

## Coram Learning & Development Academy



### *Coram Talks*

## Insights from the father of Social Norms Theory

*Professor Wesley Perkins, PhD (US based)*

Thursday December 7<sup>th</sup> 2017

11am - 12.15pm

In the Board Room

Professor Wes Perkins is a pioneer in work uncovering peer misperceptions of alcohol and other drug norms, and developed the theory underlying the social norms approach to prevention. Social norms theory is based on the premise that humans are group oriented, like herd animals, and are largely influenced by, and conform to peer norms. Young people tend to *overestimate* the amount of risky behaviour (bullying, substance misuse, sexual behaviour etc.) their peers are engaged in and *underestimate* the safe and protective behaviours of their peer group. Natural human behaviour is to think that if the majority of people are doing something then it is more acceptable. Because of this, individuals are more vulnerable to engaging in those behaviours – even if they involve risk. Social norms theory plays an important role in wellbeing education and policy (and underpins the preventative approach taken within Coram Life Education) on the basis that challenging misperceptions of norms of behaviours are more likely to change the *actual* norms of behaviours.

Professor Perkins is Project Director of the Alcohol Education Project in New York, an initiative providing research, educational resources, and strategies to reduce alcohol and other drug abuse throughout the U.S. and internationally. His other research interests and publications include studies of family roles and well-being among young adults and social norms and bullying amongst adolescents. His most recent research is entitled *Misperception is Reality: The 'Reign of Error' About Peer Risk Behaviour Norms Among Youth and Young Adults.*"