

## 5. YOUTH, ALCOHOL AND DRUG ISSUES

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The purpose of this report is to update elected members on collaborative initiatives which are aimed at addressing the lack of Government action around youth alcohol and drug issues. Councillor Alister James will report on progress.

### BACKGROUND

Christchurch has a growing problem of young people with alcohol and drug addiction issues and which impacts on youth crime including house burglaries. There are other social and health costs beyond the cost of criminal offending. A Youth Drug Court is being piloted in Christchurch at a time when the closure of the Queen Mary Hospital (QMH) adolescent programme has left the South Island without any residential facilities for young people with such addiction issues.

A meeting was held on 18 January 2002 of members of alcohol and drug agencies together with representatives of Government agencies and the Christchurch City Council, including Councillors Megan Evans and Alister James. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss issues relating to the then pending closure of the QMH adolescent programme. A representative of the QMH gave an overview of the adolescent programme and the decision to close the programme in March, both as the result of an application for an increase in funding being declined by the Ministry of Health and also a business decision to focus on adult programmes including private referrals. The programme ran for 24 months only with retention and completion rates improving in the six months prior to closure. It was stated that the programme was still in a development stage. Generally, the programme had full capacity with approximately half the clients being Maori. The majority of young people on the programme experienced some kind of conduct disorder. The Ministry of Health funded five youth specific alcohol and drug beds for the South Island and in addition, the Department of Child, Youth and Family funded other beds. Those at the meeting agreed that it was important to ensure that funding for the residential beds was not lost to the youth, alcohol and drug sector upon the closure of the QMH programme and the group set the challenge of exploring alternative ways of meeting young people's needs and to seek methods of providing service delivery which incorporated continuity of care and best practice.

It was also stated that there was to be a major review of the existing configuration of alcohol and drug services and service needs assessment in the southern region with the needs of youth as a focal point. Responding to a recent letter from Councillor James (see attached letter), the Minister of Justice, Hon Phil Goff, stated that the Minister of Health, Hon Annette King advised (see attached letter) that the Canterbury District Health Board was discussing the possibility of re-configuring existing services to accommodate a youth treatment option). The Minister also observed that any programme proposed by the CDHB must be designed carefully and focus on addressing the most serious needs of young people with drug problems and not aimed exclusively at offenders. However, a statement from the Canterbury District Health Board advises that it has no immediate plans to set up a youth-focused residential drug and alcohol treatment programme.

A review of mental health services is to take place but will not be completed until the new year. It is uncertain whether this review will result in the CDHB making funding available for a residential drug and alcohol treatment programme for young persons, particularly given its current deficit of \$23 million.

Research has been undertaken as to best practice models. Councillor James recently observed the Youth Treatment and Education Court operating in San Francisco and met with the Administrative Director and Clinical Director of the treatment programme. A copy of his report is attached. Any residential programme will need to be therapeutic having regard to wider conduct disorders as well as the need to offer other programmes such as the educational needs of young people.

Christchurch is well served as regards adult programmes with several residential programmes and other services. A number of organisations offer outpatient counselling and assessments. Odyssey House provide a four day a week youth programme and with adequate funding may be willing to provide a residential facility, similar to the Odyssey House residential youth programme in Auckland. An issue for many young people is that unsatisfactory family homes contribute to their problems and in reality, the Department of Child, Youth and Family are not able to provide safe and stable placements. Neither the Government or local government are meeting the needs of young people requiring supportive accommodation.

A pilot Youth Drug Court in Christchurch commenced in March 2002 in the same month as the QMH adolescent programme closed. It arose from the recommendations of the Ministerial Taskforce on youth offending. The taskforce expressed concerns about the "large gaps in the availability of appropriate mental health services for young people, and particularly alcohol and drug treatment services for younger teenagers". The objectives of the pilot are to improve the health and social functioning of the participants, decrease their drug use, reduce crime associated with drug use and reduce criminal activity. This is to be achieved with the imposition of Court ordered intervention/treatment programmes. A copy of the media statement of the Minister of Justice as to the Youth Drug Court initiative is attached. It states "Up to eighty per cent of young offenders are estimated to have a drug or alcohol abuse problem, they either offend to obtain drugs and alcohol or offend under the influence of those substances". Further, "Preventing further offending requires that we tackle and deal with that problem".

#### **ACTION UNDERTAKEN**

A working group convened by Lyn Campbell, comprising Councillor James, representatives of alcohol and drug agencies and government agencies has been meeting regularly and has included a meeting with former Minister Matt Robson. The group is concerned that progress is not being made in the establishment of a residential facility in Christchurch. It supports a meeting between the City Council and the CDHB with other agencies represented to discuss the lack of a residential facility. The Minister of Justice has rejected the suggestion of a forum involving Government agencies as he regards the issue as a matter for the health sector only.

However the working group believes that there is value in the Mayor convening a forum with representatives of CDHB and other agencies to progress the establishment of a residential drug and alcohol treatment programme for youth in the South Island. Working group representatives from key community groups and Child, Youth and Family are working with Councillor James to prepare a presentation highlighting the issues. The working group also believes there would be value including Judge Walker from the Youth Drug Court, in a Mayoral Forum. The Ministry of Education has undertaken to collaborate with the Department of Child, Youth and Family and the health sector, to develop a programme for schools to address the exclusion of young people from schools for drug and alcohol issues. Drug related issues are a major reason for suspensions.

#### **CONCLUSION**

A major concern is that the previous Ministry of Health funding of residential beds has now been lost to the South Island and that responsibility for funding has now been passed onto the CDHB. It is understood that the previous Ministry funding has now been directed into North Island services. The Hon Jim Anderton has been appointed as Associate Minister of Health with responsibility for driving the Government drug and youth suicide strategies. It is not clear whether those strategies will provide additional funding or services for Christchurch, at least in the short term.

Previous Government statements have reflected concern at the incidence of youth offending and reoffending leading to persistent adult offending and a crime reduction strategy which inter alia, provides for beneficial partnerships between government agencies and territorial local authorities.

The lack of Government action in developing a worthwhile treatment programme for young people is causing considerable frustration and it is evident that there is a lack of collaboration between government agencies and including the CDHB in the delivery of alcohol and drug services for young people.

#### **Staff**

- Recommendation:**
1. That the Mayor convene a forum with representatives of the Canterbury District Health Board and other agencies to progress the establishment of a residential youth alcohol and drug treatment programme.
  2. That a copy of this report and the resolutions of the Council be sent to all local Members of Parliament and relevant Ministers.
  3. That the Associate Minister of Health, the Hon Jim Anderton, and Judge Walker from the Youth Drug Court, be invited to attend the Mayor's forum

#### **Chairperson's**

**Recommendation:** For discussion.