



PREVENTION NEEDED IN DIFFERENT WAYS IN COUNTRY

## WORKING IN RURAL AREAS – THE WELSH EXPERIENCE

by Rose Davies, West Glamorgan Drugs Prevention Team

### The problems

DRUGS misuse is often seen as an inner-city problem – regularly reinforced by lurid media reports. But rural areas have their fair share of difficulties, though sometimes different to those of their city cousins.

The isolation of many villages is a problem in itself. Many were the centres of thriving coal and heavy manufacturing industries, but these once wealthy communities are now run down with huge unemployment figures.

Their geographical isolation is worsened by poverty, so many are unable to afford bus fares to the nearest towns – even going to the pictures becomes prohibitively expensive. Some miss out on the chance of tertiary education because of lack of transport.

Although many valley villages are in lovely mountain areas with plenty of fresh, clean air, children are often noticeably undersized compared to those in towns and city.

In the affluent west of the county, however, although young people are generally healthier, rural isolation leads to boredom and experimentation with drugs, often more expensive ones.

In this context drugs misuse has flourished in different ways from

### The county

*THE West Glamorgan Drugs Prevention Team serves over 363,000 people distributed unevenly between a large coastal plain and three major valleys spreading inland in a wide fan-shape.*

*Population is concentrated in the city of Swansea and the towns of Port Talbot and Neath. Sixty seven per cent of the workforce is employed in service provision, 28 per cent (concentrated around Port Talbot) in manufacturing and heavy industry, with agriculture on the Gower Peninsula and other rural areas of the county. There are also well over 60 small towns and villages.*

*Around 18 per cent of the population are fluent in Welsh with the incidence of second-language Welsh speakers rising rapidly. About two per cent of the county's people are from other ethnic groups, mainly Bengali.*

the city patterns. For example, many villagers have noticed the "Deals on Wheels" phenomenon – enterprising mobile dealers make regular visits to outlying villages to sell ready-rolled joints, extra-strong fortified wines and any number of chemicals to isolated local young people.

The easy availability of Magic Mushrooms, solitary areas ideal for cannabis cultivation and a "Smugglers' Coast" ensure a steady supply of drugs into all the rural locali-

ties of the county.

Seclusion in both the affluent and poorer areas has led adults to minimise problems, believing that drugs are a city issue, rather than a time-bomb just about to go off.

### The work

Ventures carried out in rural areas have been experimental and looking for successful blueprints to carry into similar communities. Fast Forward (Glyncorrwg) is just one of the innovative projects taking off in the county, based in a tiny ex-mining village, many miles up the Afan Valley from Port Talbot.

A partnership scheme between the County Youth Service, Drugs Prevention Team and Swansea University Department of Adult Continuing Education, Fast Forward is a three-phase project.

The first involved 6 months of gruelling "outreach" work on the streets of the village (no joke in the middle of February) by youth leaders who gradually won the confidence of the area's young people, started to break down their "tribal" isolation and gently prepared the ground for phase 2 – the "invasion" from the big city.

This happened in August '93 and brought troupes of contemporary dancers, video makers and Rave, Rap and Scratch musicians to the village, to explore drugs and personal development issues as part of a participative Arts extravaganza. Both city workers and village participants experienced culture shock! The resulting "warts and all" report and project video make compelling reading and watching.

Phase 3 – "THE FOLLOW UP" is now in place. Fast Forward was just the BEGINNING of work in this part of the county and, although an innovative Arts Project,

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"FAST FORWARD" – the groove in Glyncorrwg – summer project bringing rap, rave, scratch, video and dance to the tiny valley village in West Glamorgan. A joint approach from the local Drugs Prevention team, Swansea University Department of Adult Continuing Education, Youth Enterprise Swansea, West Glamorgan Youth Service and Dynion Dance Company.

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minibus would also be used to transport young people to recreational activities.

