ESF Peer Mentoring Scheme extended

ESF Peer Mentoring Wales, which helps individuals with substance misuse histories back into employment and education, has been granted an additional £1.3m by the Welsh European Funding Office. This will allow the project to run for a further 6 months, to March 2014.

Over 9,000 people have now benefited from the knowledge and experience of ‘Peer Mentors’ through the project, which operates across Wales. The project has been successful in helping 850 people with substance misuse histories into employment and an additional 800 into further education. As well as re-entering work and education, participants have reported increases in confidence, gained new life-skills and developed supportive relationships. All of these outcomes are believed to reduce the risk of future relapse into substance misuse.

Included within the Scheme extension is the Employment Support Service, which delivers substance misuse training in the workplace, and helps employed individuals with substance misuse concerns to remain in employment.

APoSM Away Day

The Advisory Panel on Substance Misuse (APoSM) held an Away Day on 23rd September to update Panel Members on the changes to their constitution, membership and role and to provide a forum for the panel to discuss, debate and agree their draft work programme for the year ahead and in the longer term. Panel members received presentations on:

- Routinely collected data in Wales and on Welsh Emerging Drugs and the Identification of Novel Substances (WEDINOS)
- Welsh Government substance misuse performance from recently published data
- Problem Drugs in Wales based upon data intelligence from Regional Intelligence Unit, Tarian

A session was also facilitated by Public Management Sector Wales to help the panel assimilate the information from the presentations they had received in the morning and to formulate their draft work programme.

Following the Away Day, the Chair, Kyrie James, met the Minister for Health and Social Services to discuss the draft work programme and have agreed the following priorities for the future work programme of APoSM:-

- To provide views on alcohol initiatives for the forthcoming Public Health White Paper
- To consider the issues/interventions for Alcohol & Drugs in an Ageing Population
- To advise on the policy response to an increase in the number of deaths due to Tramadol

The next meeting of APoSM will be held 7 February 2014. Further information about APoSM, its member’s and notes of previous meetings are available on the newly updated pages of our website. Please click here.

Fatal and non-fatal deaths Consultation begins

A new consultation into undertaking fatal and non-fatal drug poisoning reviews in Wales is now available on the Welsh Government Webpages. The consultation opened on the 23rd of September and seeks views on new guidance to be published on undertaking drug poisoning reviews in Wales. It is aimed at Health Boards, Substance Misuse Area Planning Boards, substance misuse and mental health service providers and those working in primary care. The guidance sets out proposals for the restructuring of the mechanisms and bodies in Wales who have a remit for reducing fatal and non fatal drug poisonings related to substance misuse. The consultation is due to close on the 16 December 2013.

If you wish to comment on these proposals please visit the Welsh Government Consultation pages.

Alcohol Related Brain Damage Seminar

A seminar on Alcohol Related Brain Damage (ARBD) was held on the 26th September. The seminar, organised by Alcohol Concern Cymru and Cardiff University, brought together health professionals, third sector organisations and other interested parties in order to discuss the current challenges in diagnosing and treating ARBD. The key challenges identified at the seminar revolved around a lack of awareness about the prevalence, prevention and treatment of ARBD and a lack of resources to treat it. A follow up to the seminar is due to be held in December 2013. For more details, or to get involved in the project contact Alcohol Concern.
DAN 24/7’s latest campaign was held over the summer period. The campaign teamed up with Oakwood Park and targeted a young audience to raise awareness of the services available through DAN 24/7 using the tag line of “stay safe after dark”.

The campaign aimed to spread a harm reduction message by promoting DAN 24/7 across the entire Oakwood Park site including the central stage.

The campaign also utilised Real Radio Wales, with adverts promoting the “stay safe after dark” campaign, presenters giving information on DAN 24/7 and an online competition to win family tickets to Oakwood. Adverts were also placed in the press across Wales.

The results of the campaign appear to be very positive. DAN 24/7 social media accounts on both Facebook and Twitter showed a marked increase in use during the period of the campaign. Hits on the DAN 24/7 website have also indicated a 15% increase (10,448 to 11,985) compared to the same three month period in 2012 Comparing calls from the 13 – 24 age group indicated a 27% increase (68 to 87) in calls to the service.

The campaign supports an overall increase in interest in DAN 24/7, which has seen a general rise in contacts (calls and text messages) to the service in 2012-13 of 36%, compared to 2011-12 figures. DAN 24/7’s social media presence has also increased with a 126% increase in twitter followers.

More information on the ‘Stay Safe After Dark’ and on DAN 24/7 is available here.

Re-Cover, a new social enterprise upcycling shoes and bags, has been formed by participants of the ESF Peer Mentoring Scheme.

Re-Cover was created by voluntary Peer Mentors, who joined CRI’s Peer Mentoring Scheme in Newport to aid their recovery from substance misuse. Re-Cover takes donations of shoes and bags, upcycles them, and then sells them through eBay and at St Mary’s Market. Participants in CRI’s Peer Mentoring Scheme have enthusiastically engaged with the new Social Enterprise, which offers creative opportunities as well as sales and business experience. Those involved have reported a sense of achievement, improved self-esteem and a new entrepreneurial spark. More information is available on the Re-Cover Facebook page

New UK figures on Drug Related Deaths in 2011-12 were published in August 2013. Key findings from the figures showed that:

- There were 1,706 male drug poisoning deaths (involving both legal and illegal drugs) registered in 2012, a 4% decrease since 2011.
- Female drug poisoning deaths have increased every year since 2009, reaching 891 in 2012.
- The number of male drug misuse deaths (involving illegal drugs) decreased by 9% from 1,192 in 2011 to 1,086 in 2012; female deaths decreased by 1% from 413 in 2011 to 410 in 2012.
- Mortality rates from drug misuse were significantly higher in Wales than in England in 2012, at 45.8 and 25.4 deaths per million of the population respectively.

Deaths involving heroin/morphine decreased in 2012, but deaths involving another opiate – tramadol– have continued to rise. There were 175 deaths involving tramadol in 2012 – more than double the number recorded in 2008 (83 deaths). In addition, deaths involving new psychoactive substances (sometimes referred to as ‘legal highs’) such as mephedrone have increased sharply in the last year from 29 deaths in 2011 to 52 deaths in 2012.

The Welsh Government has continued to be proactive in responding to the rapid growth in the use of new psychoactive substances in Wales by developing a range of education and prevention materials in addition to carrying out a national campaign in conjunction with our national helpline DAN 24/7, Real Radio and the Welsh Rugby Union.

Welsh focused on harm reduction by developing an early warning system whereby any alerts received from across the UK are distributed via the Chief Medical Officer. The purpose of these alerts is to circulate as appropriate this information to relevant clinical services, and to ask if any services – including Emergency Department’s and ambulance teams if they are aware of related cases and/or additional intelligence.