



## **Aberdeen City Alcohol, Drug & Blood-Borne Virus Forum**

### **Report to the ADP Meeting of 20<sup>th</sup> May 2016**

#### **Introduction**

The Aberdeen City Alcohol, Drug & BBV Forum (ADBBVF) aims to co-ordinate the views of service users, service providers and communities within Aberdeen with regards to all aspects of the substance misuse agenda. The forum use a conversation café style format to discuss priority topics with communities and frontline staff to provide a mechanism for gathering views in a dynamic way, feeding these views back to the Alcohol & Drug Partnership with the aim of enhancing the development of responses to local issues.

#### **Forum event – 26<sup>th</sup> April 2016: Young People, Preventing Alcohol and Drug Related Harm**

Taking into account ADP priority on early intervention and prevention, the recent forum event focussed on how we can prevent young people developing problems with alcohol and drugs. Three case studies were presented, representing young people from different backgrounds, experiencing different types of risk in relation to alcohol and drugs. We are grateful to colleagues from third sector, education and Social Work who joined the working group to assist with this, ensuring the case studies were based on actual local people. The conversation café event was attended by around 50 attendees from a range of interested members of the community including representatives from; a wide range of third sector organisations, NHS, Social Work, Residential Services, First Aid Responders, Education, Housing and the Youth Forum, including others with a keen interest in the alcohol, drugs and BBV agenda.

Feedback from the event participants was very positive, with 85% rating the event as 'good' or 'very good'. The conversation café format and the informal opportunity to network was also rated highly by attendees. Some feedback suggested that attendees would have liked to see more information regarding what specific services are available for young people which will be taken into account for future events.

Conversation Café discussions were asked to consider each case study in turn and discuss what could help each young person and what could prevent harms escalating.

### **Forum conversation – Identified Themes: What can we do to prevent harms?**

A strong theme which emerged was the importance of building trusting relationships with each young person. It was also highlighted that all professionals need to start by asking what the young person's view of the situation was and what they are looking for help with, rather than as professionals making assumptions regarding what needs to be 'fixed'.

When considering young people from a prevention perspective, it was repeatedly stated that harmful use of alcohol or drugs is usually a symptom of an underlying problem or concern. Responses by all need to take this into account and not just deal with the situation but seek to understand reasons for the harmful substance use and aim to address these issues.

It was noted through the discussions that mental wellbeing and resilience were seen as critical to whether a young person was likely to develop an enduring problem with substances. Support for young people with a focus on 'increasing capacity to reduce vulnerability' was seen as important.

It was also noted that young people with a history of trauma and loss in their childhood were seen as at greater risk of using alcohol and drugs harmfully. It was noted that these young people need easy access to support to help develop their resilience and reduce their vulnerability as an important preventative measure.

Key transitions in the lives of young people such as moving into foster care, parents separating, exams, going to college etc. can escalate the risk of harmful substance use. Support needs to be available for young people at these key transition points which recognise this risk and intervene to reduce future harms.

The case study discussions all demonstrated there were key opportunities to intervene at an early stage with these young people which had the potential to dramatically reduce the escalation of substance use. When appropriate interventions were not delivered however, the potential for escalation of harms was significant, creating longer term, entrenched problems for the young person.

The importance of early (timely) professional intervention was therefore noted as important in that we need to ensure the workforce is skilled to note these key early opportunities and intervene appropriately.

It was felt that opportunities to intervene and support youngsters at an earlier stage were sometimes lost with a focus on 'high tariff' young people who are already known to services. Whilst there was no solution offered, the need to put resource

up-stream to prevent young people becoming 'high tariff' was a strong message from the discussions.

In order to improve opportunities to intervene early, it was suggested that access to some elements of local specialist provision should be improved with a specific emphasis on providing community outreach based and flexible support to attract young people into services.

### **Conclusions from the event**

- ✓ All services/supports engaging with young people need to focus on developing good mental and emotional resilience in young people as this is a key preventative measure
- ✓ To intervene effectively, all responses need to ensure the young person's views are a central focal point for decision making
- ✓ Future service developments for young people around alcohol and drugs need to demonstrate an early intervention/prevention focus
- ✓ There is a need to identify capacity for supporting young people at transition points where potential risks are increased
- ✓ Up-skilling the Named Person and other key generic professionals to identify risk/signs and intervene appropriately is a key priority
- ✓ There is a need to ensure support is available to assist universal professionals when young people are identified and require additional support
- ✓ Specialist services need to have an outreach element to their provision to ensure young people at risk are encouraged to engage with support

### **Details of Next Event**

The next conversation café event will take place in August with a focus on how we learn from tragedies to reduce drug related deaths. This event is planned to coincide with national Overdose Awareness Day on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2016.

Luan Grugeon  
Forum Chair  
4<sup>th</sup> May 2016