



SU/DoH Consultation
Room 4.6
Admiralty Arch
The Mall
London
SW1A 2WH

Email: su-dohconsultation@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk

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Novas-Ouvertures Group response to consultation on the National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy

Introduction

The Novas-Ouvertures Group is a dynamic group of voluntary and community organisations, registered social landlords and social businesses. The Group welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department of Health and Strategy Unit's consultation on a National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy.

The Novas-Ouvertures Group comprises of 14 member organisations whose services include direct access hostels, supported housing, community outreach, floating support, advice and community services. The Group works with a range of service users including rough sleepers, Travellers, refugees and young people.

The Group's work is spread across the UK. Members provide services across London, and the South East of England, the North West of England, Bristol, the Midlands, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

The Group provides a wide range of specialist services to people with an alcohol dependency, as well as providing generalist services to people with alcohol issues. Services include:

- Many of the Group's hostels have drug and alcohol specialist support workers who work with residents who are seeking to address their dependency issues, access specialist rehabilitation and detoxification services. Many hostels also provide space within the scheme where residents are able to drink in a safe environment, for example, Arlington House in Camden and Ennersdale House in Lewisham.
- Brent Community Alcohol Service (BCAS) provides a range of accessible and culturally sensitive support services to people who are either directly concerned about their drinking or are seeking support in relation to the drinking of a family member. Specific service areas include family services, on-site services for Travellers, outreach to black and Irish people, homeless street outreach, home and hospital visits. A range of interventions are used including counselling, cognitive



behaviour therapies, motivational interviewing, 1-1s and group work, peer support and life skills management (as alcohol misuse can bring up other support needs around, for example, literacy, gambling, mental health and relationships). BCAS works with local GPs to raise awareness of alcohol issues in the community.

- Camden's Contact and Assessment Team provides proactive and assertive services to the street population in the area, the team regularly make referrals to the wet day centre service the Group also manage in the area.
- Forge Midlands Housing Associations a member of the Novas-Ouvertures Group provides the only wet day centre in Leicester for street drinkers.
- Acton Street Drinkers Project is an assertive outreach team targeting street drinkers. It provides access to support, advice and information on a range of issues together with access into services, such as wet hostels and wet day centres, such as Spectrum Day Centre in Camden. The project works very much from a harm reduction approach.
- Burghley Road in Camden is 24-bedroom care home for older people with long-term alcohol dependency and associated mental health issues. The scheme is open to both men and women. The service provides 24-hour care and support, the service works from a care plan approach that provides, welfare benefits advice, budgeting, by key working with individuals. The scheme allows tenants to drink on the premises whilst working proactively with them using harm minimisation techniques.
- Azadeh Community Network in Liverpool provides self-contained supported accommodation for heavy drinkers, the organisation specialises in providing supported housing to vulnerable members of the community and through its approach supports residents to live their own live choices in a supportive environment.
- Novas-Ouvertures, has capitalised on its extensive experience in working with people who have an alcohol dependency by pioneering a hostel with wet service provision in Northern Ireland, one of the first of its kind within Northern Ireland.

A National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy

Novas-Ouvertures welcomes the Government's commitment to developing a national strategy on alcohol. The Group looks forward to working with the Government and key stakeholders on the development of the strategy.

The Novas-Ouvertures Group has a great deal of experience of working in the drug and alcohol field. In practice we have often found the focus of resources targeted heavily towards drugs due to a range of historical, political and media-related reasons. Services for those with alcohol dependency are often seen as the poor relation next to drugs services, so we very much welcome the proposal of an alcohol strategy.

We believe the strategy should be inclusive of the culture of alcohol use in the UK – it should consider licensing laws, advertising regulations and availability of alcohol. The strategy



should also consider differing issues relating to alcohol use and misuse in the context of gender, age, ethnicity and social circumstance. The strategy should incorporate the wider impacts of alcohol misuse, for example on relationships, the incidence of domestic violence and on child protection issues.

We believe that the strategy should include the most comprehensive range of interventions and services for those seeking to address their alcohol use. This should include lower levels of preventative intervention, for example promotion of wellness rather than illness and enabling people to find and access services and support before they find themselves in a state of crisis.

The Group would advocate that the proposed strategy should be strongly linked with existing related frameworks and strategies at national and local levels, including the Homelessness Strategy, Supporting People, Drugs Strategy, National Service Frameworks and QUADS, Health Improvement Plans and, where appropriate, Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies.

We believe the key to the success of the proposed strategy lies at the local development and implementation of the strategy. The strategy must be flexible enough to enable local responses – as homelessness strategies already do

Drug and Alcohol Action Teams (DAATS)

The Group has experience of working with both DAATS and Drug Action Teams (DATs). We support the process of DAATS being nation-wide as experience shows that it is untenable to have separate Drug and Alcohol teams as services, ways of working and the client group can be interlinked. It is also a way of pooling shared resources and the stakeholders are often the same in each field.

In our experience of working with DAATS we have found that the drugs agenda can often dominate the focus of action plans and services. The Group believes alcohol services would benefit from a separate commissioner for alcohol services as part of the DAAT.

We would we support Homeless Links recommendations on funding

- Funding for alcohol treatment to be radically increased to reflect the fact that addiction to alcohol kills more people annually than addiction to drugs.
- Detoxification and Rehabilitation services should be used as harm minimisation, or respite intervention with a client who has been addicted for years.
- Adequate funding for alcohol services available nationwide.

Crime and Disorder

Novas-Ouvertures is a large provider of wet services in hostels and day centres across the UK. These range from Arlington House, a 400-bed wet hostel in Camden, to the Anchor Centre, a wet day centre in Leicester. We come into contact with street drinkers regularly and work proactively with them to support and advise them on a range of issues. By providing wet services there is an opportunity to engage with clients using harm reduction techniques, support them with their tenancies and support their access to other services such as primary health care. The Anchor Centre enables street drinkers to spend the day in



a safe environment and access a range of services within the building, including primary health care, welfare benefits and tenancy sustainment support. By providing a safe environment a safe space for street drinkers we are able to challenge the perceptions that street drinkers are often perpetrators of crime and cause anti-social behaviour.

The Group believes that local crime and disorder strategies should be drawn up in partnership with the DAATS so as not to undermine the local strategies or services set up to work with people with alcohol dependency. The Group would also advocate that in the development of the strategy lessons are learned from the positive experiences of areas providing wet services, assertive outreach teams targeting street drinkers and their impact on local communities with regards to anti social behaviour and levels of street drinking.

Conclusion

The Novas-Ouvertures Group has many years experience of working with populations who would be affected by a National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy. We therefore look forward to working with the Department of Health and the Strategy Unit in the future to develop the strategy. The Group will also seek to play a proactive role in the development of local strategies in areas where we provide services.

If you would like more information on our alcohol-related services, or would like to contact us regarding the strategy, please use the contact details below.

Penny Marshall
Policy Officer
Novas-Ouvertures
233-234 Blackfriars Road
London
SE1 8NW

T: 0870 906 3219
E: penny.marshall@novas.org
www.epolitix.com/forum/novas

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