



AIVL’s Learning Resources Build Empathy for Drug Users

Australian Injecting & Illicit Drug Users League (AIVL)
Best Unique or Innovative Learning and Development Program
October 2018



Company Background



Headquarters	Australia
Year Founded	1989
Revenue	Less than \$50 million
Employees	1-24
Global Scale (Regions that you operate in or provide services to)	Mostly located in one country (Australia) with some global reach.
Customers/Output, etc. (Key customers and services offered)	Education, healthcare, pharmaceuticals
Industry	Not-for-profit
Stock Symbol	N/A
Website	http://www.aivl.org.au



Budget and Timeframe

Overall budget	\$34,233-plus GST (Australian dollars)
Number of (HR, Learning, Talent) employees involved with the implementation?	3
Number of Operations or Subject Matter Expert employees involved with the implementation?	3
Number of contractors involved with implementation	2
Timeframe to implement	15 weeks
Start date of the program	May 4, 2017

Business Conditions and Business Needs

Australian Injecting and Illicit Drug Users League (AIVL) is the Australian national top organization representing the state and territory peer-based drug-user organizations and issues of national relevance for people with lived experience of drug use. AIVL's purpose is to advance the health of people who use or have used illicit drugs. This includes a primary focus on the effective implementation of peer education, harm reduction, health promotion and policy and advocacy strategies at the national level.

In its strategic plan (July 2015-June 2018), AIVL recognized the need to challenge and reduce stigma and discrimination among people who use illicit drugs and advocate to improve the quality, availability and accessibility of existing evidence-based treatment.

AIVL's organizational goal for this project was to develop an online learning resource that would support medical professionals in enhancing the customer experience for people who use drugs as they accessed health services.

AIVL recognized that there was considerable discomfort experienced by many drug users, where there was a strong sense of being judged for their drug-taking behavior and being categorized as somehow different from the general population. AIVL's goal was to develop empathy in health professionals for the concerns of drug users with an aim to improve the patient's customer experience.



Overview

The initial brief from AIVL to The ID Crowd, an instructional design company, was to convert its existing three-hour face-to-face program for general practitioners (GPs) into a one-hour eLearning module. Through multiple design sessions, this evolved to focusing more on developing an engaging learning experience that provided a balanced perspective for both health practitioners and drug users alike.

The ID Crowd and AIVL developed the podcast series [“A Normal Day,”](#) in response to the learning needs outlined by AIVL. They used research and interviews to explore real human stories with an aim to create a shared understanding of clinical interactions and how they are experienced by drug users and medical professionals alike. The goal was to create a small window into the worlds of both drugs users and medical professionals who have experience working with drug users.

“A Normal Day” features conversations between a range of healthcare professionals and people who use drugs on the challenges and misunderstandings that occur within the clinical relationship. The opportunity for learning is delivered through an innovative series of podcasts and accompanying practical resources that help build empathy and provide the tools to change behavior. The aim was to use the unique opportunity to hear real stories, supplemented by useful resources to support healthcare professionals to increase their skills and confidence in working with patients who use drugs.

The ID Crowd knew this wasn’t going to be the normal, “run of the mill” learning piece. A traditional eLearning module was not going to be the right solution for the audience or for the outcomes that were being sought. They needed to create something that would begin to help each audience understand a little more about each other to begin to build empathy and the drive to approach these relationships differently.

The concept of “A Normal Day” came along quite early in the project and it just stuck as the project progressed. It had a lot of buy in from stakeholders and learners alike. The idea was that everyone deserves to have the same experience when visiting their GP: from the small talk with the receptionist, to the time spent with a doctor, to the collection of a script at the pharmacy.

Design of the Program

“A Normal Day” is the chance to build empathy through listening to stories from people covering diverse perspectives — and the portability and convenience it offers (review via the site or download an episode and listen in car or on the bus).

The ID Crowd recommended podcasts as a solution over a traditional one-hour eLearning module as they recognized how time poor the audience members were during design sessions with AIVL. AIVL explained that it was currently running three-hour face-to-face sessions, which despite having great content and positive feedback from those who did attend, there was very low attendance in general by healthcare professionals. The solution needed to allow learners to access the learning resources anytime, anywhere with very little effort.

The other interesting shift that came out of the design workshop was the defined audience. AIVL had been targeting healthcare professionals, GPs in particular. Through conversations about what AIVL wanted to achieve from the program, shared understanding and better communication between healthcare professionals and drug users, however, it was clear that there were two audience groups — not one that had to be considered. This really shaped the solution and the decision to do a podcast series that both audience groups could access. Drawing on their experience in creating human-centered learning, The ID Crowd worked with AIVL and partners to develop an innovative solution that aimed to bridge the gap between the two audience groups (i.e., patient and healthcare professional).

