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EPPIC - Exchanging Prevention practices on Polydrug use among youth In Criminal justice systems

Adolescence and young adulthood are important periods for initiation into substance use and for use to become established patterns of behaviour. During this time, interventions are needed to prevent onset into different forms of substance use, reduce escalation into heavy substance use and intervene to reverse problematic substance use. Young offenders are considered one of the most vulnerable or at risk groups of developing drug problems and they are likely to be affected by a myriad of health and social inequalities. However, there has been very little attention paid to young people in contact with the criminal justice system in relation to drugs prevention policy and practice. This project focuses on young people aged between 15 and 24 who have been in contact with the criminal justice system in six European countries (UK, Italy, Denmark, Poland, Germany and Austria). This will cover research on prevention programmes in prison and community settings as well as forms of diversion and therapy.

Overall objectives:

The objectives of this project address the 3rd EU Health Programme:

- To gather knowledge, exchange best practice and identify transferable innovations and principles of good practice on interventions to prevent illicit drug use, the development of polydrug use and the use of new psychoactive drugs (NPS) among vulnerable young people in touch with the criminal justice systems in partner countries (Austria, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Poland and the UK);
- to assess identified initiatives against minimum quality standards in drug demand reduction;
- to examine the appropriateness of the existing standards within the criminal justice context and to develop a set of guidelines adapted to initiatives aimed at the target group;
- and to initiate a European knowledge exchange network for practitioners and stakeholders working with young people in the criminal justice system.

The project will:

- Address issues of health, healthy environments, and social inequality of a vulnerable group of young people (those in touch with criminal justice systems) who are at greater risk than their contemporaries of developing problem drug use, including polydrug use and use of NPS.
- Identify and describe drug using trajectories of the target group and identify key intervention points to facilitate prevention and intervention efforts and promote healthier lifestyles.
- Identify and develop tools (e.g. guidelines for quality assurance) and mechanisms (e.g. Criminal Justice Practitioner Forum) to facilitate the implementation of 'best practice' approaches in EU member states.
- Facilitate the exchange of knowledge across partner countries and across other EU member states (research based and experiential knowledge, shared and jointly developed).

The following methodology will be applied:

- Collection and analysis of existing knowledge as well as the generation of new knowledge from research;
- Examination of existing European drug prevention quality standards, assessment of the relevance of existing standards for the development of prevention initiatives for the target group and the development of a new set of guidelines;
- Working collaboratively with practitioners and other stakeholders relevant to the criminal justice system and to drug prevention work with young people;
- Setting up systems to encourage knowledge exchange and communication across disciplines and across European countries.

Partners: Coordinator: Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, Middlesex University (UK), Change Grow Live (UK), Aarhus University (Denmark), Eclectica (Italy), European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research (Austria), Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences (Germany), Institute of Psychiatry and Neurology (Poland).

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