

**Western Region Drugs Task Force**  
**Multi-agency Parents Initiative**  
**Programme Evaluation**

**May 2013**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### Overview

This report presents the findings of an external evaluation of the Western Region Drugs Task Force Multi-agency Parents Initiative. The initiative commenced in Galway, in 2009 as a multi-agency and multi-disciplinary response to substance misuse education for parents within a school's context. It arose as a response to requests from schools to various agencies to provide one-off talks. The initiative developed as a multi-agency programme, co-ordinated by the WRDTF and involving An Garda Síochána, the HSE (Drug Service/Health Promotion) and the Department of Education (SPHE Regional Manager). Secondary schools in Galway, Mayo and Roscommon were invited to take part, and, to date, 81 schools have participated. It involves an initial one-night introductory evening at which presentations are made by the four agencies, followed by a three-night parenting course.

### Evaluation objectives and approach

The objectives of this evaluation were:

1. To assess the extent to which the aims and objectives of the Parents Initiative had been met
2. To assess key programme inputs and outputs and where feasible to make assessment of outcomes (medium-term) and impacts (long-term)
3. To identify and include the voice of all stakeholders in the initiative
4. To make recommendations for the future of the programme and its potential adaptation as a model elsewhere.

This evaluation combined both summative and formative elements and was based on analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. Evaluation questionnaires completed by participants (parents) and schools were analysed and a series of in-depth interviews were undertaken with a range of stakeholders involved in the delivery of the initiative. Secondary data from programme documentation and a previous review completed in 2012 were also used.

## Key Findings

1. The **schools** who participated were very satisfied with the planning, content and delivery of the training in their schools. Whilst a few expressed some difficulties with recruiting parents, they were generally pleased with the attendance and spoke very positively about how the course was perceived among parents.
2. Through an analysis of the **parents' questionnaires**, satisfaction levels were also very high among participants, with a strong appreciation expressed for the dedication of the trainers and hearing the perspectives of the various agencies. Some suggestions for improvement included:
  - More emphasis on similar training/topics for young people within school or in a similar format as the parents programme
  - Some felt the three-night course was too long
  - Many suggested other topics that could have been included, some of which are outside the remit of a substance misuse training programme
3. The **interviews with stakeholders** involved in the delivery of the initiative also spoke positively about their engagement in the programme and particularly welcomed the multi-agency aspect of it. They felt it offered a more holistic and integrated response and was very strong as a preventative initiative. Some issues identified included:
  - The linkages with the **implementation of the SPHE curriculum** within schools and the involvement of young people was identified by some as requiring strengthening
  - The objective of **supporting schools in developing a substance misuse policy** is one that appears to have been the most challenging.
  - The organisation of the initiative in such large geographical areas and including various agencies posed **some logistical challenges**. Some felt that pre-planning and organisation took up too much time and others felt that there was not sufficient work put into pre-planning. It was also suggested that more time could be spent on planning of content and approach.

### UPTAKE OF THE PARENTS INITIATIVE

The Parents Drug Education Initiative began in Galway in 2009 and in Mayo/Roscommon in January 2010. The following figures give a breakdown of the attendance at the information evenings and workshops.

- The total number of parents attending information evenings = 2633
- Total number of parents attending drug education workshops = 1061

Figures are based on an average attendance at the three workshop sessions. More parents will have participated if they attended one or two sessions only

Table 1: Attendance at information evenings and drug education workshops

| Year             | Galway: Parents Information Evenings | Galway : Parents Drug Education Workshops | Mayo& Roscommon: Parents Information Evenings | Mayo & Roscommon: Parents Drug Education Workshops |
|------------------|--------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| <b>2009-2010</b> | 729                                  | 265                                       | 232 <sup>1</sup>                              | 98   |
| <b>2010-2011</b> | 307                                  | 114                                       | 474   | 174  |
| <b>2011-2013</b> | 251                                  | 104                                       | 617   | 304  |
| <b>TOTALS</b>    | 1287                                 | 483                                       | 1346  | 578  |

(Taken from WRDTF Review of Parents Initiative 2012)

Table 2: Penetration into schools (by county)

| County    | Number of post-primary schools (May 2012) | Number of schools completed Parents Initiative | Percentage of schools in county completed Parents Initiative |
|-----------|---|--|--|
| Galway    | 44  | 31   | 70%  |
| Mayo      | 29  | 27   | 93%  |
| Roscommon | 9   | 7  | 77%  |

Table 3: Rate of 'conversion' of parents attending initial evening to participation in parent workshops

| County Galway | Attendance at parent information evening | Attendance at parent workshops | 'Conversion rate' |
|---------------|--|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| 2009-10       | 725                                      | 265                            | 36%               |
| 2010-11       | 307                                      | 114                            | 37%               |
| 2011-12       | 251                                      | 104                            | 41%               |

| Counties Mayo & Roscommon | Attendance at parent information evening | Attendance at parent workshops | 'Conversion rate' |
|---------------------------|--|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| 2009-10                   | 232                                      | 98                             | 42%               |
| 2010-11                   | 474                                      | 174                            | 36%               |
| 2011-12                   | 617                                      | 304                            | 49%               |

**Key recommendations**

1. The Parents Initiative has been **very successful at a number of levels**, and it is recommended that it should continue.
2. **A programme budget** should be allocated, taking into account time (including a percentage of the salaries of the relevant personnel), travel and administration costs, in order to provide a realistic costing of the time and resources dedicated to it.
3. The issue of **travel restrictions within some agencies should be addressed**, in order to allow the initiative to continue successfully.
4. The next phase of the initiative should have a **greater focus on the engagement of schools**, with more onus placed on them to (i) embed it within the SPHE Curriculum (with potential for new programmes through Junior Cycle reform) and (ii) address their overall substance misuse policy and school environment and (iii) adopt a whole school approach through bringing all relevant stakeholders on board.
5. **More systematic and co-ordinated training, pre-planning and review processes** should be organised for multi-agency delivery partners. Communication between the various agencies could be improved in some instances.
6. Where feasible, it would help to **standardise some of the materials being used and ensure that consistent messages are given**.
7. The possibility of **staff burnout and the high administrative burden** should be addressed, possibly through greater administrative and logistical support.
8. More focus **could be placed on ensuring that the initiative is valued and supported at all levels within the delivery agencies**.
9. In future school-based evaluation questionnaires, **more questions could be included on the impact of the initiative**.
10. As the involvement of schools is a crucial aspect of the programme, the **possibility of including principals or school SPHE co-ordinators in occasional planning or review meetings** to address the overall aims and objectives and approach within the sub-region could be explored.



GLOSSARY OF TERMS

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|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| HSE                | Health Service Executive                             |
| Parents Initiative | WRDTF Multi-Agency Parents Drug Education Initiative |
| SPHE               | Social, Personal and Health Education                |
| WRDTF              | Western Region Drugs Task Force                      |

## 1. INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 OVERVIEW

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This report presents the results of an independent external evaluation of the WRDTF Multi-agency Parents Drug Education Initiative (hereafter referred to as ‘the Parents Initiative’). The Parents Initiative commenced in 2009 as an inter-agency and multi-disciplinary response to schools asking various agencies and individuals to deliver drugs education talks. In line with good practice in substance misuse education, a more holistic and co-ordinated approach was put together, culminating in an initiative which involved the WRDTF (as co-ordinating body), the HSE, an Garda Síochána and the Department of Education and Skills delivering a programme for parents in the school setting that focuses on substance abuse prevention. The format of the initiative involves an initial one-night introductory evening at which presentations are made by the four agencies, followed by a three-night parenting course. The Parents Initiative commenced in Galway in 2009 and was subsequently rolled out in Roscommon and Mayo. The education support workers in each sub-region (Galway and Mayo/Roscommon), hosted by two different organisations (AIDS West in Galway and South Mayo Development for Mayo/Roscommon) were given the responsibility of implementing the initiative within their area.

The initiative was reviewed initially in 2011, some of the results of which are included in the appendix. The initiative is currently at a crossroads, due to its stalling in Roscommon/Mayo, and there is an identified need to address whether the initiative is still meeting its objective and to make recommendations for its future implementation. Some interest was also expressed by one agency in broadening its scope to include other regions. Currently the initiative only operates within the western region.

### 1.2 REPORT STRUCTURE

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In this section, the overall evaluation objectives and approach to the evaluation are set out. This includes a description of the methodology used. The policy and contextual background of the initiative and a brief overview of how it is implemented is provided

in **Section 2**. **Section 3** presents the key findings of the perspectives of schools and parents. These were gained mainly through the analysis of the questionnaires given to schools and parents at the end of each parents workshop. This is followed by the perspectives of the various stakeholder involved in the delivery of the initiative in **Section 4**. These were obtained through in-depth semi-structured interviews, which were analysed thematically. The key themes are presented here, including key outputs, challenges, inter-agency co-operation, engagement of schools and specific recommendations made by stakeholders. The concluding **Section 5** provides the summary of key outputs, outcomes and impacts, a SWOT analysis, an overall assessment in light of the evaluation objectives and some concluding recommendations.

### 1.3 EVALUATION AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

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This evaluation of the inter-agency drugs parenting initiative sought to address the following broad aims:

- To assess the extent to which the aims and objectives of the Parents Initiative had been met
- To assess key programme inputs and outputs and where feasible to make assessment of outcomes (medium-term) and impacts (long-term)
- To identify and include the voice of all stakeholders in the initiative
- To make recommendations for the future of the programme and its potential adaptation as a model elsewhere.

During the research process, specific research objectives were identified as being important to the evaluation. These included *inter alia*:

- How has the Parents Initiative been received by schools and what has their involvement been?
- What impact has it had on parents and on communication within the family in relation to substance misuse?
- How has the multi-agency approach benefited the initiative?
- Has the programme been implemented differently in the two sub-regions? Has this impacted on programme delivery overall?

- To what extent as such does this initiative represent a good model for substance misuse education for parents that could be replicated elsewhere?

## 1.4 METHODOLOGY & APPROACH

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### OVERVIEW

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This evaluation commenced in mid-January 2013 and was based on a combination of summative and formative evaluation approaches. A summative evaluation provides a 'summation' of a project or programme (usually at the end) in order to assess whether it has achieved its stated goals and objectives. A formative evaluation often seeks to strengthen or improve the programme being evaluated and may be conducted at several stages throughout the process and in some cases, it has been suggested that formative evaluation may be carried out in order to prepare for summative evaluation (Quinn Patton 2011). Formative evaluation may be targeted more at the personnel or participants of a programme as it assists them in learning from the evaluation and finding ways to improve the programme (Worthern et al. 2004).

The Parents Initiative was introduced in the Western Regional Drugs Task Force region in 2009, but has not been introduced on a national scale. In such respects, it could be viewed as a pilot or innovative initiative, which has not been tried and tested throughout the country. This evaluation seeks to assess the programme, both from the perspective of providing an overview of key outputs and potential outcomes (summative) and some analysis of how the programme has worked, processes that have contributed to it and how the programme could be strengthened or improved (formative).

This evaluation follows on from, and complements, a previous review of the initiative carried out in 2011 and supplemented in 2012. This review provided a good summary of the background, work of the project to date, voices of some stakeholders and quantitative data on project implementation. Some summary quantitative and qualitative data from this review are included in the appendix.

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 DATA COLLECTION
 

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The evaluation of the programme covered the period from the origins of the initiative in 2009 to the end of 2012 or early 2013 (Galway sub-region). Whilst some stakeholders talked about the development of the initiative since its inception, the focus for many was on its implementation during 2011 and 2012.

The evaluation commenced in early 2013 and entailed the following steps:

**Table 1. Overview of data collection steps**

| <b>Task</b>   | <b>Objective(s)</b>   | <b>Timeframe</b> |
|---|---|------------------|
| <b>Initial meeting with research sub-group</b>                  | To finalise aims and objectives of evaluation<br>Obtain background information and documentation  | Jan. 2013        |
| <b>Meeting/semi-structured interview w. Project Dev. Worker</b> | To obtain detailed information on the programme, its implementation, key stakeholders and project documentation from the Project Development Worker responsible for the co-ordination of the initiative | January 2013     |
| <b>In-depth interviews with two education workers</b>           | To obtain a detailed overview of how the programme is implemented, challenges faced, outputs and perceived outcomes, and details of delivery agents   | Jan./Feb. 2013   |
| <b>Semi-structured interviews with stakeholders</b>             | Interviews with key deliverers of the programme   | Feb – April 2013 |
| <b>Observation of parenting evening</b>                         | To observe how the programme is delivered in practice, including the engagement and participation of parents  | Feb. 2013        |
| <b>Documentary analysis</b>                                     | Analysis of documents such as previous studies, current literature, project documentation, previous reviews and evaluation questionnaires (schools and parents)   | On-going         |

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## STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Table 2 outlines the interviews undertaken with stakeholders. Where feasible, these were held face to face or otherwise were held by telephone. The interviews lasted between 20 minutes and one hour for the delivery agencies and between two and three hours for the Education Support Workers. An interview schedule was used as a guide, with some questions asked of all participants. The interviews were semi-structured, however, and participants were probed further on information they gave and were encouraged to raise issues they perceived to be important. It was not possible to interview all stakeholders involved in the delivery of the programme, but attempts were made to contact all the relevant people. Detailed meetings were also held with relevant WRDTF staff and the research sub-group.