The Forum asked the Brighton and Hove Drugs Prevention Team for a grant to fund the Woodingdean Youth Advice and Information Bus for the first year of operation. A project management committee was established comprising members of the Youth Concern Forum and representatives from statutory agencies who subsequently put staff and resources into the project.

### Operating successfully

The Woodingdean Youth Advice and Information Bus began operating in June 1992, three evenings a week for 2.5 hours per evening. During the first 10 months of operation, the following results were achieved by the information and advice service provided by the bus:

- 309 people contacted the minibus comprising 78 adults, 159 young males and 72 young females.
- These people subsequently contacted the minibus on a further 539 occasions.
- Contacts were mainly by males aged 13-16 (77 per cent of all young males) and females aged 14-16 (72 per cent of all young females).
- The most requested information topic was drugs. There were 1,179 enquiries about different drugs on 504 occasions.

The bus, now called the Youth Advice and Information Bus, continues to visit various sites in Woodingdean as well as Ovingdean, Rottingdean and Saltdean where groups of young people congregate, and is now entering its third year of operation.

*Copies of "Drug Use in the North Wealden District of East Sussex" are available at £5 from East Sussex Drugs Advisory Council, Room N11F, County Hall, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 1SW.*

*Copies of the "Woodingdean Youth Advice and Information Bus" project evaluation report on year one are available free from the Brighton and Hove Drugs Prevention Team, Second Floor, Circus House, New England Road, Brighton, East Sussex BN1 4GW.*

## No room for complacency

# DEALING WITH DRUG MISUSE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

THE LEAD Government department for dealing with drug misuse in Northern Ireland is the Department of Health and Social Security. In an overview of the current situation, the department says:

"All available indicators suggest that, while the misuse of the so-called 'hard' drugs such as heroin and cocaine remains relatively low in Northern Ireland, the misuse of drugs such as ecstasy, LSD and amphetamines has increased. While not complacent about these recent worrying developments, the department has tried to put the situation here in context by pointing out that the problem has not reached the level experienced in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland.

"The Northern Ireland Committee on Drug Misuse (NICDM) was established in 1984 to advise the department on policy in relation to drugs misuse.

"The main tasks of the committee, which includes representation from the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) Drugs Squad, Customs and Excise, the Probation Service, other Government departments, health and social services boards and clinicians who work in this area, are to monitor the extent of the problem, to promote liaison and co-operation and to suggest preventive measures.

### Low-key approach

"Since its inception, the committee has, until recently, consistently recommended a low-key approach to dealing with the problem of drugs misuse. A major concern was the danger of increasing awareness and, as a consequence, unwittingly encouraging experimentation amongst the young. How-

ever, in view of the perceived increase in the problem, the department has invited the committee to review this policy and it is likely that a revised policy statement will emerge later in the year.

"In the meantime, the committee has recommended the production of advice booklets for parents to help them deal with drugs misuse problems amongst young people. The department commissioned the Northern Ireland Health Promotion Agency to carry out this work and the booklets were launched on 16 March.

"Consideration is being given to further measures designed to tackle the problem

which might be timed to coincide with European Drug Prevention Week later this year.

### Accurate data

"In order to assist efforts to formulate effective policies and target initiatives to combat the problem, arrangements are being made to obtain more accurate data on the extent of drug misuse in Northern Ireland.

"While a number of options are still under consideration, we can confirm that questions on drug misuse will be included in a World Health Organisation study into the health behaviour of secondary school-aged children up to 15 years.

"To complement this, drug related questions will be included in a survey of 16- and 17-year-olds in sixth forms, youth training programmes and further education colleges. Both surveys are being managed by the Health Promotion Agency."

## How the professionals view the problem

DR DIANA Patterson is well qualified to comment on the drugs misuse scene in Northern Ireland. Consultant Psychiatrist with special responsibility for substance misuse on the Western Area Health Board of Northern Ireland, she is also Chairman of the Northern Ireland Committee on Drug Misuse (NICDM).

