

FESAT



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10th FESAT Newsletter

November 2007

FESAT Conference

"Taking a Call on Cannabis" - Drug Helplines Response

Lisbon 1-2 October 2007

Our recent Conference was a great success and we thank all of those who attended! This newsletter features inputs and summaries from key speeches and workshops during the two-day event that will be of interest both to those who were there and those who could not attend. We have inserted a copy of the Conference programme at the end of this newsletter for your reference.

Conference reader/ documentation

More detailed information, including powerpoint presentations from the conference and photographs are available on our website: www.fesat.org

Copies of the conference's documents and pictures in CD-rom format were posted by Tom Evenepoel to all services who attended.



Patricia Pissarra, FESAT Vice-President (Portugal) and
Hans-Volker Happel, FESAT President (Germany)

Welcome speech by FESAT president Hans Volker Happel

Hans Volker Happel welcomed all of the participants to the conference and paid particular gratitude to IDT, the Portuguese Institute on Drugs and Drug Addiction for their support in hosting this conference. He also noted the support of the EMCDDA, without which the conference could not have taken place and he particularly thanked Mr. Paul Griffith and Mrs Deborah Olsewski for their engagement, support and hospitality.

Mr Volker Happel quoted an interview in April 2007 where Mr Wolfgang Götz, the director of EMCDDA, identified a new challenge for the years to come as looking at the response to increased consumption of cannabis and cocaine. This shows the relevance of this FESAT conference topic.

He spoke of Cannabis as a growing problem across Europe. "But what kind of a growing problem? Is reliable data available or has the media focus changed and influenced the (political) agenda?". Following a period of trivialisation of cannabis use, it has become a more dramatic topic. Mr Volker Happel used an example from the serious and popular German weekly journal *Der Spiegel*, which featured an illustration on its front page depicting a pre-school girl who was holding a "Schultüte", which is cone-shaped gift, normally given to children on their very first day of school, colourfully decorated and containing sweets and small gifts. This cone, however, was shown as a cannabis joint and the caption read "Cannabis – the epidemic plague". Since this feature, a polarized debate about the most appropriate approach to addressing cannabis use has restarted.

Mr Volker Happel went on to talk about how opinions such as "cannabis is a psychoactive drug which can be used in an unobtrusive manner" are strongly discredited, while positions that "cannabis is a drug which is dangerous, provoking psychosis, leads on to harder drugs, and involves severe psychological and health problems" are influencing the justice system on issues such as the amount of cannabis "for personal use", low gram amounts and the accusation of trafficking and dealing, length of prison sentence etc. Surprisingly, the real use of cannabis by 14-18yr olds appears to be declining, both in lifetime prevalence and actual use (BZGA, 2007).

Mr Volker Happel acknowledged that these short comments do not make a claim to give a complete analysis of the topic, but rather provide a framework for the tasks facing this two-day conference. Questions to be debated include: How and what kinds of information do we give on the phone? What are the counselling measures used? Do we differentiate between tolerant versus over-considerate parents; casual/ habitual/ strong and dependent users; gender and migration-specific approaches, etc.? He ended by saying that we have ample questions for a lively conference and that he hoped that we would all benefit from our experience here to increase the quality of service we deliver at home.

Last but not least Mr Volker Happel extending his gratitude to the current board members, especially to Patricia Pissarra, from IDT Portugal and also a sincere thanks to Marianna Musat our managing director, without whom this conference would not be happening.

Hans-Volker Happel
FESAT President

Plenary

Cannabis and Drug Helplines – Data from the FESAT Monitoring System

The Monitoring data collection in March 2007, which covered the second half of 2006, included some extra questions about cannabis. The different cannabis questions were answered by a different number of helplines ranging from 9 to 15. The most important results include the following:

Cannabis is the most common subject with about 25 % of all calls, followed by heroin with about 20 %. In 2006 the number of calls increased mainly about cocaine, alcohol and cannabis. Parents are the kind of callers that most frequently contacted a helpline about cannabis and the second most frequent is users themselves.

The most common subjects related to cannabis are general effects and length of time that cannabis is detectable in blood or urine. Cannabis users are judged to have the most positive attitudes to cannabis and police officers the most negative. Attitudes to cannabis seem to have become more negative during the last three years among all kinds of callers.