**Table 2 Stakeholder interviews**

| <i>Agency</i>                    | <i>No. of interviews</i>   | <i>Sub-region</i>   |
|----------------------------------|--|---|
| <b>WRDTF</b>                     | 1 in-depth interview plus three other meetings with key staff/research sub-group | Both  |
| <b>Education support workers</b> | 2  | 1 in each   |
| <b>HSE</b>                       | 3  | Drugs counsellors in each county                                      |
| <b>Gardaí</b>                    | 3  | Mayo/Roscommon and key Gardaí involved in early stages                |
| <b>Education</b>                 | 2  | SPHE Support Services Manager<br>HSE Health Promotion Schools Officer |

## OBSERVATIONS

In order to observe the process first hand, the evaluator also attended an information night in a secondary school in Galway. This gave a good indication of how it works in practice and allowed an opportunity to meet with some of the agencies.

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DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS

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In addition to collecting primary data, secondary documentation was used in the analysis. This included the analysis of questionnaires provided by the Education Support Workers from parents and schools, various project documents and a previous review completed in 2012.

## 2. CONTEXT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INITIATIVE

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### 2.1 POLICY CONTEXT

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The Parents Initiative feeds into the Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Curriculum in Junior Cycle and has sought to inform and educate parents and families in relation to drugs and alcohol in a positive and supportive manner. SPHE is an innovative component of the Irish post-primary curriculum, and aims to promote a whole-school approach to health and education. In doing so, a holistic and multi-sectoral approach has been adopted, involving a range of stakeholders both within and outside the educational system.

The WRDTF is a co-ordinating body, providing a multi-agency and regionally appropriate response to substance misuse in the Western Region. It has commissioned a number of relevant research and evaluation projects, which highlight the importance of family-led responses to prevention of substance misuse (Sixsmith and D'Eath, 2011). Thus, the involvement of parents and the wider family in drugs education programmes draws on a model of family support, in conjunction with the wider school community. Whilst an extensive evaluation has been carried out of *The Strengthening Families Programme*, the outputs and impacts of the specific Parents Drugs Education Initiative have not yet been fully explored.

The National Drugs Strategy 2009-2016 is the key national policy document, outlining the Government's approach to substance misuse prevention and education. It has identified an overall strategic objective to:

*...continue to tackle the harm caused to individuals and society by the misuse of drugs through a concerted focus on the five pillars of supply reduction, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and research (p6). Action 29 under the prevention pillar is to develop a series of prevention measures that focus on the family to include:*

- supports for families experiencing difficulties due to drug/alcohol use*
- parenting skills*
- targeted measures focusing on the children of problem drug and/or alcohol users aimed at breaking the cycle and safeguarding the next generation*



(The National Drugs Strategy, 2009-16, p100)

The Parents Initiative, as rolled out by the WRDTF, fits within these broad objectives and specifically focuses on prevention through family support and parenting skills. The WRDTF sets out a number of key areas within its strategic plans *Shared Solutions* (WRDTF, 2006) and more recently in *The Way Forward* (WRDTF, 2011). Three specific prevention and education actions in relation to the Parents Initiative in *The Way Forward* (pp 45-46) include the following:

*Action 5: Support and encourage delivery of SPHE within post primary schools through the Regional SPHE Service. Lobbying where appropriate to ensure the success of its implementation*

*Action 6: Expand the existing drug & alcohol parenting programmes to the wider community*

*Action 15: Review and evaluate the on-going WRDTF drug & alcohol awareness parents initiative.*

Action 5, which relates specifically to the support of SPHE and linkages with the regional SPHE service. Such linkages are established through the engagement of the SPHE service in this multi-agency initiative. Action 6 refers to bringing such initiatives to a wider audience and this evaluation relates directly to Action 15.

Overall, the Parents Initiative developed as a response to a specific need to involve parents, whilst also ensuring linkage and engagement with schools, but through leaving the actual delivery of SPHE modules to teachers. Specialist training for SPHE teachers is made available through the SPHE Regional Co-ordinators, which is communicated as part of the initiative.

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## 2.2 GOOD PRACTICE IN SUBSTANCE MISUSE EDUCATION

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Various risk and protective factors have been identified in the decision by young people to engage in substance misuse. Whilst peer groups and the school environment play an important role, the family has been identified in playing an important role as both a protective and risk factor. The relationship between the adolescent and his/her family can be a strong protective factor in providing a secure base (Sixsmith and d'Eath 2011)

and parental monitoring can assist in the management of risky situations (Piko & Kovacs, 2010). In a review of the role of the family in preventing substance use and misuse, the authors found that previous research:

*all demonstrated the strength of parental influence (via both behaviour and attitudes) on young people commencing substance use. Social factors that affect early development within the family, such as a chaotic home environment, ineffective parenting, and lack of mutual attachment, have been shown to be crucially important indicators of risk (Velleman et al. 2005, p95)*

Family support as an effective strength-based approach to working with children or young people and their families has become more prevalent in the last decade. It encompasses both formal and informal measures of support (Dolan and McGrath 2006) and can help to build resilience (Dolan, 2008). It has also been shown that family support works best when a range of organisations are involved and it is delivered locally (Brady et al. 2008). A family support approach has been adopted by the Western Region Drugs Task Force in its overall work and is particularly evident in programmes such as *The Strengthening Families Programme*. The Parents Initiative also draws on such an approach and is a clear example of a programme that aims to bring about multi-sectoral involvement and co-ordination between the various agencies.

Whilst the initiative encompasses various agencies working with parents in providing substance use and misuse education, based on good practice, its setting within the school environment is an important aspect of the programme. It is also innovative in the sense that it is targeted at families and focuses on various aspects of parenting and communication within the family, yet is based in a school setting. It is strongly embedded in the SPHE programme at Junior Cycle and is geared to complement what students cover at school, allowing parents/guardians the opportunity to hear about what should be covered in school and examine how some of the principles can be put into practice in the home environment. Communication within the family setting is also a key aspect of the programme, with a focus on how issues such as substance use and various behaviours are both modelled and communicated in the family.

A manual of quality standards in substance use education has been developed by the Drug Education Workers Forum, under the National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008. This

comprehensive manual sets out a series of recommendations of good practice in the school, youthwork and community settings. Specific programmes for parents are included in both the school and community settings. Within the school setting, the vision for programmes working with parents and guardians includes:

*The programmes assist parents and guardians in supporting and complementing the school substance use policy and substance use education work carried out in schools in the context of the SPHE curriculum. They also support and build parental and guardian efficacy in exploring and addressing substance use issues in the home, school and community.*

Some of the key best practice standards and performance indicators mentioned that may be of relevance for this evaluation are included in appendix six.

Health education programmes are a core component of SPHE and are designed to promote physical, mental, emotional and social health and well-being (SPHE Support Service Post-primary, 2012). A behavioural approach to health education approach has been recommended, which emphasises preparing students to deal effectively with and resist pressures associated with risk-taking behaviours (Nic Gabhainn et al., 2007). Parental and community involvement have been identified as essential attributes of successful health education programmes, recognising that attributes, values and behaviours related to health need to be replicated in the home environment (*ibid*). Community and voluntary sector groups with specific expertise play a key role in fostering linkages between the pupils, teachers, parents and the wider community and bring a wealth of specific knowledge and skills.

### 2.3 FEATURES OF THE PARENTS INITIATIVE

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The overall features of the Parents Initiative were set out in the previous review (WRDTF, 2012, p5) as including the following elements:

1. A planning and information session with the school
2. A Parent Information Evening

3. Support for the school around the development of their Substance Use Policy and related procedures; the option of subsequent Parent Drug Education Workshops held over three evenings
4. The option of training for school staff involved in the delivery of the SPHE substance Use Module (through the DOE SPHE Support Service manager at in-service training)

The overall aim of the initiative is *to inform parents and the school community about the effects and consequences of substance misuse and inform them about available service in their area* (WRDTF, Regional Parents Drug Education Initiative – Information leaflet). Its specific objectives are stated as:

- ✿ Increase awareness around substance use
- ✿ Increase awareness of the availability of services within the local areas
- ✿ Inform parents about the legal consequences of drug use
- ✿ Inform parents about the availability of drug education courses
- ✿ Inform the school that training is available for all staff (though the Regional SPHE Co-ordinator)
- ✿ Support schools in developing a school's policy in line with the Department of Education and Skills Guidelines.

According to the previous review and project documentation, the objectives relating specifically to the parents information evening included:

1. To inform parents and teachers about the effects and consequences of substance misuse
2. To identify community services that can support them in responding to issues
3. To highlight effective preventative strategies
4. To describe the Junior Cycle, SPHE curriculum and the Substance Use Module in particular
5. To support schools in developing their Substance Use Policy in line with the Dept. of Education and Skills Guidelines
6. To inform parents about the availability of three-night Parents Drug Education Workshops being organised by the WRDTF and run in conjunction with the school

As of December, 2012, a total of 2,633 parents had taken part in the introductory evening in 81 schools, with 1061 parents participating in the three-night Parents Drug Education Workshop. This workshop generally included modules on:

- ✿ Substance misuse – signs and symptoms and awareness of various substances
- ✿ Legal/law enforcement aspects and the local drugs scene
- ✿ Positive parenting and communication
- ✿ Referrals and the role of the HSE substance misuse counsellors
- ✿ Various scenarios and how to react.

The three-night workshops are generally more interactive than the introductory evening and are held on three evenings agreed with the school in advance of the first night. These are delivered by the Education Support Workers in conjunction with representatives from the Gardaí and the HSE. The initiative is still continuing in Galway, but has stalled in Mayo/Roscommon as of May 2012 due to travel restrictions within the HSE. These do not appear to have affected the Galway area to the same extent.

### 3. KEY FINDINGS – PERSPECTIVES OF SCHOOLS AND PARTICIPANTS

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#### 3.1 PERSPECTIVE OF SCHOOLS

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##### OVERVIEW

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As part of the evaluation, schools were not contacted directly as it was felt that sufficient feedback had been obtained through evaluation forms and oral feedback via the education co-ordinators and the SPHE co-ordinator. This was elicited through the semi-structured interviews (qualitative data) and specific school evaluation forms filled in by a school representative (e.g. Principal/Deputy principal or SPHE co-ordinator). These evaluation forms were made available from the Roscommon/Mayo sub-region (n=10) and from the Galway sub-region (n=2).

The schools evaluation questionnaire contained a combination of quantitative and qualitative responses. The most relevant questions, quantitative charts and summarising of qualitative information (with key quotations) are contained below. A sample of schools questionnaires from twelve schools in both sub-regions were analysed.

##### MAIN MOTIVATION FOR REQUESTING TALKS FOR PARENTS

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The questionnaire asked the school to comment on their main motivation for requesting talks for parents. Generally these were offered to schools and schools were given an option of participating in the programme. Reasons given varied, but an emphasis was placed on fostering linkages with parents, informing and educating parents, perceived need due to particular circumstances locally or in the school and parenting support. In some cases, the role of the Parents' Association was alluded to.

**Key quotations - motivations**

*To provide drugs education for parents*

*Parents' Association decided they would like such talks*

*There is a very big issue in X (name of town) with underage drinking and the sale of drugs*

*To provide an opportunity for parents to inform themselves about the issues. Also to allow parents the chance to speak to each other about common concerns. A chance to be open and frank.*

*Perceived need due to some incidences with pupils of the schools, and also schools substance policy is to offer information/education to parents.*

*To help parents get information, knowledge skills to help them cope, understand what challenged are faced by young and old alike*

*Parents don't have enough awareness of the importance of the issue*

*To inform parents/teachers about or make them aware of the signs, symptoms and support available*

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**EXPECTATIONS OF ATTENDANCE**


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Schools were asked to comment on their expectations of attendees for both the initial evening and the three nights. Generally, they were not disappointed with the numbers attending, with some expressing slight surprise at lower than expected turnout (for the initial evening in particular), and others expressing satisfaction at the higher than expected numbers and the large numbers signing up for the three-night evening.

