

Review of Re-Solv's DVD Productions

for young people
..by young people



Re-Solv
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About Re-Solv

Re-Solv's mission is to contribute to happier, healthier, safer social environments by preventing death, suffering and crime which may result as a consequence of solvent and volatile substance abuse (VSA.)

We are calling for:

- Prevention of solvent and volatile substance abuse to be placed high on the national and international agenda
- Clear educational messages to ensure that products are used for their intended purpose
- Better services and provisions for users, especially young people and their families.

We do this through research, dissemination of educational materials, training and community projects.

With over twenty years experience and dedication to the prevention of VSA, Re-Solv is acknowledged as the lead body in the field and recognised as a specialist source of information on VSA.

Background

Re-Solv has produced a variety of resources that have been successful in educating young people about the dangers of solvent abuse. However, Re-Solv recognises the need to ensure that their resources continue to engage young people and reflect the society of today. For this reason, Re-Solv has conducted a review of the DVD resources currently in use, based on the views and suggestions from young people.

The two resources to be reviewed were 'Chicken' and 'A Loaded Gun'. The 'Chicken' DVD was made in 1989 and plays for approximately 30 minutes. It follows the story of two brothers who become involved in solvent abuse and highlights the impact of peer pressure. 'A Loaded Gun', made in 1999, which plays for approximately 12 minutes, is a factual documentary about the dangers of VSA and includes emotive interviews with family and friends of three young people who have died as a result of VSA.

Selection Process

Two Secondary schools from the Staffordshire area were selected to help with the evaluation of the DVDs. In order to access a range of young people from a cross section of society the schools were selected in terms of geographical location and on the basis of their 2007 GCSE results. The Secondary Schools selected were as follows:

Holden Lane Specialist Sports College is located in an area called Sneyd Green in Stoke-on-Trent. In 2007 the percentage of students who gained 5 GCSEs grade A*-C (including English and Maths) was 43%.

St. Josephs Catholic College is located in the area of Trentham in Newcastle-under-Lyme. The percentage of students in 2007 who gained 5 GCSEs grade A*-C (including English and Maths) was 95.2%.

Demographic Information

		Holden Lane	St. Josephs
Gender	Male	29	28
	Female	32	19
Ethnicity	White	54	35
	Black	1	5
	Asian	6	7

Key Findings

In total, 108 young people aged between 12 years and 16 years reviewed the DVDs. Each DVD was reviewed three times, each time by a different group of students. Each group viewed one DVD only so as not to draw comparisons between the two resources.

The table below shows the number of students from each year group that reviewed the resources.

'Chicken' DVD

	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11
Holden Lane	21 pupils	0 pupils	0 pupils	0 pupils
St Josephs	0 pupils	16 pupils	0 pupils	11 pupils

'A Loaded Gun' DVD

	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11
Holden Lane	20 pupils	0 pupils	13 pupils	0 pupils
St Josephs	0 pupils	27 pupils	0 pupils	0 pupils

Students were asked to evaluate the film they had seen using the feedback forms provided (see appendix A)

'Chicken' DVD

Overall the students liked the 'story-telling' element of the DVD and stated that they enjoyed watching it more than they would have done if it was in documentary format. They felt that the family set-up was a good way of showing the effects that VSA has on the family, particularly in relation to the reaction of the Mother when she read out the dangers of solvent abuse and viewers see how scared she was about what it could do to her son. All students liked how the DVD focused on the difficulties of dealing with peer pressure and how it led to Nick being taken to hospital. Students liked the way in which factual information was provided within the storyline, along with advice on who to go to for help, for example counsellors.

The majority of students felt that the DVD resource effectively delivered the message that solvents can kill you instantly. However, some students felt that the DVD could have been more dramatic in delivering the message and should not contain jokes as this may detract from the seriousness of the film.

The students were asked to rate the film on the following categories. The table below shows the average scores given per group and the total average from all students.

	Visual Impact	Contents	Message Delivery	Watch Ability	Length
Year 8	7.25	8.42	9.1	7.68	7.9
Year 9	6.56	6.81	6.88	5.5	5.1
Year 11	5.9	6.9	8.1	6.5	6
Total Averages	6.57	7.38	8.03	6.56	6.3

The ratings above show that the majority of students thought that the resource was of a good quality, rating the contents and message delivery particularly high. In addition to liking the story element of the DVD, students also liked the questions that were presented to them as they felt that this made them think about the contents on a deeper level. However, many students suggested that the questions should be read out aloud to the audience to retain their attention, rather than being in the form of a silent freeze frame.

