



Traveller Specific Drugs Initiative



Contact the TSDI programme at Pavee Point Travellers Centre, 46 North Great Charles St, Dublin 1 on 01 8780255 ext 111 or at drugsawareness@pavee.iol.ie Autumn 2006 edition

National Day Event on Drug Issues hosted by the TSDI

The TSDI hosted a National Day event for Traveller organisations on the issue of drugs in April 2006. This event occurs at a time when the NACD are about to publish research on drug issues in the Traveller community. The day was a difficult one, discussing hard and often negative issues, and it is clear from Traveller groups at the national event that many of them are starting to 'take on' the issue of drugs as part of their work. As a community development issue, the negative impact of drugs is a challenge to the Traveller community and Traveller organisations. Community development responses to drugs, however, have potential to give 'added value' to and support the work of Traveller organisations. The issue of drugs correlates with many other issues, such as racism and social exclusion issues that Traveller groups work on daily. In this respect, it is important to acknowledge the particular experience of the Traveller community in relation to the issue of drugs. Finally, the point was made again and again that Traveller leadership is central to any response to drugs in order for community development responses to work. We would like to thank all of you who took the time to attend the National Day and hope readers find this newsletter informative.

A number of speakers gave presentations on the issue of drugs. Anna Quigley, Co-ordinator of Citywide, spoke about community responses to the issue of drugs and the experience of Citywide in this work. Some of the points raised by Anna on the experience of other communities could inform and support Traveller groups who are seeking to work on the issue of drugs in the Traveller community.

Responding to Drugs

Anna spoke of three different types of responses to drug problems within communities:

- Firstly, there is often a sense of denial or what's called protest, that is, the denial of the existence of a drug problem in a community;
- Secondly, vigilantism, communities taking action on and responding to the drugs issue in a negative way;
- Thirdly, a community response, which is about mobilising the community and making sure that those people affected by drugs directly and indirectly within the community are involved in a positive community response.

Who's role?

Anna then went on to describe some of the ingredients that make up a community response which included three main areas;



Anna Quigley at the TSDI National Event

The wider Community itself which is affected by the existence of drugs within its community; those affected directly by drugs, drug users and their families and local service providers and policy makers who have a role in addressing the issue of drugs locally.

The important role of Communities

The point was made that communities affected by drugs are 'experts' as they have the experience of how drugs are impacting on their community. Communities in areas of Dublin have been to the forefront of setting up community development responses to drugs such as the local drug task forces in the mid 90s, when the issue of drugs was having a negative impact on many families and young people in Dublin.

Working in Partnership

In wrapping up Anna also spoke about the need for real partnership in addressing the issue of drugs locally. If communities are not involved in local partnerships with all the other stakeholders as 'Equal Partners' in making decisions about their communities, then someone else will make decisions for them. Anna added that real partnership is essential if communities are to make a real difference on local drug issues, however, communities cannot do it on their own. Partnership involves communities, an evidence based approach i.e. evidence that there is a drug problem, and finally political will to ensure an appropriate response at a local level.

A full copy of Anna's presentation is available from the TSDI at drugsawareness@pavee.iol.ie

Local Issues, Local Answers

National Day...National Day...

A second presentation was provided by The Daish Project: Bray Travellers CDP. They spoke about their work on the ground with the Traveller community in Bray and the approaches and types of work they do. Mick Mason and Christy Moorehouse, the two project workers, outlined their work, which is summarized below.

Some of the aims of the Daish Project include:

- To address the issue of substance misuse amongst young Travellers
- To carry out outreach work to engage young Travellers at risk,
- To disseminate information on drugs to Traveller families and particularly young Travellers, both male and female
- To provide activities such as education/prevention programmes for all Travellers, particularly those at risk

Areas of work that the project is engaged in

- Prison visits with Travellers who are drug users and supports for Travellers who are in court for drug related offences
- Supports for Travellers who are homeless drug users
- Linked into work being carried out by Bray Travellers CDP with young Travellers at risk of drug misuse
- Provision of Education and prevention programmes with young people 'at risk' from drug use
- Delivery of outreach work with Travellers who are drug users and their families on sites, estates and on the street
- Working directly and advocating with local drug service providers to ensure that Travellers are accessing and are supported to access drug services

Supports that Daish Provide:

Some of the supports provided by the project are one to one supports for drug users; family supports; advocacy and referrals for drug users to drug services; harm reduction information, outreach work etc.