**Key quotations – Expectations of attendance**

*We were delighted when 80 people arrived for the introductory lesson*

*I had expected it to be well attended*

*I had hoped to see 100+ turn on the first night. Perhaps my expectations were too high, but in hindsight the numbers that show up at such meetings are quite unpredictable*

*I had expected a greater number but from experience know that what we got (approx 20) was good.*

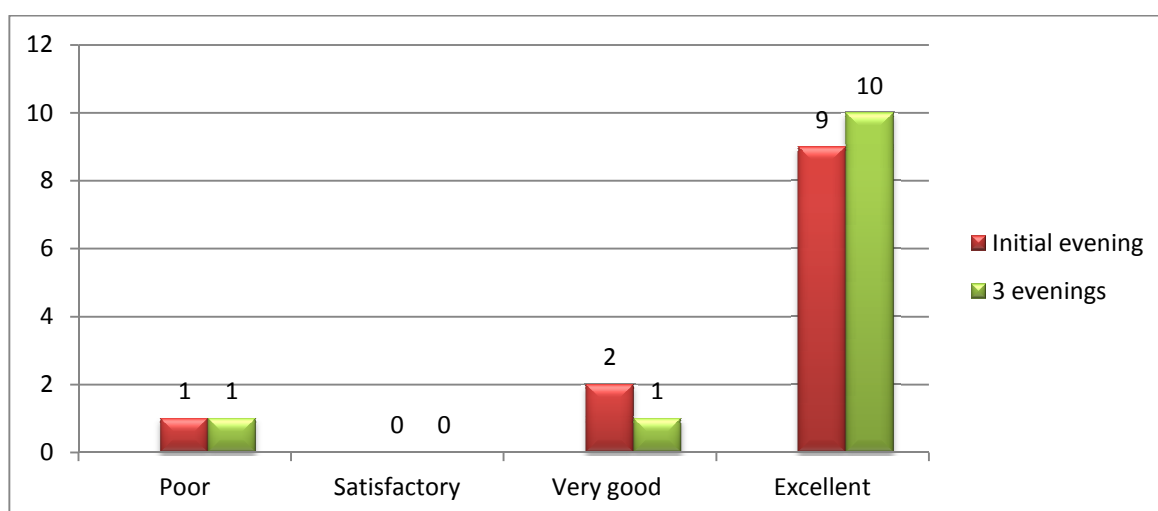
*Was happy with the initial turnout on the first night*

*It was obvious from the first night that a large number would return for the three evening workshops.*

### SATISFACTION LEVELS WITH PRE-PLANNING AND ORGANISATION

Respondents were asked to rate their levels of satisfaction with the pre-planning and organisation of the initial evening and the three-evening parenting programme. The number of responses under each heading are summarised in the chart below:

**Figure 1 Pre-planning & organisation of initial evening & 3 evening programme by no. of responses**



Overall, satisfaction level with the pre-planning and organisation were high. In one case, where these were rated as poor, it was explained that the Parents' Association had taken responsibility for the organisation of the programme and some difficulties in communication had arisen. Some further comments on this question included:

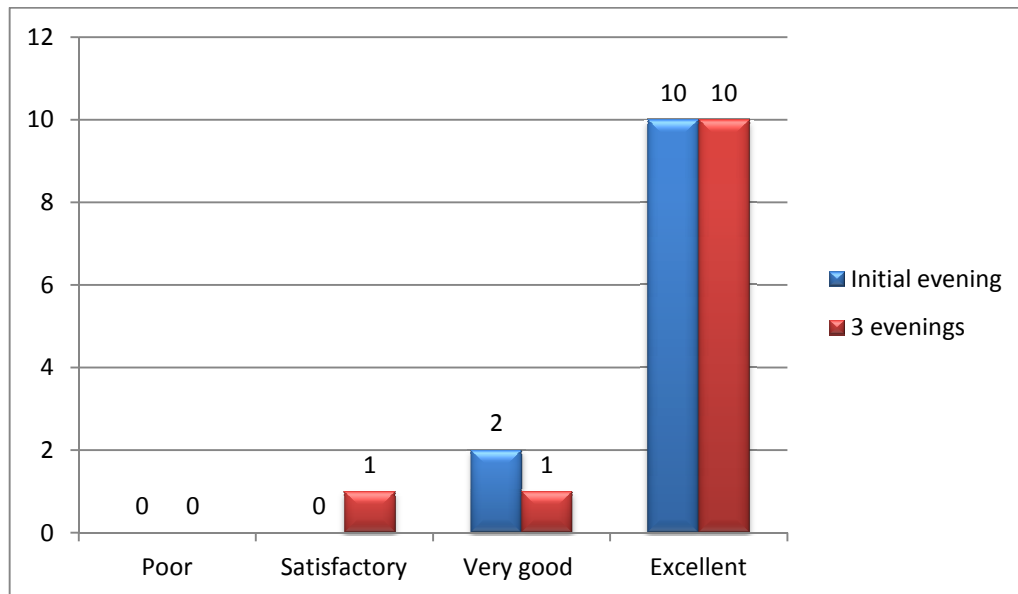
*Excellent pre-planning letter and information bulletin. We also mentioned the event on Mid-West radio on a few occasions prior to the initial meeting with parents*

*The overall programme was excellent. I see this as the beginning of an on-going process*

### DELIVERY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF PROGRAMME

The levels of satisfaction with the delivery of the programme and its perceived effectiveness were very high.



**Figure 2 Delivery of initial evening and 3 evening parenting programme**

Some of the comments in relation to the delivery of the initial evening and the three-night parenting programme included:

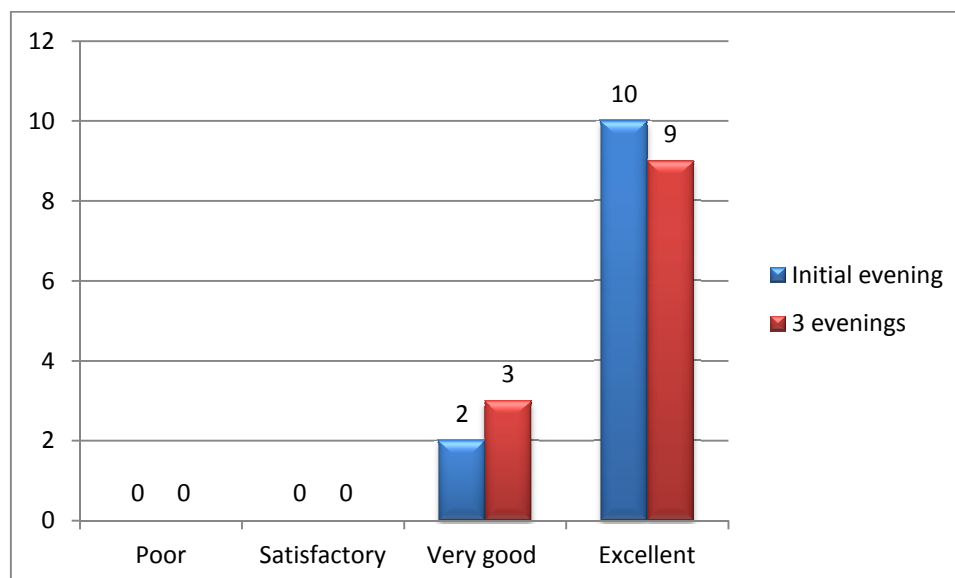
*Both presentations in their detail and the manner in which they were presented were excellent.*

*Parents were loud in their praise of the course*

*It was efficiently and well delivered with a cross section of speakers giving variety and maintaining interest of participants*

*The programme was well organised. Gillian kept the continuity of the programme together. Different speakers sharing different aspects was excellent.*

*Realistic, grounded in experience and research, stimulating and engaging the parents*

**Figure 3 Effectiveness of initial and 3 evening parenting programme**

The programme was perceived by schools to be very effective and this is evidenced both in the responses provided here, and also in the high numbers that have requested further courses. Some expressed slight disappointment that numbers were not higher.

*The Garda made an excellent impact on people and I would feel he was the main reason people decided to return for the three nights. The general feedback from parents at the three evenings was very positive*

*The programme achieved its goals and the multi-disciplinary team showed that it was a complex problem needing a multi-faceted approach*

*Obviously very effective since parents have asked (repeatedly) for another programme in the near future*

*For those who attended, the programme was excellent. We need to get more people involved*

*If only to help parents understand the issues, but more importantly to make people aware where to turn to in case of need*

## OTHER TOPICS THAT COULD HAVE BEEN ADDRESSED AND FURTHER COMMENTS

Respondents were asked whether other topics could have been addressed in the programme. A minority of respondents made some suggestions, including a stronger focus on alcohol. Some of the comments included:

*I think the range of topics was good. Especially the displaying of drugs and talking about them*

*A similar programme concentrating specifically on alcohol would be very worthwhile some time in the future*

*Perhaps an element for students*

*Not sure, I would like the programme to continue and to extend it to the younger students. Trying to cover too many issues might dilute the programme.*

*Maybe videos of young people. Videos of teens using drugs.*

Respondents were then asked for further comments on how the programme could be improved. Most expressed satisfaction with the way it had been run and some gave a few particular suggestions, as outlined below. Two suggested condensing the three night programme into two, a suggestion also made by some other stakeholders. Others also suggested that students could be involved in a similar programme.

*I think three nights plus an information night is too much. Perhaps less time spent on eliciting parent input and more time giving information*

*Maybe condense it into two evenings instead of three. We found a lot of parents dropped off by the third session. Also, there is no need for an introductory session – launch straight into it.*

*Already an excellent programme including the garda (who was very clear and thorough) and HSE who gave lots of anecdotal stories which parents relate to. (SPHE co-ordinator) gave a comprehensive account of the need for and value in the SPHE Programme. All of this is well co-ordinated and carefully delivered under the eye of (education support worker). She is very approachable and very eager to help out the school community in any way she can.*

*No other than to roll out a similar programme to students*

*Include the students, especially those in 1st, 2nd years in secondary school*

## SUMMARY OF SCHOOLS' PERSPECTIVES

The level of satisfaction of schools with the initiative appears to be very high overall.

This was evidenced in:

- ✿ The schools questionnaire
- ✿ Feedback from the education support workers and other project delivery stakeholders

The schools appear to be very grateful to the initiative delivered by WRDTF and express a desire for it to continue. Questions were not asked in the questionnaire about its wider impact in the school community. This could have included issues such as:

- ✿ Its linkages with and impact on the SPHE programme in the school
- ✿ Ways in which the initiative has relevance for the substance use policy of the school

### 3.2 PERSPECTIVES OF PARTICIPANTS (PARENTS)

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Similar to the perspectives of the schools, the views of parents (participants in the initiative) were ascertained mainly through questionnaires filled in by parents at the end of the initiative (three-night parenting programme) and through the feedback given in the stakeholder interviews.

Evaluation forms were given to parents at the end of the three-night programme. The evaluation forms were designed by the two project education workers and were different in each sub-region. It is therefore not possible to make direct comparison between the two. A sample of evaluation forms from a wide range of schools in both regions was obtained for the purposes of this evaluation and some of the key findings are summarised here.

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#### PARENTS PERSPECTIVES – GALWAY

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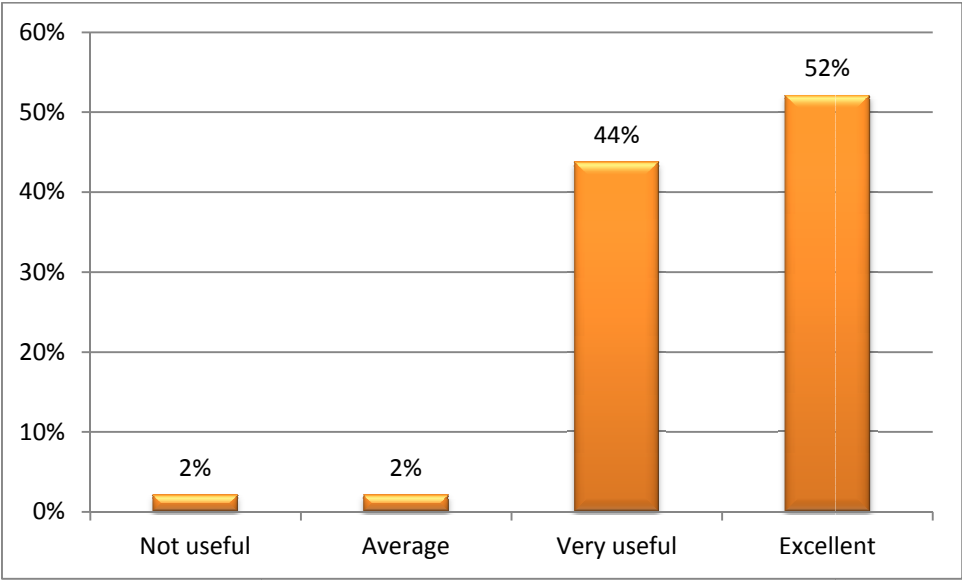
The evaluation forms were given to parents at the end of the final workshop and they relate to the three-night parenting course. A random sample of 51 questionnaires from four schools in Galway city and county were obtained for analysis. The results are presented below, with percentages of responses to each question used.

