



New Drug Trend Awareness Programme Scottish Borders

Executive Summary

Over the previous two years a new generation of New Psychoactive Substances (NPS), sometimes known as 'legal highs', had become widely available across Scotland and more locally in the Scottish Borders.

Up until 2010 there were no incidents in the Scottish Borders involving NPS that had come to the attention of the local partnerships, however during 2011/12 there were 25 admissions to the Borders General Hospital where patients had admitted taking NPS. Staff from drug and youth services also raised a need for additional information about these new substances.

The initiative consisted of a media campaign over the festive period and outreach work within licensed premises and at educational establishments. A drug resource pack was developed by Crew (Drug service based in Edinburgh) for those working with young people. Frontline staff in substance misuse services and primary care teams were trained in emerging trends in the NPS 'market' and how to respond to people using these substances. Information and intelligence was also monitored through a local drug trend monitoring forum.

The initiative led to a significant increase in knowledge and awareness of NPS for frontline staff and young people and a reduction in the number of NPS-related hospital admissions in the Scottish Borders however it is not possible to quantify to what extent the reduction in hospital admissions is directly related to the work of the project. Improved relationships between partners involved in the project have been reported; including substance misuse services, licensees and Police.

This project won the 'Prevention and Problem Solving' category for the Safer Communities Awards 2013.

Background and Aims

From 2011, there was an increase in the number of NPS incidents in the Scottish Borders – 25 hospital admissions during 2011/12 where patients admitted taking NPS.

Concerns were expressed about this unheard of emerging trend from frontline drug and youth services. There was also a belief amongst young people that as these drugs were marketed as "legal highs" they were considered to be safe. These concerns led to the development of an educational media and training programme aiming to reduce NPS hospital admissions and increase knowledge of this issue with frontline staff.

A multi-agency steering group (Alcohol & Drugs Tasking & Coordinating Group - ADTAC) was developed to implement the programme. This group determined the materials and approaches to be used in the media initiative and training programme and consulted with frontline staff and service users to ensure maximum impact with the target groups.

The initiative highlighted information about NPS, consequences of their use and how to engage with and treat an individual who may have taken NPS. The media campaign focused on licensed premises and educational establishments and covered NPS use as well as other prevention messages around sexual health and alcohol consumption.

The initiative aimed to ensure frontline staff in substance misuse and youth services had up to date knowledge of emerging drug trends and how to manage their increased availability and use in the local area. At the same time it aimed to make young people more aware of the risks associated with NPS use and reduce hospital admissions resulting from NPS use in the Scottish Borders.

Activities

Media and Outreach

A poster and media campaign in the local press and radio was delivered over the festive period within licensed premises, with educational establishments and events like Borders Festivals also targeted. 750 of these posters (see below) were distributed and had information about NPS as well as local substance misuse services available. Outreach work within the local licensed premises around NPS and sexual health also took place.



Training

Training was delivered to 388 specialist substance misuse service staff, primary care teams and other frontline services on emerging trends and how to effectively respond to, treat and engage with people using NPS. Four of these trained staff undertook training to allow them to peer educate a wider group of frontline service staff. For less specialised frontline staff, a seminar was delivered to 93 people. A drug training resource pack was developed for those working with young people through Community Learning and Development (CLD) and schools. Twelve of these resource packs were distributed, and between this and additional training and outreach events, over 700 young people were engaged.

Trend Monitoring

A Drug Trend Monitoring Group (DTMG) was created which has local and national representation. This is a multiagency group established to monitor trends, scale and patterns of use of new and illicit drugs along with any associated risks and harms identified. The DTMG also provides an opportunity to strengthen links and build relationships between a wide range of partners, spanning statutory and third sector organisations both within and

outwith Borders. In providing regular opportunities to meet and discuss emerging substances and trends there is potential for better health outcomes, reduction in harm and greater efficiency in delivering service, activities and training.