Björn Hibell

CAN, Stockholm



Bjorn Hibell, Board Member (Sweden) and Sara Moreira (Portugal)

CONFERENCE NOTES
MON OCT 1ST

WORKSHOP 1:

Cannabis concerns in helpline calls

Summary by Hans-Volker Happel, Workshop moderator

All three presentations in this workshop (Samantha Poynter, Ireland; Ulrich Gottschalk, Germany and Sturla Johansen, Norway) documented the high quality standards of drug helplines. Three points of note may be taken from this workshop under the headings of the similarity of cannabis call topics, counseling and networking/ integration of helplines.

1. Records of the content of cannabis calls seem comparable across Europe. Common frequently asked questions, along with common themes of health, help and trafficking issues are also shared. High percentages of services received cannabis calls seeking help; support/ counselling and information on urine screening. Average percentages of services reported cannabis calls referring to more acute problems and seeking treatment. Fewer services regularly dealt with issues such as health problems; school projects; pregnancy and withdrawal problems in their cannabis related calls. This analysis of monitoring data helps use to fine tune intervention options.
2. Counselling techniques and measures have reached a very professional level. Motivational interviewing is combined with client-centred talk-therapy methods and the helpline worker has to respect elements of interaction such empathy, transference and self-reflection. Thus helpful interventions are based on a toolbox of counselling and goal attainment skills that we use with callers along with offering information from various data banks.
3. Helplines seem to often be integrated within broader helping services including those involved with general health, legal or vocational advice, poisons centres etc.

The discussion showed that there is a deep need for general information exchanges amongst helpline workers and sometimes it was difficult to focus on the specific theme of cannabis, with a lot of interest in the topic of professionalism and quality development. Along this line it is quite difficult to include voluntary workers in the general duty in an appropriate way. It is surprising that the discrepancies of former years between the European helpline are evening out. The similarity of methods and measures and also the basic attitude to illegal drugs signal European quality standards.



Tom Evenepoel, Board Member (Belgium) and Ulrich Gottschalk (Germany)

CONFERENCE NOTES

MON OCT 1ST

WORKSHOP 2:

Cannabis online

Summary by Annemarie Kok, workshop moderator

This was a very interactive workshop, from a raver (drug dancer) to a chat room to email counselling.

Daan vd Gouwe from Holland showed us an interactive way of giving information about the effects and risks of cannabis. He showed us the raver on the homepage of www.drugsinfo.nl He also shared his experiences of one-to-one chat online.

The second workshop was from Sara and Marta from IDT, Portugal. They showed us their chat room and gave a presentation on 'the making of this chat room'. They chat with young people and are just beginning and are very excited about it. They have a chat room where several people can chat at the same time.

Tom Evenepoel from Belgium shared his experience with email counselling and compared it with the telephone phone counselling. The outcome was that dealing with email queries is a different discipline to taking helpline calls. It takes more time but also given its ease of access, you can ask a question whenever you want.

During the coffee break, some of us continued the workshop sharing information and for example we found out that Finland has a very nice game to download to your mobile phone- another medium to be used for drug prevention.

Conclusion:

We use several ways of giving information about cannabis and drugs in general. This workshop was a helpful and worthwhile, though, as always we were too short on time. So, let's keep each other up to date and share experiences on the FESAT website (www.fesat.org) or via email.



Philippe Bastin (Belgium) Natalie Dekker (Netherlands) and Annemarie Kok, Board Member (Netherlands)

**CONFERENCE NOTES
TUES OCT 2ND**

WORKSHOP 3:

**Young people, parents, cannabis and helplines
(Counselling, short interventions)**

Summary by Tom Evenepoel, Workshop moderator

The third workshop of the conference focused on young people and parents, two of the most important target groups of drug helplines. Although both tend to have a lot of questions on cannabis, the perspectives of parents and cannabis using young people are, of course, very different from each other. This workshop looked at what a helpline has to offer to these target groups in terms of counselling, brief intervention strategies or as gateways to more elaborate counselling, therapy or treatment.

Chris Murphy (DAP Crosscare, Ireland) shared some interesting experiences of counselling parents who are concerned about cannabis use by their son or daughter. He looked at how to deal with dilemma's such as the powerlessness that parents feel and how that relates to young people's struggle for more responsibility and autonomy. Another recurring topic is the negative impact of drug use on the child-parent-relationship as well as the relationship between the parents themselves. From this last perspective he highlighted the importance for parents to look after their own well-being rather than to let the drug problem suck up all their energy.

