



Tacade promoting sexual health and drug education with young people in hostels and housing projects in East London

Tacade was funded by Barclay's Community Programme to work with hostels and housing associations in East London to enable them to develop and improve drug, alcohol and sexual health promotion work with young people. The project, which ran from September 2004 – March 2006, involved providing training, advice and guidance to hostel and housing workers.

Research has indicated that legal and illegal drug use is common place amongst a significant proportion of young people. For example, 24% of 16 to 19 year olds smoke tobacco. This increases to 32% of 20 to 24 year olds. Approximately 50% of all young people have taken illegal drugs at some time in their lives, although only about one fifth become regular users. Cannabis is the most commonly used illegal drug among young people. Alcohol use, and particularly 'binge' drinking, is on the increase among young people. Fifty-four per cent of 15 to 16 year olds report having 'binged' in the previous month. In addition, the United Kingdom (UK) still has the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Europe and increasing rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among young people. Homeless young people, including those living in hostels and supported housing, may be particularly vulnerable to poor sexual health and risky drug and alcohol use.

Learning from the Project

Many hostel and housing support workers felt their young clients were particularly vulnerable to drug and alcohol misuse and poor sexual health.

Workers appreciated that there was a tremendous need for drug, alcohol and sexual health promotion work with young clients and residents. A high proportion of hostel and housing workers that took part in the Tacade project felt that cannabis use was the cultural norm amongst their young residents and binge drinking was common-place.

The current provision of drug, alcohol and sexual health promotion varied considerably between hostels. A couple of hostels/housing projects had regular input from sexual health outreach services. However, all of the hostels/housing projects involved with the project could do more to provide comprehensive health promotion to their young clients.

There was resistance from some senior managers in housing projects to prioritise drug, alcohol and sexual health promotion work. Hostels and housing projects currently have a great number of demands placed on them and it seemed difficult for some workers and managers to prioritise health promotion.

Many staff felt that they needed adequate training

before they would have the knowledge and confidence to tackle these sensitive issues. Many of the workers were not aware of the young people friendly drug, alcohol and sexual health services available in the local area.

Several local drug, alcohol and sexual health service providers were keen to provide information and advice to both workers and young people in the hostel and housing projects.

Appropriate policies and procedures need to be in place to provide guidance for workers and young residents about the role of the workers in relation to drug, alcohol and sexual health promotion work and to ensure that residents are clear about what is permitted within the residential setting.

Some of the hostels/housing projects were very keen to distribute condoms but found it difficult to access a sustained free supply. A few workers went as far as to collect free condoms from family planning clinics to distribute within the hostels/housing projects.

Tacade offered both tailored training to whole staff teams and courses open to hostel and housing workers from across East London. The latter courses proved particularly popular and effective in developing both the knowledge and skills required by the workers.

Opportunities for promoting Drug, Alcohol and Sexual health work

- Through information in welcome packs
- Key working sessions
- Provision of free condoms and lubricants
- Group work sessions/workshops, although some hostels found residents were not keen to attend workshops.
- Signposting residents to the local young people's friendly sexual health, drug and alcohol services.

The project process:

Tacade offered the hostels and housing associations that work with young people tailored training sessions for staff about drug, alcohol and sexual health promotion, along with advice and guidance about resources, policy and management issues. Two housing associations took up the offer of the tailored package.

In addition, Tacade offered four training days open to all hostel and housing workers in East London. These events proved very popular. Local service providers contributed to the training and the local Primary Care Trusts helped to publicise the courses. Participants attending the training events completed evaluation forms at the end of the courses which helped to inform future planning.

The training sessions:

Over fifty hostel and housing workers attended the training courses. Two courses were run promoting the health of young people in hostel settings. One course focused on sexual health and the other on drug and alcohol education. Both courses were repeated to ensure that an optimum number of people were able to attend and interactive participatory training techniques could be used.

The courses aimed to enable participants to:

- consider practical ways in which young people's health could be promoted in the hostel setting
- increase their confidence, skills and knowledge to deal with sensitive health promotion issues
- find out about local and national specialist services
- consider how to create a health promoting environment within the hostel or supported housing situation.

In addition, tailored training was provided for staff teams in two housing association projects.

Partnership working:

Collaborative partnership working was crucial to the success of the project. Newham, Tower Hamlets and Hackney Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) and the local

Supporting People Team helped to publicise the training programme. Links were made between some of the housing projects and the local Primary Care Trusts with the aim of linking the housing projects into condom distribution schemes. Local service providers such as Drug and Alcohol Service London (DASL) and Options (Tower Hamlets young people's sexual health service) contributed to the training. Both of these services were able to offer ongoing support to the housing projects thereby helping to ensure the sustainability of the health promotion work.

The health of young people in hostels and supported housing:

There is very limited research into the health of young people living in hostels and supported housing in the UK. There is some research into drug use amongst homeless young people which includes young people in hostels and supported housing (Home Office 2005; Wincup 2003).

Obviously homeless young people are a very diverse group but this research indicates that these young people are particularly vulnerable to problematic drug use. Twenty-four per cent of 'vulnerable' young people in the Crime and Justice Survey (2003) reported frequent drug use, compared to 5% of young people considered not 'vulnerable'.

Although 18% of the homeless young people interviewed in the Wincup (2003) study did not drink alcohol a considerable proportion were risky 'binge' drinkers. Anecdotally, the workers that took part in the Tacade project described a similar pattern amongst their residents. Almost all of the young people interviewed in the Wincup (2003) study smoked tobacco, with many smoking hand-rolled cigarettes without filters.

There is a dearth of information about the sexual health of homeless young people, although it is recognised that homelessness can make young people more vulnerable to sexual exploitation. In general, STIs are on the increase among young people. Over the last ten years rates of Chlamydia have increased by over 200% and rates of gonorrhoea have increased by over 100%. This may, in part, be because more people are being screened for STIs, but it also indicates that thousands of young people have STIs. Gorton (2001) surveyed thirty-one London hostels and found that 24% of young female residents had become pregnant in the previous year.

Key Recommendations

Hostel and housing projects are working with vulnerable young people who are in need of relevant, accessible health promotion. A more strategic and co-ordinated approach is required to ensure that hostel and housing projects prioritise health promotion and are offered ongoing advice, support and training about health promotion, particularly around sexual health, drug and alcohol education.

Hostels and housing projects are potentially good settings to be included in condom distribution schemes, with training and support linked in.

Further sources of information:

www.drugsandhousing.co.uk

'Drug use among vulnerable groups of young people: findings from the 2003 Crime and Justice Survey' Findings 254, published by the Home Office in 2005
www.homeoffice.gov.uk

'Good Practice in Supported Housing for Young Mothers. Report prepared for the Teenage Pregnancy Unit, Department of Health and Office of Deputy Prime Minister' written by Hinton T and Gorton S, published by Health Action at Crisis.
www.crisis.org.uk

'Healthy Hostels. A guide to promoting health and well-being among homeless people' written by Hinton T, Evans N and Jacobs K, published by Crisis in 2001.
www.crisis.org.uk

'Homelessness and drugs. Managing incidents' published by DrugScope in 2000.
www.drugscope.org.uk

'Homeless Young Women and Pregnancy. Pregnancy in hostels for single homeless people' written by Gorton S, published by Crisis in 2001.
www.crisis.org.uk

'Youth homelessness and substance use: report to the drugs and alcohol research unit' Home Office Research Study 258, written by Dr Wincup, Buckland G and Bayliss R, published by the Home Office 2003. This document can be downloaded: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/hors258.pdf>

Resources published by Tacade suitable for use through group work or adapted for use on a one-to-one basis are pictured right.



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