

**1997 Report of the Substance Misuse Prevention Project**

**Mid-Western Health Board  
Parkview House,  
Pery Street,  
Limerick.**

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## **1. Introduction**

The Substance Misuse Prevention Project embraces a broad range of objectives and over its first year has been involved in activities designed to meet those objectives. These objectives include developing initiatives to tackle drug and alcohol-related problems at a local level, the education and training of Health Board staff and other key people in the area of substance misuse, and the provision of information and resources related to substance misuse.

## **2. Education and Training**

It has become apparent to us that there is a specific and overwhelming need in the region for education and training in the area of substance misuse. This need was aired in meetings we have had with many forms of organisations, both statutory and voluntary, and with other concerned individuals.

With this in mind we set about developing and organising a series of introductory workshops on the issue of substance misuse. We targeted people from the statutory and voluntary services and the response has been enthusiastic. Workshops will be held in November and December 1997, with the possibility of further sessions in early 1998. Facts about drugs, signs and symptoms of drug use, attitudes to drug use, treatment services and the role of each sector in prevention will be addressed at an introductory level. Participants will include youth and community workers, health and welfare personnel, along with individuals from the education and justice sectors.

Other sectors have also been targeted in relation to training, with sessions facilitated and organised for student nurses, schools, parenting groups and community groups.

## **3. Community Development**

One of our main objectives is to tackle alcohol and drug-related problems at a local level. We are very much committed to a community development approach in this regard. As a means of achieving our aim of community involvement, we have become involved in the training of a pool of tutors who are, in the course of their work, available to facilitate community groups in the Department of Health's drug and alcohol awareness raising package D.Q.L.A., - 'Drug Questions. Local Answers'. All courses are co-ordinated through the Substance Misuse Prevention Project where advice and support around the practical issues associated with organising a training course are offered. A number of D.Q.L.A. courses have been facilitated in the Limerick city, Ennis and Nenagh areas, with further programmes in preparation and due to commence in early 1998. It is hoped that the spirit and enthusiasm which result will manifest themselves in the shape of community action on local drug issues.

## **4. Raising Awareness and Developing Resources**

- The Project Workers have been involved in a range of awareness-raising initiatives; the Pyramid Theatre Company's performance of 'Other People's Children', at venues in Limerick and Ennis, was organised and supported by the Project, whose workers were available at each show with information and leaflets. The theme of this family-orientated play was drug use and family communication

- The Project presented an information stand at the launch of Limerick Youth Services' Youth Work Pack in October, an event which was attended by a large number of youth workers and which proved to be a very valuable way of increasing awareness about the aims and activities Project.
- We have produced leaflets entitled 'Health Promotion and Drugs' and 'Drug Free Cul - What Does It Really Mean?', in addition to the very popular Directory of - Addiction Services for the Mid-Western Health Board Region'. These have been widely disseminated to health professionals, youth and community groups and other relevant bodies and individuals throughout the mid-west region.
- The Substance Misuse Prevention Project aims to be an up-to-date source of information in all aspects of drug use. We are constantly up-dating and adding to our library of journals, books, videos, pamphlets, posters and drug education packs. These have proven to be a valuable resource and many items have been used by external agencies.

## **5. Building Local Contacts**

As the Substance Misuse Prevention Project is a new initiative under the auspices of a developing Health Promotion centre, we, as Project Workers, realise the importance of focusing specifically upon contact building and upon promotion and awareness raising about the Project and the Health Promotion Centre as a whole. We have dedicated ourselves to making contact with and visiting community projects, local interest groups, the Gardai. Health Board personnel - including addiction counsellors, social workers, child care workers etc, - the formal and non-formal education sector, justice representatives and the youth service. Feedback has been positive and has greatly aided the prioritisation of our objectives. Issues raised include the perceived lack of service and treatment options, the level of concern at community level regarding drug use, and genuine satisfaction and interest that such a project has been established for the region.

Another means of publicising the Project which we have availed of and will continue to do so is the media, largely written, at local, regional and national levels.

## **6. Multi-Agency Activities**

The Project aims to co-ordinate multi-agency health promotion in relation to drugs and alcohol at a local and regional level. We have worked with agencies such as the Department of Health on the organisation of a Regional Youth Health Forum. This event brought together personnel working with young people at risk to discuss and make recommendations at a national level about the health needs of this vulnerable group.

We also co-operated with the National Youth Council of Ireland in the organisation of their training days on dealing with the drug issue in a youth work setting and their training in the Substance Abuse Prevention Programme (S.A.P-P.), Both Project Workers also took pan in this training as a means of networking with relevant organisations and individuals and also to contribute to our own professional development.

## **7. Providing Advice and Referral**

Two important initiatives have been conceived and developed over the past year in conjunction with the Project Workers:

(i) Gerry Mitchell, community worker, with North Nenagh Community Services, has opened a Drug Information Point which is available within the premises and hours of the Citizens Information Centre in Nenagh. The Information Point is a source of up-to-date literature and initial contact on the issue of drugs.

(ii) The Red Ribbon Projects' Drug Initiative will open Thursday afternoons between 2.00 p.m. and 5.00 p.m., commencing operation in December 1998. The service on offer will be similar to that of the Nenagh Centre - a confidential, drop-in service, staffed at the onset by one of the Project Workers, who will train and offer back-up and support to Red Ribbon volunteers who will ultimately be responsible for its delivery.

These initiatives arose from concern voiced that members of the public often do not know who to contact for basic information about drugs, treatment services and other related issues- It is hoped the initiatives will perform a useful function in terms of providing easily accessible information for the general public.

## **8. Keeping Up-To-Date**

We realise there is a need to keep ourselves informed about international and national drug related issues. It is vital we are in touch not only with local issues, but are also aware of how European and national political and drug climates influence and determine our regional drug issues and priorities. With this as our objective, we attend conferences, training days, lectures and debates throughout the country on topics such as mental health, community development, drug use and poverty and treatment options.

## **9. Research and Monitoring**

The process of accumulating a database of prevalence rates, attitudinal and knowledge-related details with regard to drugs and alcohol is intensive and ongoing within the Public Health Department, The Project Workers are involved in providing input into the formulation of questionnaires and with the sourcing of relevant youth groups for the early school leavers' prevalence study. The importance of representative, precise and up-to-date statistical information is appreciated by the Project and we are committed to involving ourselves in so far as possible in this valuable information-building process.

## **10. Conclusion**

The Substance Misuse Prevention Project is committed to building upon foundations achieved in its first year of operation. The Project will continue to promote healthy choices and behaviour in relation to substance use, while also working to alleviate the problems associated with problematic drug use.