Networking

Mick and Christy spoke about the range of relationships that the project has fostered with a number of agencies such as the Bray community addiction team, probation and welfare services, local youth services, Bray community guards and Bray Local Drugs Task Force; who are also the project's funder. A member of Bray Travellers CDP sits on Bray LDTF as the Traveller representative.

Harm Reduction Clinic

In conjunction with the Health Services Executive Addiction Services Unit, the Daish Project operate a harm reduction clinic and through this clinic the Daish staff are receiving relevant training in addressing drug misuse and in making referrals for drug users and their families.

National Day... National Day...

Learning of the Project on Approaches to Drugs Work in the Traveller Community

Building Trust within the Traveller Community is central and this has taken the project a long time. Some of the work they have been involved in to date has helped to build this trust e.g. working with the Primary Health Care Group in Wicklow, working directly with Travellers who are drug users, working with the LEAP project which is a training programme for Traveller men etc.

Trying new things and being able to develop new approaches to working on the issue of drugs as certain approaches may not be appropriate or meet the needs of the Traveller community.

Employment of a Traveller peer worker: the workers made the point that having a Traveller doing this work is vital as their community knowledge makes building trust and their ability to engage with the community easier. It is imperative that Travellers are involved as drug workers working in their own community and within drug services, if Travellers are to engage with services.

It is vital to have structured funding that has flexibility: this was stated in relation to new drug related issues emerging in the work e.g. drug related issues with young people, prison work etc and the difficulties that may arise with funding restrictions in carrying out this work without that flexibility.

Finally, Mick and Christy outlined some of the strengths and weaknesses of the project. In relation to weaknesses, they cited a lack of understanding by agencies of Traveller issues. Secondly, a lack of trust and confidence still exists for some Travellers in the project and they need to continue to build trust, which takes time. In terms of strengths they named local knowledge, training of workers, knowledge and understanding of Traveller culture, plus having Travellers and settled workers working together as providing real benefits. As can be seen from the range of work being carried out by the group, the project is meeting a wide range of needs and benefiting the local Traveller community in Bray. Mick and Christy can be contacted in Bray Travellers CDP on 01 2762075



Participants at the National Day Event

Challenging the fear of Education!

Training and Education

In May 2006 Patrick McCann of the TSDI Pavee Point completed a Certificate in Addiction Studies from NUI Maynooth, through the HSE Northern Area. In the following article Patrick outlines his experience of taking on this course.

When I first heard about the Addiction Studies course I wasn't paying it much heed. I've always had an interest in addiction but I thought the course wasn't for me. I went to the interview and when it was more like a discussion I said if some of the lectures are going to be like this it could be interesting, maybe it is for me, I'll give it a shot.

First Impressions...

The first day I went up to the course it was like starting school again and I had a very bad experience in school, I got flashbacks of that even when I went up to the course for the first time. When I saw people taking out notepads and stuff I thought, I'm going to be lost, but the notepads soon got put away. I was feeling uncomfortable in the first session but I felt more comfortable in the smaller group-work sessions and said my piece. It took me a few weeks to know everybody but there were people there that I gelled with straight away. I realised that everyone was there the same as my-self; to find out what addiction was.

Through the course I began to realise the amount of background work and research that goes into addiction studies and that not everyone working in addiction is sitting in 'ivory towers'; it changed my mindset and thinking of people like that. After a few weeks I used to look forward to going up to the course, it was in a way a sanctuary for getting away from everything else, you're hearing different things, you're learning something new, it was like a break, it was like fishing!

