

## TACKLING RURAL DRUGS PROBLEMS - A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

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### Summary

Drugs misuse in rural areas has received increasing media attention but little work has been done to understand the nature and extent of the issue or to develop a coherent strategy for tackling it. This paper reports on a project in Driffield, a small town in East Yorkshire within the Humberside Police force area. Driffield serves a large agricultural area and is in many ways representative of rural England. The aims of the project were to examine drug misuse in a rural area and develop a police-led inter-agency initiative to deal with it.

The key elements of the project were:

- A review of literature and general background to rural drug taking.
- An investigation of police intelligence on drugs in Driffield and surrounding towns.
- Community-based surveys of drug taking in Driffield.
- Sharing knowledge and assessing the potential for action.
- Developing a police led inter-agency initiative: the Participatory Drugs Profiling (PDP) Scheme.
- Assessing the value of the initiative in tackling rural drug misuse.

### Key findings

#### *On drug issues:*

Whilst drugs misuse has been popularised as an urban phenomenon, a limited range of literature exists which discusses it in a rural context.

- ❑ Little evidence was found of pro-active use of police intelligence in the rural area although many officers see tackling drugs as important.
- ❑ There are few reliable indicators of the extent of misuse, but the indications are that it is less prevalent in rural than in urban areas.
- ❑ All forms of drug misuse are evident but cannabis use is the most common. Many other drugs are widely available in Driffield and are also obtained in nearby large towns.
- ❑ Two clear needs were identified by people in the town - more information on all aspects of drug misuse, and access to information in a way that does not stigmatise. This was a particular issue for young people, who felt that the close-knit character of social life in rural areas meant that they couldn't seek information about drugs without everybody knowing, and thinking they were using illicit drugs.
- ❑ Agencies indicated the importance of understanding the 'reality' of drug taking when devising preventive strategies.

## On Participatory Drugs Profiling

The local initiative developed in Driffield focused on building a shared view of drug issues and how they may be tackled through the participation of the police, other agencies and local people. The initiative took the form of Participatory Drugs Profiling - a task oriented process in which groups of participants focus on a real-life case, in this case the life history of a drug user, to develop proposals for action. The task of the groups, which include agency workers and community representatives, parents and young people, is to examine how, when and by whom the particular problem presented in the profile could be changed. Other profiles that might be used to focus activity in this way include the pattern of drug use in the area, and the network of victims of drug use.

In assessing the value of this approach, the report found much support from participants, including the police, parents and young people:

- for the police, it uses their knowledge and leadership skills to build bridges with the community, raising trust and confidence. The informal, task-focused setting enables them in particular to develop constructive relationships with young people;
- for other statutory and voluntary agencies, it enables the setting of priorities sensitive to community needs;
- for the community, it facilitates a dialogue which promotes a sharing of views about the issues and what can be done. Parents and young people in particular found it valuable to be able to discuss drugs issues openly with others;
- for drug users and potential drug users, it widens the scope for better-informed decision-making and choices. The profiles help to bring home the reality of drug misuse.

The Participatory Drugs Profiling model is not resource intensive and is adaptable and capable of application in a variety of contexts.

## Other related PRG papers

Crime Detection and Prevention Paper 62.

Performance Indicators for Local Anti-Drugs Strategies – A Preliminary Analysis.

Crime Detection and Prevention Paper 72.

Methadone Maintenance and Crime Reduction on Merseyside.

Crime Detection and Prevention Paper 80.

Tackling local drug markets.

Special Interest Series Paper 8.

Drugs trafficking enforcement: examples of good practice. (RESTRICTED)

## Points for action

Their knowledge of drug problems and issues, together with their leadership skills, makes the police particularly well-suited to drawing up the profiles used in this approach and facilitating the programme of discussion. In order to implement a PDP initiative the following steps, and decisions, need to be taken:

- 1) Design the scheme
  - select the target audience
  - decide what sort of profile will work best with this audience
  - who will take the lead role?
  - how many sessions are needed?
  - co-ordinate and plan the programme
  - who will receive feedback for action?
- 2) Prepare the chosen profile
  - it should be presentable in 5-10 minutes
  - it needs to be factual and relevant to the target audience
  - base it on local knowledge, anonymised as necessary
  - don't include too much detail
- (3) Prepare task for groups
  - it should be relevant to the profile
  - make it activity-based (need paper, pens, other materials)
- (4) Presentation/discussions
  - Don't go over one hour: 5-10 minutes presentation, 30 minutes task activity, 5-10 minutes for feedback / review
  - maximum of 15 persons per group
- (5) Feedback
  - review the outcome of sessions
  - decide the main issues to emerge
  - identify the main points for action