##### ***Q. 1. Did you enjoy today's workshop?***

100% of respondents stated 'yes' to this question

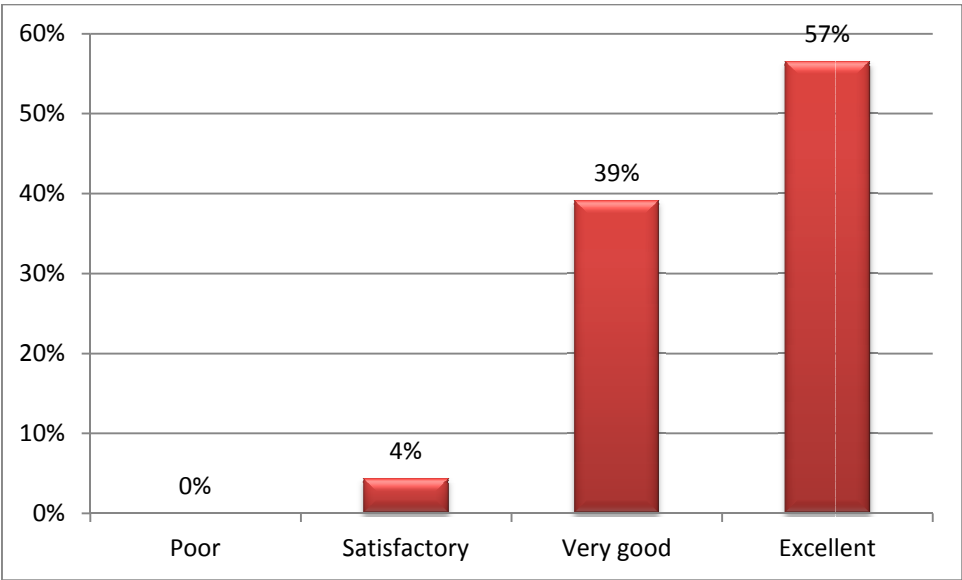
**Q.2 Did you find the information useful?**

**Figure 4 Usefulness of the information**

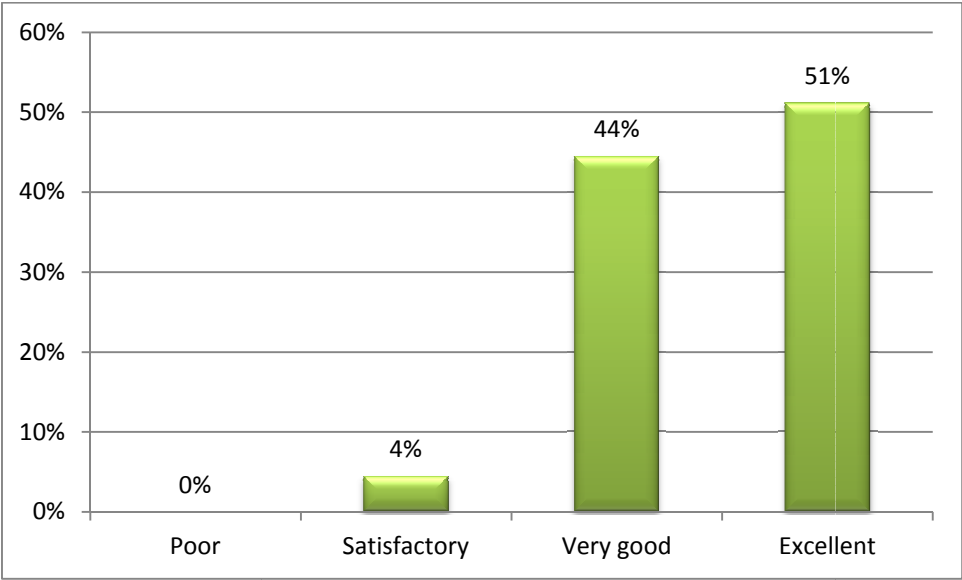


**Q.3 How would you rate the delivery of the topics covered?**

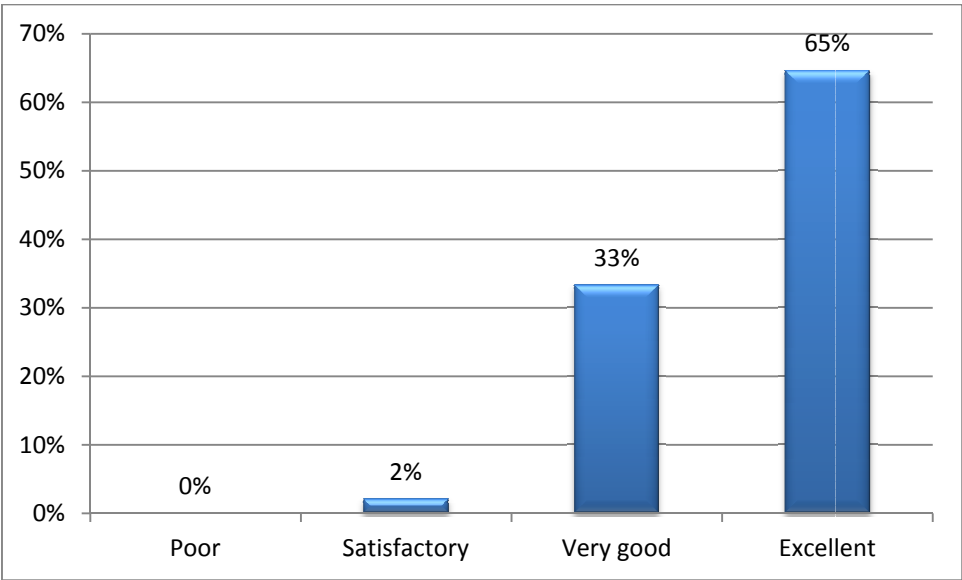
**Figure 5 Topic 1, Drug theory**

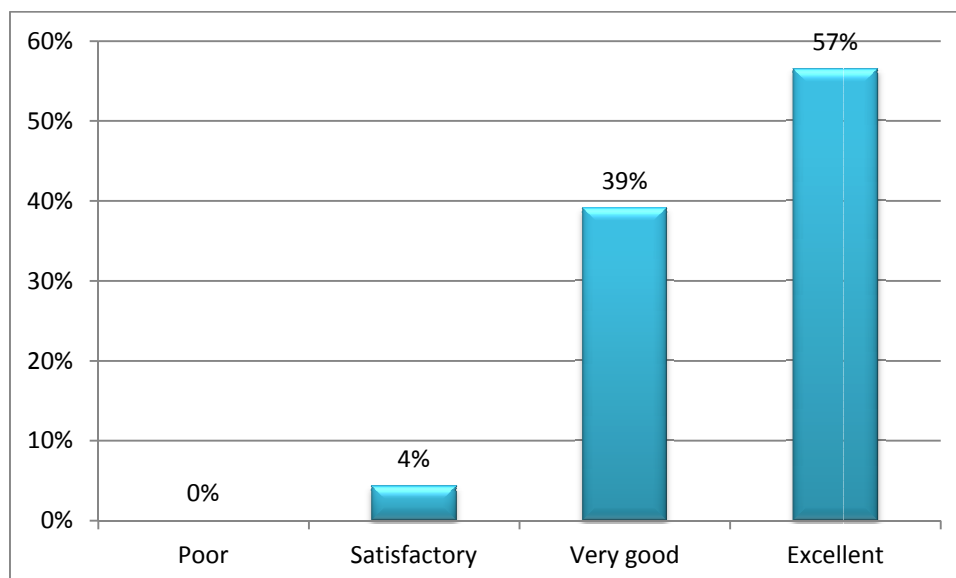


**Figure 6 Topic 2, Positive parenting**



**Figure 7 Topic 3, Drug awareness**



**Q.4 Figure 8: How would you rate the workshop overall?****Q.5 How could this workshop be improved?**

A range of suggestions were included here. There was a strong emphasis on the perceived need to include children/young people in the programme (n=9) or to address the same issues in school with them. Some asked for more discussion time, whilst others stated they would have liked more input and less discussion. Some of the suggestions are outlined below:

*I would love to see this programme rolled out to the school students*

*More handouts*

*To happen on a yearly basis*

*A lot of time dedicated to alcohol and I would have liked a broader discussion on the illegal drugs*

*Get the Garda into the schools to talk about drugs*

*More time for discussion (group work)*

*Modify for kids. They should have it as part of school curriculum*

*I think it would be very beneficial to attend a similar workshop with my daughter when she is 16 years in 3 years time*

*They should go to schools and youth clubs. The children need to hear from them and not only the parents*

**Q.6 What other topic(s) would you like to see covered in a similar workshop?**

A range of other issues were mentioned in 20 questionnaires. The most common were sexual health (n=3), bullying (n=3), technology (n=3) and dealing with peer pressure (n=2). Many of the topics mentioned may be outside the remit of the WRDTF and substance use education, but nevertheless may be useful for the planning of future parenting programmes in the school setting. Some of the main suggestions are summarised in the figure below.

**Figure 9 Suggestions for other topics that could have been covered (Galway)**

**Q.7 Do you have any other comments? (e.g. what you enjoyed least/most)**

*Most of the comments provided here were very positive and expressed satisfaction with the course overall and the methods of delivery.*

*Getting ideas on how to broach the subject of drugs/alcohol was very helpful. Enjoyed all of it.*

*More about the drugs themselves. Garda talk excellent. Less parenting theory*

*Speakers very approachable and welcoming*

*This course was excellent and a real eye opener for me*



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**PARENTS PERSPECTIVES – MAYO/ROSCOMMON**

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Participants in the initiative in Mayo/Roscommon were also given the opportunity to fill in an evaluation questionnaire at the end of the three nights. The questionnaire used was of a different format from the one used in Galway and therefore the analysis is conducted separately. A total of 158 questionnaires were analysed from 12 different schools. The sample included those where participants had provided responses to the qualitative questions as the data from these was richer and more detailed.

***Question 1: Did it meet your expectations?***

99% of the respondents stated it did meet their expectations. Of the two who responded no, one stated that it had exceeded his/her expectations.

***Question 2: Did you find it easy to participate within the group?***

97% (n=154) of respondents found it easy to participate within the group. Those who responded negatively explained this in terms of their own uneasiness in such group settings.

***Question 3: Did you feel the issues discussed were relevant to you?***

96% of respondents found the issues were relevant to them. Some (who replied both yes and no) stated that they were not relevant yet but may be at some stage in the future.

***Question 4: Did you find the activities/worksheets helpful?***

99% of respondents found the activities/worksheets helpful.

***Question 5: What did you think was most helpful and why?***

A broad range of responses was given to this question. The table below includes most of the responses, with those stated more than once indicated by the number in the left column of the table. As shown in the table, the most common response related to seeing and learning about the different types of drugs, reflecting an appreciation of basic information about common drugs in use. This was followed by information on signs and symptoms and how to recognise them.

**Table 3 Most helpful aspects of 3 night parenting programme**

| <b>Most helpful aspect</b>   | <b>No of responses</b> |
|--|------------------------|
| Seeing and learning about different types of drugs                                       | 35                     |
| Signs and symptoms and what to look out for  | 9                      |
| Garda talk   | 7                      |
| Getting advice on how to deal with situations re substance abuse                         | 7                      |
| Knowing who to turn to for help  | 5                      |
| Case studies or scenarios  | 5                      |
| Protective and risk factors  | 4                      |
| To educate myself and prepare for eventualities  | 4                      |
| Info on the different drugs and to lock away alcohol and medications                     | 3                      |
| Looking at substances in the home  | 3                      |
| Group feedback as lots of different opinions   | 3                      |
| Finding that all parents deal similarly with situations                                  | 2                      |
| Info and tips on what to do in a situation   | 2                      |
| Information from people working with specific problems                                   | 1                      |
| Positive parenting   | 1                      |
| Depth of knowledge   | 1                      |
| What messages and models we give   | 1                      |
| The way people react with drugs  | 1                      |
| To hear from 3 different perspectives  | 1                      |
| Learning all the things which we can be dependent on, not just alcohol and illegal drugs | 1                      |
| Friendly setting   | 1                      |
| Handouts   | 1                      |
| Knowing that a lot of ordinary drugs are addictive                                       | 1                      |
| Realising how common drugs are   | 1                      |

**Question 6: What did you think was least helpful and why?**

Many respondents left this blank or stated that everything was helpful. The small number of other comments made included the following:

**Table 4 Least helpful aspects of 3 night parenting programme**

| Least helpful aspect   | No. of responses |
|--|------------------|
| Introductory night - rather than giving info on 3 nights, get straight into it | 3                |
| Garda talk   | 2                |
| Protective and risk factors  | 1                |
| Some discussions getting away from the topic                                   | 1                |
| Too much info re poly drug use   | 1                |
| Too much background information on drugs                                       | 1                |
| Seeing the selection of drugs - I worry!                                       | 1                |
| Some brain storming too long   | 1                |
| When were asked to introduce ourselves and say something about our child       | 1                |

***Question 7: Is there any other information you would like to see included in the programme?***

A strong theme emerging from both sub-regions was recognition of the need to provide a similar programme for students. Whilst this falls under the remit of SPHE within schools and parents would have been informed of this during the course, it nevertheless demonstrates that parents feel there is a gap and that students would benefit from such a programme. A minority also suggested that it could be run for parents and students together.

