

The tide is turning at last on drug abuse in Wexford but drug related deaths in the region give cause for concern.

The Cornmarket Project has just released figures for its range of services delivered in 2013 throughout county Wexford. The project dealt with 382 individuals during 2013 and was successful in ensuring that 84 young people between the ages of 18 and 28, moved away from drugs, alcohol abuse and criminality. In addition, they have regained control over their lives and have progressed into employment or further training and education. Speaking on the release of the figures for last year Paul Delaney, coordinator of the project, stated that the good news is that we are beginning to see a turning of the tide in relation to drug abuse in Wexford. However, he also pointed out that alcohol abuse remains a problem for a lot of those who use the project's treatment and rehabilitation services. The project has worked relentlessly over the past fifteen years to help those caught in the throes of addiction and substance abuse to recover, rebuild relationships with their families and move on with their lives, he said.

We know first hand from the thousands of individuals and families that the project has supported over that period that our efforts have undoubtedly saved the lives of many young Wexford people who had got sucked into substance abuse, he continued. Unfortunately, similar to other parts of the country, heroin and other hard drugs that can be abused have got a foothold in Wexford over the last fifteen years. However, unlike other areas where people have buried their heads in the sand and denied that such a problem existed in their communities, Wexford has been to the forefront in ensuring the development of effective early interventions that support individuals and help to protect our communities, he stated. The work of the Cornmarket Project, in partnership with the Probation Service, the HSE, the Department of Social Protection and Wexford Local Development, has meant that we now have a very effective strategy in place in county Wexford to counteract the threat that substance abuse poses to our communities. At last we can say that there are encouraging signs that we are beginning to win that particular battle, he said.

However, he cautioned against complacency stating that the recently released figures from the Health Research Board relating to drug related deaths are very concerning. The figures include those who died from poly substance abuse i.e. the abuse of more than one substance, and alcohol is strongly implicated. The fact is that out of the ten regional drugs task force areas outside Dublin, the South East regional drugs task force area, which includes county Wexford, has recorded the highest incidence of drug related deaths, he said. Unless it is an overdose situation, deaths from drug related issues often go unreported publicly and yet the reality is that many people continue to die from the effects of substance abuse, both drugs and alcohol, he continued. He highlights the following figures taken from the Health Research Board report released in January of this year relating to drug-related deaths and deaths among drug users in Ireland covering the period 2004 - 2011: South East Regional Drugs Task Force 253, East Coast Regional Drugs Task Force 212, Mid West Regional Drugs Task Force 172, Southern Regional Drugs Task Force 168, North Eastern Regional Drugs Task Force 165, Western Regional Drugs Task Force 154, South Western Regional Drugs Task Force 151, Midlands Regional Drugs Task Force 148, Cork Regional Drugs Task Force 128 and North West Regional Drugs Task Force 82.

He concluded by stating that although the figures on drug related deaths are very worrying, the multi-agency approach adopted by the Cornmarket Project in Wexford in relation to responding to the threat of substance abuse in our communities is paying dividends. Those with drug related problems whether for themselves or a person within a family, can be assured that there is help for them and it is easy to access the confidential and free services of the Cornmarket Project. The project can be contacted on their confidential phone line 0539144931 or the main line on 0539155800.

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