

# **A Local and Social Approach to Drugs Praxis in Youth Work**

Lessons from the Gurranaברה and  
Churchfield Drugs Outreach Project

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NATIONAL DRUGS CONFERENCE  
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# Background

- The uncertainty and precarious nature of DTF projects in Cork and Munster
- A view that the GCDOP represents a solid example of best practice
- A perception that other agents don't fully recognise the value of such projects and their contribution
- Rise of numerical-referral as success criteria
- A desire to put forward the Community Youth Perspective; the local and social.

# Research Questions

- Can Community Youth Projects effectively deliver services across the range of the tier system?
- Does the Gurrabraher-Churchfield Project deliver services to persons located across the entire tier spectrum?

# Methodology

- EMCDDA evaluation manuals; an internal evaluation.
- Fieldwork (Feb. 2010), deskwork and critical analysis (Mar-May/Sept-Nov).
- Qualitative Grounded Theory Approach
- Use the GCDOP as a Case Study to build a theoretical model.

- Empirical; Interviews with management, staff and service users
- Sub-survey (random) with local people.
- Anecdotal; fear in some professional quarters regarding disclosure of opinion
- Full access to project records and personal
- Potential conflict; Researcher also Chairman of Sponsoring Organisation (Youth Work Ireland Cork); External Academic acted as independent monitor.

# Profile

- Locality; Gurrabraher Churchfield.
- Agency; Youth Work Ireland Cork
- Project Structure; Independent + Flexible
- Personnel; Experienced + Skilled
- Vision; Develop a Comprehensive Service
- Service Users; Wide Range
- Substances; Wide Range (Alcohol-Heroin-Yokes etc.)

# **Structure**

## **Youth Work Ireland Cork**

Board of Directors + Services Director

## **Gurrabraher-Churchfield Area**

SPY Project

GCDOP

U4EA

# Theory

- A Social View of Drug Use
- Drugs Work; Harm Reduction + Appropriate Referral
- Youth Work; Participative 'Scene' Orientated
- Community Work; Development Orientated
- Interpersonal Work; Humanistic
- Communications (Dress/Language/Non-Verbal); Sophisticated and Appropriate



# Methods

- Prevention; 'Cork Urban Skateboard Project'
- Education; Rappers + Information Delivery
- Individuals; Support + Assistance Packages
- Groups; Participative Discursive
- Contracted Groups (Bruac)
- Cooperative Groups (DTF Brief Intervention)
- Miscellaneous (Admin + UT)
- Assess/Intake/Practice/Exits

# Theory + Method Synopsis

- Flexible + Eclectic
- Targeted
- Social + Systemic (ecological)
- Networks + Liaisons
- Practice Wisdom + Humour (Defence); *“I felt a disturbance in the force”* MM
- Dedicated staff group; danger of overstretch and burnout

# Ecological Changes

- Headshops; Caused a Big Switch Away from Street Drugs
- Heroin; Has Become an Established Drug
- Injection Use; Rare But Becoming More Common, Concern That it will Increase
- Age Profiles; The Older User is not a Young Person

# Feasibility of Expanded Services

- Detoxification Service within the Community
- Methadone (2 sites in Cork)
- Needle Exchange (Waterford is Closest)
- Extended Working Hours
- Alternative and/or Satellite Premises

*Realistically, GCDOP can expand in the last two areas if resources are increased and a youth work identity is to be maintained.*

# Evaluation

- Original Mission; Aims and Objectives
- Youth Work Ireland Cork Mission Statement
- National Drugs Strategy
- National Youth Work Development Plan
- Cork Local Drugs Task Force Strategy
- The Service User Perspective; Speed + Trust
- Relations with the Local Community

# Key Features

- Staff; Committed, Skilled and Experienced
- Management; Supportive (Supervision Procedure), Role-Defined
- Structure; Organically Developed
- Theoretical Clarity; Sophisticated yet clear
- Historical Bedrock of Trust in the Community (an asset of inestimable value) GCDOP 'piggy-backed' into the community

# Required Actions

- Reconstruct Aims and Objectives
- Develop a New and Appropriate Strategy
- Clarify Age Situation
- Expand Physical Presence
- Retain Congruence with NDS and NYWDP
- Retain High-Standing in Locality

# Core Finding

- Community based youth projects can deliver services across all of the tiers.

To do so they require;

- A clear theoretical framework
- A physical and visible presence in the community
- Skilled practitioners who can operate in a flexible and independent manner



# Implications

- Practice; High Level of Skill and Expertise in the areas of Outreach, Communication, Engagement and Appropriate Intervention.
- Policy; Do Tier System and Numerical Referral Evaluations Devalue Other Forms of Drugs Work? *“The drugs is a small part”* (SU).
- Theory; Youth Work (as practiced by YWIC) and Harm Reduction share a common value base.

# The Social View

Problematic Drug Use is a Symptom of Societal Issues.

From a Youthwork perspective, a particular ethos informs praxis; that drug use is a socially constructed activity. Socially Orientated interventions are required. Such interventions demand specific skills, knowledge and values that remain faithful to a Youthwork ethos.