Similar to the responses from Galway, respondents suggested a number of other issues that they would like dealt with, some of which may be outside the remit of substance use education, but may have some overlap.

**Table 5 Other information to be included in the programme**

|  |    |
|--|----|
| This information could be give to the children in the same kind of setting in schools  | 12 |
| Suicide  | 3  |
| A parent and child evening on same issues  | 3  |
| Video or slides  | 3  |
| Someone who had experience of drugs or their family to give their story  | 3  |
| Sexual behaviour in young people   | 2  |
| Al Anon added to the list of local supports/services available   | 2  |
| Building self esteem in teens  | 1  |
| More group discussion on issues  | 1  |
| If the Gardaí had more time as that was very informative   | 1  |
| The programme was in a lovely relaxed atmosphere   | 1  |
| Tobacco abuse  | 1  |
| Damages caused by misuse   | 1  |
| I would like to see those poster campaigns rolled out everywhere – if someone thinks their travel arrangements could be altered by drug convictions they might think twice | 1  |
| More parenting skills  | 1  |
| More on alcohol  | 1  |
| Steps to take to get help  | 1  |
| More cohesiveness between the presenters   | 1  |
| More on side effects of medications  | 1  |
| More group work  | 1  |
| How alcohol/drugs misuse might change sexual behaviour   | 1  |
| Drug awareness and the ways kids are using them, i.e. yoghurt and food   | 1  |
| Effects of alcohol on a child's body   | 1  |
| Support for parents with difficult teenagers who go against home boundaries  | 1  |
| More information on what to do if your child has been using a substance –plan?   | 1  |
| I would like to hear more information from the local guards and the drugs guards   | 1  |
| More information on mental health issues   | 1  |
| Parents rights, empowering parents   | 1  |
| Children being bullied into taking solvents, etc.  | 1  |
| Parental control   | 1  |

**Question 8: Any final comments?**

Many of the comments related to the respondents' overall satisfaction and gratitude. Some included more specific suggestions. Again, some suggested that the course could be shortened. A sample is provided in the box below.

*Thanks Gillian – excellent facilitator, hope I can do likewise in SPHE class*

*Use parents with older children for advice*

*Very worthwhile*

*As a 26-year-old, I was very surprised by the lack of knowledge parents of today have regarding drugs and alcohol*

*Excellent, very informative*

*Would like more parents to have benefited from the course - feel they have missed out!*

*Very good I found. I went home discussing the course with my kids and I learnt a lot about what they think about teenage issues*

*Have learnt a lot of ways of dealing with teens in general, communicating with them stands out the most*

*Is there a similar course available for 3rd level students faced with life style choices away from home boundaries*

*I would prefer if there were 2 meetings instead of 4. I felt under pressure with my time to attend, but appreciate the effort that went into the preparation*

*Great speakers – could listen to them all night*

*I feel that drugs have become an 'accepted' part of young people's lives. No word of putting drug pushers out of town*

*I have a greater awareness regarding drugs, etc. and know where to go for help should I need it*

*Some sessions moved very slowly. I would prefer if time stuck to 2 hours*

*I felt that the course was informative but felt that brainstorming was not very beneficial*

*Every parent should be educated more about alcohol and drugs*

*I like the fact that it is up to date and factual, with a lot of statistics*

*I found the course very educational not alone in identifying, but also dealing with problems*

## 4. KEY FINDINGS – PERSPECTIVES OF AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

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### 4.1 OVERVIEW

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Semi-structured interviews were carried out with eleven stakeholders involved in the delivery and implementation of the initiative. This included the WRDTF Project Development Worker (n=1), the Education Support Workers in the two sub-regions (n=2), HSE drug counsellors (n=3), Gardaí (n=3) and education (n=2). In some cases, a follow-up interview was carried out or subsequent contact was made in order to obtain further documentation.

Questions were asked on a range of topics and were tailored to the type of respondent. The interviews with the WRDTF Project Development Worker and the Education Support Workers were lengthy (up to 2.5 hours); and some interviews were recorded and transcribed. In the remaining interviews, detailed notes were taken and the respondent was asked to speak slowly. An interview guide was used for each interview and certain questions were asked of all respondents.<sup>1</sup> These included questions on key outputs, inputs, challenges encountered, inter-agency work and recommendations for future programmes. Respondents were encouraged to speak freely and their responses are anonymised where possible and no quotations are used that are attributed to particular individuals. Complete anonymity was not absolutely guaranteed given the small nature of the sample, and the particular roles of certain individuals (e.g. education support workers) are identified where appropriate. Care was taken however to ensure that nothing of a sensitive nature that could be attributed to a particular individual is included.

The interview notes were transcribed and analysed according to the key themes arising. These are presented in the sections below.

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<sup>1</sup> A sample interview guide is contained in the Appendix.

## 4.2 BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW OF THE INITIATIVE

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Interview participants were asked about their own role and the stage at which they became involved in the initiative. A number of key issues emerged here:

- ✿ Previous one-off talks to schools were perceived as not working and there was a lack of joined-up thinking
- ✿ The Gardaí in particular were contacted to give one-off talks in schools and wished to work with other service providers in this area
- ✿ Some confusion existed in the early days in relation to good practice in drugs education e.g. some worked from a model of involving former drug addicts

*It was unclear what format the evenings should take. Can you bring in a drug addict? But what does it bring to parents. The world of drugs education has moved on and we need to educate schools on good practice. That was why the initiative was needed. We should be on the same song sheet for the approach we use (Education Support Worker).*

- ✿ The initiative started in Galway in 2009 and was subsequently rolled out in Mayo and Roscommon given the positive feedback. The Education Support Worker for Galway was hosted by AIDS West (through a tendering process) and for Mayo by Foróige (until 2011) and subsequently by South Mayo Development Company in Mayo/Roscommon.

## 4.3 ORGANISATION, PLANNING AND LOGISTICS

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The initiative is being implemented in three counties, with one Education Support Worker covering Galway (city and county) and the other covering Mayo and Roscommon. The initiative involves the WRDTF as lead agency and also includes An Garda Síochána, the HSE (Dug Service and Health Promotion) and the Department of Education (SPHE Regional Manager). It is co-ordinated overall by WRDTF, but is implemented by an Education Support Worker in each sub-region, working with a team of delivery agencies. In Galway, the Education Support Worker implements the initiative, along with the HSE Health Promotion in schools co-ordinator (covering SPHE and how it fits within the curriculum), an HSE drugs counsellor and a Garda (one main Garda from Galway city and sometimes a local Garda in other areas far from the city). In

Mayo/Roscommon the situation is somewhat more complex, given the wide geographical spread. Local teams are drawn up in the four areas of South Mayo/North Mayo/South Roscommon and North Roscommon. The Education Support Worker and Department of Education representative (SPHE Co-ordinator) remain constant and local teams are made up of HSE workers and Gardaí.

**Direct contact with schools** is carried out by the Education Support Worker, who writes to a key number of schools at the beginning of each school year, inviting them to participate. This is followed up with a reminder letter. The following year a new group of schools are contacted, in addition to those who did not take it up the previous year. Ideally, in the third year, the schools who participated in the first year are written to again. Liaison with schools generally involves an on-site visit by the Education Support Worker who explains the process and provides background information on the programme.<sup>2</sup> This may then be followed by several phone calls and e-mails relating to the logistics and agreeing date, venue, etc. Attempts were made in some areas to combine schools, especially where the school numbers were small. This was, however, generally met with resistance by schools.

The Education Support Workers also need to ensure that the dates, venues, etc. also suit the various other agencies involved in the delivery. This can mean that considerable effort is put into the **logistical management**. Some suggested that the pre-planning could be streamlined more, with dates agreed farther in advance where feasible, although this could be difficult to organise with schools.

The Education Support Workers are not employed full-time to work on the Parents Initiative and are both involved in the delivery of other relevant educational programmes. When up and running however, it was estimated that the Parents Initiative took up ca. 60% of their time and more at peak periods (e.g. at the beginning of the school year). The **administrative burden** is also relatively large, especially where a significant volume of educational and information materials are provided for the parents. Administrative support is provided to a greater extent in one sub-region.

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<sup>2</sup> See appendix for sample material



The initiative involves a considerable amount of **evening work**, particularly for the Education Support Workers. In one region, this involved two to three evenings per week, but attempts were made to ensure it was not more than two on average.

*We go in 7:30 to 9:30 but it's often 10pm getting out. ... I could be home at midnight or after it, but I might stay there.*

**Pre-planning meetings** are organised sometimes with the delivery agents, particularly at a local level. The number and frequency of these meetings seems to vary and some respondents suggested that they had been involved in them more than others. They seemed to happen more frequently at the early stages.

The issue of **travel and expenses for travel** also arose, particularly in the Mayo/Roscommon sub-region where a travel ban for HSE staff for non-clinical work resulted in the programme being suspended since September 2012. It was not clear at what stage this was to be lifted and how it would affect the future of the initiative in this sub-region. The geographic spread of the schools also means that in both areas long distances may need to be covered by certain agencies. This was a potential concern in the winter months, but generally had not impeded the implementation of the programme. Whilst such concerns may have been noted, the individuals involved expressed great enthusiasm and dedication to their work and were committed to ensuring that the programme continued.

#### 4.4 KEY INPUTS REQUIRED

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There was **no overall budget** dedicated to the initiative and it was difficult to obtain any figures on its financial cost as the main expenses involved the time of the various agencies (for whom the initiative is part of their work), some travel and subsistence and administration costs.

Overall, the key inputs required and that are currently being invested in the initiative can be summarised as:

- ✿ **Dedicated Education Support Workers** to co-ordinate initiative in each sub-region and carry out logistics and planning, liaising with schools, delivery agents,

delivery of programme (first night and 3 night programme), conducting monitoring and evaluation, etc.

- ✿ **Multi-agency co-operation** by WRDTF, HSE, Gardaí, Department of Education and host agencies of Education Support Workers
- ✿ **Delivery of programme** by range of agencies
- ✿ Buy in and **commitment at a managerial level**
- ✿ **Willingness of schools to engage** with the programme and assist in recruiting parents
- ✿ Overall **management, co-ordination and planning** (including assessment of whether programme still has relevance and is meeting its objectives).

#### 4.5 DELIVERY OF TRAINING IN SCHOOLS

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The actual delivery of the Parents Initiative in schools varied slightly in each sub-region and changed slightly depending on the availability of personnel, wishes of the school, etc. Generally, it followed the format of an initial one-night introductory evening, which involved a brief presentation by the Education Support Worker (introducing the initiative and the three-night course), the HSE (outlining their role and supports they provide), the Gardaí (overview of drugs scene, their role in the parenting course) and the Department of Education or HSE Co-ordinator for Health Promotion in Schools (on how the programme fits within the SPHE curriculum and how it can be embedded within schools).

Parents are then asked to sign up for a three-night parenting course. The format of this course varied by each sub-region and whilst it was generally three nights in both, it had been reduced to two nights in Galway in 2012 as three nights was considered too long. In Mayo/Roscommon, the format of this three-night course generally involved:

- One night delivered by Education Support Worker substances use and misuse, signs and symptoms, parenting skills, etc.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> night delivered by Garda representative and Education Support Worker on local drugs scene, legal consequences, identifying drugs, etc.

- 3<sup>rd</sup> night delivered by HSE Community Substance Misuse Counsellor and Education Support Worker on parenting skills, dealing with various scenarios, communication skills, local support services, etc.

