

Police Guidelines:

Preventing drug-related harms in
young people who use drugs
(YPUDs) and other at-risk youths



YOUTH RISE

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- Discussions with Youth RISE Law Enforcement and Youth Project Leaders in Nepal, Pakistan, Lithuania, Kenya, Ireland, Czech Republic and Lithuania;
- A Consultation exercise at the Law Enforcement and Public Health 'Police, Drugs and Harm Reduction' pre-conference;
- A Consultation exercise as part of a LEPH 'Marketplace of Ideas' Session;
- Discussions with a wide array of police force members and other experts;
- Input from colleagues in SSDP International and SSDP Australia;

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Introduction

We believe that police should protect and serve us and our communities. Like the 'Asayish' people's police force in 'Rojava', they should protect the interests of the people and not institutions (Finn, 2018).

Unfortunately, throughout our extended networks we have heard and witnessed the bullying, intimidation, assault and rape (e.g. Youth RIS, Nigeria, 2016) of young people who use drugs (YPUD) and other at-risk youths. This occurs frequently under the guise of protecting youth and their communities from drug-related drug problems. It is often a case of policing poverty and often contributes to the continued oppression of the already oppressed. For black, brown and other ethnic minority youth and friends are particularly affected throughout the world ().

At the same time we are also aware of many progressive police efforts such as trauma-informed policing, restorative justice programs, diversion projects, the Dutch 'Top 600' program, crisis intervention teams, assertive engagement programs and efforts to work with civil society partners in the context of festival/nightlife and chemsex settings. We applaud these efforts and encourage their rapid diffusion throughout international police forces.

We advocate here for the following guidelines

1. Engage positively with youth;
2. Minimise sources of friction;
3. Adopt a life-course approach;
4. Develop partnerships.

Core components of these guidelines include treating youths with respect, developing partnerships, and adopting human rights-based, trauma- and developmentally-informed policies.

We believe that by adopting these guidelines police can repair their relationships with youths. In the process, we can work together to reduce drug-related harms (including HIV) and enhance public health and community safety.

Florian Scheibein
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Youth R&E

Guideline 1: Engage with Youths Positively

1.1 Develop cultural competence through specialised training and regular engagement with youth, their families and communities

Youths who are members of low socioeconomic status, homeless/in-care, migrant, and LGBTQ+, indigenous and sex worker communities are more likely to experience drug-related harms. Concurrently, they have differing needs which require differing cultural competence skills. Law enforcement should display cultural competence in working with these groups.

There are several progressive police programs that work directly with such groups including those working with Australian Aboriginal Youth, Canadian Native populations and the Dutch 'Blue in Pink' Initiative that work directly with LGBTQ+ communities. Cultural competence is achieved through specific training (e.g. on YPUD, sex work, homelessness, LGBTQ+ issues) and systematic exposure to the key affected populations in the form of regular dialogue and engagement.



TRIANGLE TALK – A MEETING BETWEEN MEMBERS OF WHAT'S THE STORY? COLLECTIVE, RIALTO YOUTH PROJECT AND GARDAI IN THE LAB PHOTO: FIONA WHELAN

Source:

<http://www.fionawhelan.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/The-Policing-Dialogues-Review-.pdf>

The Irish Policing Dialogue Project brought together youths, youth workers and gardai (Irish Police) to discuss experiences of each other. Youths subsequently attended Templeogue College (Irish policing school) to assist in the training of new recruits.

Lithuanian Youth RISE-funded Initiative



In November 2018, Youth Wave delivered a YPUD training module to the Lithuanian Police School cadets and lecturers that consisted of lectures and role play on various psychoactive substances and positive responses to their use, HIV and other blood-borne diseases. The training which was delivered by YPUDs and Chief of Police Peter Muysbondt was well received and a number of subsequent trainings have since been delivered.

1.3 Be Professional

Unprofessional practices and language undermine the relationship between police and youths which they protect and serve. They can lead to hatred of police and can jeopardise lifetimes of potentially positive interactions.

Case Study

A young man in his twenties was stabilising his drug use and was granted access to his child. During a visit, a police officer called him "a dirty junkie". He was arrested following the subsequent altercation. His drug use escalated and he had a number of suspected intentional overdoses

Violent, stigmatising and dehumanising practices and language should be avoided. Such practices include engagement in provoked violence, reacting disproportionately, unnecessary use of handcuffs, searching of body cavities, intimidation/bullying, assault and in some reported cases rape (e.g. Youth RISE Nigeria, 2018).

Practices and language should be sensitive, compassionate, non-judgmental and inclusive. Policies should be developed in systemic consultation with young people who use drugs (YPUDs), their families and communities to ensure that they are locally and contextually appropriate.

1.4 Move from Just Say No to Good Samaritan Drug Policy

Abstinence-only type programmes (e.g. D.A.R.E) lack an evidence-base and may even be counterproductive (Strang et al., 2012). They are a frequent source of ridicule by youths and undermine the standing of police as experts on public health and community safety.

We are aware of cases where youths wear D.A.R.E T-shirts whilst attending classes and in other environments where significant drug use takes place. In this context, youths may purposefully take drugs to rebel against such programs. Police should immediately desist from all such school-based programs as they lack evidence of efficacy and are counterproductive.



Source:

<https://ssdp.org/blog/the-d-a-r-e-generation-speaks-out/>

Conversely, many members report that youth are often resistant to calling ambulances during drug-related emergencies due to a fear that police will attend and subject them to drug law enforcement. This should be considered a failure of current prohibitionist policies and police should use all their powers to prevent this from occurring. Police should have clear Good Samaritan Policies that ensure that law enforcement do not attend ambulance call outs unless there is a clear risk that someone will harm themselves or others.

2 Minimise Sources of Friction

2.1 Implement a Human Rights-based approach with clear and independent recourse to justice

Police policies and procedures pertaining to drug use should be clearly outlined and be available to youths. Good Samaritan Policies should be communicated to youths in various forms in place of current abstinence-only educational programs. No youth should be subject to harassment and/or intimidation by police. Police should implement clear and independent procedures to deal with valid complaints. This will serve to renew faith in our police forces.

2.2 Avoid Stop and Searches

Stop and Searches have little evidence of efficacy (Quinton, Gagliardi and Bradford, 2017) and youths are often disproportionately targeted for Stop and Searches (Y Stop, 2016). This may partly be due to their increased likelihood of occupying social spaces such as parks and public pressure for police to be seen to do something (Muyschondt, 2019). Police should resist public pressure to search innocent youths and

risk undermining their relationship with them as a result.

Youth RISE members throughout the world report that Stop and Searches cause significant friction between them and local police. In one reported case, a youth peer outreach worker was searched and injecting equipment was seized whilst conducting outreach work. This has clear implications for the spread of HIV and should never occur. Another case is outlined below:



A policeman forced his ungloved hands into the mouth of a youth (pictured above) he searched; when the youth bit down he was charged and convicted of assault of an officer. He was pressured to plead guilty. He received a 3 month sentence despite currently being enrolled in tertiary education.

Y-Stop (2016) have developed guidelines for youth when they are searched. They may be adapted as guidelines for law enforcement when conducting Stop and Searches on youths:

- Speak calmly. Do not be aggressive or arrogant;
- Maintain eye contact and treat the young person as an equal;
- Treat the interaction as a conversation and not a confrontation;
- Explain why you are stopping them and what legal power you are using;
- Explain what you are looking for;
- Explain who you are and what station you are from;
- Make clear if they are free to go or if you will detain them

2.3 Enforce Law Proportionately

Unfortunately, youths from Black Asian and other Ethnic Minorities (BAEM) backgrounds and those living in conditions of other socioeconomic disadvantage are particularly victimised (Y Stop, 2016). Stop and Searches should only be conducted where serious crime is suspected e.g. possession of weapons and/or stolen goods.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2006) suggests using a measurement called the Relative Rate Index (RRI) which measures the ratio of people being arrested. Youth RISE recommends using this RRI and reporting on Stop and Searches, arrests and imprisonments; and using RRIs as KPIs.

“It is important for the public, particularly young people and people from Black and Minority Ethnic communities, to be able to see the police conducting their work in a professional way” (College of Policing and Home Office, 2014: p. 4)

3 Adopt a Life Course Approach

3.1 Engage in trauma-informed policing

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) have been linked to a number of high risk behaviours such as underage sex, drinking and injecting drug use (Bellis et al., 2014; Felitti et al., 1998). Preventing ACEs would decrease engagement in high risk behaviours. The Welsh Police have adopted the National ACE

Approach to Policing Vulnerability Programme and have invested heavily in the area.

Youth RISE Ireland and Garda Youth Diversion Projects are co-funding a project, led by Dr. Sharon Lambert (School of Applied Psychology, University College Cork), to examine the role of trauma in youths accessing Garda Youth Diversion Projects through training of youth workers, focus groups with youths and interviews with Juvenile Liaison Officers and senior police members of the Garda Youth Diversion Projects.

3.2 Addressing empirically-informed policies

3.2 Utilise Powers of Discretions and Divert Youths Away from the Justice System

Drug use is normalised in our societies (Aldridge, Measham and Becker,). A significant minority of all youths will try cannabis, MDMA, amphetamine, cocaine, NPS or other substances. The vast majority of these will eventually stop using these drugs (ibid.).

Convictions for drug offences can jeopardise relationships, housing, employment and education. They can also lead to significant stigma. Poor relationships, homelessness, unemployment, poor educational attainment and stigma are known risk factors for high risk drug use.

