



opportunity youth

Alcohol and Drug Commissioning Framework for Northern Ireland 2013-16

Opportunity Youth Response

April 2013

Introduction

Opportunity Youth (OY) have considered the Commissioning Framework document recently produced by the Public Health Agency and Health and Social Care Board of Northern Ireland. In this response OY are considering the Adult and General Public section of the framework with specific reference to the Community Support Service. OY have been delivering Alcohol and Drug Community Support in five areas of the SHSCT for the last 5 years and have had a strong contractual relationship with the Public Health Agency throughout this time. OY has also built up strong networks across the Southern Health and Social Care Trust. We have well established networks across all sectors and work in collaboration with a wide range of agencies to deliver highly effective and quality drug and alcohol community support services.

OY are interested in all tiers of the NSD, including workforce development, prevention and early intervention and 'treatment'. We see all of our work, whether as partners or separately, as providing a continuum of support for service users, their families and communities. Integrated working is most definitely the way forward, and shared working between agencies and sectors needs to become more established in order for this integrated work to be effective. We also believe that joint commissioning would be both a sound way to achieve real economic efficiency as well as provide more opportunities for shared services and practices. Ultimately, any developments must ensure that the experience of the service user is a good one.

However, there are structural changes required in order for all of the above to be possible and we appreciate that the PHA and its partners and stakeholders cannot bring this about in isolation. We know that the PHA does see part of its role as linking up government departments and strategies, which we acknowledge it is already doing. Our recent experience of the 'Future Search' event was a positive one and the conversation demonstrated that there is will and commitment to join up strategies, budgets and commissioning processes. We welcome this development.

We agree with the principle in the framework that individuals, families and Communities should have access to similar services regardless of where people live. We sincerely hope that this is achieved as far as possible, and the regional approach will need to be paramount in trying to achieve this, whilst still acknowledging particular local needs, such as those of rural communities, inner city, high deprivation areas and others.

Community Support Services:

- OY welcome the key points set out in the strategic context of the framework and believe that most productive work is done when people work collaboratively to address need at all levels. Our experience of this in the community is mixed and while some very effective work takes place, barriers to collaborative working can be very frustrating with gate keepers playing a vital role. OY believe the way forward for community support services is to develop a community support role that is tasked to, and has responsibility for, coordinating and joining up services in a locality to ensure access to the most appropriate service is guaranteed.
- OY, through the vast array of work the organisation undertakes out across a range of directorates, support the frameworks key role in providing the general public with information on alcohol and drug related harm. We believe this to be a key role of any community support service, especially in deprived areas where you are 5 times more likely to die from alcohol or drug related harm. To address such inequalities OY would advocate that community support services coordinate services at a local level while forming part of an integrated strategy that address all aspects of harm and need. Through such a key role OY believe communities and individuals would have improved access to services.
- OY believe community support has a key role in delivering the outcomes of the framework and that where you live should not impact on your ability to access the most appropriate service for you. A comprehensive, regional community support service would allow those in need of support to present a one central point and their care pathway be influenced by an informed member of the community support service. All community support services would therefore have a responsibility to develop clear referral pathways that tie in all services in a locality, regardless of funding stream. Services would also be held accountable within this way of working.
- Community support services need to take cognise of community make up and services coordinated by this role should mirror the community they are supporting. Therefore the vulnerable groups definition included in the framework needs to be developed to include all vulnerable groups that misuse alcohol and drugs such as the older population, looked after children and ethnic groups. Community support services need to provide access to services that support communities from the cradle to the grave but also take note of the complexity that is community. OY welcome the importance put on early intervention,

prevention and education but this approach needs to be well structured, resourced and available.

- OY, through delivering community support services over the last 5 years, see a real need for a service that builds capacity, signposts, refers, supports and enables individuals and communities to respond to crisis. OY also believe such a community support service would enable community mobilisation and action as it will be driven by one service that works in partnership with and on behalf of the community where it is located. Such a community support service would embrace all elements of need either on an individual, family or community level and would include education and prevention services and access to treatment services.
- OY are committed to interagency working and welcome the value the framework places on this approach. However, this approach will not realise its full potential if it is commissioned as a dedicated service. Community support services, if given this responsibility, are in a key position to influence and drive this and ensure communities get appropriate access to local services that are providing high quality, evidence based interventions and support.
- OY are concerned with the lack of local evidence based practice used in the Framework. OY have been inputting information to the RIMT for the last 5 years yet none of this evidence is cited in the report. Through the RIMT OY can demonstrate significant changes in communities' knowledge with 85% of those taking part in community support initiatives reporting an increase in knowledge around substance misuse issues, while 65% reported a reduction in their alcohol or drug intake. OY would also like to highlight that community support services delivered by the organisation are built around evidence based practices such as MI, CBT and creative group work, all ignored in the research highlighted by the framework. OY would also advocate that the PHA consider setting the level of expertise required by each service and mirror this through workforce development opportunities.
- OY welcome the harm reduction approaches highlighted by the framework and see community support services having a key role in getting those in need access to the most appropriate intervention for them within their locality. However, realistically this can only occur if harm reduction is a key option within community responses to reducing harmful and hazardous drinking and substance misuse. Flexibility, accessibility and referral pathways are key here and a competent community support service, we believe, would have the ability to link people in with early intervention and brief intervention services as well as treatment services.
- OY are advocating for a community support service that is available on a regional basis and at all times is visible, accessible and available to the community but also has a key focus on building the communities capacity to deal with issues and concerns through a proactive approach. This can only be achieved by regional community support service that meets the need of the community by coordinating services thus ensuring everyone has access to the most appropriate support for them and as a result ensuring community mobilisation.

- OY recognise that all of the above are not the specific responsibility of the PHA and/or the HSCB. However, OY believe that you can be champions for 'real' integrated working and joint commissioning and we are committed to having an active part in this. We are not discounting the element of competition which exists between services for resources, in particular across the community and voluntary sector; however, we strongly believe that it is possible to deliver services in such a way that young people and adults can benefit from a more 'one stop' approach to meeting their needs.