In relation to the length and watch ability, nearly all students felt that the 'Chicken' DVD was too long in duration and was a little outdated, therefore making it difficult to watch and engage with. In particular, many felt that the break-dancing theme was no longer relevant to young people nowadays and therefore made it difficult for them to relate to the characters as well. Many students questioned whether Nick had actually died in the film as a result of VSA, and therefore felt that this should have been made clearer and presented in a more dramatic way. Many felt that showing Nick dead or a grave would have had a stronger impact. In relation to the presentation of the DVD, students stated that the music needed to be modernised and alternated to reflect the tone of the film at different points. They also felt that the dull lighting was poor in places and made it difficult to see what was happening.

As a suggestion, many students stated that they would have liked to have viewed alternative endings for the character of Nick. They recommended that viewers could be shown Nick receiving help and consequently stop abusing solvents and lead a fulfilling life. Alternatively, viewers could see Nick standing up to the peer pressure and saying 'No' to solvent abuse. Many felt that this would show the audience that there are different alternatives to a life of drugs.



'A Loaded Gun' DVD

Overall the students liked the large amount of facts, statistics and information that the DVD provided them with. They also liked how the DVD focused on real-life youngsters who have died from VSA as they felt that this grabbed their attention from the onset and illustrated how dangerous it is. In relation to this, the majority of students felt that by incorporating interviews with the family and friends of the deceased and showing how they have been affected, made them personally consider how their own parents would feel if it had been them who had died. However, some students would have liked to have seen interviews with ex-users to understand their perspective and to show that individuals can turn their lives around after VSA.

Students rated the film on the following categories. The table below shows the average scores given per group and the total average from all students.

	Visual Impact	Content	Message Delivery	Watch Ability	Length
Year 8	7.35	7.65	9	8.28	6.42
Year 9	7.63	7.36	8.63	8.12	7.19
Year 10	7.4	7.7	8.3	9	6.4
Total Averages	7.46	7.57	8.64	8.47	6.67

The ratings above show that the majority of students thought that the resource was of a very good quality. They specifically rated the message delivery particularly high, stating that the DVD clearly shows that VSA can cause death. However, many students stated that the duration of the DVD should have been longer and demonstrated the deaths of a wider age range of users instead of focusing on solvent abuse in young people only.

In relation to the actual content, students liked how the documentary gave background information on three individuals who had died, but the majority felt that each story needed to be told separately to make it clearer and to have more of an impact. Students also struggled to see how certain scenes, for example, the snooker playing, were directly relevant to the film. Following discussion on this, students understood that the game of snooker was a past-time of one of the deceased youngsters. However, the need for clarity on this point shows that it is not made clear in the DVD. A small percentage of students felt that there was too much emphasis on the views of the deceased friends and that this time should have been dedicated to providing more facts and statistics about the dangers of solvent abuse.

In relation to the visual impact of the DVD, although a high proportion of the students stated that the DVD was watchable, they all agreed that the graphics were a little outdated and that the DVD was in need of modernisation. Feedback gathered highlighted that students would have liked more pictures to be included and for the music to be more dramatic and reflective of the mood. It was suggested that the music played could be the music that the deceased young people listened to. Students all agreed that the reconstructions shown in the DVD were a powerful way of showing the way in which Jay died. However, they all felt that visually, the reconstructions could have been clearer in places, to have more of a dramatic impact on the audience.



'A Loaded Gun' Continued

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In addition, all students were asked to identify which tools they felt would be most effective in delivering the message about solvent abuse to the young people of today. The table below shows the tools chosen in order of popularity.

Tool	Number of votes
Real-life experiences	75
Young people	74
Music	66
Clear facts	65
Parents	50
Reconstruction dramas	50
Bright colours	23
Teachers	21
Cartoons	7
Games	6
Fun sketches	5



Discussion

In addition to completing the evaluation forms individually, the students were given the opportunity to discuss their views in more depth through an open discussion forum. The information gathered revealed that students found that watching the parents visiting the graves of their deceased children and hearing their friends talk about how much they missed them had the greatest impact on them emotionally. Hearing facts about how quickly VSA can kill and seeing articles that had been published in the National Newspapers were aspects of the DVDs that they remembered the most.

The reviews highlighted a large variety in the knowledge base of students on the topic of VSA. Their experience of solvent abuse and knowledge ranged from very little (guessing it related to glue sniffing) to those who had personally abused solvents on a regular basis. These differences were not attributed to the age of the student or which school they attended. However, one consistent factor across all ages and schools was how little students actually knew about the dangers of VSA, both immediately and long-term. No-one was aware of the term “sudden sniffing death syndrome” or how quickly solvent abuse can kill. A large percentage of students stated that they would have liked the DVDs to have concentrated more on the damage that solvent abuse can cause to the body and the different ways in which it can cause death.

