

# Citywide Drugs Crisis Campaign - April 2012 - Results of Survey: Impact of Budget 2012 changes in Community Employment 'Income Disregard'

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## INTRODUCTION

Since the introduction of the Social Welfare Bill 2012, Special CE Drug Rehab projects have been concerned that the changes pertaining to 'income disregards' would have a serious impact for a large number of people seeking day programme rehabilitation options. Some projects had already begun to see a decline in their waiting list and had experienced refusals by some people to take up places offered.

The CE Drug Rehab projects are a specific intervention of the National Drugs Strategy and provide 1000 day places for those recovering from drug use. As such they are different from mainstream CE. As the **Report of the Working Group on Drugs Rehabilitation 2007** states:

*"The special CE Drug Rehab Projects are designated as 'special' projects in recognition of the fact that they are not operating as a labour market mechanism in the same way as mainstream CE, but rather as a support mechanism through which drug rehabilitation programmes can be delivered. Nine key adjustments have been made which differentiate CE Drug Projects from mainstream CE and these adjustments are based on the needs of the target group of recovering drug users."*

The majority of drug users applying for places on these community programmes have always been either in receipt of a disability payment or one parent allowance payment. Before the introduction of the Social Welfare Bill, CE participants were able to retain a portion of their original social welfare allowance whilst also claiming a CE allowance. This enabled them to pay for childcare and/or disability costs such as transport, special dietary requirements, etc. Of equal importance however was the fact that by retaining a portion of their social welfare allowance, participants kept a live 'link' to their original social welfare claim thus providing them with a sense of security for when they completed their CE rehabilitation programme. The changes in the recent Social Welfare Bill now mean that participants coming onto special CE Drug Rehab Projects must forego their original claim completely. This is acting as a disincentive towards taking up the offer of Drug Rehab CE as can be seen from the comments attached.

Citywide wrote to Minister Burton in January 2012 pointing out our concerns. We saw that there was potential for problems and the results of this survey bears out those fears.

## SURVEY

To try to ascertain a profile of CE applicants and to see if there were any early signs of a negative impact on take-up of the programme, we surveyed 37 Drug Rehab Community Employment Projects using the online tool, Survey Monkey. We asked projects for comparative numbers of CE participants on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2011 and on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012. It also asked them for comparative information on their waiting list numbers over the same three month period and to make comment on any relevant impacts since the Social Welfare Bill.

Total survey: 37 Drug Rehab Community Employment Projects -Response: 22 = 59% approx. All 22 respondents answered all questions

## SURVEY RESULTS

In December 2011 the twenty two projects responding had 457 'T coded'<sup>1</sup> Drug Rehab places filled. By March 2012 the number of participants had reduced to 421 – a reduction of 8.5%

Of the 457 places in December 2011, 78% were in receipt of the combined payments of either Disability or One Parent Family Allowances. By March 2012 this figure had decreased to 69% - a decrease of 9% over a three month period.

**Respondents came from the following Task Force areas:**

North Inner City – 3	South Inner City - 3	Canal Communities – 2	Ballyfermot – 2
Clondalkin – 2	Tallaght – 1	DLR – 1	North East LDTF – 2
Finglas/Cabra – 1	Ballymun – 1	Dublin 12 – 3	Blanchardstown - 1

### Q.1: How many "T code" CE participants were on your FAS wage sheet on?

Dec 31st 2011:	457
March 31st 2012:	421 (Reduction of 8.5%)

### Q.2: How many "T coded" participants were in receipt of DISABILITY benefit or allowance on?

Dec 31st 2011:	232	= 51% of total
March 31st 2012:	188	= 44% of total (see fig 1 below)

