

Citywide Seminar May 19th 2011

Working Together - Tackling Intimidation

Over 80 people, with a broad representation from services, Task Forces, Community Reps, families and activists, attended the half day seminar in Ballybough Community Centre. The meeting was broken into three distinct sessions. The first was presentations from four contributors outlining responses to intimidation in communities. This was followed by workshop sessions and finally there was a plenary session for open debate of issues.

Four presentations at the start of the seminar:

1. Working Together Tackling Intimidation - Detective Superintendent Michael O' Sullivan, Garda National Drug Unit
2. Example of community response to intimidation – Graham Ryall Canal community, Dublin
3. The Framework on an interagency approach facilitating Action 5 National Drugs Strategy - Audra Cotter, Clonmel Community Based Drugs Initiative
4. Intimidation – how *do we* and how *should we* respond? Johnny Connolly Alcohol and Drug Research Unit

1. Working Together Tackling Intimidation - Detective Superintendent Michael O' Sullivan, Garda National Drug Unit

National Drugs Strategy

"To develop a framework to provide an appropriate response to the issue of drug related intimidation in the community." **Action 5 – NDS 2009-16**

Purpose of Strategy:

- To provide a single point of contact
- Ensure a confidential and effective means of dealing with intimidation.
- Provide families with sufficient support and advice from An Garda Siochana

Pilot Project - Dublin Metropolitan Region - Commenced 1st March 2011 - 6 Month Period Communications between Liaison Gardai and Family

- Confidential.
- Advice given.
- Course of Action decided

The Pilot Project works closely with the Family Support Network. The scheme is designed to assist families and provides families and the wider community with a point of contact. It must be added that the Gardai cannot sort out all the problems relating to intimidation. It serves to bridge the gap between the community and the Gardai. There is no one simple solution to this complex problem but a partnership approach is essential. The pilot project will be reviewed after 6 months and following feedback from stakeholders will lead to a national roll out.

2. Example of community response to intimidation – Graham Ryall Canal Communities, Dublin

Dolphin House - Late 1970's - Mid 1980's

- Heroin Hits, Dolphin House Succumbs
- State neglect of the problem & the situation
- Criminalisation of Drug use
- Formation of CPAD
- 'Vigo's'(vigilantism) element introduced, Today Tonight Special 'We've got our own Army'.

Mid 1990's

- Third epidemic of Heroin in Dublin
- Re-emergence of Anti-Drugs Groups
- Death of local drug user
- Rialto Policing Forum.

Dolphin House Today

- Visible drug dealing re-introduced to Dolphin House a number of years previously
- Power of drug gangs evident within the estate
- Loss of Community, Tenants living in Fear & Intimidation

Community Response to the situation, Partnership approach

- Taking back the community
- Drug dealing ceases
- Pay-back time! Retaliation from the Gangs

Graham outlined that the current downward turn in the economy has resulted in the shelving of the proposed regeneration of Dolphin House. This has had a major negative impact on the community. The community are now taking a human rights approach to demanding facilitated and services. We have a responsibility to the wider community but specifically young men to tackle intimidation. When you have taken the young men out of 'the gang' you find they are vulnerable and come from backgrounds of addiction and need.

3. The Framework on an interagency approach facilitating Action 5 National Drugs Strategy - Audra Cotter Clonmel Community Based Drugs Initiative

“To develop a framework to provide an appropriate response to the issue of Drug Related Intimidation in the Community”

- All agencies shared a vision of a problem solving approach to issues facing families in our community.
- Not all cases of intervention required court proceedings or prosecution, by working directly with families involved they effectively come up with the solutions themselves.
- When provided with correct information and advice, that is pertinent to them and by combining that with ease of access to services in a non judgmental manner.
- Barriers were broken down and the human element of perception eroded this allowed people to see, hear, and understand in a different dimension

All of these elements are vital for the inter agency approach to function based on a common vision

Working in Partnership - Working on drug related issues often requires working in partnership with other agencies

A genuine partnership can offer

Shared Resources; Compliment each other's work; Add value to the overall work

This Partnership is based on a working relationship which is characterized by a shared sense of vision

1. Purpose
2. Mutual Respect
3. A Willingness to Negotiate

All of this elements are vital for the inter agency approach to function based on a common vision

A Shared Vision

Once we discovered the shared vision, we had to decide what the aims of that vision were. We collectively decided that the aim was:

- ▶ To develop a framework whereby service providers could ensure that families could be offered an integrated collaborative approach tailored to meet the needs of each individual family based on trust, need, and solid relationships and to create for them ease of access to services in a non judgmental manner particularly when dealing with issues of intimidation.