During the discussions, students also stated that they would like to be given more information about the types of products that can be abused, as they felt that the DVDs focused heavily on lighter fluid refills as the main cause of death. Although it may be beneficial for students to be aware of the hazards of different household products, Re-Solv has a strict policy that, for ethical reasons, we do not inform people about what specific products can be abused or how this can be done. It was explained to students that this would not be possible as the focus of Re-Solv’s work is to educate about the dangers of VSA, not to provide more curious individuals with the knowledge and know-how of what to abuse.

In addition to gathering the views of young people, feedback was also obtained from the Teaching Staff who viewed the resources. The two staff members who watched ‘A Loaded Gun’ DVD stated that they liked the emotive stories based on the death of teenage children as they felt that this helped the students to relate to the material. They felt that the resource delivered the message well and would have liked posters/images to accompany the DVD so that they could continue the discussion in the classroom having watched the DVD. Staff rated the contents of the film highly but suggested that it could include interviews with young people to show how little they know about VSA. As an educational resource the teaching staff stated that the DVD was informative but stated that the music and film techniques need to be modernised to make it more engaging.

In relation to the ‘Chicken’ DVD, the two staff members who viewed this agreed that presenting the facts as a story was a good way to engage the students and showed a comparison between the character before and after the solvent abuse. They liked the emphasis that was placed on peer pressure and thought that it had a strong relevance to the youth culture of today. From a teaching perspective they liked the questions that were presented and the way in which the DVD paused at this point. However, they felt that more factual information should have been included. Both teachers agreed that the ending was too vague and would have preferred it to show that Nick had died. They commented that as an educational resource, they felt that the DVD was too outdated to effectively engage the students.

Both students and teaching staff felt that the titles of both DVD needed to be changed as they did not relate to what the film was actually about. In relation to the resource ‘A Loaded Gun’, many viewers expected it to be a film about guns and gun crime. Many stated that the title ‘Chicken’ gave the viewer no idea at all as to what they would be watching. The following suggestions were made as to what a film about solvent abuse could be called; “Death in a second”, “Russian Roulette”, or “Sniffer.”

The DVD review was a positive experience for both students and teaching staff alike. Teaching staff commented that they were horrified at the amount of students who had personally experienced VSA either themselves or had been present when friends were using. This highlighted the fact that a large proportion of solvent abuse in young people is still undetected. Having watched the DVDs, teachers commented how relieved they were to actually hear some students' state that they would not be abusing solvents again now they know the truth about the effects. This highlights the importance of educating young people about the dangers of VSA.

Recommendations

Although both DVDs received positive comments and delivered the message about the dangers of solvent abuse, the review has highlighted the need to modernise the resources and adapt them to appeal to the young people of today. Having incorporated the suggestions from students and teaching staff, the following list gives some indications as to what young people of today would like included in a modernised DVD resource about VSA.

1. A computerised image showing the short-term and long-term effects of VSA and the different ways that it can kill.
2. Statistics and real-life stories from a wider age range (7 years to middle aged).
3. Voice-overs from a range of people, including experts, parents, young people and paramedics who have treated solvent users.
4. Clear reconstructions of real-life deaths to increase the impact. Include interviews with ex-solvent users about how it has affected their lives, as a warning to young people that 'this could happen to you'.
5. Modern images such as football and computer games and modern music relating to the tone. For example, 2-pac and hardcore during the dramatic reconstructions and funeral music depicting their deaths.
6. Include interviews with ordinary young people questioning them about VSA, to show how limited their knowledge is about the dangers of solvent abuse.
7. Ensure that the length is between 15-25 minutes for maximum engagement.
8. Show what warning signs to look out for on products, how to keep safe when using products focusing on ventilation and tips on first aid.
9. Final scene should be a dedication to those who have died, depicted by showing the names and pictures of deceased individuals within the outline of a gas canister or on a grave stone.

Appendix A

Film Review

	Comments
What did you like most about the film? Good bits!	
What did you not like? Bad bits!	
What would you definitely leave in?	
What changes would you make?	
Do you think the story is good at getting the message across? If not, what would you do instead?	
Would you like alternative endings? If yes, what are your suggestions??	

(1= Poor 10= Excellent)	Mark out of 10	Comments
Visual impact		
Story and contents		
Message delivery		
Watch Ability		
Length		

As a **Director** which of the following tools would YOU use in this DVD to get the message across? (Please circle your answers and add anymore that you can think of).

Music Bright Colours Cartoons Reconstruction dramas
 Parents Young People Teachers Real life experiences
 Clear Facts Fun sketches Games

Other _____

What issues would you like covered in a DVD about 'sniffing'?

What would be the ONE thing you would include in this film to stop young people 'sniffing'?

Thank you!





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