



Saving lives: Project community development manager Paul Weight and drug prevention manager Shannon Luttrell look forward to the awards night. Picture: Mark Farrugia

Drug project for youths lines up for recognition

BY ANDREW MATHIESON

A GEELONG drug and alcohol treatment program is vying for a national award after turning around nearly 500 young lives in less than two years.

The work of the BAYSA Youth Outreach project is as one of three finalists at an Australian National Alcohol and Drug Awards. Judges will announce winners on June 23.

BAYSA project manager Paul Weight said the service had cost \$250,000 since September, 2004, for three workers to travel up to 3000km a week providing young users with rehabilitation.

"The reason why it's been successful is because the youth outreach workers have a strong ability to engage with young people in their settings and then facilitate access into appropriate treatment and support them throughout the treatment cycle," Mr Weight said.

"They've been working tirelessly over a two-year period developing

an innovative model and supporting 480 young people.

"It's a testimony to their resilience and professionalism."

Two people a year had access to youth drug and alcohol rehabilitation services in the region before the project began operating but it increased places to 18 in its first six months.

"That speaks volumes in regard to how quickly this program has had a positive impact," Mr Weight said.

The project had found that binge drinking and cannabis use were the main drug problems among young clients in the Barwon South West region.

Mr Weight said one in seven clients were indigenous, with the project targeting their "significant health and access issues".

Previous recognition of the project's success was a 2005 award for youth service excellence at a Regional Victorian Alcohol and Drug Conference.