

The Crisis Continues.

- We are still in the middle of a devastating drugs crisis – this is the clear message from the communities most affected by the drugs problem. A lot has happened since the First Ministerial Report on Drugs in 1996, but a problem that has built up over years of neglect and inaction cannot be turned around in a short space of time. The drugs crisis must remain a priority for government – otherwise, things will not just not improve, they will get worse.
- Over the past couple of years, more and more communities outside of the Dublin region are being affected by a serious drug problem. The recent Family Support Conference brought together families from across the country who are experiencing the nightmare of drug use in their family. The drugs crisis must now be recognised as an issue across the country and services put in place to deal with it. The new Regional Drugs Task Forces must have the resources to support real involvement by families and communities. It will be a crime if any other community in our country is allowed to develop the kind of drug problem that Dublin communities are experiencing.
- People in our communities continue to die from drugs. They are dying all the time, not just when there are bad batches of heroin. Each year more names are being added to the lists of the dead at the memorial services that now take place in communities right across the city. Some of these deaths result from overdoses – we call for the anti-overdose drug Narcan to be made available immediately to ambulance crews, as it is in the rest of Europe, so that at least some of the deaths can be prevented.

Treatment and aftercare – some key issues.

- Treatment services for drugs users have developed in a crisis, with the emphasis being on numbers. There are now serious concerns about the quality of some of the treatment that is on offer. The Health Boards need to give an immediate commitment to entering serious discussions with community groups, drug users and their families to address the issues of concern about the quality of services.
- Estimates of Hepatitis C infection amongst IV drug users range from 50% to 90% - this represents a health time-bomb for our communities. The Health Boards need to launch a comprehensive education and awareness campaign aimed at drug users, their families and communities and to work in partnership with them in developing supports and services around Hep C infection.

- There is an immediate need to address the growing incidence of cocaine use by drug users in our communities. The Health Boards and communities need to come together to look at what services and strategies are needed to prevent the problem developing any further.
- Funding has been made available to local communities to develop rehabilitation and after care services through the Fas Special CE Programme. Cutbacks in CE places are putting pressure on communities in a number of ways and it is essential that the 1,000 places allocated for Special CE Drugs Projects not only remain in place but also are expanded to meet the needs of recovering drug users.

Prevention – some key issues.

- The Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund is investing resources and services in facilities for young people in local communities. It is essential that this investment be kept under review to ensure that it is reaching the young people who are most at risk in our communities and that we are developing more effective ways of reaching these young people.
- The bulk of resources allocated for drugs awareness campaigns should be targeted at local community initiatives and the development of materials by family, community and user groups, with smaller amounts going to large scale media and poster campaigns.

Justice – some key issues.

- Effective community policing is an essential part of the efforts to control the supply of drugs in local communities. The pilot community policing initiatives which have been developed in the North and South Inner cities show that these kind of structures cannot be run effectively on a voluntary basis and need resources if they are to develop properly. The Dept. of Justice needs to make a budget available for the development of community policing initiatives in the communities most affected by the drugs problem.
- The Prisons Service should immediately appoint community and voluntary representatives to the Steering Committee on Prison Based Treatment Services, so that the Prisons Service can learn from the considerable experience of community and voluntary sectors in developing effective treatment services and avoid making the same mistakes as have been made in developing services outside of prison.

Housing – some key issues.

- Housing policies being adopted by local authorities are seriously undermining the efforts of people who have used drugs to get their lives back on track. The Dept. of the Environment needs to enter discussions with community, family and user groups as to how housing policies can balance the well-being of communities and the housing needs of drug users.

Supporting and Involving the Families.

- The current National Drugs Strategy fails completely to recognise the impact of drugs on the families of drug users and the need for services to be put in place for families. The family services that are needed have been identified through the work of individual family support groups and projects in local communities and through the Citywide Family Support Network. These services need to be added to the 100 actions in the National Drugs Strategy as a matter of priority.

Supporting Community Involvement.

- Community involvement continues to be the driving force behind the campaign to combat the drugs crisis. Community representatives have shown huge commitment to the work of the Local Drugs Task Forces because the Task Forces and the NDST have recognised that the drugs problem can only be tackled effectively as a community drugs problem. The community representatives are now very concerned that the Task Forces and the NDST will not be allowed to continue with this approach. It is essential that we now look at how to build on and develop the work of the Task Forces to date in supporting communities in dealing with their drugs problem.
- There needs to be an immediate commitment from the Dept. of Education to provide funding for community drugs training programmes, which provide local community people, who have experience of the drugs issue, with the opportunities to access employment in the drugs services.
- Resources should be made available as part of the drugs strategy to support the involvement of drug users themselves in the process, through providing funding for user groups and networks.