Challenges

I never got a good education when I was smaller, I went to school until I was about 12 but I never got a good education, so the writing was one of the challenges. Another barrier was in understanding some of the language, like some of the handouts they'd be giving out, I'd take them home and take them to literacy lessons and the teacher used to go through them with me. There was a lot of help there if I needed it, and it was made quite clear, if you need help you're allowed to use it. But I knew when I was doing my essay, if I spoke up about what I'd seen through my life and got people to write it down then there wouldn't be a problem with it.

Successes

Just going up there and meeting other people was a success. To get on with people from different nationalities, from different parts of the country, different parts of the world, Australia, Nigeria, to me that was a success because I'd never done anything like that before to be honest about it; not on my own, there would always have been another Traveller with me or someone with me.

NUI certificate Addiction Studies

There were a few people in the class and from me being there, and my colleagues coming in and doing an information session on Traveller culture and the impact of drugs, it changed their mind about Travellers. They never thought that they'd see a Traveller sitting in the class; they thought Travellers wouldn't have an interest in that sort of thing, so it changed a lot of people's attitudes on Travellers. Although, even at the end of the course, some of them still didn't believe Travellers used drugs! If Travellers get a half a chance they will meet people 50/50 but I think for a lot of the class I was their odds on favourite to drop out after four or five weeks, a lot of people thought I'd fade away, I proved them wrong.

Responses within the Traveller Community

When I was doing the course people at home were asking me, "we didn't see you in a while, what are you doing?", so I used to tell them and they'd make a laugh of me, because they still don't believe I was doing a course with Maynooth. And they'd ask me what, and I'd say addiction studies and they thought I was mad, they'd say "why do you have an interest in addiction?" and "you wouldn't show up in a place like that you'd rather be in a concert! You're lying"; they thought I was lying at all costs. There's a lot of them that still don't believe that I done the addiction studies or think that I took the essay stuff from books; part of which you have to do, but I also put in my own two-pence worth. So just proving them wrong is a good thing for me, the critics section I call them, but you can't go through life without them, just to prove them wrong!

Recommendation to other Travellers

I think more Travellers should do addiction studies because there is an increase of all drugs in the Traveller community and we're going to get more people doing this kind of work to help Travellers in the future. But when they're doing the course not to think its going to be a field day, that they can sit back and don't have to get involved in something; they are going to have to read, they are going to have to write stuff down but they've got to have a good sense of humour and they're going to have to be able to get on with people. If they can't do that they're wasting the course. Also, don't be afraid to ask for help, it's there. I would recommend the addiction studies course for any Traveller, young or old, but it wouldn't have to be about addiction, any education that suits them, go for it, because when I can do it any of them can do it.

Thanks

I would like to thank Dervalla, Trish and Bernie who facilitated the course, all the students in the class, my colleagues Sinead and Emma in the TSDI, Trish Murphy from DALC for all her help and Richard Redmond from Exchange House.

SEE BACK PAGE FOR INFO ON ADDICTION STUDIES COURSES

Date for Your Diary!

Merchants Quay and Pavee Point will host a joint seminar titled: *Diversity and Drugs: exploring drug issues amongst New Communities and the Traveller Community*. The aims of the seminar are to:

- Raise awareness/Provide information re the pertinent issues relating to drug issues within these communities;
- Explore the learning from the research projects;
- Learn about models of good practice re drug service provision both nationally and internationally;
- Take part in a forum which provides information on these issues

The seminar will take place in Dublin on the 2nd of November. The seminar will present two pieces of research, one on Travellers and drugs and the second on new communities and drugs.

A brochure will be sent out to Traveller groups in late September and numbers will be limited as the seminar is a joint event. We would hope that Traveller groups who have drug initiatives or are engaged in some level of drugs work, e.g. representing Travellers on Local or Regional Drug Task Forces, can attend this event.