The area Dr Patterson is responsible for under the Western Area Health Board is large geographically, covering most of Londonderry and Tyrone and all of Fermanagh, but with a small population of only 260,000.

"Although a good half of the population of Northern Ireland lives in or near Belfast, much of it is in rural areas, and most of it, even to an extent Belfast itself, is still much more parochial than other UK cities," she said.

Dr Patterson says there is not a big problem with misuse of 'hard' drugs such as heroin and cocaine, but there is growing misuse of drugs associated with the dance or 'rave' scene, such as ecstasy, LSD and amphetamines. Cannabis is used, but the figures have stayed stable for a relatively long period of time. Figures suggest its use is similar to that in rural England.

Benzodiazepines – tranquillisers such as Valium, Librium and Temazepam – are widely misused orally, usually originating from legitimate prescriptions but then sold on illegally on the black market.

There is, she says, a very low rate of notification in Northern Ireland – only 70 people are registered as dependent on 'hard' drugs such as heroin and cocaine at the moment. "There certainly is some heroin use but it's low, and there's extremely low use of cocaine."

Dr Patterson says: "Drug misuse is different here to the rest of the UK, because life in general is different. Young people generally live at home with their parents until they get married, and then stay close to home. There has not been the break-up of the extended family as seen in most of the UK. There is not widespread mobility,





## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Professionals Problem

either, so that people tend to know their neighbours very well. Hence there is more restraint on people and it is more difficult to get into the drug-taking scene."

Another big difference, she says, is that there's virtually no injecting drug misuse. "We are sure about this despite suggestions it's a lack of vigilance on our part. We are vigilant and we do not have the consequences that you would get with needle misuse, ranging from minor illness to serious illness such as septicemia, to death, for example from HIV," says Dr Patterson.

One reason for the lack of an injecting culture, she believes, is down to the stance taken by the medical profession: "Twenty years ago in England, heroin was legally prescribed to heroin addicts, and nowadays the substitute methadone is prescribed. But in Northern Ireland we have always refused to prescribe either, except when treating heroin or methadone addicts in controlled clinical conditions, because we took the view that if either was made available legally, there would pretty soon be a black market developing from it.

"Another rather odd thing is that it doesn't seem to occur to our young people to inject even though they are using drugs which are injectable."

The security situation also has a bearing, says Dr Patterson. "People entering and leaving the country are subject to much closer scrutiny than elsewhere, so are less likely to take the risk of carrying drugs.

"So for various reasons there is less of a problem with 'hard' drugs here than elsewhere in the UK, but we are not complacent about the seriousness of drugs misuse," says Dr Patterson. "Our whole thrust is towards prevention, and, because we view heroin as the biggest threat, and injecting the worst type of method, we have always taken steps to keep them out.

"But there is a problem with ecstasy and other rave-type drugs. This has increased quite dramatically over the last three to four

years and we believe it's now similar to that of the UK as a whole. Treatment is similar to that in England and Wales, carried out in Northern Ireland by community addiction teams which deal with alcohol as well as drugs misuse.

"Prevention is delivered through education, by the education authorities and by the RUC's Drugs Squad, which has an input into the national curriculum."

**Detective Chief Inspector Alan Green** of the RUC's Drugs Squad oversees the prevention, detection, and conviction of dealers in illegal drugs throughout the province. He also sits on the NICDM and is keen to see through the proposed setting up of several sub-committees to deal with specific aspects of drugs misuse.

DCI Green says there has been a boom in drugs misuse in the past two to three years. "Seizures are quite high now, particularly of ecstasy, and cannabis is through the roof. Usage now is quite similar to the rest of UK," he said.

The main problem the police have to contend with is lorry drivers bringing drugs in – in the last 12 months, around 10 drivers were stopped on the mainland carrying 200-300 kilos of cannabis. Another



DCI Green

problem, says DCI Green, is with the importation of drugs through the post. "Drugs such as ecstasy are, unfortunately, quite easy to post in large quantities, and we are looking closely at suggesting new legislation to combat this," he says.