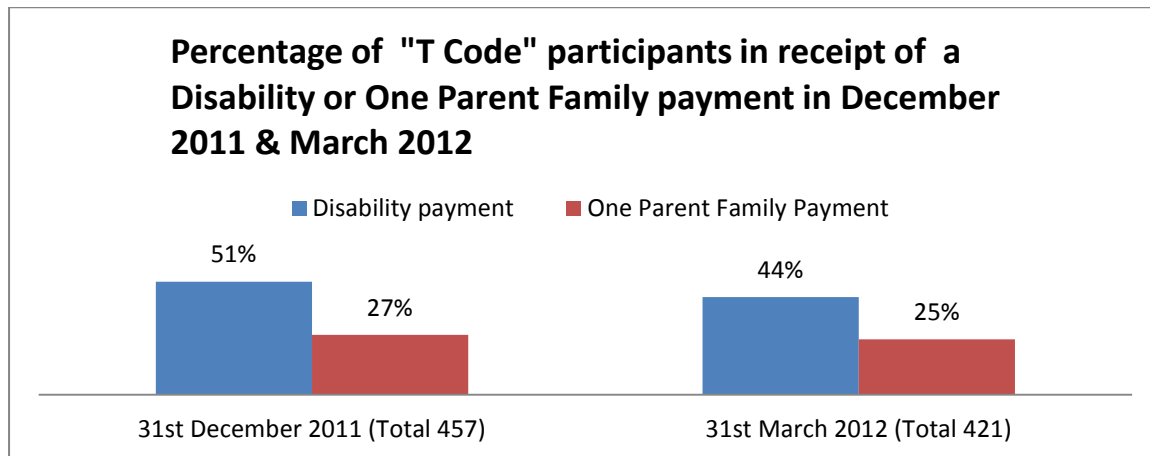
### Q. 3: How many "T coded" participants were in receipt of ONE PARENT family payment on?

Dec 31st 2011:	121	= 27% of total
March 31st 2012:	104	= 25% of total (see fig 1 below)

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<sup>1</sup> T Code is the FAS/DSP reference used for CE ring fenced Drug Rehabilitation places

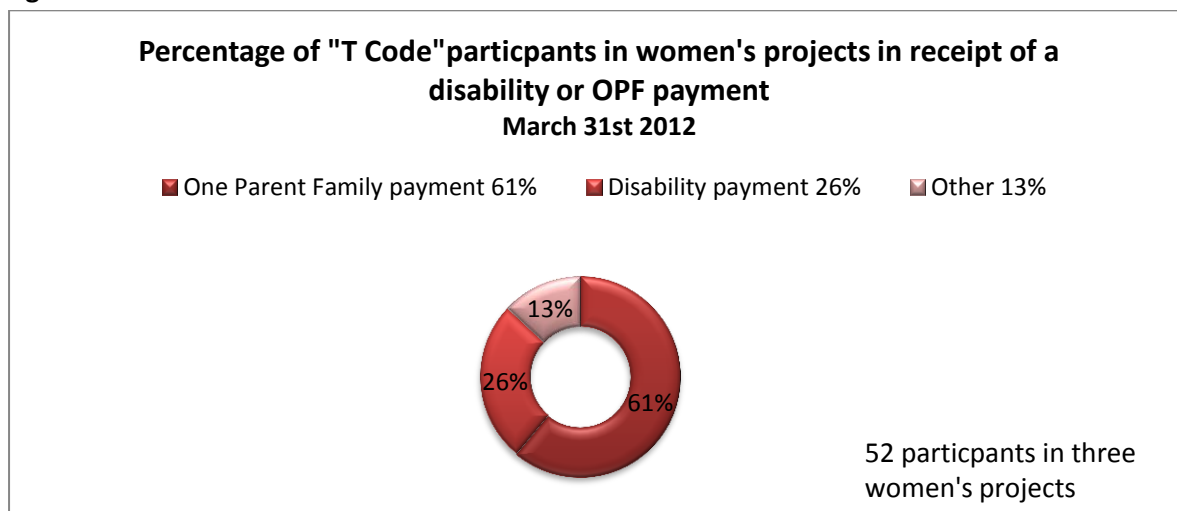
Figure 1



## WOMEN

While the overall percentage for the combined applicants on disability or OFPA averages out at 78%, it's important to note that women specific projects are more likely to have a greater number of clients in receipt of OFPA. Our survey shows that of the three women specific projects 87% of participants are in receipt of disability or OFPA and in one project the percentage is 100% (see fig 2 below).