National Advisory Committee on Drugs

The publication of the NACD research on drug issues in the Traveller community will take place in early October 2006. The research will be launched in mid October followed by a number of regional workshops will be facilitated by the NACD to disseminate the research findings and recommendations. The dates for the workshops will be circulated to Traveller groups via the three national organisations. It is important to promote Traveller participation at these meetings. Local groups will receive a copy of the research and should discuss the research's findings and recommendations with Travellers before the regional seminars. The Traveller Specific Drugs Initiative is drafting a short synopsis paper on the NACD research report from a Traveller organisation perspective. It is important that local Traveller groups discuss the research findings and recommendations within their own groups. The national organisations will attend the regional seminars as they participated in the Advisory Group for the research project. If groups would like any further information on the research, contact the TSDI.

Community Addiction Studies Courses

A number of accredited addiction studies courses are being run in the Eastern region and other regions beginning in the autumn. Travellers have participated in these courses over the last number of years. For information on Addiction Studies courses in your area contact your HSE Drug education or health promotion officer. Alternatively you can contact the TSDI.

National Drug Strategy Updates

Meeting with Local Drug Task Force co-ordinators

The TSDI met with LDTF co-ordinators subgroup on June 7th to formalise links and to highlight issues of concern. One of these issues was Traveller participation in the work and structures of the LDTFs, in spite of the prioritisation of Travellers within this structure. The LDTF co-ordinators have said that they would like to see greater Traveller participation in the work of the LDTF. If local groups in LDTF areas (Dublin, Bray and Cork) would like more information about the LDTFs contact the TSDI.

Emerging Needs Fund Updates

The Minister of State Noel Ahern T.D. recently announced funding for a range of organisations under the emerging needs fund. Four Traveller organisations received funding under this initiative to carry out a range of work e.g. Traveller women's drugs worker, workers to work with young Traveller men on prevention and education initiatives and a project to work with young Travellers who are drug users.

Meeting with Cathal Morgan HSE representative on the National Drug Strategy Team:, some of the following issues were discussed:

- The increasing numbers of young Travellers accessing drug services; ensuring Traveller inclusion within the work of the Regional Drug Task Forces and the current work happening outside of Dublin in relation to drugs

New Traveller Drugs Network established

An inaugural meeting of a Drugs network for Traveller organisations engaged in drugs work met for the first time on July 12th in Pavee Point. This group will meet four times a year. The venue for the meetings will be rotated. The group is open to Traveller organisations that have drug projects (these projects can be education/prevention or treatment and rehabilitation) or groups who have Traveller representatives on local and regional drug task forces.

The benefits named by Traveller groups at the meeting of having a forum such as this included: information sharing, supporting each others work, having a more strategic and organised approach to our work and solidarity. The next meeting of the Traveller Drugs Network takes place in Pavee Point on November 23rd '06 from 10 until 1 pm.

National Day on Drugs: Small Group Discussion

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Identifying the issues.....

Forty three people attended the National Day event from a range of Traveller organisations. A lot of the issues named here are not new, however, what is clear is that the problem of drug misuse is more prevalent and is affecting the wider Traveller community in a variety of ways. A summary of the feedback from the small group discussions and key themes are outlined in the article below.

Drug use in Traveller Families

Many worrying family related problems resulting from drug use were cited by participants. Examples given were family members being in debt to drug dealers; violent behaviour and intimidation by dealers to those who owe them money for drugs and family conflict. Participants acknowledged that some family members are actively trying to support drug users to overcome the issues named above. It was also stated that drug and alcohol use within the Traveller community is not a new phenomenon; however the scale of it has increased over the years. For Traveller parents who are drug users, family supports are vital for them and their children. In relation to alcohol misuse, its negative impact on Traveller families and its contribution to family breakdown, participants raised concerns about Traveller children who are taken into institutional or foster care as a result of parental alcohol problems. The issue of intergenerational alcohol and drug problems was also discussed.

