

Clonmel Community Conversations on Substance Use

Community Groups, Clubs and Organisations Session

The following is a summary of contributions made by representatives of community groups, clubs and organisations in the Community Conversation on the 25th October 2023, Minella Hotel, Clonmel. After introducing themselves and their business interests, participants were asked to respond to 3 broad questions.

1. Share your organisation's experience of substance use

There was agreement that drugs are an issue in Clonmel but there was mixed experience of substance use by those attending the workshop; some had little first hand experience and others had a great deal.

Experience with those involved or immediately impacted

- Club member passed away after taking a substance which impacted the Club and made us aware of the issue and use the Healthy Clubs Initiative Policy for Substance Misuse.
- Young people are dying and this is commonly related to drug use
- Age range – concerned parents of substance users
- Previous club members (players) have been found in possession of drugs.
- Impacts on club players whose parents are engaged in substance misuse. Children are presenting poorly kept, turning up consistently late and/or tired.
- What are the consequences of drug use from the night before
- Ostracised in a group due to drug use, people withdraw. How do we support their inclusion?
- Support young people - being aware of their background
- Seen the shame and dread of people using substances; physical fears of no money/ owing money and suicide as a way out of drug-related deaths (less so with alcohol)
- Consistency is needed for support – some users that are imprisoned for a short period come back and use substances again/ further and this can be very negative on their bodies
- Users have multiple problems they have to face
- Family support – families are nearly in as much need
- Families need explanations
- Generational effects of substance misuse
- Withdrawal from family
- Changes in friend groups
- Change in behaviour and attitudes
- Declining school grades
- Anti-social behaviour
- Kids can't settle into their environment
- Some kids don't have any schools at all

Experience of organisations, clubs and groups

- The club is on the main bypass near the new playground. The club grounds become a potential trading ground for drug dealing.
- Giving people a chance – some organisations have a bias towards them
- Drug paraphernalia found on the ground
- Trauma impacts on other club members
- Trying to get information for others
- Generational users coming for support
- As the group carries out their activities, they regularly meet those with drug-related problems such as aggression and violence in the home
- Provide a soup kitchen

Experience around town

- We find syringes around the town, tin foil and other drug related waste.
- Drug use has become more prevalent and is intimidating, antisocial behaviour is putting people off Clonmel
- Dealers and users appear to have no fear but the public are afraid
- Problem areas
 - In the Lane across the road from Penneys, at the back of the Clonmel Arms around derelict buildings, people have been intimidated.
 - The lane beside Mahers Chemist is a known dealing/ using spot.
 - People shouting from the Clonmel Arms at another person on the street
 - People keep gaining entry.
 - At the back of Mary Street Car Park, people are climbing over the closed gate and wall of AIB bank.
 - The lane at Fitzgeralds Menswear
 - Drug dealing on Blueway
 - On the grounds of Old St. Mary's Church.
 - At the apartments on the Quay (yellow building) and across the road, drugs are handed out windows
- It's everywhere – witness to drug dealing in open spaces and in daylight. See in laneways, queues of people (12) waiting for their fix
- There is a stigma to the area
- Fear of violence [amongst public]
- No fear on part of dealers and users
- Lack of Ferryhouse now means gangs and nowhere for youth to go, so they join together
- Home and housing environment impacts on the kids

Particular need to focus on children and young people

- Need to keep kids in school and college, keep them away from gangs and safe, off the streets
- Get young people involved at an early age and keep them away from the drug scene
- [young] people are using drugs regularly
- Introducing meals for kids does help them

General observations

- How do we approach it? Being aware, knowing how to respond, having a trusting relationship?
- Hidden drug use – normalised
- No legal protection around drug use
- People who are convicted come back to the same community as heroes
- Money is a big bar to immediate help
- Substance Use and Mental Health services/ supports are separate and need to talk to one another
- Blame is useless
- Who do users listen to? What messages get through and impact on substance use in Clonmel? What supports, programmes and policies work?
- There is a culture of drug use and the drug of choice appears to be cocaine
- There is real fear that drug use is now the norm and that it devastates families
- Hard to challenge [drug related] activities
- Can see deprivation from the start

2. What are the strengths and assets we have in our organisations that can help us to respond?

Our people

- The people involved in the club are invested; coaches provide stability and see people 2-3 times/week.
- Volunteers of the clubs have the interest of members at heart.

