

Bridges workers build on a dream

by MARNIE ONEILL

YOUTH outreach worker Tirrania Suhood has a novel thought: "Imagine growing up in a community where young people and adults understand each other".

It need not be such a far-fetched idea, according to Ms Suhood and her colleagues at Blacktown's Bridges Project.

Bridges held its first public workshop last week, inviting young people, parents, drug and alcohol counsellors and police to share their perceptions of substance abuse and ideas.

"Bridges believes drug issues are complex and that there are no simple solutions," she said. "Strengthening relationships between young people, parents, the community and agencies is a major part of the solution."

Bridges project worker and youth counsellor of 25 years, Peter Slattery said he believed advertising played a large role in



Youth counsellor Peter Slattery addresses the workshop

social acceptance of drug and alcohol abuse.

Billboards depicting sweating athletes — usually footballers or boxers — swilling bottles of beer were seen by children at railway stations across Sydney every day, he said.

Mr Slattery said he saw one billboard featuring a

close-up of a sneaker being injected with a syringe with a slogan about "performance enhancing drugs".

"Alcohol commercials make a huge difference. We live in a world which encourages substance abuse."

Other advertising campaigns portrayed youths

as aggressive, tainting the public's perception of them.

"I believe most young people are good people. Taking drugs doesn't make someone a bad person," he said. "I heard somebody say once we don't have drug problems, we have people problems — it's a response to the world we live in."