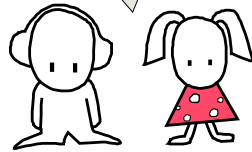


# VOICES and CHOICES



**Voices and Choices is a presentation for young people, designed and presented by young parents who have trained as peer educators. The program aims to influence the health and wellbeing of young people by helping them make informed decisions and increasing their knowledge and understanding of sexual health and teenage parenting.**

In 2004 Lifehouse Project began running the program in SE Queensland when some young parents volunteered to become Peer Educators on the Gold Coast. The presentation they offer shows how their lifestyle is different to their peers. They emphasise that they love their children dearly, but they are also very clear with the message that being a parent means that your life changes dramatically and you are on call 7 days a week for 24 hours a day! The Peer Educators talk the students through what it's like to become pregnant, make the choice to keep your baby and what happens once the baby arrives. They use their own true stories to depict the variety of issues and challenges that young people face. They get the students actively involved in the presentation and invite the students to ask questions at every stage.

The aim of the program is to get high school students thinking about what is involved in parenting. They are encouraged to make positive and informed choices about sexual health, contraception and relationships. The Peer Educators don't glamorise pregnancy or parenting, they describe their experiences realistically and honestly. They encourage students to think carefully about their sexual



health and they inform the students where to go for help and advice. Voices and Choices also helps young people consider the implications of unprotected sex, responsibilities of men and women in a relationship and the peer pressures placed on them as young people. The Peer Educators promote healthy images of women and encourages the students to be assertive about their needs in healthy relationships.

*After a recent presentation, 85% of the students said that they would now avoid getting themselves or their partners pregnant in the near future.*

Schools have found Voices and Choices a valuable resource in a number of curriculum areas and the presentation has already been utilised by School Based Youth Health Nurses, Youth Support Coordinators and Year Coordinators. A recent funding

submission to the Queensland Governments Office For Women was successful which means some new Peer Educators have been trained and are offering the presentation to young people. It is hoped that many schools, youth groups and youth organisations will take up the offer and teenagers all over the Gold Coast will have the opportunity to hear this excellent presentation from their peers.