Drugs in Hounslow – An Investigation by Hounslow Youth Council

Introduction

The roots of this report are in a conversation between young people and Hounslow’s Director of Children’s Services, Judith Pettersen. At the request of the Director, Hounslow Youth Council conducted an investigation into Drugs and their effect on young people in Hounslow. This is a summary of that investigation.

This report consists of two parts – analysis of responses to a survey of young people in Hounslow as well as a set of recommendations based on a frank and open discussion between young people and PC George Holland, MPS Hounslow, which took place at Hounslow Youth Centre.

The survey was carried out in the middle two weeks of June 2011 and approximately 40 surveys were returned.

Young people completed surveys at Brentford School for Girls, Isleworth and Syon School, Cranford Community School, The Heathland School, Heston School and with young people with special needs and disabilities at Hounslow Youth Centre.

The aims of the survey were to:

- Find out Young People’s **Knowledge** of drugs in general and their perceptions about drugs in their area.
- Allow young people to assess their own **Skills** in avoiding problematic drug and alcohol use.
- Discover the **Attitudes** that young people had towards the issue of alcohol and drugs in Hounslow in 20102.

61% of respondents were of Black and Minority Ethnic heritage – the largest individual groups in the survey being Asian (33%) and White British (25%). 8% were of mixed heritage. 13.8% reported having a special need or disability, Dyslexia being the most common.

Ages of young people completing the Survey ranged from 9 to 20, with the largest number being between 15 and 17:
This chart shows where the young people who responded to the survey lived:
Knowledge Questions
We asked young people: **What drugs have you heard of being used in your community?**

Translating “street” names into scientific names, we can make a chart like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alcohol</th>
<th>Cannabis</th>
<th>Heroin</th>
<th>Crack</th>
<th>Ecstasy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Magic Mushrooms</td>
<td>Crystal Meth</td>
<td>Vicodin</td>
<td>Tobacco</td>
<td>Antibiotics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ketamine</td>
<td>Cocaine</td>
<td>None “A Lot”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The word “Community” was deliberately ambiguous. When asked around half of the Youth Council used the word synonymously with the estate or streets where they lived while a similar amount referred to a larger area – the whole borough or one of its towns.

Young people were not given a list of words to pick from and so those that described Tobacco or Alcohol as “drugs” did so unprompted. 16% of young people said “None.”

One salient point that we can draw from this is that a small number of young people must be drawing their information about drugs from popular culture rather than actual experience – one young person said “Vicodin”, a painkiller commonly abused in the US but unavailable in the UK.

It is especially interesting that, as this investigation began into a discussion of rumours of the sale and abuse of Ritalin that no one mentioned Ritalin during this discussion. We then asked young people: **What do you know about their effects?**

Not every recipient felt confident in answering this question but those that did said:

- Highly dangerous, can be addictive...Stimulate, relax, are addictive...Nothing...Die, Heart Failure, End up in hospital, are addictive...Die...Not a lot...Make you feel like a different person...None...None...Relax...Paranoid, high, loss of memory...Don’t Know...They affect the development of the brain...Makes you calm, forgets hunger...Drives people crazy...They make you high and you think you’re invincible...Negative and dangerous...Weed makes you feel funny and smoking gives you an addiction...Negative effects on body...Nothing...Can harm your health...Bad, Hallucination...None...Weed=makes them high, out of senses...Cocaine makes you hallucinate as do the other drugs. Some increase your blood pressure...Ecstasy - alertness. Vicodin - energy. Weed, Cocaine - hallucination...They are dangerous. Can possibly cause death....Cannabis-kill or marks body, Cocaine kills brain cells...Kills...Feel dozy, Feel ill...Kicked out of college, house, work...They change you, make you high...Make you high
This list of responses shows that a lot of messages about drug misuse are getting through to young people, but at the same time there is a great deal of confusion and the occasional misunderstanding.

Only one young person mentioned a lifestyle change rather than a physical effect, the rest of responses were split roughly 70/30 between “negative” and “positive” words.

Finally in this section, we asked young people: **Where would you go for information about drugs?**

![Pie chart showing the preferences for information sources](chart.jpg)

It is interesting to see that family members are more trusted than friends – it would be interesting to see that figure divided into “Parents” and “Siblings”. Also, it is good to see the popularity of the Frank website – a third of all young people would use it.

We then asked three questions with straight “Yes/No” answers, designed to allow young people to assess their own **Knowledge** in avoiding problematic drug and alcohol use.
Do you think that you learn enough about drugs and alcohol at school?

41% said YES/59% said NO

Are you aware of people using drugs in your school or local area?

69% said YES/31% said NO

Do you know where to go if you or your friends had a problem with drugs?

64% said YES/36% said NO

We can see here that there is still work to do in promoting drugs education in PSHCE in Hounslow as well as promoting the work of Visions and other agencies.

