

**RAG/ LAG Stakeholder Engagement
Event:
The Needs of Children and Young People
Affected by Drugs and Alcohol**

Wednesday 8 December 2021



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines a consultation led by the Senior Youth Officers for Belfast and supported by West Belfast, South Belfast, North Belfast and East Belfast Local Advisory Groups (LAG) for key stakeholders including young people to explore the needs of young people affected by drugs and alcohol. The event was hosted in the form of a hybrid model with a mixture of in house and online discussions taking place. The event engaged with over 120 key stakeholders from across Belfast and addressed some of the key issues for young people affected by drugs and alcohol, creating the opportunity for recommendations on how Youth Service can also provide support.

During the event each of the stakeholders took part in a number of workshops and completed a survey which emphasised the many issues facing young people affected by drugs and alcohol and highlighted the lack of support services available in their areas. Many of the issues noted included issues with young people accessing the correct support and that the current information available is dated and does not reflect the current issues. Others indicated that the use of legal highs and vaping within youth culture is on the rise particularly amongst young teenagers.

Key recommendations on how Youth Service could address drugs and alcohol related issues with children and young people included a review of current programmes with the aim ensuring that these are relevant and up to date to deal with current trends/issues. It was also noted that more needs to be done to work with young people while facing addiction issues to maximise their support. Programmes for young people, parents, and carers on dealing with the effects of drugs and alcohol with specific information on accessing support services and what is available within local communities. Young people also highlighted that they need to have a greater input within the consultation process on how funding and resources are developed on these issues.

1.1 Aim of the Event

- 1.1.1 Increased participation of children and young people and other Youth Service Stakeholders on key themes
- 1.1.2 The purpose of the event is to establish the views and opinions of young people and key stakeholders on the needs of young people affected by drugs and alcohol.
- 1.1.3 To discuss the issues identified by young people and other stakeholders and outline how these can be addressed by Youth Services
- 1.1.4 Engagement on the development of the key themes for the Regional Assessment of Need and the Regional Youth Development Plan 2020-2023

1.2 Why the theme 'The Needs of Young People Affected by Drugs and Alcohol'

- 1.2.1 Drugs and alcohol issues has long been an issue faced by those delivering and attending youth service provision. This remains a key issue and is important that youth service is up to date with current trends in order to offer the correct methods of support.
- 1.2.2 Youth Work can play an important role by supporting young people affected by drugs and alcohol by providing support and information to meet their direct needs on dealing with these issues.
- 1.2.3 Priorities for Youth, DE's policy document placed a greater emphasis on the needs of young people to increase their life chances in areas such as future employment and training opportunities.

2.1 Survey

2.1.1 A survey was completed by all stakeholders who attend the event sought to gain information about the following:

- Young people's experiences of Alcohol programmes
- Young people's experiences of Drug programmes
- The potential risk factors facing young people affected by drugs and alcohol
- Sources of support accessed
- Programmes of support that Youth Service could offer

2.2 Activities

2.2.1 The session was facilitated via Zoom and included workshops facilitated by guest speakers including youth work practitioners & public health officials. The event followed a hybrid model with a mixture of broadcasts and in-house workshops that were summarised and fed back to all participants.

2.2.2 Feedback from the survey was presented to all participants.

2.2.3 Presentations from current practitioners dealing with these issues highlighted examples of good practice, current & emerging trends, support available and barriers to accessing support.

2.2.4 Breakout rooms provided participants with the opportunity to explore the issues further and make recommendations for Youth service to take forward for consideration with Local and Regional Advisory Groups.

3**ATTENDANCE****3.1 Attendance Figures**

Attendance Group	Number
Young People	119
Local Advisory Members	8
Regional Advisory Members	2
Youth Work Staff	18

3.1.1 Invitations for the event were circulated to Regional and Local Advisory Group members and all core funded youth groups in the Belfast area. Further invitations were issued to young people engaged in current youth work programmes. A total of 148 people attended.

Which issues relating to young people affected by drugs & alcohol can be addressed by Youth Service?

Participant responses from the workshops stated that although youth service offered several drugs and alcohol programmes however these focuses heavily on prevention and not dealing with the effects and experiences of young people affected by drugs and alcohol. Further discussions highlighted.

1. Drugs and alcohol programmes need to reflected current trends such as vaping, spice and other legal highs with greater emphasis placed on support for young people.
2. Youth service needs to do more to engage with young people dealing with addiction issues and could develop greater links with existing support services
3. Programmes should be offered to parents and careers that provided support and knowledge on drugs and alcohol related issues and should provide information on how to access support services.
4. Current information on drugs and alcohol can be confusing for young people focusing on prevention and does not offer support on what to do if under the influence, further work is needed to provide young people with information on how to stay safe.
5. Further awareness and training opportunities for young people on how to support friends who are under the influence and keep them safe.

What can Youth Service put in place to support the needs of young people affected by drugs & alcohol

Participant responses stated that they had been involved in some form of drugs and alcohol awareness/training within their time in youth provision and while they see its value some felt that the information given did not reflect their lived experiences. Participants also felt that peer pressure was one of the main reasons for young people getting involved with drugs and alcohol. Further discussion highlighted.

1. A review of current programmes and continued support made available for young people that should be reflective of current trends i.e. legal highs vaping
2. Greater promotion of support services and how to access them, with information simplified for young people and parents/ carers.

3. Further access in each local area one on one support services with young people facing/living with addiction issues.
4. Greater awareness of the positive experiences of young people who have come through drug and alcohol addiction.
5. Young people need to be at the fore front of any future consultations on how funding is spent on training and support services to ensure these are directly meeting the needs of those accessing them

Appendix 1 Survey Data

Is the current strategy and education around the effects of drugs and alcohol meeting the needs of the young people in our areas?

1.1 Using the qualitative and quantitative data from the group discussion and questionnaires the general consensus was that where young people have availed or participated in drugs and alcohol education programs, that they felt that those programs were relevant to them and the issues. However, a portion of the young people responded by saying they hadn't ever participated in any programs and some responded by saying the last time they were involved was as far back 2019.

What has been the effect of drugs and alcohol on the young people's community and personal lives?

2.1 Every respondent in the questionnaire said that drugs and alcohol were an issue within their community.

2.2 When asked have you been affected by drugs and alcohol in your personal life, family life or in your community, 66% of the young people that responded said yes, they have been affected personally by drugs and alcohol.

2.3 All those questioned said that there needs to be more done to tackle the effects of drugs and alcohol in their community and when asked who they think should be doing more they answered as follows: -

- PSNI 35%
- Families 18%
- Medical professional 17%
- Youth Work and Schools both 10%
- Council 7%
- Community Organisations 3%

2.4 When asked if a family member or friend found themselves in a position where they needed help with the effects of drugs of alcohol, would they know where to go for help and support?

All the respondents replied that YES they would know where to go.

Use of illegal drugs in the community

3.1 We asked in your opinion or to your knowledge what are the main types of illegal drugs being used in your community, everyone was asked to select their top 3.

1	Vaping of THC / Spice	35
2	Cannabis	20
3	Prescription Tablets misuse	15
4	Spice	12
5	Nitrous	12
6	MDMA	11
7	Cocaine	11
8	Heroin	10
9	Crack Cocaine	2