- Broad range of people in clubs with different backgrounds, professions – Gards, teachers, etc. – can be linked in
- Leaders are passionate and invest in the youth
- Youngsters will tell you exactly what drugs are out there

Our organisations themselves

- People watching/ observing what is happening on the ground – see the victims and dealers.
- More people have talk in clubs about substance issues – normalised conversation. The GAA as a national organisation is providing supports on these issues.
- Clubs/ groups could be referred to supports for people to services for substance use supports.
- Some organisations have resources; people with relevant experience, social workers, probation officers, etc.
- By reaching out and letting [drug users] know that support is there
- Clean up work – litterpickers and gloves
- Supply equipment needed to get involved so that it is inclusive and accessible
- Support involvement in the activity beyond 18 years of age
- Skill and team-focused; practice teaches patience and discipline
- Trained expertise within clubs
- Social media platforms of clubs/ groups can share

Our approach

- Children/ young people feel comfortable and build relationships.
- Openness around drug use, empathy and understanding
- Group encourages respect and instils mutual values that are maintained by leaders.
- Provide a safe and nurturing environment
- Ask why if they don't turn up regularly [take an interest and concern for members]
- Respectful as to where people are at
- Provide a nurturing "family" experience
- Someone they look up to/ good mentors give young people attention, ask their opinions, give them respect and responsibility.

Specific measures in place/ actions carried out

- Healthy Clubs Initiative, helps to develop Drug Policy
- Clubs can share information, be a platform for discussion; on mental wellbeing, etc.
- Child Protection Officers
- A coach may notice first changes with a young person/ child (or adult)... and are/ should be trained in the next steps of child protection.
- Talks John Leahy provides in the community and schools
- Public information session (more are needed)
- Build relationships with other agencies – C-saw, counselling services, etc.
- There is no inter-agency approach to help people on the ground
- Take part in initiatives in town – light Darkness into Light
- Awareness of other organisations to seek help/ advice
- Child Welfare Officers, Health & Wellbeing Officer
- Inclusion programmes
- Relevant community and youth services provided by these community organisations & their strengths:
 - One-to-one assistance from drugs worker (post only filled in last 6 months)
 - Outreach worker
 - Family support group with qualified substance counsellors
 - Resources are limited
 - Do people know that we are even here? (need to advertise!)

- Arrest referrals
- Really working, open group providing a safe place to discuss outside of substance use e.g. solicitor/ child access/ budget, practical supports
- Mentoring works well
- Independence – not having to ask anyone else can we open, etc.
- Owning our own premises
- Counselling services, with good turnaround
- Make great contacts and provide signposting
- Confidentiality and trust – Garda vetted
- Lots don't know us
- Downside is a fear of counselling
- Youth volunteers aren't used because of need for Garda vetting [of others] but if a work around was found, this would be possible and a way to get them involved in activities
- Designated Child Protection Officers – so young person has someone to talk to. Long term generational interest in families
- Local print media provides opportunity for advocacy, education and a call to arms to catalyse positive actions, building community, sparking conversations, presenting different ideas e.g. that addiction is a symptom not a cause, leading to changes in perception, promoting positive projects such as recovery cafés, etc.
- School meals
- School diversion programme (Wilderness) if they drop out – is successful
- Clonmel Training Centre
- Get more information highlighted and out to them [organisations] to know that they're there.
- Start early to steer them towards clubs, groups, etc.
- [National] policies in bigger groups are good support

Particular focus on young people

- Keep them [children and young people] busy
- Aisling Centre in Tipperary Town is very good

Challenges

- There was a very difficult time during Covid
- Volunteers were lost during Covid, so were community Gardaí in the estates which had a good impact and built relationships with the kids, etc
- In the past (18yrs ago) there was a great initiative in secondary school provides information to the kids, being very frank and honest with them. Delivered over 4-5 weeks in second year.