More young people refused to answer the last question than any other, with one young person (Male, aged between 9 and 12, resident in Heston) instead saying “Will never have one.”

Skills Questions

We then asked young people to assess their own Skills in avoiding problematic drug and alcohol use.

Young people were asked to say to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the following statements:

“I find it easy to resist peer pressure and do what I want to do.”

64% of young people agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Only one young person “strongly disagreed.”

“I understand how to look after myself and stay healthy.”

84% of young people agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Only one disagreed. This is a key question and one of the main reasons why we divided the survey into the Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes sections. Last year, the Youth Council produced the “Hounslow Challenges” survey which dealt with young people’s health. In that survey we found the 83% of Young People understood the concept of ‘Five a Day’, whilst only 16% claimed to actually eat five portions of fruit and vegetables daily.

“I have a lot of interests outside of school which occupy my time.”
69% agreed with this. The last Youth Council survey, “Hounslow Challenges” found that nearly 40% of young people did more than four hours of sport or exercise.

“Teachers and other adults in my life give me positive messages.”

Only 50% agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

Attitudes Questions

The “Attitudes” questions were in the same format.

“I am concerned about people using drugs in my school or local area”

A quarter of young people agreed or strongly agreed with this. This is a much lower figure than the 69% who said that they were aware of drug use in their area.

“I believe that it is never acceptable for people to take illegal drugs”

64% of young people agreed or strongly agreed with this. There may be some contradiction between this and the previous answer.

“I think celebrities and people in the media should show young people a better example about drugs.”

Two-thirds of young people agreed or strongly agreed with this. However, this was the statement with which the largest number of respondents strongly disagreed.

“If I was offered drugs, I would report it to the police.”

44% of young people in Hounslow strongly agreed with this.

Conversation between Hounslow Youth Council and PC George Holland, MPS

Young people from Hounslow Youth Council met with PC George Holland at Hounslow Youth Centre on Monday 11th June for a long, frank and productive discussion that even over-ran into the England – France football match!

The full minutes of the discussion run to seven pages, but some key points/recommendations are:

- More than drug use itself, young people are concerned by what they perceive as open drug/alcohol use in certain town centre areas. Kingsley Road, betting shops and some licensed premises were mentioned as places were young people were intimidated by what they perceived as drug users.
• Young people need frank and honest drug education in schools but there is a debate to be had about what are the best ways of dealing with the problem of drug possession by young people in schools.

• The Frank website was praised by young people and police and should be better promoted to young people.

• It was felt that police officers wearing plain clothes were much more approachable to young people.

**Conclusions/Recommendations**

The Youth Council recommends that:

• Consideration is given to improving the amount and quality of drug education in Hounslow’s school, including better use of the Frank website.

• More is done to reduce the perception of Hounslow Town Centre as a place where drugs and alcohol are used openly.

• Young people are provided with and encouraged to take part in healthy recreational activities.
Appendix: The Survey

Drugs Survey

ABOUT YOU

1. Are You?

Male □

Female □

2. How Old Are You?

8 and under □ 9 to 12 □ 13 □ 14 □ 15 □ 16 □
17 □ 18 □ 19 □ 20 and above □

3. How would you describe your ethnicity?

4. Do you have a Disability or special need and if so, what is it?

None □ Yes □ (Please State :____________________)

5. Which of these areas do you live in?

Feltham □ Bedfont □ Hanworth □ Cranford □ Osterley □
Heston □ Hounslow □ Isleworth □ Brentford □
Chiswick □ Not in Hounslow Borough □
Knowledge

6. What drugs have you heard of being used in your community?

7. What do you know about their effects?

8. Where would you go for information about drugs?

Family □ Friends □ Teacher □ Youth Worker □ Other Adult □
Frank/Other Website □ Other (please say where) _________

9. Do you think that you learn enough about drugs and alcohol at school?
10. Are you aware of people using drugs in your school or local area?

11. Do you know where to go if you or your friends had a problem with drugs?

Skills

12. For each of the following statements, please circle a number from 1 to 5, where 1 is “Strongly Agree”, 5 is “Strongly Disagree” and 3 is somewhere in between.

“I find it easy to resist peer pressure and do what I want to do.”
1 2 3 4 5

“I understand how to look after myself and stay healthy.”
1 2 3 4 5

“I have a lot of interests outside of school which occupy my time.”
1 2 3 4 5

“Teachers and other adults in my life give me positive messages.”
1 2 3 4 5
Attitudes

13. Answer these questions as honestly as you can.

“I am concerned about people using drugs in my school or local area”
1   2   3   4    5

“I believe that it is never acceptable for people to take illegal drugs”
1   2   3   4    5

“I think celebrities and people in the media should show young people a better example about drugs.”
1   2   3   4    5

“If I was offered drugs, I would report it to the police.”
1   2   3   4    5

Please leave your details below if you would like to be contacted by the Youth Council about future activities

Name:

Email: