

Local authority bans drug education service

AN international drug education service has been told by a London borough they are not welcome in their area. Schools in Tower Hamlets have been advised by their Healthy Schools Scheme to cancel or reschedule 'lectures' from the US-based Narconon pending an investigation.

Tower Hamlets took the unprecedented steps after Narconon failed to respond to concerns about their practices and alleged links with the Church of Scientology.

In the summer of 2002, Narconon approached schools in Tower Hamlets and Newham asking for support in applying for funding to Morgan Stanley to provide school-based drug education. Concerns about their legitimacy led a number of schools to seek advice from their local authority.

Healthy Schools drug education advisor Shane Bennett made enquiries about the service and raised his concerns with the organisation in December 2002, 'I am still waiting for a reply', Mr Bennett told *Druglink*. 'Above all I am concerned about their ignorance of government guidelines and codes of drug education practice. Not only that but they have not even heard of key education stages – never mind how they should apply them to drug education.'

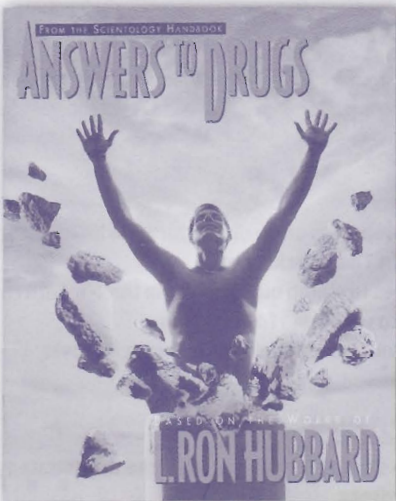
Narconon's failure to respond forced Tower Hamlets to notify all the schools of their investigation and to advise them not to allow Narconon into their schools.

Druglink has also learned that Morgan Stanley does not fund Narconon and, pending Tower Hamlets' investigation, has no plans to do so.

When asked about their disregard for educational guidelines, Noel Nile, director of Narconon Drug Education is unapologetic '[Tower Hamlets] brought to my attention documents I knew nothing about [...] We are vetted by the schools we approach' Mr Nile told *Druglink*. But questioned on his approach to drug education Mr Nile is critical of harm reduction methods and organisations like DrugScope who promote this over abstinence, 'I wonder what the agenda is with DrugScope with this harm minimisation and all that. I really do despair' Mr Nile explains. 'I have been fighting the drugs war for 25

years, and it hurts me when people make these attacks.'

Controversy over Narconon's methods is not new. In 1982, concerns were raised in Crawley about their treatment of addicts using techniques devised by the Church of Scientology. Crawley County Council is still monitoring their work. In February 2003, the council sought to remove them from a city centre site



Narconon follows the L Ron Hubbard way but denies links to Scientology

following advice by the Drug Action Team coordinator Alan Rosenbach. 'We do not like their educational messages and advised the council not to allow them to put up a display' said Mr Rosenbach. 'Despite that they erected their marquee anyway. I have asked the council to remove them, with force if need be. This is no way to provide an educational service'. Mr Rosenbach is also sceptical about their work with schools. 'We advise all schools not to

engage with Narconon', he told *Druglink*.

Narconon claim they reach 6,000 pupils a year throughout the UK, charging £120 a lecture. Most of their work is carried out in the south of England, in and around East Grinstead, West Sussex where they are based – and also where the Church of Scientology is situated.

Narconon fiercely deny any links with Scientology, despite most staff being converts of the church and their literature 'being based on the works of L. Ron Hubbard'. 'We are a secular charity that does good work in the field of education and treatment' says Mr Nile. 'We do not adhere to any ideologies. We go in to schools and give the cold facts. If you care about kids, you don't want them to take drugs. How is that a hidden agenda?'

Adrian King, education consultant to the Department for Education and Skills believes this is misleading. 'As far as I'm concerned they are a front for the Church of Scientology' says Mr King. 'I believe that what they are doing is bringing their religion into schools in another guise. Their links are well documented.'

Above all Mr King questions their lack of educational knowledge and 'their unwillingness to accept professional standards that are consistent with substance misuse strategies that have harmony and integrity at all stages.' Mr King's advice to schools is to consult with the DfES and DrugScope codes of practice on drug education and using school visitors and to speak to the Local Education Authority or PSHE coordinator. 'Schools have a legal responsibility to provide proper drug education that fits into the curriculum.'

what they say

Narconon's educational literature says, 'All drugs are basically poisons. The amount which you take is what decides how it affects you. A small amount is a stimulant (speeds you up). A large amount is a sedative (puts you to sleep). An even larger amount acts as a poison and can kill you.'

Our expert says, 'This is rubbish. By definition a poison is a substance capable of damaging the structure or function of living organisms. Drugs like LSD and cannabis do not damage the structure of nerve cells but rather affect chemical transmission. As to saying an amount determines a drug's stimulatory or sedative effects, this is not only completely incorrect, it is downright dangerous.'