Many people start injecting drugs in prisons (O'neil, 2007). Imprisonment is an academy for crime whereby prisoners can make contacts for criminal enterprises such as drug dealing (ibid.). It can also subject youths to severely traumatising experiences such as witnessing or experiencing beatings, stabbings and/or rape. Traumatic experiences are also a known risk factor for high risk drug use. Although up to 50% of people who inject drugs will be imprisoned in their lifetimes there is a

chronic lack of prison harm reduction services globally (HRI, 2019).

As a result, law enforcement should aim to utilise their discretion and divert YPUDs and other at-risk away from the justice system at every opportunity. Several successful police diversion programs exist including the Irish Garda Youth Diversion Projects, the American Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion and the Dutch Top 600 program.

Top 600 Program

In the Netherlands, the top 600 offenders are identified by police. They work with proactivity with these youths to address issues such as housing, employment, education and mental health.

Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion Programme

The Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD)® program is a US-based program which uses diversion and community-based trauma-informed care systems with the goals of improving public safety and order. LEAD® participants were found to be 58% less likely to be arrested ([Collins et al., 2017](#)) and showed benefits in housing, education and income benefits ([Clifasefi et al., 2017](#)).

4 Develop Partnerships

Police interact with youths in a wide array of risk environments. In some cases, police actions can have profoundly negative influences on public health outcomes. However, they can protect youth by adopting shared key performance indicators with other service providers, considering the public health impacts of their strategies and engaging in partnerships with service providers. Such partnership efforts include assertive engagement programs, multi-agency safety training, crisis intervention teams and chemical-crime related responses.

In many regions of the world, police can be a barrier to service delivery and may actively interfere with the work of service providers. This is not a phenomenon limited to developing countries. This includes confiscating harm reduction supplies (e.g. injecting equipment, naloxone), parking in front of supervised consumption sites and actively interfering with resuscitation (e.g. administration of oxygen). In contrast, some police forces are trained to administer naloxone and police in Ghana distribute condoms to sex workers (Crofts, 2018).

Assertive Engagement Program

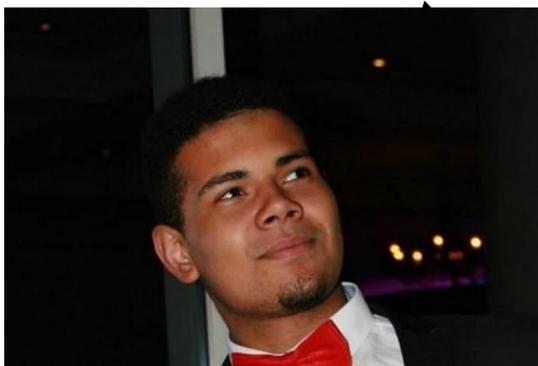


Source: Ana Liffey Drug Project

Ana Liffey Drug Project works with the Gardai (Irish police), Health Service Executive (HSE) and Dublin City Council to address the needs of a cohort of people with complex and multiple needs in their Assertive Engagement program. They work with 4 main populations: addiction and public injecting; homelessness and rough sleeping; anti-social behaviour, begging and criminal behaviour; and mental health.

An evaluation report ([Dolphin,2016](#)) found that the intervention led to increased access to accommodation, improved engagement with healthcare, increased drug treatment uptake and reduced antisocial behaviour.

In an ideal situation, young people would not expose themselves to the harms of unregulated 'controlled' drugs at festivals, but they do. If a young person does use drugs, they should know as much information about the quality and purity of drug as possible.

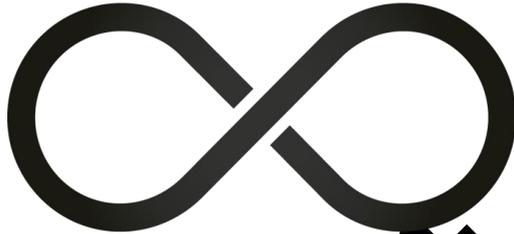


RIP

Irish student Alan Ryan (18) died after accidentally ingesting the highly potent substance 24i-NBOMe

West Midlands Police Force have publicly endorsed the availability of drug checking or testing services which allow people to test drugs for quality purity ([Jamieson, 2018](#)). Services such as Spanish [Energy Control](#), Swiss [Safer Party](#) and Dutch [Jellinek](#) have been providing such services for over 20 years!

Multi Agency Safety Testing



Source: The Loop

UK-based The Loop having been providing drug testing at several festivals in the UK. Drugs are tested on-site and the results are communicated as part of a brief intervention around drug use. The service operates in full collaboration with UK Police.

Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT)

Chemsex Responses

The 'Grinderr' Murderer

United Kingdom-based Stephen Port killed at least four gay men in the twenties by poisoning them with the chemsex-related drug GHB. A lack of police understanding of chemsex delayed the arrest unnecessarily. 58 other murder cases potentially involving GHB were subsequently reinvestigated (Evans, 2016).

Conclusion

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