The second speaker switched the perspective. Christina Pabst (Drogennotdienst, Germany) described how her service tries to reach young cannabis users through the use of a tailored brief intervention programme. Not surprisingly motivational interviewing techniques (which seem to be widely known amongst helplines) play a crucial role in these kinds of programmes. Although the cannabis users often attend these group sessions because of some kind of external pressure (from their parents, school or even because of legal sanctions), they often seem to learn quite a bit and even reconsider their own cannabis use afterwards. Positive peer influence, a safe environment and interactive learning seems to be key success factors in such groups.

Nathalie Dekker (Drugs Infolijn, The Netherlands) put the focus back on parents with her presentation. Prevention work in Holland recently switched to a more radical message about alcohol and parenting. Scientific evidence about the risk of brain damage led them to advise parents to forbid their children to drink alcohol under sixteen. This message on alcohol made the helpline workers reconsider the advice that they give to parents on other types of substance use, such as cannabis. Traditionally parents of cannabis users are advised to discuss and negotiate with their children, trying to convince rather than to simply forbidding its use. Nathalie asked the workshop participants to share their views on parenting and substance use. Should parents simply forbid any use under a certain age or should they negotiate with their children? And what if they already started using before a certain age? This triggered a lively workshop discussion, which led to the conclusion that it is very hard to pin down one strict piece of advice or guideline that is useful for all parents. A discussion on forbidding, age limits and difference in legislation across Europe brought the participants back to the notion of power and the feeling of powerlessness amongst parents that Chris had addressed in his contribution.

The involvement of the participants showed that the topics raised by all three speakers were very familiar and relevant to a lot of the helpline workers. Once more, their active input convinced me that drug helpline workers throughout Europe share the same sincere involvement and genuine dedication to their work.

WORKSHOP 4:
Selective (mis) perception of cannabis use

Summary by Patricia Pissarra, Workshop moderator

This workshop had two presentations, one from Raul Melo Clinical Psychologist from IDT and other from Daan van der Gouwe, Drugs Infolijn, The Netherlands.

Daan's presentation began him showing that mis-perceptions exist in society and that our challenge is to address them appropriately when our service users present them to us in their call, text or email. To achieve that acknowledgment Daan showed on-line some web-sites such as www.thepartyflock.nl, where his helpline is trying to intervene by demystifying some 'absolute truths' that are posted there every day. In contrast to this he used the EELDA (Evidence Based Electronic Library on Drug Addiction) and Erowid websites as examples of places where the mis-perceptions can be demystified with the use of scientific information. Participants were then asked to help to identify the top five mis-perceptions, which they are presented with in their services, and the way they handle them.

Raul Melo's presentation was a very practical one where participants played two games about perceptions. The games show participants the different ways our perceptions are influenced. He asked: "How do we know our perception is a correct one?" Some say that there is no reality, only the mis- perceptions we create from what surrounds us. They correspond to the comprehension and integration of selective information filters in our system of values and beliefs, confronted with our early experiences. The use of substances, including cannabis, as a way to improve the performance or the welfare of these information filters, have a role on that system, sometimes as a conscientious choice, others as an impulsive behaviour. The perception of this fact will have different meaning depending on which angle we approach it from and in this way it will promote different reactions. None of them will be the right one because in a way all these statements will be limited by the mis-perceptions on which they are based on.

In the end participants discussed the specialist's role in the management of this *reality*? Should we inform, or correct the misperceptions, or combat the supporters of these substances, or comprehend those behaviours? Should we do it all at the same time? This workshop attempted to explore these questions from the personal to the technical point of view and look at translating that into our work.

CONFERENCE FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS

Taking a call on cannabis

'Taking a call on cannabis -- drug helplines' response' was the theme of a conference organised by the European Foundation of Drug Helplines (FESAT) from 1-2 October in Lisbon. Held in collaboration with the EMCDDA and the Portuguese *Instituto da Droga e Toxicodependência* (IDT), the event brought together drug helpline services from around 20 European countries.

The two-day meeting, hosted by the EMCDDA, featured a broad range of presentations in relation to Europe's most consumed drug. These included: trends in cannabis use in Europe; health effects; legal aspects of cannabis use and common misconceptions relating to the drug (e.g. potency, legality). It also provided a forum for the exchange of information on new problems and responses and latest research. 'Frequently asked questions' to the helplines were examined and options for interventions presented (e.g. replies, counselling, and referrals).

