Brother music video has had 959 views online.



**510**

presentation attendees

Project presented to a total of 510 conference and university lecture attendees.



**200**

symposium attendees

Community symposium in June 2016 attracted 200 community members of all ages.



**210**

first month documentary views

*Behind Be a Brother* short documentary (published to YouTube 4 July 2016) attracted 210 online views in its first month.



Online views of the three short films

**780** views

*Brothers in the Day*  
*Enemies at Night.*

**245** views

*Deep Inside.*

**361** views

*Your Future is Our Future.*

## Project outcomes

- Reduced alcohol consumption – Participants in interviews and focus groups spoke of their and/or others' reduction in alcohol consumption as a result of the project.
- Increase in social acceptability of moderate drinking – project evaluation suggested there had been a change in these young men's beliefs about themselves and their ability to create change in this area (their relationship with alcohol).
- The twice-weekly SMSs proved to be one of the most effective communication channels in maintaining frequent contact with the brothers and proved successful in influencing behaviour. Their significance lies first in their content, the messages about moderating drinking and encouraging others to, and second in that they model that encouragement.
- Here's an example SMS:

Not trying 2 burst ur bubble 2nyt but take the time 2 count ur drinks and count ur blessings, know what matters most?

**#startthinkingdrinkless #beinspired**

- Participants described how remarkable they are:  
“  
**The text messages... the text messages, I don't know, if we count blessings from God I think Be A Brother text message is that, because when they receive it they're like, whoa, there's somebody looking out for me. So it's kind of amazing.**  
“  
**When I receive it [a SMS] it's the reason why I go out and I don't drink, or go out and drink less, or go out and feel very proud as a brother.”**
- The Be a Brother project demonstrates that:
  - a collective or community approach rather than an individual approach was culturally appropriate in terms of both the young men's cultural background and their group drinking.
  - The principle of 'by the community, for the community' was necessary for the project to achieve buy-in from the young men, and is consistent with the Arts Generator model of embodied practice and more broadly cohealth's codesign value.
- Increased capacity of project team to deliver activities to reduce alcohol-related harm.
  - The peer mentors were trained by drug and alcohol educators on the effects of drug and alcohol use and treatment and recovery options.
  - Three of the five peer mentors also completed Mental Health First Aid training.
- Evaluation of short- and medium-term changes makes it plausible to anticipate that the increased acceptability of moderate drinking and reduced heavy drinking will be sustained in the longer term.

Please note: Only qualitative evaluation measures were used, including two focus groups – one a month after the start of the social media campaign (n=15), and another a month after its completion (n=15). There were also semi-structured interviews with the project team (n=3).

## What's next?

- cohealth arts generator received a grant from the City of Brimbank, which has enabled the continuation of the Be a Brother project through the weekend SMS messages and the training of five more peer mentors to support 'brothers' to drink less.
- A follow up evaluation of Be a Brother will take place in 2017, funded by VicHealth. This aims to find out if the positive outcomes of participating in the project have been sustained in the longer term.
- The opportunity to trial and evaluate a new approach through the 'VicHealth Innovation Challenge: Alcohol' has increased cohealth's capacity to work in the space of alcohol consumption and drinking culture with a range of target communities.
- Be a Brother peer mentors have collaborated with City of Yarra on a VicHealth-funded scoping study of drinking culture within a local African-Australian subpopulation. This work will inform applications by City of Yarra for future funding towards alcohol culture change activities.
- cohealth will recruit and train five female peer mentors to launch the first stage of the Be a Sista project in 2017. Content will be aimed towards African women aged 16–25.
- The Be a Brother message continues to be spread far and wide, with the project team presenting at forums, universities, through television and radio, national and international conferences.

## Definitions

- 1 Active participants** – individuals who participated in the films (actors and extras), the focus groups, attended the launch event, and the peer mentors and registered 'brothers'.
- 2 Involved participants** – individuals who assisted in the making of the films, photography and worked on the website (including paid suppliers).
- 3 Audience** – the audience includes attendees at the project launch event, conference presentations, university lectures, and community symposium as well as online views of short films, music video and 'Behind Be a Brother' documentary.



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