How Do We Work Together

- There was issues arising within the community where families needed advice, information and direction from the Gardai, however they felt uneasy presenting to the local Garda station as they felt they would meet different Gardai each time
- Sgt. O Regan met with the families in a venue that was safe and comfortable for them; the families found this extremely beneficial
- As a result relationships between Com Pol Units and Family Support began to grow & did the trust in the Unit
- Sgt. O Regan and Garda Hennessy became regular visitors to the Family Support Groups
- Relationships have been maintained & the Group are welcoming to the Garda Unit
- The Community accepts that Community Policing Unit is a vital service, and that the Community Based Drugs Initiative is an important engagement and bridging tool in gaining access to the unit in times of crisis

Audra highlighted the evaluation of the scheme indicated that trust has been built with Gardai. The project is moving into the 2nd year and is being rolled out across the south East Region.

4. Intimidation – How *Do We* and How *Should We* Respond? Johnny Connolly Alcohol and Drug Research Unit

What do we know?

The hidden problem in front of your eyes

National drug policy and the everyday local experience of crime & intimidation

The need for local data and research - there has been little research carried into intimidation other than:

- North inner city CPF survey
- Monitoring quality of life in an urban area
- NACD community study
- Family Support Network study
- Understanding Limerick – social exclusion and change

It is important to connect the knowledge in the room with research. Local experiences of intimidation rarely influences or registers on national responses or research. National surveys do not paint a true picture of experience on the ground.

Intimidation & control: a Limerick case study

- The hierarchy & strategy of intimidation in Limerick
- Serious players – intimidation and territorial domination through fear
- Foot soldiers and street gangs play an important role in controlling communities

The role of children:

- Eyes and ears
- Verbal abuse and intimidation
- Stone throwing and graffiti – targeting the vulnerable

Regimes of fear

‘Caught between core criminal families, surveillance and assessment by social workers, Gardai and the local authority...this feeling of powerlessness is secondary to the terror experienced as a result of being constantly monitored by criminal family gangs’

How do we respond?

- Consequences of intimidation & violence
- No – go areas, particularly after dark
- Community stigma
- Development of gangs
- Perpetuation of cycle of violence
- Fear of reprisal
- See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil
- Drug markets and their ‘host’ communities
- Breakdown in community cooperation
- Failure of regeneration

Moving forward

Problem definition – From anti-social behaviour to serious assault

Local analysis and agreed solutions

Realism

- Early intervention & School based prevention
- Focus on gangs
- Community based mediation between the intimidators and the community (NIACRO)
- Measurable outcomes
- Solving not shifting problems
- Commence regeneration
- Partnership through the JPCs
- Solution must be community based
- We must put the issue on the political agenda. The Local Policing Fora work when they are community based. The LPF should set the agenda for the Joint Policing Communities and the JPC also be community based.

WORKSHOP REPORTS

Q1. What is the level of intimidation in your community?

(Combined answers from each group)

Attacks on individuals/families & property from Drug Gangs and for Drug Debts.