In Galway, a similar format is followed in terms of content, but the input is mainly from the Education Support Worker, in conjunction with the Garda representative on one evening. The format is generally:

- 1st night on an introduction to the drugs scene (with the Garda)
- 2<sup>nd</sup> night on positive parenting and dealing with various scenarios
- Recognition of various drugs

In both areas, there is an emphasis on group work and presentations, with a balance between the two. The initial information evening is less interactive than the three-night parenting course.

#### 4.6 IMPLEMENTATION WITHIN A SCHOOL CONTEXT

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The Parents Initiative takes place within the **school setting** and is embedded within the SPHE curriculum. A core objective of the programme is also to 'support schools in developing a school's drug policy in line with Department of Education and Skills guidelines' (WRDTF, 2011). The initiative arose as an inter-agency response to one-off requests from schools to various agencies to carry out one-off talks and intended to provide a more stream-lined and inter-agency response in line with good practice in substance misuse education.

As shown in the school-based questionnaires, **the schools are generally very grateful for the initiative** and appreciate the work carried out by the WRDTF. The schools facilitate the implementation of the initiative, but at a broader level they cannot be considered to be active delivery agents or instigators. Its broader context within schools and its links with SPHE are represented through the two educational representatives in each region (the SPHE Co-ordinator for the West of Ireland who presents at the information session in Mayo/Roscommon and the HSE West Schools Health Promotion Co-ordinator who presents at the information session in Galway). This **link with broader educational goals, SPHE and curriculum development** is welcomed by

those involved. Whilst such linkages are very important, this does not equate to direct school involvement in the co-ordination of the initiative or a complete sense of ownership and buy-in by the individual schools involved. Such an issue is complex and stakeholders spoke about the varying levels of commitment among schools, in relation to delivering a high quality SPHE Programme, embedding the learning from the initiative within the wider schools environment and a commitment to reviewing their substance misuse policy in line with good practice. This was also partly evidenced through the suggestions by parents that students should avail of similar educational programmes, perhaps highlighting the perception that such issues were not always dealt with adequately within the school context or at least parents were unaware of what was being covered.

Some interview participants also talked about **the role of SPHE teachers** in the school and their varying involvement in the programme, with one suggesting that their participation should perhaps be mandatory. The **linkages with the SPHE curriculum** was also an area where it was suggested that improvements could be made, which could also be addressed at a national level. In relation to the linkages with SPHE, one participant stated:

*There's a lapover, but there not a direct feed in. Maybe there should be. It's a substantial programme. It's only run in the west, although there has been interest from outside the west. We could have more requirements for schools and that mightn't be any harm.*

A view was also expressed that **the implementation of the SPHE curriculum** was very limited and the risk of its dilution within the new curriculum. Familiar issues in relation to the implementation of SPHE were mentioned, such as teacher turnover, lack of dedicated teachers, its poor perception within schools, etc. (Nic Gabhainn et al. 2007). It was also suggested, however, that SPHE was revolutionary and that attitudinal change takes time and some schools showed great commitment to its implementation.

One way it was suggested that greater linkages with the school could be fostered was through asking schools who were participating in the initiative for a second time to be more engaged and to ask them (i) what they had implemented since the last time, (ii) what was being covered in the curriculum, (iii) what their policies were (including how they worked in practice) and (iv) to review the wider school environment and its

attitudes to substance misuse. This was summarised also as: *The Parents element is good, but we need to go back to the school and embed a whole school approach (interviewee).*

It was also stated by another participant that schools are sometimes looking for a quick fix approach and they may need to look deeper at young people having a role and the role that modelling by adults plays.

In relation to **logistics**, the role of schools was also mentioned. In most cases, this had not caused any problems, but in some cases the Education Support Workers encountered minor difficulties in relation to communicating with parents or ensuring that the school was ready and welcoming when they arrived on the first evening.

The objective of **supporting schools in developing a substance misuse policy** is one that appears to have been the most challenging. The nature of the delivery of the programme means that schools can sometimes become passive participants, but no onus is placed on them to review their substance misuse policy. Whilst it is mentioned during the information evening, interview participants were aware that for some schools there was no strong commitment to reviewing their policies. It was suggested that:

*I would like that instead of schools asking for us to come in...instead we would look at the school substance abuse policy and get them working with us (interviewee).*

It was also highlighted that working with schools on developing their substance misuse policy could be very difficult as all schools were obliged to have one and various agencies had worked previously with schools in developing one. It was seen that asking them to do it again or suggesting that they review it would be very difficult. Reservations were expressed by some respondents about the nature of the policies in place and how they actually worked in practice.

The school was also not required to have someone attend the information evening or parenting courses in schools and whilst someone normally did, their role varied and included SPHE teachers, Principal/Vice Principal or a representative of the Board of Management of Parents Association. There are therefore issues relating to the **consistency of school participation**. One participant suggested that the initiative

should be extended to working with the Board of Management on reviewing their policies and embedding it within the wider school culture. Some concern was also expressed in relation to a very punitive (rather than restorative) approach to substance misuse within schools.

One worker described how part of the way in which the initiative was originally pitched to schools was:

*...softly, softly, here we are with this programme, we're not going to disturb the running of the school, bring our own biscuits, let them off lightly. But I think a lot of schools needed that in order to buy into it, but then word got out... and there wasn't as much anxiety around it (interviewee).*

Another worker also described how the focus changed when the WRDTF initiative started, with schools being approached (rather than schools approaching agencies) and less onus put on them in terms of organisation and delivery, in comparison with previous agency work carried out in schools.

Overall, it appears that this approach has worked and has succeeded in bringing the vast majority of schools in the region on board. The nature of the participation of schools in the future is, however, something that could be reviewed going forward, with a greater emphasis on developing a sense of ownership by the schools and a review of their overall approach to substance misuse within the wider school community.

#### 4.7 INTER-AGENCY CO-OPERATION

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The inter-agency co-operation was viewed as one of the key strengths of the programme and behind its *raison d'être*. All participants were positive about how the various agencies co-operated together and presented a co-ordinated approach to schools. This was also reiterated in the parents and school questionnaires and is undeniably one of the main success factors of the initiative.

Some of the benefits of such co-operation as stated by the interview participants included:

- ✿ It demonstrates **collaboration between the various agencies** and sends a very clear message to parents and schools.
- ✿ It entails **communication outside the process** and the possibilities of developing other synergies
- ✿ It means that there can be an **emphasis on good practice** in substance misuse education (e.g. not doing one-off talks to schools or bringing in former addicts) by all agencies involved
- ✿ The nature of the initiative is **more holistic** and as substance misuse is a very complex and broad area, various sides and nuances are presented (e.g. legal, personal development, counselling, parenting, communication, role of school, SPHE, etc.)
- ✿ Whilst the programme concentrates on parents, it is **embedded within the SPHE curriculum** and this message is supported and demonstrated by the various agencies involved
- ✿ Through the inter-agency co-operation, **referrals to the various agencies** were made easier when required
- ✿ It offers possibility for **joint training and development of materials**
- ✿ As well as offering support to parents, initiative is preventative in nature and all agencies focus on **preventative aspects** and on promoting resilience among young people.

One of the parent participants stated in the questionnaire that they would like to have seen a more joined-up approach between the various presenters. Such statements were rare and on the whole the co-operation seems to have functioned very well. Some interview participants however stated that the turnover of various staff members delivering the training sometimes had an impact, with some being more experienced and at ease than others in such a role. The need for **on-going training**, the **development of clearer materials** and **more frequent meetings** for all involved was also highlighted by some. In one county however, some respondents felt there were too many pre-planning meetings and that too much time was spent on logistical details, rather than focusing on content and approach.

#### 4.8 KEY OUTPUTS

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All interview participants provided very positive feedback on the co-ordination and delivery of the initiative. They were all asked to summarise what they saw as three of the key outputs. The most common ones mentioned included:

- ✿ The programme has allowed for the agencies to **come in contact with a generic and wider group of people**, with whom they may not usually have contact
- ✿ It provides an opportunity for **planned and informed involvement in schools**, using a multi-agency approach and based on good practice
- ✿ It encourages schools and service providers to **engage with parents** and to view them as partners in the process
- ✿ It is an **opportunity to engage schools** on this topic and to help them to think about their own approach to substance misuse policy
- ✿ Agencies had all been involved in some format in providing talks or information to schools on an *ad hoc* basis. The initiative provided an opportunity for a more **co-ordinated and planned approach**.
- ✿ Parents are **becoming more informed and aware of substance misuse** signs and symptoms as well as the various drugs that are available
- ✿ Parents think more about **the impact of their behaviours** and the modelling that they provide
- ✿ Parents **benefit from support in parenting** and particularly in communicating with their child/young person
- ✿ The initiative has produced **wider synergies through inter-agency co-operation** (see above)
- ✿ **A number of referrals** have been made to the HSE substance misuse counsellors as a direct result of the initiative
- ✿ The three-night parenting course **allows time to look at the issues in more depth** and to engage in more group work
- ✿ It provides a great **opportunity for parents to discuss the issues** that arise with their young people at home and to ask whether they are covering it in SPHE in school



- ✿ It provides **a link for the various agencies with the community** and helps to break down barriers (especially for the Gardaí).

A sample of quotations in relation to the positive outcomes of the Parents Initiative is provided below:

*The HSE feedback wise – get the most calls afterwards. They get the parents ringing for support, advice, concerns, referrals and they're working with a few of the young people.*

*The feedback from the workshops is so positive I think it is what they need. We've asked what they would change and so on, and they say no it's great, can we have it again. Whether it's they don't know or what, but it def seems to tick the boxes for them. The educational element being addressed and the information, the legal side, the SPHE and the HSE the health umbrella, treatment, rehabilitation, advice, counselling support. We also put a lot of effort into a supports list for parents to take home in their locality.*

#### 4.9 CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED

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Whilst the feedback on the initiative was overwhelmingly positive, a number of challenges were encountered. These are divided into the categories of (i) logistical and administrative challenges (ii) working with schools and embedding programme within SPHE (iii) fostering more inter-agency co-operation (iv) uncertainty regarding the future and (v) other challenges. The recommendations that follow in the next section address some of these challenges.

##### **(i) Logistical and administrative challenges**

As referred to earlier, the initiative requires significant amounts of time, travel and logistical co-ordination in order to run smoothly. The Education Support Workers role involves a significant amount of administration, preparation of materials, logistical organisation and travel in addition to preparing and delivery the training within schools. They also foster key linkages with schools and the various delivery agencies. The size of each region can present challenges, particularly the area of Mayo/Roscommon, with its multiple teams involved in the delivery. A large proportion of the worker's time was also taken up with photocopying and dealing

with multiple delivery partners and schools. In one county, it was also suggested that more time could be put into pre-planning and involving the various delivery agencies in that process, whereas too many pre-planning meetings was raised as a concern in another county. It was suggested by a delivery agency that the agreement of dates, etc., should happen in advance where possible and pre-planning meetings should not be spent on detailed logistical issues. It was felt that this was a poor use of time and pre-planning meetings could be limited to the beginning of the year.

Most schools expressed satisfaction with the communication and pre-planning, although this required considerable time and effort. A suggestion was made by one participant that a county co-ordinator with greater linkages with schools could assist with the practical logistics of liaising with schools and setting dates, etc. The organisation of dates to suit all parties and that could be communicated in sufficient time to the parents involved also posed some challenges. The nature of the one night followed by three nights being run in different schools in different locations during the same period sometimes led to a very heavy workload for the Education Support Workers. The lack of a back-up plan in case the Education Support Worker was sick or unable to attend was also raised as a concern.

***(ii) Working with schools and embedding initiative within SPHE***

The topic of schools and the role they played featured frequently in the interviews. Whilst their engagement overall was welcomed and positive, on reflection interview participants suggested that their engagement could be reviewed going into the future. This included previous suggestions on reviewing their substance misuse policy, addressing the initiative within the context of SPHE and possibly engaging in a similar course with young people.

The linking of the initiative at a broader level with SPHE and the national curriculum was also a challenge that was encountered. As the initiative was currently only being rolled out regionally, there was no onus on schools (from a national level) to engage with it or to embed it firmly within the school and within the context of SPHE. Some missing linkages were identified in this regard.

***(iii) Fostering greater inter-agency co-operation***

Whilst inter-agency co-operation was a strong feature of the initiative, it also posed a few minor challenges. Some interview participants felt that it could go further, that it was piecemeal at times and lacked clear institutional buy-in at all levels. It was felt that much was due to the dedication of particular individuals, but many aspects had not been mainstreamed at an organisational level. Challenges were also encountered in particular organisations, such as the wide geographical remit of the SPHE co-ordinators' role, the travel restrictions imposed by the HSE in one sub-region and the turnover of different Gardaí delivering the initiative in some areas.