An 'intelligence system' was also created within the Borders General Hospital (the only hospital in Scottish Borders with an emergency department) where anonymised information about patients who had been admitted to the wards reported using NPS was captured and reported to the DTMG. In addition to this, information is shared with the DTMG from a national perspective to allow any emerging trends or health alerts to be circulated to the group for onward distribution to frontline services where appropriate.

Impact

A reduction in the number of admissions, and therefore cost to partners such as the NHS, was noted, with no NPS-related hospital admissions between January and April 2013. Using SCSN's cost-benefit toolkit the cost of an average NPS incident is £2180, with NPS incidents in 2011 and 2012 costing partners £54,500. Spending £6500 on the initiative may have contributed to £0 spend on NPS related admissions in the first three months of 2013.

Over the festive period there were 56 hits to the website – using Quick Response (QR) barcodes on the posters allowed an aspect of the media campaign impact to be monitored. Feedback was also sought from licensees and student vice president who were keen to be involved in raising awareness.

All training sessions and seminars were evaluated, with anywhere between 97% and 100% of delegates reporting they had 'good to excellent' knowledge of new drugs and emerging trends following the training compared to 50% to 90% rating their knowledge as 'poor or fair' prior to the training. Delegates also reported an increase in their level of confidence to work with NPS users and a rise in their knowledge of recognising the effects of NPS.

93% of young people who received an input reported an increase in knowledge of NPS following the seminar which would allow them to make more informed choices as well as an increased awareness of support services available.

Wider impact was noted within the partnership, with partners working better and closer together since the initiative began. This included new links with the Statement of Opinion Unit and creation of a network (DTMG) between substance misuse service providers, NHS, the Statement of Opinion Unit (now under Police Scotland) and local authority. ADTAC, the multi-agency steering group has been sustained to continue working on substance misuse prevention and education and initiate any actions emerging from the DTMG.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The impact of the media campaign was monitored by gathering the number of website hits resulting from the QR barcode on the posters. Feedback was also sought from licensees and student vice president who were keen to be involved in raising awareness.

All training and seminar attendees were asked a number of role-specific questions after the session about their knowledge of NPS, confidence in recognising the signs of NPS, confidence in working with users and availability of speciality services.

Regular meetings of the multi-agency steering group were held and an 'action tracker' developed to monitor the implementation and delivery of the initiative, and informal feedback gathered from this group to inform future developments. The identification of lead officers within the Police and Alcohol and Drug Partnership (ADP) helped to coordinate actions.

Lessons Learnt and Sustainability

Information from the seminar evaluations indicated that more role-specific workshops may have been beneficial.

In terms of sustainability, the DTMG will continue to monitor trends and provide appropriate information to local media. For 2013/14, the group have recognised the need to expand on reporting arrangements on prevalence of NPS. ADTAC have continued to work together to sustain a partnership which works on other prevention and early intervention activities around drug and alcohol misuse. Both of these will contribute to keeping NPS knowledge up to date within the Scottish Borders and contribute to Ministerial Priorities for 2013/14

Resources

- Funding:** The local Police prevention fund and Alcohol and Drug Partnership (ADP) contributed specific funding - £6,500.
The police, fire and rescue service, ADP, local authority, Heriot Watt University, substance misuse services and licensees all contributed in-kind support.
- Partners:** ADP, Lothian and Borders Police (as was), Scottish Borders Council, Drug and alcohol services, Heriot Watt University and Borders College

Outcomes

- National**
- 4. Our young people are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.
 - 6. We live longer, healthier lives.
 - 9. We live our lives safe from crime, disorder and danger.
 - 11. We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others.

- Local**
- Alcohol and Drug Partnership Outcomes:
- Prevalence: Fewer adults and children are drinking or using drugs at levels or patterns that are damaging to themselves or others
 - Community Safety: Communities and individuals are safe from alcohol and drug related offending and anti-social behaviour
 - Health: People are healthier and experience fewer risks as a result of alcohol and drug use
- Police Scotland Scottish Borders Local Authority Local Police Plan:
- Reducing the harmful community impact of alcohol and drugs

Practice Note Information

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