Through extensive discussion with the client, it was clear that there was a broad range of personal experiences and a number of “significant players” who needed to be acknowledged, not just drug users and GPs. The six-part podcast series was made up of extensive interviews with GPs, pharmacists, researchers, emergency room physicians, GP receptionists, university experts and drug users who provide unique insights and rarely heard perspectives on the clinical relationship and the challenges and misunderstandings that sometimes occur within the clinical relationship.

Jude — Is an energetic person, avid thinker, avid reader and loves poppies. She loves art and can see through bullsh*t. She has three adult, professional children and is married but separated. Jude lives in Canberra.



Finn — Disabled transgender (transitioning from female to male) American user. Lost his leg in a motorcycle accident. He is a lovely, gentle and thoughtful person.

Felicity — On bail at the moment, parent who has had children removed from care. Ice user, started when older through partner. Sad about kids, lost and heading back to prison.

Tonya — Emergency registrar, highlight anti-drugs, she's seen it all on a Friday and Saturday night, runs anti-drug programs in schools on behalf of her hospital.

Christian — Gay male, regular user of crystal meth, partner not aware. Articulate and interesting.

Brian — Pharmacist who has been working with and empathetic to drug users for many years. A big, quirky personality.

Dr. David — East Sydney (inner city practice). Works well with users, a big part of his practice, gentle and sophisticated in nature.

Val — Medical receptionist at same clinic and has a great attitude. South American, caring and honest.

Dr. Griffith Jones — Head A&E at Royal Adelaide Hospital, worked extensively with drug users in emergency situations. An anti-drug crusader but realistic.

Dr. Lincoln Pike — Rural GP, positive, experienced especially with ice use, laid back and straight talker.

Associate Professor Linda Gowing — Department of Pharmacology at University of Adelaide, has worked with AIVL and Jude and is highly skilled to comment on programs. Impressive knowledge and experience in this area.

This enabled real insight into the world of people who use drugs and the healthcare professionals that they interact with. The project team worked together to create a bank of questions that would be asked of all interviewees. There was a real opportunity to shed some light on key misunderstandings, different perspectives and misconceptions that were uncovered as a result of being able to compare and contrast responses and different points of view (i.e., the idea of "collusion vs. care"). Drug users were concerned that GPs and pharmacists were colluding or talking behind their backs — it was seen as malicious. When asked about this, both GPs and pharmacists were able to understand the drug



user's position but then talk about their devotion to "duty of care." If a pharmacist sees that a patient is not coping, they will contact the GP to ensure they check in on them. The use of real stories was important as they were effective in developing understanding in the learner and the building of empathy.

In short, this was a great opportunity for both audience groups to look into each other's worlds and begin to work toward a shared understanding and building better relationships between health professionals and people who use drugs when visiting their GP.

AIVL worked with The ID Crowd and their development partners to weave together a series of stories using the interviews and additional research into different themes relating to patient's experience from walking in the door to the actual consultation with the GP and the visit to the pharmacist for the script for the podcasts.

Episode 1 — Just a Sign: Covered the patient's feelings of seeing that sign on the window about "no cash or drugs kept on premises," many GPs hadn't considered the implication of this before.

Episode 2 — A Typical Day in the Waiting Room: Covered the perspective from the drug users themselves; it really delved into their sense of community.

Episode 3 — Just Your Run-of-the-Mill Small Talk: Focused on the perspective of the receptionist, the front-line — the "gatekeeper to the demigod."

Episode 4 — The Simple Act of Renewing a Script: Covered the unique perspective of GPs and other healthcare professionals within that consultation room.

Episode 5 — An Ordinary Trip to the Pharmacy: Focused on the perspective from the pharmacist, particularly around how patients on the methadone program are received

The visual design of the final product was extremely important to this project as well. The "Normal Day" podcast series and resources were bundled together in a simple HTML page for ease of access across devices. When considering illicit drug use, lots of negative — quite dark imagery might spring to mind. However, having the theme of "A Normal Day" really helped to inform the look and feel to be something much more positive — even hopeful. The light feel and watercolor design helped to focus on the human element, irrespective of personal choices.