Participants also highlighted the need for more frequent meetings and greater planning between the various agencies, in addition to the more consistent use of content and materials.

***(iv) Uncertainty regarding the future***

Currently, (April 2013) the programme has stalled in the Mayo/Roscommon sub-region since May 2012 due to a HSE travel restriction and this has created some uncertainty regarding its future. Some agencies also expressed a need to review the initiative and look at how it could be improved in the future. The suggestion of rolling it out on a national basis was also referred to. It is hoped that this evaluation will assist in addressing some (but not all) of these uncertainties.

***(v) Other challenges***

Other challenges that were highlighted included:

- ✿ Need for greater inclusion among the parent participants in the initiative. This included reaching out to minority groups or those who may feel uncomfortable discussing in a group setting and the need to have more fathers involved.
- ✿ Challenges sometimes arose in asking parents to assess their own attitudes and behaviour in relation to substance use, particularly alcohol.

- ✿ Various agencies may appear to give a slightly mixed message, and emphasis on supportive and restorative approaches vs. legal/punitive ones could be confusing for participants and schools
- ✿ The wide age range of students in secondary school and the needs of the various age groups sometimes arose as a challenge.

#### 4.10 RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY STAKEHOLDERS

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At the conclusion of this report, a series of recommendations are made, based on an overall analysis of the findings (from schools/participants and agency stakeholders in addition to the evaluators analysis and observations). A number of specific recommendations however were made by the interview participants. These included:

1. It was suggested that the initiative currently targets a large number of schools every year and is aimed at all students, but that this may not be sustainable going forward. Some suggested that it did not make sense to keep delivering the same programme to the same schools. One option put forward was to **address it to parents of different age groups at different times.**

*I don't know how regularly we can sustain that. Is it a matter of once off, every 2 years, 3 years? Is it for 1st years or parents of LC? The gaps there. We target all parents at the moment, but maybe as a recommendation, whether we look at... the info we are presenting for 1st years versus LC can be very different. So we try to present info that is neutral enough for all teenagers, because 13 and 17 year olds are so different (interviewee).*

2. It was recommended that there should be **greater administrative and logistical support** for the education support worker, particularly in the Mayo/Roscommon sub-region.
3. A need to **involve young people in the initiative**, which could also be done in a community setting. Opinions on this varied however and others felt that this was the remit of schools and perhaps more work could be carried out with SPHE teachers and school management rather than working directly with the young people.

4. Suggestions were made by several participants about the need to put a greater onus on schools and to continue the initiative in **such a way that engaged more with schools**, e.g. by asking them to report back the second year on what they had implemented or to focus the second year on policy development.
5. It was also recommended that the **Department of Education should have a stronger input into the initiative** and to work more closely with schools on developing and reviewing substance misuse policies in line with good practice and through adopting a whole school approach.
6. The possibility of **working with primary schools** was also suggested, as many of the foundations in terms of emotional development, communication, etc. were laid at this stage.
7. In relation to inter-agency co-operation, it was also suggested that **greater policy development** could happen at this level.
8. It was suggested that in some of the more remote and rural areas, **more local delivery agencies could be involved** and trained, rather than relying on people to travel long distances from outside the area.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

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### 1.1 ADDRESSING THE EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

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At the outset of this evaluation report, a series of questions were posed, outlining the key objectives of this evaluation. Many of these issues have been addressed throughout the report. The following provides a synopsis of the analysis under these headings.

#### ***1. How has the programme been received by schools and what has their involvement been?***

As indicated in the school-based questionnaires and through feedback from the various stakeholders, the schools involved have received the programme very positively and are grateful for the programme. To date they have participated in the programme, but have not been one of the primary drivers behind it. Some of the recommendations made comment on how their engagement could be strengthened in the future.

#### ***2. What impact has it had on parents and on communication within the family in relation to substance misuse?***

The parents surveyed indicated that the initiative has supported them in opening up lines of communication in relation to substance misuse within the family. The longer term impact on how this has been received by the young people and how it may affect their behaviour in the long-term is not known. As indicated by stakeholders, the Parents initiative is just one aspect of the overall approach to substance misuse education and needs to be complemented by quality teaching and approach within schools and a range of other community responses.

#### ***3. How has the inter-agency approach benefited the initiative?***

The inter-agency approach has been one of the strongest aspects of the programme and has benefited all involved. It was felt however that it could be strengthened, with a greater emphasis on pre-planning and the embedding of the initiative within each organisational environment.

**4. *Has the programme been implemented differently in the two sub-regions?  
Has this impacted on programme delivery overall?***

A number of minor differences were noted in the methods of delivery of the initiative in the two sub-regions. This included differences in the number of nights of the parenting course (2 or 3 nights), the quantity of written material produced, the make-up of sub-regional teams, the format of who presents (e.g. greater or lesser involvement of other agencies for the parenting course) and some minor differences in content. This also showed how the initiative was interpreted slightly differently in each region and by each Education Support Worker. Differences also arose in relation to meeting local needs and the varying levels of involvement of the delivery partners.

The differences, however, were not substantial and the outcomes and challenges for the initiative are reasonably similar across the two sub-regions, as evidenced in both the questionnaires and the interviews.

**5. *To what extent, as such, does this initiative represent a good model for  
substance misuse education for parents that could be replicated elsewhere?***

Several participants spoke of the potential for such an initiative to be replicated elsewhere or to be mainstreamed nationally. There appears to be overwhelming evidence that it is responding to a need and effectively addressing almost all the objectives. It has also presented an opportunity for agencies to work together, develop new synergies and engage on best practice and how their approach fits within a more holistic context. Parents are a group that have not previously been involved to such an extent and it is filling this gap through bringing them into the loop and recognises their role as primary educators and the need to support them in this role. It also addresses the issues within a school context and challenges the school to think about how it approaches substance use. It should be noted, however, that a few challenges have arisen and its replication should take these into account, in addition to the recommendations made in relation to its improvement.

The Parents Initiative has been dependent on a high level of commitment, goodwill and dedication of the staff involved and considerable work has been put into fostering relationships between the various agencies and engaging schools. No specific budget has been set aside for the programme, but the workload for the Education Support Workers is relatively heavy and travel has been significant in some areas.



## 1.2 SUMMARY OF OUTPUTS, OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS

The table below summarises some of the key outcomes of the programme and some of the longer-term impacts that may arise. It was difficult to assess the longer-term impacts in the absence of any longitudinal analysis over time. The potential impacts are based on the assessment of the stakeholders and are considered estimates of its longer term impact.

***Table 6 Summary of outputs, outcomes and potential impacts***

| Key outputs  | Short/medium term outcomes   | Potential impacts   |
|--|--|---|
| Participation of over 80 schools, with 2633 parents involved in the initiative | Awareness raising among parents of substance misuse issues   | Greater ability to deal with, recognise and prevent substance misuse                                      |
| 40% of parents attending first night continue to do parenting programme        | Opportunity to address issues of parenting, communication and dealing with scenarios                               | Improved parenting skills, with emphasis on communication   |
| Engagement of key stakeholders   | Agencies working together, with informed and evidence-based approach   | Improved model of working within agencies and institutional buy-in  |
| Relationships built with schools   | Schools more engaged with agencies   | Schools and agencies working collaboratively to address substance misuse                                  |
| Awareness raising of role and remit of various agencies                        | Schools and parents have greater understanding of what agencies do and where to get help                           |   |
| Resolution to requests for one-off talks to schools                            | Progress made on understanding and implementing good practice in relation to substance misuse education in schools | Informed approach in schools to good practice in substance misuse education and environment within school |
| Referrals as a result of the initiative  | More young people being seen by appropriate service providers when need arises                                     | Greater prevention, support and treatment   |

## 1.3 SWOT ANALYSIS

**Table 7 SWOT Analysis of Parents Initiative**

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✿ Effectively addresses gap in substance misuse education of engaging parents at a preventative level</li> <li>✿ Embedded within schools, with links to the SPHE curriculum</li> <li>✿ Strong inter-agency co-operation</li> <li>✿ Evidence-based approach</li> <li>✿ Addresses wider parenting and family support needs</li> <li>✿ Meets objectives as set out and wider objectives of WRDTF substance misuse education and awareness raising</li> </ul>  | <p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✿ Logistical challenges, including wide geographic remit, heavy administrative burden, difficulties agreeing dates, etc.</li> <li>✿ Objective of addressing schools substance misuse policy not fully met</li> <li>✿ Young people not included directly in the initiative – who may/may not benefit from similar content/approach within SPHE</li> <li>✿ No specific budget for the initiative and actual time/resources required not fully costed</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✿ Junior Cycle reforms may present new opportunities for schools to look at various aspects of SPHE and substance misuse education in a more holistic way</li> <li>✿ Pause in programme in Mayo/Roscommon and evaluation may offer opportunities to reassess and improve initiative</li> <li>✿ Potential as a model to be rolled out in other regions</li> <li>✿ Opportunities going forward to engage schools and Department of Education more and mainstream some of the learning</li> </ul> | <p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✿ On-going travel restrictions within HSE and general public service cutbacks may jeopardize its future</li> <li>✿ Risk of burnout among staff</li> <li>✿ Novelty factor for schools may wear off if same programme is delivered every year, without changes made</li> <li>✿ Junior Cycle reform could equally result in a dilution of SPHE as it may not be a compulsory element in the same way</li> <li>✿ Changes in personnel/priorities in key agencies could result in less commitment to the initiative</li> </ul> |

## 1.4 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

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Various recommendations were made by stakeholders (parents/schools/agencies) throughout this report. Below is a summary of the key recommendations, based on an overall analysis.

1. The Parents Initiative has been **very successful at a number of levels**, has addressed most of the objectives as set out, addresses an identified need; and it is recommended that it should continue. Some particular issues may need to be addressed, as outlined in the recommendations below.
2. If the initiative is to be replicated elsewhere or questions arise in relation to its on-going funding, it is recommended that **a programme budget** should be allocated, taking into account time (including a percentage of the salaries of the relevant personnel), travel and administration costs.
3. The issue of **travel restrictions should be addressed**, especially within the context of the importance of the initiative as a holistic inter-agency approach to substance misuse education and prevention and its wider health promotion remit.
4. The next phase of the initiative should have a **greater focus on the engagement of schools**, with more onus placed on them to (i) embed it within the SPHE Curriculum (with potential for new programmes through Junior Cycle reform) and (ii) address their overall substance misuse policy and school environment and (iii) adopting a whole school approach through bringing all relevant stakeholders on board.
5. **More systematic and co-ordinated training, pre-planning and review meetings** should be organised for multi-agency delivery partners. Where meetings are held, the objectives and roles should be clear. Communication between the various agencies could be improved in some instances.

6. Where feasible, it would help to **standardise some of the materials being used and ensure that consistent messages are given**. This would also help where a stand-in person was required to cover at short notice. It is still important however to keep the training embedded within a local context, with information on local support agencies or the current 'drugs scene' of the locality.
7. The possibility of **staff burnout and the high administrative burden** should be addressed, possibly through greater administrative and logistical support.
8. More focus **could be placed on ensuring that the initiative is valued and supported at all levels within the delivery agencies**. All agencies involved could play a role in embedding the learning from it within their own organisation. Key strengths and lessons learnt from the initiative should be mainstreamed at regional and national policy levels.
9. In future school-based evaluation questionnaires, **more questions could be included on the impact of the initiative** and steps it has since undertaken or intends to undertake, such as the role of the initiative with regards to SPHE, its substance misuse policy and a whole school approach. A one-off review focusing specifically on schools could help to address their role going forward and suggestions they may have for future programmes.
10. As the involvement of schools is a crucial aspect of the programme, the **possibility of including principals or school SPHE co-ordinators in occasional planning or review meetings** to address the overall aims and objectives and approach within the sub-region could be explored.

## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX 1 PARENTS INITIATIVE ATTENDANCE

(Taken from WRDTF Review of Parents Initiative 2012)

| Year          | Galway: Parents Information Evenings | Galway: Parents Drug Education Workshops | Mayo & Roscommon: Parents Information Evenings | Mayo & Roscommon: Parents Drug Education Workshops |
|---------------|--------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| 2009-2010     | 729                                  | 265                                      | 232 <sup>1</sup>                               | 98   |
| 2010-2011     | 307                                  | 114                                      | 474  | 174  |
| 2011-2013     | 251                                  | 104                                      | 617  | 304  |
| <b>TOTALS</b> | 1287                                 | 483                                      | 1346   | 578  |

Total number of parents attending information evenings = 2633

Total number of parents attending drug education workshops = 1061

*NOTES:*

The Parents Drug Education Initiative began in Mayo/Roscommon in January 2010

Figures are based on an average attendance at the three workshop sessions. More parents will have participated if they attended one or two sessions only

*PENETRATION INTO SCHOOLS (BY COUNTY)*

| County    | Number of post-primary schools (May 2012) | Number of schools completed Parents Initiative | Percentage of schools in county completed Parents Initiative |
|-----------|---|--|--|
| Galway    | 44  | 31   | 70%  |
| Mayo      | 29  | 27   | 93%  |
| Roscommon | 9   | 7  | 77%  |

Rate of 'conversion' of parents attending initial evening to participation in parent workshops

| <b>County Galway</b> | <b>Attendance at parent information evening</b> | <b>Attendance at parent workshops</b> | <b>'Conversion rate'</b> |
|----------------------|---|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 2009-10              | 725   | 265                                   | 36%                      |
| 2010-11              | 307   | 114                                   | 37%                      |
| 2011-12              | 251   | 104                                   | 41%                      |

| <b>Counties Mayo &amp; Roscommon</b> | <b>Attendance at parent information evening</b> | <b>Attendance at parent workshops</b> | <b>'Conversion rate'</b> |
|--------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 2009-10                              | 232   | 98                                    | 42%                      |
| 2010-11                              | 474   | 174                                   | 36%                      |
| 2011-12                              | 617   | 304                                   | 49%                      |

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## APPENDIX 2 OUTCOMES SUMMARISED IN PREVIOUS REVIEW

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### **Parents Initiative Outcomes** (WRDTF, 2012, p10-12)

The involvement of all the stakeholders in the Multi-agency Parent Initiative since 2008 has resulted in the delivery of a quality whole school and community education pilot project that has impacted on the lives of up 2,633 families to date. Those involved in the review outlined what the Parent Initiative outcomes were for each agency. The outcomes described below highlight how the initiative has worked for them as agency participants and attendees in general. In addition, specific outcomes for each agency involved in managing, presenting or hosting the Initiative are detailed. The outcomes highlighted below include those from the schools who participated in the review through the on-line survey.

*OUTCOMES THAT WERE CONSISTENTLY PRESENT FOR ALL AGENCIES INCLUDED THE FACTS THAT THE PARENTS INITIATIVE:*

- Supports evidence-based practice
- Clarifies a common perception of the scale of substance use issues for parents and teachers
- Outlines how the different agencies work together to deliver a positive response to the substance use issues among young people
- Reduces a perception of stigma associated with substance use among young people
- Reinforces the idea and signposts how all agencies, families and young people can have a role to play in responding positively to the issue of substance use in the community
- Facilitates better communication between schools, families and the support agencies
- Supports agency personnel in delivering a co-ordinated approach to substance use training

*FROM THE FAMILIES PERSPECTIVE, THE PARENTS INITIATIVE:*

- Clarifies the signs associated with substance use to be aware of
- Provides training in how parents can positively respond to signs of substance use
- Outlines what steps parents can take to increase protective factors
- Signposts the support available in the local community from the different state agencies
- Provides a clearer idea of the personal development aspect of the SPHE curriculum in Junior Cycle



*FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS PERSPECTIVE,  
THE PARENTS INITIATIVE:*

- Complements the work of the DOE SPHE Support Service Manager
- Presents a platform to highlight the relevance of the SPHE to parenting
- When the role of other agencies and families (in anticipating and responding to substance use is clarified) then school retention rates may be sustained

*FROM AN GARDA SÍOCHÁNA PERSPECTIVE, THE PARENTS INITIATIVE:*

- Clarifies the role of An Garda Síochána for parents and schools in relation to the substance use issue for early teens
- Supports Garda contact with other community agencies
- Establishes a personal school contact for managing local substance use and other issues
- Highlights the approachability of An Garda Síochána and establishes an open rapport which may diminish communication barriers with parents
- Supports An Garda Síochána crime prevention role

*FROM THE WRDTF PERSPECTIVE, THE PARENTS INITIATIVE:*

- Addresses the issue of substance misuse awareness within the wider community
- Broadens the awareness of substance use beyond a consideration of dependency issues
- Targets the engagement of parents of early teens, and SPHE teachers in prevention work
- Promotes good practice in drugs awareness promotion
- Promotes the signposting of support facilities, resources and agencies
- Broadens the interest and debate within the community about drug-related issues

*FROM THE HSE DRUG SERVICE AND HSE HEALTH PROMOTION OFFICER FOR  
SCHOOLS PERSPECTIVE, THE PARENTS INITIATIVE:*

- Highlights the pro-active role of HSE in promoting early response and prevention as part of a Public Health Model of intervention
- Clarifies the scope and effectiveness of substance misuse counselling via the HSE Drug Service
- Provides the HSE Health Promotion Officer for schools with an opportunity to meet parents and reinforce the relationship with school principals
- Co-ordinates with other agencies appropriately to deliver a substance use awareness /health promotion message
- Establishes an early intervention/crisis response link with schools and An Garda Síochána

- Delivers Parent Drug Education Workshops that the HSE previously had a role in facilitating prior to health service cutbacks
- Supports the role of the HSE Health Promotion Officer for schools in supporting schools in their development of a Substance Use Policy and related procedures

### *FROM THE POST PRIMARY SCHOOL PERSPECTIVE, THE PARENTS INITIATIVE*

- Promotes a whole school approach to substance use issues
- Provides opportunity to review the content, promotion and effectiveness of the school's Substance Use Policy and procedures
- Supports SPHE staff in delivering the Substance Use Module
- Supports staff in their identification of the signs of substance use in the student population
- Establishes a pro-active link with personnel from different local support agencies
- Clarifies the necessary co-ordination between parents and school in relation to substance use issues that may arise
- Supports the school in fulfilling its legal obligations in relation to the provision of a policy around substance use

APPENDIX 3 PARENTS EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE – MAYO/ROSCOMMON

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**Parents Drug Education Programme**

**Did the course meet your expectations?** Yes /No

Any Comments:\_\_\_\_\_

**Did you find it easy to participate within the group?** Yes /No

Any Comments:\_\_\_\_\_

**Do you feel the issues discussed were relevant to you?** Yes/ No

Any Comments:\_\_\_\_\_

**Did you find the activities/worksheets helpful:** Yes/No

**What do you think was most helpful and why?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**What do you think was least helpful and why?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Is there any other information you would like to see included in the programme?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Any final comments?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Thank You For Participating!**

Name (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_

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APPENDIX 4 PARENTS DRUG EDUCATION INITIATIVE TIMELINE 2009-11

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**Jan 2009:** Members of Garda Drug Units in Galway and Mayo completed the DEWF Quality Standard Training in Carrick-on-Shannon along with members of the Western Region Drugs Task Force. The Gardaí began reviewing their currently method of information delivery in schools.

**June 2009:** Gardaí, SPHE Support Service and WRDTF met to discuss current practice of work with schools within the region. It was agreed that the Gardaí would stop going into schools for one-off talks and that the Gardaí, SPHE Support Service and WRDTF would work together to deliver Drug/Alcohol information evenings to parents via the schools.

**August 2009:** All post-primary schools in Galway City and County were written to and offered the opportunity to run a parents evening.

14 schools responded immediately and evenings were booked.

WRDTF Education Support Workers offered a three-night parents programme in follow up to the information evening.

**September –December 2010:** 14 Schools ran parents evenings in Galway City and County.

**January 2010:** The Roscommon team (Garda Drugs Unit, HSE Drugs Service, SPHE & WRDTF) gathered in late 2009 and began work on the roll-out in Roscommon. In January 2010, all schools in Roscommon were written to and offered the programme.

The Galway roll-out continued from January to April.

**June 2010:** In June an evaluation of the work to date in Galway City & County was carried out and schools were contacted and asked to complete a questionnaire. Those involved in the delivery reviewed their inputs and made recommendations for the continued role out of the programme

**August 2010:** The three County Teams (Galway, Roscommon & Mayo) met in Parkmore with the aim to:

- Bring everyone up to speed on the roll-out to date
- Work on the presentations to ensure continuity in the three counties
- Worked in county teams to agree days, times, etc., for the roll-out in the coming school term.

Members of the HSE Drug Service, Gardaí, SPHE Support Service and WRDTF were present.

All schools in Co. Mayo were written to and offered the parents evening. 18 schools were engaged in organising an evening between September 2010 and February 2011

**November 2010:** A seminar for schools principals “*Substance Use and the School Community*” was organised by the WRDTF and the SPHE Support Service. Presentations were given by the Gardaí Drugs Unit and the Education Support Workers on the Parents Drug Education Initiative

**December 2010:** On 15<sup>th</sup> December 2010 the three teams gathered to review and evaluate the process to date and plan for 2011.

**2011:** Continue the roll out in the three counties

## APPENDIX 5 SAMPLE INVITATION LETTER SENT TO SCHOOLS

August 27<sup>th</sup> 2010

**Re: Substance Use Awareness/Information Evenings for Parents**

Dear,

The Western Regional Drugs Task Force (WRDTF) in conjunction with the Gardaí, HSE Western Region Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Support Service and the HSE West Drug Service wish to inform you of a new joint initiative which we are offering to schools and community groups. The parties mentioned above are now working together to deliver information evenings to parents groups to address the issue of drugs from a Legal, Informational/Educational and School perspective.

An evening talk will include the following:

The **Gardaí** will present the current situation with drugs in the region, the legal situation and what to look out for.

The **WRDTF Education Worker** will look at communicating with your children about drugs and about the 3 session drugs education programme on offer

The **SPHE Support Service** will present on what is happening in the school in SPHE re drugs/alcohol and how this happens

The **HSE Drugs Service** will present on the services they provide in the area.

We are in a position to offer these evenings to schools in the Western Region on a first come first served basis. The talks are available on **Wednesday evenings** and will generally take place **from 7.45pm**. If there are a number of schools in one area interested in the talk we would try and organise a central venue in the area or if it is a single school we hope to be able to use a school hall or room for the talk. We are happy to provide the refreshments on the nights.

After running the event we would be in a position to offer the parents and school the following:

- A three-session drugs education programme for parents
- Training for all teachers/Board of Management
- Support in developing the school's drugs policy in line with Department of Education and Science Guidelines

If you are interested in organising such a night please contact **Neil Wilson, Education Support Worker** on **091-566266 or 08607274888**.

We look forward to working with you.

Kind Regards,



## APPENDIX 6 RELEVANT BEST PRACTICE INDICATORS AS LAID DOWN IN SUBSTANCE USE EDUCATION PROGRAMMES WITH PARENTS AND GUARDIANS IN THE SCHOOL SETTING – DEWF

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### **1. Strategic and operational planning evident in all programmes**

- All parent programmes are carefully planned in the context of national and local issues by the programme provider with the school
- All programmes are detailed in the school's substance use policy
- All programmes are strategically planned to complement the SPHE curriculum for students

### **2. All programmes are learner-centred, predicated on a needs assessment**

- All programmes are based on needs assessment involving relevant stakeholders
- Relevant to local social environment
- Appropriate messages (e.g. not fear-based) are used

### **3. All programmes are delivered by appropriately skilled and qualified facilitators**

- Facilitators are accountable for delivering the agreed programme and provide a report on learning objectives and feedback from participants and themselves

### **4. The contents of all sessions is specific, relevant, evidence-based and based on participants' needs, yet flexible as needs may emerge during the course itself**

- The programme will identify further learning opportunities for participants
- Protocols established for effective and appropriate referral and parents to relevant support services

### **5. All programmes are accessible for participants**

- Affordable: low cost or free
- Involve a realistic commitment regarding location, timing and duration
- Inclusive: sensitive to gender, cultural, literacy requirements, disability, level of parent and guardian engagement with the school, educational disadvantage and socio-economic differentials

### **6. Dependent on the needs analysis, the programme may require a specific focus on one or more of the following (e.g. parent/child work; information/substance use education; skills building)**

### **7. All methodologies employed are based on adult education principles and practice**

## APPENDIX 7 SAMPLE INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

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1. What is your role in the programme?
2. Since when have you been involved?
3. How often are you involved in the delivery?
4. What do you think are the main objectives?
5. Do you feel they have been met and what are key outputs?
6. What has worked well for: a) your organisation b) the delivery c) the overall programme
7. Can you name 3 main challenges. Have you overcome them – how?
8. Can you identify any weaknesses of the programme
9. Has the inter-agency element worked well? Why/Why not?
10. What resources/inputs have been required?
11. Do you feel that such a parenting initiative is effective within the overall context of drugs education? Why?
12. What recommendations can you make about the programme for the future?
  - For this region
  - If implemented elsewhere

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