

If only I had a magic wand ...

The No Drugs – Wot Else Fund

★ *A few pounds at the right time can help change lives*

WORKERS IN OUR local drug agencies have a tradition of diverting rare donations and speaking engagement fees to a 'client fund'; they know that sometimes access to a small amount of money quickly could have a major influence on a client's efforts to reduce their drug intake or remain drug free. Understandably these funds are often drained and are dependent on the entrepreneurial skills of the workers. Frustratingly, this money supply is erratically unpredictable – when most needed, it is not there! In the absence of funds workers can play the charitable trusts' game – competitive, time consuming for the worker and not serving the client's immediate needs – months could pass before even a modest grant was approved and processed.

Establishment of a Home Office drugs prevention team in Brighton and Hove was seen as a possible solution to this problem. Local workers advocated that 'prevention' in this context should mean not only primary prevention but also embrace helping existing drug users reduce or stop using drugs and remain drug free. Team members and the team's local advisory grants committee held a similar view. This resulted in the Home Office Central Drugs Prevention Unit approving, subject to safeguards, an initial grant of £2200 in January 1992 to establish the 'No Drugs – Wot Else Fund'.

The purpose of the fund is to give small grants to individuals or groups for:

- providing alternative activities to build resistance to drug offers among vulnerable individuals or groups;
- assisting ex-drug users to find displacement activities or interests to replace their drug use, and to build up self-esteem and resistance to further drug offers.

The local workers and the drugs prevention team felt that to be successful and avoid pitfalls the fund should:

- have minimal administration costs;
- make grants directly payable to the 'keyworker' of a recognised statutory or non-statutory organisation applying on behalf of the client, the keyworker being responsible for the certification of the grant's purpose, its dispersal, and for the return of invoices and unspent monies;
- provide grants to successful applicants within 24 hours.

Paperwork is kept to a minimum: a local drug agency worker administers the fund, approves applications (in cases of doubt conferring with a member of the local drugs prevention team), and sends the cheque off to the keyworker. In extremely urgent cases, personal application by the keyworker can result in a cheque within ten minutes!

The criteria for a No Drugs – Wot Else grant are simple:

- recipients must be residents of Brighton or Hove and living in the community, ie, not in residential programmes;
- recipients must be under 26 years of age;
- funding is not available from other sources;
- the maximum grant is £75.

The age and 'live in the community' criteria were introduced to prevent block applications from residential projects on behalf of their entire client group swallowing up the lion's share of funding, and to focus attention on younger non-opioid users, who were not so well-resourced as older clients.

Grants have been given for:

- equipment and fees involved in new leisure interests;
- small items for young people setting up home;
- complementary therapies;
- group projects and activities with young people who are vulnerable to becoming or are already recreational drug users;
- clothing to improve presentation at job interviews and to equip the recipient for a new job;
- training for future employment;
- travel costs involved in re-establishing family links.

Keyworkers who have applied for a grant have included drug workers, social workers, probation officers, youth workers and other workers in non-statutory agencies. The average age of the recipients was 24 years; the average grant was for £38; administration costs were 1.7 per cent.

With the original £2200 spent, in June 1992 the fund received a further £2000 from the Drugs Prevention Initiative. Particular efforts have been made in this second round to publicise the fund to youth workers and to attract younger recipients. Currently the average age of recipients is 18 years; the average grant is £21; administration costs are 0.9 per cent.

Is it a success? Overall 197 clients have benefited through applications from 26 workers. Feedback from both groups suggests that the regular availability of small amounts of money quickly is of immense value. New hobbies and interests, independence, improvement in quality of life, training and real employment are the results of the modest help provided. Reports of reduced drug use, new drug-free lifestyles, or of sustaining abstinence and refusing drug offers, show that this initiative can promote drug prevention in a low-cost, pragmatic and viable form.

Sometimes colleagues from other areas are dismissive of the Home Office Drugs Prevention Initiative, seeing it as essentially cosmetic. Perhaps by adopting a proactive approach, talking with their local team about what they feel would be useful within a broad framework of drugs prevention, they too may get given a magic wand! ■

by

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