

# Forth Valley Substance Action Team – Involving Communities

## 30 November 2004 ~ Summary Report

### Introduction

Forth Valley has a long history of supporting community involvement, and in recent years the scale and nature of this involvement has developed considerably.

The Forth Valley Substance Action Team (FVSAT) was initially approached by a number of community groups who felt that by hosting a workshop type event they could share with others practical advice as to how to go about setting up and running a community group. It was also felt that such an event would be beneficial to those employed to provide community support.

As a number of the local groups have had and continue to receive requests for information from other areas it was felt there would be a demand for such an event. The groups involved believed that a potential additional benefit of the workshop would be an improvement in both the understanding of the role of community groups locally and as well as identifying ways of improving the level of support available to drug users, their carers and their families.

In planning the event, the decision was taken to run the event as a free event in order to increase the opportunity of smaller community group members to attend. The event took place on 30 November 2004 at the Grange Manor Hotel in Grangemouth and involved five community groups.

When registering for the event, participants were asked what they were expecting to get out the event. This information was collated to ensure a focus for the day in meeting the needs of most of the participants. It is hoped that the positive feedback received on the day was in some way attributable to this initial planning technique

### Structure of Event

The opening session of the day was chaired by Helen Munro Director of Community Services for Stirling Council. The first presenter, Agnes Douglas, project manager from LADA (Locals Against Drug Abuse) outlined how the group developed from 'kitchen table' to 'made it' and the many challenges faced along the way. Derek Sharp followed Agnes and spoke very emotionally to a silenced audience on his journey from drug user to organiser of the service users group. Derek spoke about how the community approach in Forth Valley enabled him to get support when he needed it, on his own doorstep, from organisations he knew and trusted.

The event planners decided on a series of 4 workshops based around the themes that best reflected their (and many other groups) development. Hence four key themes emerged

- ◆ Kitchen table
- ◆ Church Hall
- ◆ Loan of an office
- ◆ 'Made it'

Within each workshop at each stage, the participants were invited to discuss how best to support groups and each stage and to share experiences of their own particular group's development. Participants were asked how things could be done better in future and how mistakes made in Forth Valley and their own home area could be prevented in future. At each stage in the process, from 'kitchen table' to 'made it', the groups had a number of key points to discuss.

In workshop 1 'kitchen table' participants were asked to focus on

Why did you start?

Where did you go for help?

Who did you find?

Why another group?

What was lacking in existing provision?

How do you find other people in same situation / same need / same concern

In workshop 2 'church hall' participants particularly focussed on the development of the service and discussed development of constitutions, management committees, frequency of meetings etc.

Workshop 3 'loan of an office' asked participants to reflect and share experiences with regard to developing policies and procedures, recruitment of volunteers, the need for reporting structures and supervision and perhaps more importantly getting publicity for the organisation.

Workshop 4 'made it' asked participants to discuss and reflect on sustainability and funding issues as well as the legal responsibilities with regard to the employment of staff etc.

### Participants

The notice of conference was sent out across Scotland via various sources including DAT (Drug Action Team) Association, local authorities, SDF (Scottish Drugs Forum) and health boards. A total of 95 people from throughout Scotland registered, including community members, workers, strategists and volunteers. The conference was addressed by Cathy Peattie MSP; sadly no one from the Scottish Executive could attend. This was disappointing as the Minister for Justice, in her announcement of additional resources for drug misuse, highlighted the important role DAT's have to play in supporting community development and to demonstrate quality and improvements in service delivery and commissioning.

### Evaluation

Participant feedback proved that the event was worthwhile. Several participants were impressed with the Forth Valley approach and indicated that this was an approach they would take back to their own area. 58 feedback forms were received with 52 reporting satisfaction with this approach. The workshops themselves were also highly regarded by participants with almost all participants rating the 4 workshops useful and helpful to them in their own area or field. It is perhaps worthwhile noting that where participants provided a negative feedback comment with regard to the usefulness of the event it tended to be from participants who were either from a statutory setting or had been asked to attend by their organisation despite drugs and community development not being a key element in their job

### Conclusion

The event was a great success with Forth Valley community groups requesting that a similar event be held annually. Most participants commented on their evaluation feedback form. Almost all of these comments were constructive, and helpful. Forth Valley SAT wish to acknowledge all the community members and participants who gave up hours of their own time to plan, participate and share experiences. Without the active participation of community members the event would not have been as successful.