Drug helplines provide the public with a valuable service comprising information, support, prevention and harm reduction. The data they collect, as a grassroots source of help, play an important role in monitoring new drug use patterns and emerging trends, both key areas of the EMCDDA's revised mission statement. The meeting provided a solid foundation for further collaboration in these areas between the EMCDDA and FESAT.

Deborah Olszewski,
EMCDDA

For more see <http://www.fesat.org>

Missed it?

Having consolidated and maintained the existence work of the FESAT network in recent years, the decision was made to host a conference on the topic of cannabis calls in Lisbon this October. It was only fitting that the most referred to drug from calls across Europe should be the topic of discussion for this network, which shares so many themes, challenges and ideals across the continent. Over 40 delegates attended the conference and as always, this forum to meet with colleagues to discuss shared interests was very beneficial. For those of us who were unable to attend this conference, I sense that we missed a golden opportunity as meeting face to face is the ultimate value of a network and surely one that we should repeat when at all possible. My colleague who attended returned with tales of human connections, invaluable inputs and has a renewed excitement both for our work within a small service and our relevance and value within the broader context of addiction services, locally and across Europe. Contacts through this newsletter, the Forum, email and telephone must be utilised further if we are to keep the network strong and energised and once we find the resources, we must focus ourselves into further seminars, conferences and other such meetings. This is not about 'junkets', it is about acknowledging the value of what we do individually and then investing that across our countries so we can all learn from each other and improve our work taking calls on all of our helplines.

I hope that both for those who attended the conference and those who could not make it, that this can be a time for rejuvenation, where the new profile of FESAT can be drawn and new activities, along with the invaluable staples such as monitoring and networking can see a redoubling of our efforts and involvement.

Stand up and be counted helplines, as the strength of this, as with any network, is in its members!

Aileen Dooley

Drugs/HIV Helpline, Ireland

CONFERENCE FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS

Some Feedback on the Lisbon Conference from our French colleague

When I first heard about the FESAT conference in Lisbon a few months ago, I had mixed thoughts of surprise, enthusiasm and sceptical. I was surprised and enthused by the idea of meeting people who do the same job as myself. This stimulated my curiosity and reminded me that we are not as “alone” as we may feel sometimes. I had never been to a FESAT conference before. I was “sceptical” because at the same time I wondered what we could say and exchange in such a short period of time. All the more so, that here in Paris we have not really been involved anymore in the FESAT activities and that we had no intervention scheduled for the conference.

Eventually, if I had to use two words about the conference in retrospect they would be “stimulating” and “frustrating”, which is very good! My “stimulation” came from the fact that despite our different backgrounds, we obviously share the same concern about finding the “right” answers and the “right” resources to reach the people we are supposed to talk to (especially the youngest). We all try to do it in our own ways, with our own possibilities and appreciations and in the same time we do more or less the same things (for instance developing e-mail counselling, chat, etc.). Being able to see the little differences we all introduce in our ways to develop these tools is a very powerful way to help us understand how we are functioning at our own level. So this conference has made possible for me to discover or understand better some tools some of you have developed (for instance the SMS developed in Ireland or the “Drugdancer” developed by the Trimbos Institute) and to understand better how we conceived things ourselves up to now. This is a “mirror effect”, the kind of “mirror effect” we offer to the people who call us, and sometimes, it is refreshing to take advantage of that. My “frustration” was in the fact that although this conference boosted my interest, the time offered was too short, the subject too specific, to really allow us to go beyond the surface. In a way this is normal as we don’t really know each other and so we only can try to show each other what we are doing. Maybe also it is not really the aim of such a conference to really go deeper. But the result of all this is that I ended the conference with a bigger thirst than when I arrived! And this is where the “frustration” becomes very powerful and, I hope, a positive option: now that I know some of you I want to know you better...

During the conference, the FESAT board asked us if it should continue to exist and called for ideas and participation. It is obvious today for me that FESAT is very useful for our own local practices and that we all have things to share. FESAT makes it possible for us to meet and keep in touch and that is its first value. We still have to build up what will make FESAT more useful for all of us and once again well recognized by the European Commission. If all of us invest ourselves a little in this organisation I am sure we will achieve this. My wish, after this conference, has been that DATIS here in France reactivates a little more its participation in the FESAT network. I asked my Director (Baptiste Cohen) if he would agree that I become a contact point for the FESAT. He agreed and so I am pleased today to start sharing information with some of you. May I suggest that people who have hesitated before should do the same thing? This is not necessarily time consuming and for sure working together will make us stronger and help us to improve our practices. DATIS and I would like to thank all the people who participated in the organisation of this Conference. You did a great job; it was perfect. THANK YOU!