3. What are the actions you'd like to be able to do as an organisation? And what help might you need with this?

Awareness, Education & Training

- Ongoing, relevant education – NOT a once off – for coaches and leaders from Under 5s and upwards, targeted at the audience and indicating trends (what is being used, how, etc.)
- Online modules for education, with chat functions for confidentiality
- Some clubs/ groups have not had this conversation [about substance misuse] and they could/should
- Raise awareness on the issues
- Safe Talk in clubs
- Talk to parents – John Leahy – how to reach parents in substance misuse
- Run education talks/ awareness training
- Find out about services in town – we are unaware of services/ resources and signpost support agencies
- We gather information and this is wasted if not fed into the community

- [Community] groups to have that conversation with members of their group and to learn how to do that to create a space for people who are suffering
- Need organisations to visit us as many as possible
- Safe Talk #Programme (HSE) – more people need to be trained and this rolled out to all groups and clubs so that a person in need has someone to go to in each group.
- Mental health 1st aid
- Provide more information
- Send information, via young people to their homes
- Panel of experts available to groups for talks/ advice
- Talk and education is important
- More information and benchmarking against places where [responses to substance use problems across a community] have worked well
- Use programmes (Icelandic model) to progress Clonmel's problems

Common (or shared) structure/ approach

- A structured system (like the one provided by the GAA, or perhaps from the Quality of Life Alliance in Clonmel) to include:
 - Signs of use and how to spot these – not assuming use, as it could be another health issue
 - Where do you go for help
 - How to have a conversation with a person involved in misuse
 - Referral service knowledge
- Need a programme for schools
- Need a link between Mental Health and Substance Misuse services for positive change – this needs to be a policy change/ If the right people raise this issue then change could happen

Communication, Co-operation and Collaboration

- Develop and participate in channels of communication on this issue.
- Share resources across clubs – work together
- Partnering with other clubs to share resources/ policies across the community
- Networking and trust among groups, clubs and organisations
- Partnership between expertise and those on the ground
- Link between mental health and drug use needs to be recognised in joined-up service provision

Actions

- Involve youth volunteers, if support systems are in place
- Finding out the skills of our members, professional backgrounds, etc. and gain more advice, knowledge..
- A Charter clubs can sign up to, publish signposts in clubs, safe talk
- Develop drug policy (workshop available in January)
- Talk to someone who you can relate to – personal stories
- Street workers and youth workers at night to engage with people using substances. This is a paid role and would prevent interaction with Gardaí. They need protection as well – it worked in Glasgow. These workers can ascertain if people are homeless, what advice and support they need and point them in the right direction.
- Directory of services – for signposting
- Celebrate and showcase all our clubs, organisations and community groups – a bit like a college open day for their clubs to encourage people to have a positive involvement
- Hearing community project ideas and putting these into local media to bring others in and inform others
- Groups engage with print media, showcasing of media training and informing through organisations newsletters
- Tell the story of lived experience and recovery – going beyond trauma – with a caution not to glamorise this

- Create a safe environment – lower competition
- More visibility of people in recovery to start conversations e.g. monthly barbershop with trained barbers, in recovery, offering free haircuts
- Drive Programme in response to drug intimidation
- Someone to call to the door and provide help/ support for families
- Somewhere for kids to go to feel safe to talk – and access counselling
- CCTV in estates
- Like to take back control of our own areas – get rid of the fear of drugees
- Liaison officers in the schools is a great idea
- After school initiatives and Foróige type programmes
- Use the experts to guide and support those in drug situations
- Looking for solutions and interventions around debt due to drug use {Drive Programme focuses on this and being trained to deal with it}
- Volunteer initiatives require support

Approach

- Culture is hard to change – celebrate wins, note losses, etc.
- Like to remove stigma around mental health
- Model healthy relationships within our organisations
- Include and value everyone
- Treat everyone with respect as a norm
- Keep the kids occupied and busy

Funding & resources

- Funding for services
- Increased resources for substance misuse – split over CHO3 and CHO5
- Clubs and community organisations only work well with volunteers and adequate resources

Other

- [widespread] Community policing
- Want to do more but mentors are voluntary and there are limits to what they can be asked to do. It is already hard to get volunteers.
- Lack of consequences for young people/ society means there is no deterrent, and it is so widespread
- Frustration around services/ hours services are available
- Intimidation is a huge problem where someone has got into debt – need to address this