Drug use in the wider Traveller Community

There were concerns raised about all age groups within the community re the range of drugs used by young Travellers, Traveller women and Traveller men. Drug use is perceived as becoming 'normalised' or accepted as a community issue and its use, in the case of cocaine, coincides with social, family and community events. The effect of peer pressure (which is not just on young people), and the fact that there are very few opportunities for young Travellers to get involved in youth activities was seen as contributing to increased levels of drug use among young Travellers. Many young Travellers are not engaged in any education or training initiatives and this situation would suggest the need for targeting them for a broad range of drug education and prevention initiatives. Drugs named by participants at the national day were varied e.g. cocaine, heroin, alcohol and under age drinking, prescribed drugs, particularly the misuse of prescription drugs by Travellers, many Travellers are oversubscribed prescription drugs also. It was acknowledged that there has been a dramatic increase in cocaine use within the community but that prescription drug use and alcohol use were still major issues. Participants felt that awareness raising programmes on drug misuse within the Traveller community should be community wide and targeted not just to those at risk of drug misuse. Such programmes would have to challenge attitudes to drugs within the community. It was also stated that there is a lack of information on the extent of the drugs problem in the Traveller community.

Impact of Drug Use.....

Impact of Drug Use on Travellers who are drug users

Social ostracisation from their community is a very real experience for some Travellers who are drug users, in particular, Travellers who are heroin/alcohol users and are homeless. Some participants' stated that the denial of a drug problem within the community, which in turn results in stigma and shame for drug users and their families, may also prevent or impede a wider community response. In some cases young Travellers (under 18s) are leaving home and becoming homeless as can be seen in Dublin and Cork city. Some Travellers who are drug users also have concurrent mental health issues and this can make it more difficult for them to access services and supports. Participants who are working on the ground with Traveller drug users identified accessing welfare, accommodation and drug services as well as a lack of family and community supports, as daily issues for Traveller drug users. However detailed information on the problems experienced by Travellers who are drug users is limited.

Traveller organisations

Traveller organisations cited a number of examples as to how drug problems in the Traveller community impact on local groups. It creates extra work in trying to meet new demands and in trying to access funding for programmes and additional staff. For many Traveller groups, drugs work is a completely new area. Urban and rural Traveller groups spoke about the need for more training in order to be confident and competent in carrying out this work and cited the need for better relationships between statutory agencies and Traveller groups to develop appropriate responses and services. Participants stated that Traveller groups do indeed have a role to play and are carrying out work on drug issues. Examples given were: supporting Travellers on Task Forces; supporting Travellers who are developing their skills on addiction issues and finally providing specific responses to the issue of drugs within the Traveller community locally.

Impact of Drug Use on the Traveller Community

Travellers felt the existence of drug use in the Traveller community may reinforce negative stereotyping of Travellers in Irish society. Participants expressed concerns about drug dealing, the availability and visibility of drugs within the Traveller community. Some of the following impacts were named: increased drug use, Traveller families leaving sites, anti social behaviour, drug related crime, and drug related violence, Travellers imprisoned for drug related crime. In relation to the impact of dealing, the intimidation of Travellers by Travellers who are drug dealers was cited as a worrying concern as was the fact that drug dealing by settled people is also taking place in areas where Travellers live. The issue of policing came up and again Travellers spoke about the community often feel over policed and under protected. In order to combat this, relationship building with the Gardaí and the involvement of Travellers in local policing fora and other initiatives, was seen as vital in addressing law and order issues that related to drugs in local areas. However, this means Travellers actively getting involved within these fora and Traveller organisations supporting such initiatives. **PTO_**

National Day on Drugs: Small Group Discussion

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Travellers and Drug Services

Drug Services

Participants cited issues of access, participation and outcomes from drug services as crucially important areas in the small group discussions. In order to promote Traveller access to services a greater focus should be placed on outreach work with Travellers by drug services. This would in turn increase the numbers of Travellers participating in drug services. More investigation and information gathering as to why Travellers are not accessing local drug services needs to take place, in order to develop more appropriate responses for the Traveller community.