Delivery of the Program

AIVL did not have its own LMS (or a large budget), so a further innovation was to leverage this from one of their partners. A “Normal Day” was made available to the audience through the Australian Society for HIV Medicine (ASHM) LMS. It was important to deliver it in this manner rather than simply sharing the website link more widely, as privacy issues meant that while AIVL wanted to get the message out as broadly as possible — they were very careful to protect the identity of the participants; some of the drug users who participated were in highly paid jobs/functioning members of society — in some cases their own family didn’t know that they were using.

Careful consideration was given to the privacy of those who were included in the podcast series, with all involved signing an interview release form and having been made aware of what parts of their interviews would be used and in what context. AIVL began targeting a small distribution of GPs and established healthcare professionals as a starting point (41 participants) and now has branched out, launching the program in universities and targeting medical students to collate feedback (44 participants).

Measurable Benefits

The learning outcomes of “A Normal Day” were measured in several ways, including qualitative direct learner feedback through responding to a TypeForm survey available through the site and a study carried out with Australian National University, School of Medicine and quantitatively through the ASHM LMS reporting.

Respondents to the survey included health professionals, either GPs or health practice employees (63%), people who identified as drug users (25%) and others (12%). Of the medical professionals, approximately 75% worked with drug users on a regular basis.

All responded that the content in “A Normal Day” would drive them to change their attitudes and approach when working with drug users. They recorded that the main intention or goal post program was:

- To become less judgmental of their clients.
- Increase their level of patience when working with drug users.
- Strive to build better relationships and attempt to understand them better.

All respondents felt that the content within the podcast series provided a diversity of perspectives, while more than half (58%) saying that the content was familiar and resonated with their own personal experiences. Most responded that the content provided broad coverage of the issue and suggestions for further content included information about long-term and continual drug use, as well as medical professionals providing additional support in problem solving for drug users.

The majority (84%) of respondents had accessed the resources provided in the site, with 80% of those people finding them useful in their role. One-hundred percent of all respondents regarded the user experience to be appropriate to its content and 84% felt that it was an effective way to present the information.

Feedback from a ANU, School of Medicine, fourth-year student study demonstrates how “A Normal Day” challenged their thoughts about people who are illicit drug users and the balanced perspective within the stories was strongly applauded. Students universally liked the learning experience with approximately 70% describing it as their preferred learning format. The narrative stories were very well-received with students enjoying a format that was different to other university learning experiences.

Overall

The ID Crowd and AIVL formed an open and transparent relationship, based on trust — in this industry that in itself is unique.

Jude Byrne, who is a key spokesperson for AIVL and was involved in the project from beginning to end (you will recognize her from the podcast series as the main “character”), sent the following letter at the end of the project:

“Hi,

“I just feel I need to provide further comment on your podcast I didn’t do justice to the exceptional and unique tool you have developed. The deft and sensitive way you have woven that enormous amount of provocative personal material into an intriguing sensitive story is testament to your skill in picking the gold from many, many words. You have developed the only intervention that has all the players having a voice that in and of itself is noteworthy, drug users, doctors, researchers, receptionists, emergency physicians, chemists. Kim’s disarming interview style has managed to get the interviewees to display an honesty and vulnerability that I have never heard it certainly has opened my eyes to

their dilemmas. Kim's questions are gently challenging and non-threatening therefore getting gold in terms of how these people think they just tell her it's priceless. Andrews's interviews also get some unheard of material that will help with the understanding of the different players.

"Nic, your introductions and summations in the podcast are integral to the intermingling of the incredibly diverse and intense issues being discussed then understood, your factual gentle empathetic voice for every person provides for the non-judgmental almost just a really good story you are discussing. Some of your introductions make the next part almost like a detective story you must hear the response.

"Andrew, your sensitive handling of us combined with your patience when we got the jitters (well me really) allowed the podcast to get to where it did and all the people you managed to get to participate speaks to your love and understanding of humanity and prescience of what could be if all these parts came together. You managed to get that disparate usually never to be seen together group has made this what is an extraordinary stigma intervention into a work of art.

"Thank you so much, from the first time I meet you three exceptional people I felt safe and my community cared about.

*"I think you all have managed to capture something indefinable yet essential to our combined objective, an intimate, honest human piece of innovative educational theatre. It's f***** brilliant actually."*

Jude Byrne — AIVL Project Officer

AIVL plans to continue to gather feedback and listen to learners regarding what they need from "A Normal Day" and its associated programs. The idea is for this program to have a much wider audience and the fine-tuning will continue to ensure learners feel a real benefit and gain insights into another person's situation or point of view, leading to healthy GP, patient relationships.



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