

Kate Davies

# Social regeneration

## Fitting drugs in

**Drug and Alcohol Action Teams have a hard fight on their hands when trying to get drug use on to the regeneration agenda**

**N**orth Nottinghamshire is a geographical area of over 500 square miles. Many of the centres of population are now known politically as 'ex-mining communities'. Regeneration packages have been made available from central government and regional initiatives over the last decade.

Most of these regeneration packages have one thing in common, their priority and principle is economic regeneration. The aims and objectives are described as 'economic development, to ensure a vibrant economy and skills for people and the workplace.' All are driven to create a positive environment for business.

The Drug and Alcohol Action Teams (DAATs) in North Nottinghamshire and North Derbyshire and many parts of South Yorkshire have been integral in ensuring that central and regional regeneration, or SRB rounds, focus on both economic regeneration and the social and emotional welfare of communities.

Communities and Coalfield Alliance regions have not been subject to Health Action Zone (HAZ), Education Action Zone (EAZ), New Deal for Communities or City Challenge funding in the last decade. Social regeneration of districts has depended on bidding rounds of single regeneration budgets. With great perseverance,

Nottinghamshire County DAAT has submitted funding application after funding application for specific drug/substance use projects.

Drugs have always been seen as a risky area to fund. This is not surprising when you realise that local politicians and government partnerships have not been able to fit drugs projects neatly into the regeneration output game.

'Youth disaffection' (whatever a disaffected youth is) was seen as the regeneration growth area that drugs projects could at last benefit from. But once again drugs projects, education and substance use prevention programmes, competed with more politically friendly bids.

Drugs projects competed with after school clubs, youth club premises, new football pitches and Scout and Guide boating trips. All are, of course, viable but how do they relate to the most hard to reach groups of young people and those already engaging in drug use.

Research has shown that in the old coal mining areas the demise of the mining industry has led to a rise in substance use. Like many areas of the UK they have seen a large increase in heroin use. Injecting behaviour has increased and solvent and alcohol abuse has escalated among a much younger population.

In recent surveys of young people evidence showed that young women

were more likely to use drugs recreationally than young men in many of these communities.

With all this evidence there is still a reluctance to fund drugs projects through regeneration schemes. DAAT partners, youth services and young people's drug services, enabled the first break through. A detached project working with young people, called 'Face It', received funding through a SRB in 1997 to focus on ex-coalfield communities. In 2001 Face It has now grown to an eight-worker project focusing on under 18 year olds - regeneration money still enables a percentage of its total core funding.

Regeneration is targeted at communities that have had the highest poverty indicator by electoral ward district. Many isolated small districts and communities establish a package of different geographical needs.

North Nottinghamshire and North Derbyshire DAATs took the unique opportunity to submit a progressive bid as part of SRB5 single regeneration budget bid to cover 33 wards across a large expanse of North Nottinghamshire's and North Derbyshire's ex-coal mining communities.

Often communities, and particularly projects working with substance use, do not touch regeneration funding opportunities with a barge



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pole. Mainly due to the high intensity of paperwork, bureaucracy and the need to match funding by at least 50%.

All of this, with the requirement to fund quarterly in arrears (sometimes longer), means that communities and smaller projects are often greatly disadvantaged. The DAAT alliance of North Nottinghamshire and North Derbyshire, now titled 'Let's Build', oversees the funding of ten diverse substance use projects targeting four main areas:

- support to parents and carers
- support to young people
- training
- community capacity building

The DAAT alliance coordinates and manages the SRB5 substance misuse funded programme, and deals with all the paperwork and bureaucracy. This enables the projects to develop and target harder to reach communities.

Funding of projects included work with:

- Pupil Referral Units and life skill projects, focusing particularly on substance use and sexual health.
- Community media and communication campaigns using local radio and bus posters, highlighting service provision and accessibility.
- Community accredited training packages aimed at parents and carers and communities most hit by drug use and isolation.
- User projects enabling support for detoxing and recovering drug users.
- Parent and carer support networks for parents and carers of substance users.
- Coordination of the disposal of used needles and syringes and community needle disposal points.

This is a sample of projects often unable to receive funding through mainstream provision, seen as too much on the periphery.

Ex-mining communities are now using regeneration funding to help match health, education and local authority crime and disorder funding. The 'Let's Build' DAAT alliance has most recently funded over thirty smaller substance use projects with one-off grants – an initiative which was greatly over subscribed.

Regeneration is of course not just about funding, it is mainly about opportunity and social and emo-



tional well-being. It enables healthier, safer and inclusive communities. It ensures a quality of life and an environment where generations can choose to stay and not need move out to get economic and social opportunities.

We often hear the phrase 'what has regeneration ever done for our community?' Along with 'what have DAAT partnerships ever done for us?' The DAAT, Coalfield Alliance, Let's Build and other young people's generation schemes would argue that through credible planning and delivery for action the economic cycle of degeneration has been broken in the East Midlands. Social regeneration has fully taken on funding of and working with drug use.

North Nottinghamshire and North Derbyshire Coalfield Alliance regeneration projects have managed to ensure that they can work with the outputs agenda of the bureaucratic regeneration game.

More importantly, the *outcomes* of the projects are now being fully recognised. There is a high level of sustainability of pupils accessing Pupil Referral Unit programmes. Successful accredited community training has been completed, ensuring qualifications for men and women who have often had no academic achievements in the past. Young people have access to drugs

workers – young people who are outside the youth clubs, not just the ones inside them.

Government regeneration programmes will now have to accept that substance use should be recognised as a bona fide regeneration option.

The picture, of course, is not all rosy. Regeneration still requires an awful lot of paperwork, short-term funded investments, and a competitive bidding against many other economic and physical regeneration initiatives.

I would urge partnerships under DAATs, criminal justice, crime and disorder, health, community and voluntary sector alliances, to battle with regeneration bureaucracy and *enable* the hardest to reach communities to benefit from much needed targeted substance use intervention.

The success of any regeneration planning is to work with your local communities and recognise that substance use regeneration is most successful when you work *with* people and communities not at them ■

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