Examples were given of attacks on property such as:

- Houses being petrol bombed, windows smashed, houses robbed, arson, cars smashed up

Examples were given of attacks on individuals & family members

- Stabbings, hostage taking, beatings, shootings, murder, sexual violence towards individuals & families for drug debts, Pets killed,
- Threats of physical violence to both individuals and families up to and including death
- Intimidation of individuals and families smuggle drugs and to carry into prison,
- Threats for money owed due to drugs being lost & confiscated,
- Threats & violence to families and individuals to keep silent and not to 'rat'
- Threats & violence for money both large and small amounts of money owed (money lenders as opposed to drug dealers).
- Young children are being intimidated – an example of a 12 year old with €3k debt; intimidation of children and child abuse, Incidents of bullying of young people.
- Intimidation within families (intimidation of parents by children)

Debts owed and debt collection

- There appears to be zero tolerance on all debt – small amounts are being chased as much as larger ones – setting an example to others

- Family possessions being taken to repay debt but debt never seems to be cleared
- Families re-mortgaging their houses to re-pay drug debt
- Drug debt and intimidation is increasing the number of suicides, however, the debt is not dying with the person
- Gang members waiting outside Post offices and dole offices to collect money from addicts
- Credit unions are giving loans to families attempting to clear debts– some know others don't.

Intimidation of drug projects & workers

- Drug dealers beginning to intimidate drug projects – low grade intimidation – hanging around outside, graffiti
- Community workers are afraid to offer advice in case they get it wrong with this impacting negatively on individuals
- Project workers feel vulnerable because of information they receive as part of their work and because of the nature of their work
- Service users disengaging from support organisations
- Bullet proof vest being worn into projects. Young people carrying guns
- Outreach workers and primary healthcare workers are unable to go into certain areas because of the control exerted by gangs or individuals

General community intimidation

- Increasing levels of physical violence that is becoming more visible - constant low grade in all areas – graffiti, car attacks and threats – this creates stress & worry and grinds the individual and the community down. In one area over 50% reported intimidation of some kind in one housing estate.
- Increasing use of weapons and firearms (including bombs, grenades & guns)
- Young children being targeted to hold drugs/become runners. These young children appear to be from respectable families as the chance of their homes being raided by the Gardai is minimal
- Women living on their own are most vulnerable – high levels of illness and depressions as a result.
- Families that are anti-drugs are having their homes targeted
- Lone parents are being intimidated into smuggling drugs
- DCC have produced anti-social behaviour policy with no consultation with community
- New communities are being targeted.
- Large gangs (sometimes of very young children 10 -12 year olds) roaming areas and intimidating communities
- Drug gangs attacking vulnerable families
- Extortion
- Drug users seen as the problem – the issue of intimidation is then blamed on them
- Access to Luas lines are facilitating a new way of dealing

Garda responses

- Reluctance/fear to go to the Gardai. This lack of reporting is then reflected in the area stats which can, in turn, impact on Garda resources. (reported from all w/shops)
- Gardai unable to safeguard people who do make a complaint
- The close knit nature of and isolation of the Traveller community exacerbates the problem as families are extremely reluctant to make a complaint to the Gardai as other minor issues get brought up against the complainant e.g. road tax etc
- Promise of full Garda protection not forthcoming for individuals who do make formal complaint and Garda liaison withdrawn
- Some local garda appear unwilling or unsure of how to proceed with intimidation for payment of debt

Q2. How has your community responded to the issue of intimidation so far? (Combined answers from each group)

Steps taken

- Two areas have Community policing forum set up through the Drug Task Force – builds trust between garda and community.
- In some areas issues are raised with elected officials and local authorities through complaints system
- One area has set up a collaborative response with the involvement of local community plus relevant agencies: probation, social work service, Gardai & DCC
- Dial to stop dealing freephone numbers have been established in some areas to raise issues and to encourage people to report. But some areas say that the Garda response to open dealing is very poor and sometimes non-existent.
- Intimidation issue brought to the Safety Forum – Integrated approach between the Gardai, community and DCC worked very well
- Installation of a CCTV system has had limited or no impact, as footage captured on cameras is not monitored. Where they are being monitored, the issue seems to just get displaced.
- Increase in Garda presence – Positive impact but could not be sustained over the long term
- Links with Community Liaison Gardai were reported to be very effective; however, the effectiveness of other members of An Garda Siochana depended on the person – no uniform response
- Public policing forum meetings; information re community Gardai, etc. available at those meetings
- Community safety week, involves Gardai, fire brigade, community projects

