

Small is beautiful and Scottish

THERE are 22 Action Teams in Scotland based on a mixture of local authority and health board boundaries, with 20 out of the 22 covering both drugs and alcohol. In addition to individual teams there is the Association of Drug Action Teams in Scotland (DAT Association). The Association was established about 6 years ago and exists to work on behalf of DATs whilst respecting the autonomy of individual teams. Contrary to speculation down south, the Association is not the 'Scottish DAT trade union'. We are actually funded by the Scottish Executive.

COLLECTIVE CONCERNS

A benefit of the Association has been the ability of teams to come together, share information and collectively identify common issues of concern. Last year the Association undertook its first annual priority setting meeting. The overall aim of this exercise was to ensure the continued development into a more pro-active body that both supports the work of local DATs while contributing and influencing the national agenda on identified collective areas of interest.

At a strategic level an important development has been the creation of the Association strategy review sub-group. With an update of the Scottish Drugs Strategy pending, the Association decided it wanted to take an active role in informing and shaping the debate of any revised Scottish strategy. As a result a short life sub-group of DAT chairs was formed. The group has now produced a 'strategy starter paper'. In this we identified five areas of highest priority, these being;

- Strengthening of the Communities Pillar
- Strategies for Reducing Drug Related Deaths
- Refocusing of the Young People's Pillar
- Provision of Treatment, Rehabilitation and Harm Reduction Services
- Greater focus on Employability and Inclusion

Each of the above headings has a number of action priorities identified within it. Over the coming months Association representatives will be presenting our views to Scottish Executive officials and Ministers.

EUROPEAN DIMENSION

Over the last year our, a European dimension has been added to the benchmarking of our work programme.

Previously, we have reported on the tensions within the sprawling bureaucracies which make up the drugs 'industry' in England. But in Scotland, writes **Justine Walker**, size has been one of the key ingredients for creating successful partnerships between Scottish Executive departments and Drug Action Teams

The Association, supported by the Scottish Drugs Forum, undertook a study visit to the Netherlands in February. A group of ten participants mostly comprising of DAT chairs and officers spent three days examining how Holland structures its drug services. One of the key differences we found was that Dutch drug services have been developed in each region into one over-arching non-government agency. These agencies have responsibility for every stage of service delivery from outreach provision, methadone provision, detox/residential programmes through to employability initiatives. Subsequently, we have identified a number of aspects for further consideration and discussion within Scotland – in particular self-help pathways through the internet, the use of mobile dispensing sites for methadone, and how the use of consumption rooms might help in reducing drug related deaths.

Our European theme will also be continued at the

Justine Walker is National Officer for the Association of Drug Action Teams.



Ian Ross, Chair of the Association

“Communication from the centre comes primarily through the Substance Misuse Division. There are a number of ministers and government departments involved in drug issues, but they tend to work through the link civil servants in the SMD so we don’t have that confusion of different civil servants from different backgrounds making contact. That’s both with The Association and individual DATs because we have made it very clear that the Association is not there to be a conduit for information from the Executive. We don’t assume that we can speak for all DATs unless that’s been agreed”.

2nd Scottish Executive/ DAT Association annual conference this October. This will enable Scottish action teams to gain greater insight into the range of European service provisions so that we can identify where we are delivering well and where we might incorporate European good practice. The joint conference, which is targeted at Action Team members and key partners, will this year include a session titled ‘Taking Stock and Future Priorities – a house debate’. In this session we will look at priorities and challenges for the Association in developing effective responses to drug misuse.

A RANGE OF INITIATIVES

Other developments in the past year have seen the Association commissioning a Training Needs Analysis of staff employed by Drug and Alcohol Action Teams. The TNA found that the most common sentiment of staff entering into Action Team support posts was a feeling of being dumped at the deep end. As such over the coming year we plan to put in place a generic framework of induction for newly appointed staff. The aim of this is to build on local host agency induction arrangements by providing a national overview to Action Team structures, aims, accountability arrangements and national partners.

One of our most remote communities, Shetland Drug and Alcohol Action Team, was at the forefront of the Association developing a Remote/Rural DAT Association sub-group. The group, which is in the early stages of development, has a remit for the exchange of ideas and good practice across remote/rural communities. The other Association sub-group currently in existence is the employability sub-group. This group is particularly focusing on strategic issues around ‘pathways into employment’. Another highly important area in the Association’s work plan is concerned with Family Support development issues.

An underpinning element for much of the work of Action Teams in Scotland has been the Effective Interventions Unit. The evidence-based approach that has been adopted by this unit will likely impact considerably on how the Association takes forward next year’s work programme. ■

Terms of Reference for the Association together with our work programme, European Study visit report and other documents can be accessed online from www.drugmisuse.isdscotland.org/dat/datassoc/datassoc.htm

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