Figure 2



## WAITING LISTS

We then went on to ask respondents what the comparative numbers were on their waiting list between December 2011 and March 2012. The figure below shows a startling decline.

### Q.4: How many people were on your WAITING LIST on?

Dec 31st 2011:	208	
March 31st 2012:	94	= 55% reduction

## QUALITATIVE DATA

Respondents were asked if they had evidence that people were declining offers of places because of the changes in the Social Welfare Bill or if their 'pre-entry' numbers were affected. Here is a sample of responses:

"Four out of five people on the waiting list asked to be taken off when informed about the changes"

"The waiting list has evaporated almost overnight as a result of the changes in entitlements and in some cases concerns about secondary benefits. One parent families fear they will lose their one parent family entitlement because they'll be deemed fit for work as soon as they register for CE and revert to job-seekers. Those on disability payments fear losing secondary benefits as well as (potentially) their disability status if they commence on a scheme. Prospective participants also report different information from DSP staff which results in a reluctance to 'take a chance' on joining CE. I don't believe there is a shortage of demand for CE as the waiting in Dec 2011 shows. We've assessed/interviewed 10, only one of whom has accepted. The remaining 18 withdrew their interest having been called more than once for interview/assessment."

"There has been some decline in the number of clients taking up on community employment; I feel that this is down to confusion around the "risk of coming off a DSP payment and the problems around trying to get payment back if the scheme doesn't work out. For many of our target group this is a risk they are reluctant to take. If community employment is to remain as part of the rehabilitation strategy further time needs to be invested into how this will be rolled out and how our participant's rights are maintained in this process. At present we are at risk of providing a system that will only be assessable to those on Jobseekers payments thus further marginalizing those with disabilities such as HIV & Aids, Mental Health."

"Waiting list for our Rehabilitation programme has significantly decreased. I have also experienced 2 people deciding not to take up placement because they would have to hand back their OPF allowance or Disability. I advertised for 10 weeks for a position before it was filled. This has never happened before".

"I interviewed 6 clients for a number of places coming up in the project. 1 was a lone parent and the other 5 were on disability. Only one was willing to come on to the project and give up their disability"

"Yes, we have always had close to ten people on the waiting list and we have experienced a huge decline in numbers. Individuals present for assessment but upon hearing of the changes in payment, they decline taking up places. Following a number of outreach visits to other agencies in an attempt to recruit participants, the uptake following the visit was zero. There are no women currently presenting for assessment."

"All of our clients on a waiting list at the end of December 2011 have declined a place when offered a place in January 12. We are due to lose 3 people in the next two months, but we have no replacements for them after trying a lot of avenues to source interested clients. This will in turn affect our supervisor ratio and eventually we will lose a supervisor and places. People are no longer interested in C.E. anymore as there is no incentive. It is a slow death of special status C.E."

"We have participants who have decided to give up one payment to come on the programme. We are careful to ensure people fully explore the implications of this decision. I believe that there will be more of an impact in the next six months with people deciding not to give up the disability payment for fear of not getting it back and consequently not coming onto the programme."

"One person on Invalidity declined because of the changes. One existing person on OPFP threatened to resign because of effects on rent allowances by being on CE. Another person on OPFP declined to take up a position

"Normally pre-entry start would be approx 10 and we would take on 6. However we only have 3 starters from this group of 10"

"In Dec 11 our pre - entry had six participants willing to come into the programme to look at their drug use. However since the changes clients have disengaged and told us that they cannot afford to participate because of reductions in payments, loss of disability allowance and the cost of childcare etc. We currently have two places available and another 5 participants leaving before 1st June 2012. We have no clients in pre entry to fill these places".