- One area dealt with very young children causing problems by working with youth service to allow these children access facilities. Another area is targeting funding at 14-15 year olds where there is a gap in service provision. Another area is working with young people – exploring perceptions of threat and one is working with young males exploring types of crime
- Initiatives to get young people working and engaging with older people, e.g. in the area of Information Technology (IT), young people supporting / showing / teaching senior citizens

- One area has worked on promoting positive sense of community and place; Promoting community safety in context of existence of high levels and different types of anti-social behaviour; great buy in and involvement by Gardai; local area partnership are involved

Fear & denial of problem in communities

- All areas reported that there was a fear of reprisals for reporting incidents of intimidation, therefore the levels are undocumented.
- Project and family support workers are too afraid to name the issue. Some areas said that people who are not directly affected are not interested in the issue.
- Another area said there was denial on the part of local politicians (tourist money needed).
- Poor response to witness protection
- Yet another area said that sometimes the community has responded violently.

Projects

- General frustration at not knowing how to respond and not having any clear evidence of success
- Services are trying to wrestle with how they work with people involved in intimidation – young people coming in to services in bullet proof vest and carrying guns

Q3: What Actions should be taken? (Combined answers from each group)

Current provision

- Roll out nationally, and publicise, current Garda pilot
- More secure ways of reporting and more protection for those reporting
- Better promotion of dial to stop drug dealing and more explanation of initiative
- Community policing fora to be established in all areas and properly supported – there must be an interagency approach to tackling intimidation.
- Training and resources are needed for Gardai to deal with intimidation.
- Build on and build new 'respectful' partnerships with Gardai & other relevant services to come up with solutions and to give support to individuals & communities

- CAB needs to be better resourced + Local CAB sections in Garda stations
- Childcare, youth, adult and community services need to be reinforced and in some cases rebuild the social infrastructure that has been dismantled
- More resources into early interventions & early development work
- Rolling out of strengthening families work
- JPC's are not working – they should be more effective and answerable – Citywide to lobby JPC's
- Invest in JPC's

Judiciary

- Sentencing policy needs to be reviewed especially in Circuit court
- Intimidation charges should be fast tracked in courts
- Court system is intimidating for victims-need to be able to provide evidence in safety eg behind screen
- Stiffer sentencing with no remission for intimidation charges
- Roll out Arrest Referral Scheme

New ideas

- Build an evidence base of incidences of intimidation. This can be done informally at local level and as a starting point. Community workers could record intimidation verbally discussed with them by service users and then on a regular basis pass this information on to the Gardai
- Community-based mediation response + Community representatives should meet with dealers to meditate community safety (not unanimously agreed)
- Communities should be mobilised to resist and respond to intimidation
- Visible proactive inter-agency collaboration by all relevant stakeholders
- We should debate the decriminalisation of drugs
- Explore notion of national day (which would create unity among communities)
- Responses focused on engaging young people, particularly the more vulnerable, difficult and marginalised / excluded & Issues of Youth alcohol & drugs use + mental health need to be addressed

- Set up a 'Dial to Stop Intimidation' service. This should be promoted as a community based campaign taking the emphasis away from Garda involvement as this may prevent the number of people making calls. Community workers could also assist service users to make reports using this mechanism
- Incentives to keep young people engaged – a Community Enforcement Approach. Early interventions with youth: A prevention and education initiative to be developed that works jointly with parents and children. Parents need to be supported to assist their children when they are being intimidated to become runners
- Hold a national conference on tackling intimidation we need to include trade unions & church leaders
- Free legal aid should not be available to those charged with intimidation (this was not unanimously agreed and it was recognised that it may not be constitutional)
- Citywide to lead out on the development of a specific Intimidation Working Group comprising of specialists from various agencies. This working group would only deal with effectively tackling the issue of intimidation. References/support should be sought from the PSNI to assess how they have tackled intimidation in the North.

The group could consist of:

- Community reps
- Senior level Gardai
- Local Authorities
- Workers from drug projects
- Social services
- HSE
- Probation
- Family Support Network
- Relevant government departments