A number of reasons were cited to explain the lack of Traveller access, participation and outcome from drug services, the list below is not an exhaustive one:

- The fact that Traveller groups have limited resources to address the issue of drugs locally;
- There is a limited number of services available
- More support is needed from Local and Regional Drug Task Forces for Traveller groups to get involved in local drug structures;
- There are long waiting lists to get on methadone programme and to get on methadone clinics and this can put of drug users who are in crisis;
- Drug service providers don't collate statistics based on ethnic identifiers which would count Travellers using drug services. This inhibits an evaluation of Travellers access, participation and outcomes from these services;
- For Travellers who are drug users there is often a lack of confidence and trust in drug services due to past experiences with other services;
- Drug services in Ireland not being culturally appropriate for Travellers;
- A lack of acknowledgement and action by some drug policy makers and services re drug issues in the Traveller community;
- Direct and Indirect discrimination by drug service providers;

Promoting Traveller Inclusion within Drug services

The following recommendations were made by attendees at the national event as potential ways forward.

- Ensure Travellers who are drug users are clear about confidentiality within services to promote trust building;
- Drug services should develop policies and practices on anti racism and interculturalism which will inform service delivery;
- Educational information should be available and accessible within local community services e.g. GPs, chemists, garda stations, health centres. Traveller specific information provision about drugs should be resourced;
- Travellers who are drug users and in prison should be provided with Traveller specific information and supports;
- In the case of drug service delivery, crisis intervention work with drug users is an area that should be resourced;
- Apart from the upcoming publication of the NACD research on the issue of drugs within the Traveller community, there may be a need for further research on drug related issues.

Future Responses

- The Traveller community and Travellers who are drug users should participate and be partners in their own response to drug issues and a greater Traveller input to drug related policy should be fostered and supported.

Raising Awareness of Drugs within the Traveller Community:

The following recommendations were made by participants

- Supporting Parental involvement and raising their awareness/knowledge and skills to encourage them to talk about drugs within the community;
- Raising awareness of drugs to support the development of a community response;
- Providing drug education and programmes on drugs for Travellers who are early school leavers;
- Providing a 'safe place' for Travellers to speak about drug issues in their community;
- A central part of community drug awareness initiatives should be in breaking down denial, stigma and promoting community participation in local drug initiatives;
- Peer Training on drugs to be put in place for Traveller Leaders and the wider Traveller community to be delivered by Travellers in local areas;
- Drug information media should be culturally appropriate and literacy friendly.

The Future.....Traveller Leadership

Many participants acknowledged that Travellers are striving to be more assertive on the issue of drugs within the community. This may mean challenging and encouraging Travellers to develop their skills to become drug workers in their own community and within drug services. Traveller leadership within the Traveller community was a theme named as being crucial in promoting Travellers to engage in open discussion on the impact of drugs on Travellers as a young community and secondly, in relation to the knock on effect drugs may have on the next generation of Travellers. Tackling internal issues which can act as factors that inhibit a positive community response to drug use were also seen as a key role of Traveller leadership. The examples of barriers to a response were: the shame, guilt, stigma, mistrust and denial within the family and community that drug problems exist and deflecting the issue by blaming others for the drug problems, a common initial response to drugs in many communities. A community development response lead by Travellers was seen as the way to overcome these issues in supporting Travellers to be actively involved in drugs work, speaking openly on the issue and in supporting collective action by Travellers on this issue.

The small group discussions convey that Travellers are increasingly concerned about and are talking more openly about drugs. A co-ordinated approach was cited as being central to addressing all issues pertaining to Travellers. Drug concerns are part of the wider racism and social exclusion situation experienced by Travellers in Ireland today. It is part of this wider context and it should be seen and addressed as such. The Traveller Specific Drugs Initiative will endeavour to support Traveller groups in their work and to progress the issues raised at the national day event over the next year. **ENDS**