

Scottish Drugs Forum / DAT Association / Scottish Executive

Outline Proposal for National Communities Conference

Background

The Scottish Executive attaches a high priority towards engaging local communities in its response to the drugs problem. In 2001 the Executive held a national conference that was attended by representatives from the community and from national and local agencies. This created an arena that allowed all participants to explore a wide range of issues together.

The Executive stated there was a commitment to ensuring that the conference was of lasting value and that the issues raised would be addressed by the appropriate agencies.

Since then a number of developments have taken place relating to issues raised within the conference:

- A Practical Guide to Community Engagement and a Practical Guide to Setting up Family Support services has been produced from the Effective Interventions Unit
- A communications co-ordinator has been appointed to work with National Agencies and local Drug and Alcohol Action Teams.
- The Scottish Drugs Forum has been provided with core funding to continue service user participation in developing services and attending relevant forums and to develop and implement a community engagement strategy.

The Scottish Drugs Forum community engagement strategy, which is in its third year, has undertaken varied tasks. Examples of the tasks we have undertaken are:

- A needs assessment of community groups across Scotland
- Compiling and maintaining an up to date database of community groups
- Working alongside Drug and Alcohol Action Teams to develop community engagement strategies
- Linking the work being undertaken by community groups to local strategies
- Ensuring groups are supported, utilising local resources more effectively and providing advice and assistance as required
- Providing training for communities
- Production of information for community groups

- Developing and strengthening community drug forums
- Sharing good practice
- Working with SIPs
- Undertaking consultations with communities
- Supporting the development of the National Family Support Network
- Assisting in developing family support groups
- Providing networking opportunities between groups
- Attendance and input at relevant forums, seminars and conferences

The work that has been undertaken by the Scottish Drugs Forum has been both challenging and rewarding. It is an extremely complex and varied area of work and our experience of work at a local level has demonstrated that it would be beneficial to share this nationally.

From the needs assessment that was undertaken in 2001 with community groups it was identified that knowledge of DAAT's was inconsistent, and limited. Although there has been a lot of work developing this area, a community engagement conference would assist in:

- Informing DAATs as to the benefits of engaging with Communities
- Providing DAAT's with examples of good working models of community engagement
- Ways in which communities can be involved in decision making and action planning
- Begin to identify support needs for DAAT's to undertake community engagement
- Assisting DAAT's understanding there involvement in community planning partnerships

Proposal

The proposal is to host a one day conference primarily for DAAT workers to assist the in understanding the importance of community engagement and look at the benefits of engaging with communities. It is envisaged that there would be approximately 120 places available with about 70% being allocated to DAAT workers and constituent agencies. The remaining places would be taken up primarily by community groups, civil servants and support staff.

The conference would be a mixture of speakers, workshops, and parallel sessions on specific subjects. Issues arising from the conference could then be used to direct the work of DAAT's at a local and national level.

Aim

The aim of the conference is on how to engage DAAT's more in community involvement and to provide an arena to highlight the issues affecting both sides and to examine best ways of addressing such issues. The conference would aim to provide a mechanism of putting communities higher up the agenda in relation to involvement in decision making.

The conference would provide a platform for highlighting some key areas of best practice in partnership working between communities and decision makers.

The conference would also provide a way of informing DAAT's about their involvement in Community Planning Partnerships

Potential topic areas include:

- Looking at what impact 'community planning' will have on communities, forums, and DAATs
- Examples of best practice relating to working with and involving communities, and highlighting resources available
- Getting support and funding – where to go / what to ask
- Engaging DAAT's in community involvement
- Using evaluation within community based projects
- How to involve 'hard to reach groups (ie service users, youth etc)
- Support needs of DAAT's in developing models of community engagement

Partners

The conference would be run in partnership with Scottish Drugs Forum, The DAT Association, the Scottish Executive and key individuals.

SDF's role would be in facilitating and organisation of the event. The DAT Association and Scottish Executive would provide input in the development and structure of the event. It would also be expected that some level of support would be given to management of the conference through the provision of staff support.

It is proposed that a steering group be established that would consist of key individuals from across Scotland along with staff from

the above organisations. The remit of the steering group would be to construct the format and content of the conference and develop best ways of promotion to the intended target audience.

Timescale

It is proposed to hold the conference in September or October 2004. Key tasks relating to the delivery of the conference include:

- Establishment of steering group (June 2004)
- Agreement of programme content and format (July 2004)
- Promotion of conference (July – August 2004)

Costs

An outline figure of between £7000/£10000 has been proposed. This is based upon such similar events that the similar events hosted by the Scottish Drugs Forum.

Next Stages

The main issue to take forward is regarding the funding of the conference and clarifying the key tasks for the steering group to take forward. It would be useful for a meeting to be arranged for staff from SDF, the DAAT Association and the Scottish Executive to discuss the best way forward.