



Who are you talking to?

A look behind the keyboard



“You think you know who you are talking to”, a powerful statement in the context of the Youth Forum held in Morawa.

The WA College of Agriculture – Morawa hosted a Youth Forum organised by teacher Amanda Gaunt and included students from the Morawa District High School.

Tackling some of the most relevant issues that teenagers face in today’s society, the forum panel was made up of Lawyer (Midwest Gascoyne Legal Aid) Kate Turtley-Chappel, Registered Nurse (volunteer St. John Ambulance officer), Debbie Collins, Officer in Charge from the Morawa Police Station, Sargent Jason Goff and Health & Wellbeing advocate, Fiona Stewart.

With over two hundred students in attendance, topics of sexting, cyber bullying, on line predators, social media content, drug use, the ice epidemic and the consequences of any of these, from a legal, health and mental health perspective was covered.

With firsthand knowledge that the negative effects of all of these issues can have on young people’s lives, their family and friends, the forum panel were able to engage students in real life scenarios they had witnessed.

Midwest Gascoyne Legal Aid Lawyer Kate Turtley- Chappel, wanted students to understand that the person you think you’re communicating with via social media, can, in her legal experience, be someone completely different.

“People are very brave behind a computer key board; I get to deal first hand with the people effected by on line predators, the predator themselves and cyber bullies.

At times just one bad choice can see situations spiralling in the wrong direction, and the consequences for the victim, the perpetrator and their families can be terrifying, particularly once they become involved in the juvenile justice system,” said Ms. Turtley-Chappel.

Health & Wellbeing advocate, Fiona Stewart, deals with the short and long term mental health impact of many of main forum topics and wanted to impress on students about the content of social media. “You will be judged on your online content – Forever, from future travel to employers and relationships. What you thought was for one person will be online for everyone to view, now and into the future.”

From the front line Police Officer Sargent Jason Goff outlined the legal outcomes from sexting, possessing these images and sending them on (distributing), and the false security people felt because they deleted images, offering student’s a sobering reality check.

“Everything that is posted online or text, is out there in cyberspace forever, people think because they pushed the delete button the image or words are gone – they are not – they are recorded and can be traced. The Police Department have people dedicated to monitoring and tracing people involved in online criminal acts.”

Not just cities and larger regional towns were feeling the effects of the rising drug problem, but smaller communities as well, and Registered Nurse, Debbie Collins, relayed what medical staff deal with on a regular basis.

For Mrs Collins Methamphetamine (Ice) has had an impact on how nurses care for a patient, “the damage this drug does to a person is overwhelming, it’s like they are the devil, the way it effects a user’s brain is like no other drug, they can go days without sleep until their body says no more, but they have no recollection of the things they have done or the people they have hurt (or crimes they have committed).”

Mrs Collins implored the students to reach out for help if they were considering using Ice (or any other type of drug) or had used before, and to think hard about the consequences of that one bad choice and the long term issues it would cause.

For police dealing with someone affected by drugs the priority has to be the individual, “Firstly we try and deal with the health issues surrounding drug taking, and we deal with the legalities, if there has been any criminal act committed later, the person’s health and well-being are paramount”, said Sargent Goff.

On concluding the forum Ms Turtely-Chappel had a message for students, in relation to social media, “please remember every decision has a consequence, and just like when we decide to get behind the wheel of a car, we need to be aware of the consequences on going online.”



Back row – Forum convenor, WACOA – Morawa Teacher Amanda Guant, WACOA – Morawa Captains Holly Crowley and Matthew Pyke, Morawa District High School Captains, Sam Ballanytne and Lucy Hebiton.

Front row - Lawyer (Midwest Gascoyne Legal Aid) Kate Turtley-Chappel, Registered Nurse (volunteer St. John Ambulance officer), Debbie Collins, Officer in Charge from the Morawa Police Station, Sargent Jason Goff and Health & Wellbeing advocate, Fiona Stewart.