Etienne Martin,

Drogues Alcool Tabac Info Service (e.martin@drogues-info.fr)

Conference Programme

Mon Oct 1st 2007

10.00 **Opening speeches** EMCDDA, IDT and FESAT president

10.30 **Plenary session**

1. Epidemiological trends in Cannabis use across Europe
Paul Griffith's, EMCDDA
2. Cannabis and Drug Helplines – Data from the Monitoring system
Björn Hibell, CAN, Sweden

11.30 **Coffee break**

12.00 **Plenary session**

1. Lifestyle and cannabis
Tom Decorte, Institute for Social Drug Research, Belgium
2. Cannabis and Health
António Maia, Institute on Drugs and Drug Addiction, Portugal

13.00 **Lunch**

14.00 **Workshop 1**

Cannabis concerns in helplines calls and e-mails (frequently asked questions)

Moderator – Hans-Volker Happel, Integrative drogenhilfe e.v., Frankfurt, Germany

i. 'Fix my son. Tell me what to do!' Daily challenges of a Helpline worker

– Samantha Poynter, Drugs/HIV Helpline, Ireland

ii. Cannabis calls, the Norwegian picture

- Reidun Wilhelmsen, RUStelefonen 08588, Norway

iii. Counselling heavy cannabis user on the helpline

- Ulrich Gottschalk, Basis e. V., Germany

Workshop 2

Cannabis on Line

Moderator - Annemarie Kok, Drugs Infolijn, The Netherlands

i. Answering questions online

- Daan van der Gouwe, Drugs Infolijn, The Netherlands

ii. Net Surfing and Cannabis

– Sara Moreira & Marta Aleixo, Linha Vida SOS Droga, Portugal

iii. 'Will zeroes & ones take us there?' E-counselling & cannabis

–Tom Evenepoel, De Druglijn, Belgium

15.30 **Coffee break**

16.00 **Meeting of the Associated Services of FESAT**

20.00 **Dinner**

09.45 Plenary session

Helplines Intervention options

Vanda Baptista, Institute on Drugs and Drug Addiction, Portugal

10.30 Coffee break

11.00 Workshop 3

Young people, parents, cannabis and helplines (counselling, short intervention)

Moderator - Tom Evenepoel, Druglijn, Belgium

i. Common concerns for parents on cannabis use in Helpline calls and email

-Chris A. Murphy, DAP, Ireland

ii. Helplines as a gateway to further interventions

- Regina Pabst, Drogennotdienst, Germany

iii. Working with parents of cannabis users on the helpline

- Nathalie Dekker, Drugs Infolijn, The Netherlands

Workshop 4

Selective (Mis) perceptions of cannabis

Moderator - Patricia Pissarra, Linha Vida SOS Droga, Portugal

i. (Mis) perceptions about drugs and how to deal with this on a drug helpline

- Daan van der Gouwe, Drugs Infolijn, The Netherlands.

ii. How do we know our perceptions are correct?

- Raul Melo, Clinical Psychologist, IDT, Portugal

12.30 Plenary session

Cannabis Legal aspects

Brendan Hughes, EMCDDA

13.00 Closing session

13.15 Lunch

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FUTURE CONFERENCES / SEMINARS

National Drug Treatment Conference

13-14 March 2008, Glasgow

www.exchangesupplies.org

19th International Conference on Reduction of Drug Related Harm

11-15 May, 2008, Barcelona, Spain

www.ihra.net

Club Health 2008

The 5th International Conference on Nightlife, Substance use & Related Harm Issues

23-25 June, 2008, Ibiza, Spain

www.clubhealth.org.uk

Remember that if:

- you have any news about your service before the next newsletter;
 - you have any news about drugs or drug use in your country;
 - you have a query for those working in drug helplines in other countries;
 - you have something else to communicate to the network members;
- use email or the members forum on our website www.fesat.org to pass the word on.

If you want to be informed.....keep us informed!

This newsletter is a compilation of pieces sent by several FESAT Associated Services and EMCDDA and was compiled by Aileen Dooley, Board member (Ireland). The Board of FESAT acts as an editorial committee.

We circulate this Newsletter by email rather than post as a way of keeping our costs down.