Terrorism does affect the situation in Northern Ireland. "Although both paramilitaries say they are against drugs and have in fact threatened to shoot anyone involved in drug dealing, in fact it is well known that both sides are involved and are creaming off funds from drugs," said DCI Green.

DCI Green agrees with Dr Patterson that: "heroin hasn't really figured here because of dif-

ferent societal factors – we don't have the inner-city movement and break-up of the family unit here which is fairly common in the rest of the UK. But the dance scene is still popular and the use of drugs there is worrying, and rising."

The RUC has only one drugs squad, manned by 30 officers, but that is boosted by the secondment, at any one time, of nine uniformed officers from elsewhere in the force. So far 150 such officers have been trained by the drugs squad so that they can take specialist knowledge back to their normal duties. The RUC has also formed a number of drug liaison units run by uniformed police, like drug squads on the mainland.

The drugs squad has an input into the schools' curricula, delivered by the RUC's junior liaison officers. Developed in close consultation with the education department, it is part of a general health programme and is not exclusively about drugs.

"We try to deliver a positive message about healthy living rather than just saying 'Don't take drugs'," says DCI Green.

The squad also gives many lectures to a wide variety of adult groups. 🐦

## Advice booklet helps parents

NORTHERN Ireland teenagers who smoke or drink are three times more likely to be offered drugs and up to five times more likely to use them, a survey has found.

But all young people are at risk and many parents don't know how to even begin talking to them about drugs, the Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland said at the launch of a new booklet it has launched, *DRUGS – What every parent should know*.

The figures from a study, \**Health Behaviours of School-Aged Children*, were outlined in the new booklet.

Produced on behalf of the Department of Health and Social Services, it spells out the position on drug-taking in the province, tells parents what different drugs look like, the signs to watch for and where to get help if it is needed.

Agency Chairman Dr James Hawthorne said: "In producing this new guide we are attempting to address the reality of drug-taking in Northern Ireland – which is different from both that in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland –

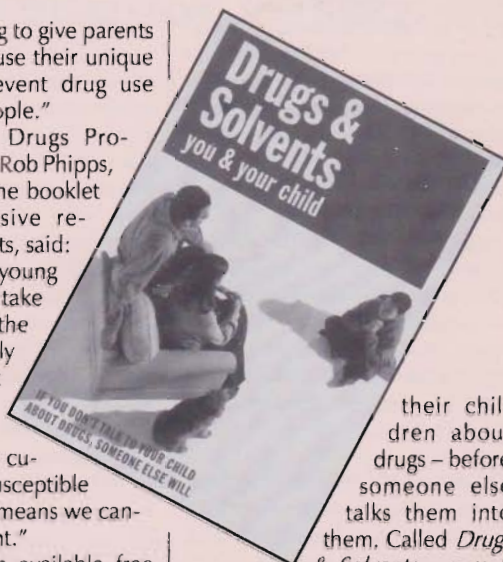
and we are hoping to give parents a real chance to use their unique role to help prevent drug use among young people."

Alcohol and Drugs Programme Manager Rob Phipps, who developed the booklet following extensive research with parents, said:

"The number of young people known to take drugs regularly in the province is relatively small, but the fact that drugs are available and young people are curious as well as susceptible to peer pressure, means we cannot be complacent."

The booklet is available free from libraries, pharmacies, health centres, Citizens Advice Bureaux and the Health Promotion Departments of the four Health and Social Services Boards.

A second booklet, produced by the Department of Health in London and complementing the locally-written guide, underlines the importance of parents talking to



their children about drugs – before someone else talks them into them. Called *Drugs & Solvents – you & your child*, it has been funded locally by the DHSS and is also available free.

\*To obtain either of the booklets or the study, or for further information, contact: Dymna Curley, the Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland, 18 Ormeau Avenue, Belfast BT2 8HS. Tel: 0232 311611. 🐦