Drug Education Forum launched to strengthen and support the sector nationally and advocate for excellence in drug education for all young people

Tuesday 20 February, 2024

Launching today (February 20th, 2024) is the Drug Education Forum (DEF), bringing together drug education providers, educators and practitioners from across the UK to uphold evidence-based standards, share best practice and provide a voice for the sector. A vital aspect of this is ensuring that all young people to have access to high quality, evidence-based drugs education, as well as advocating for this to be an essential part of any response to preventing drug-related harm.

Led by the Daniel Spargo-Mabbs (DSM) Foundation, the initiative has commitments from a wide range of individuals and organizations, and is open to anyone working in this field as well as stakeholders. Membership will provide practitioners and providers with access to expert speakers, the latest evidence, research and resources, examples of best practice, and opportunities to connect with others working across the sector, to improve outcomes for young people in relation to alcohol and other drugs. A steering committee chaired by Fiona Spargo-Mabbs (DSM Foundation) and comprising Emma Crawshaw (Crew 2000), Nick Hickmott (We Are With You), Charlotte Gordon (KIP Education), Ivan Ezquerra-Romano (Substancy), Helena Conibear (Talk About Trust) Paul North (Volteface) and Arda Ozbuckuku (Neurosight) will provide expertise and oversight of the DEF, while a group of key advisors (including Prof Harry Sumnall, Prof Adam Winstock, Jason Kew and Jamila Boughelaf) is in place to supply strategic insights and guidance.

Today's soft launch – marked by the release of a video highlighting the importance of drugs education at the DSM Foundation's tenth anniversary event in Croydon – will see the DEF's website go live, and will be followed by an online webinar which will officially launch the DEF on March 20th 2024, featuring Harry Sumnall as keynote speaker. Professor Sumnall, from Liverpool John Moores University School of Psychology, is recognized as a leading expert in young people's drug use and prevention interventions. The event programme will also feature short spotlights on different models of drug education and harm reduction from across the UK, and an opportunity for delegates to ask questions, share best practice and plan the future development of the DEF.

For more information about the DEF and/or to sign up go to https://www.drugeducationforum.org.uk

Quotes:

Fiona Spargo-Mabbs OBE, *Director and Founder, DSM Foundation*: *"We're really excited to be launching this national community of practitioners and providers, committed to reducing the harm from drugs through effective, evidence-based drug education and harm reduction for all our young people. Working together we can make the difference that's needed to equip young people to manage safely the choices about drugs they will almost all, almost certainly, at some point face."*

Jason Kew, *Senior Practice lead at The Centre for Justice Innovation and Senior Drug Policy and Former Chief Constable, Thames Valley Police*: *"Education is prevention. Drug use occurs throughout every corner of society, it is crucial to enable access to the highest quality, evidenced, effective drug awareness and education for everyone who may need it. The world-leading experts within this forum will seek to develop, inform, and strengthen the evidence base for resources that are proven to keep people safe."*

Prof Harry Sumnall, *Professor in Substance Use in the School of Psychology, Liverpool John Moores University:* "*Young people tell us they use drugs for many different reasons, for pleasure and socialisation, but increasingly, to help cope with poor mental health and wellbeing. We also know that for some, drugs can lead to health and social problems, and disruption of life-chances. The drugs landscape is always changing – new substances emerge, different drugs come in and out of fashion, and technology affords young people new ways to access and use those drugs. All of this means that drugs education and prevention has never been more important. However, just having good intentions is not good enough, and there are many examples of poor quality drugs education in the past. This is why the launch of the Drugs Education Forum is so welcomed. Evidence-based, ethical, and supportive drugs education helps to provide young people with the skills to make healthier and safer decisions, to reduce risks of harms from drug use, and to develop the confidence to seek help for themselves or their friends if they need it. By fostering a sense of professional identity, sharing good practice, and advocating for*

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evidence-based drug education the Forum will help ensure that all young people get the high quality drugs education they deserve"

Information for editors:

Media enquiries about this press release or the work of the DSM Foundation should be sent to media@drugeducationforum.org.uk

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The Drug Education Forum will aim to strengthen the sector by:

- Upholding evidence-based standards and practice based on international research.
- Providing regular briefings, updates, sharing best practice and networking opportunities for DEF members and wider stakeholders.
- Disseminating current information, evidence and research, and relevant legislative and policy changes to DEF members.
- Creating and taking opportunities to strengthen evidence-based drug education through contributing to and disseminating evaluation and research.

And to provide a voice for the sector by:

- Advocating for access to excellent, evidence-based drug education for all young people in the UK.
- Advocating for drug education to be at the heart of any response to drug-related harm and wider work prevention work.
- Engaging with key stakeholders to maintain and build awareness and understanding of the importance and role of evidence-based drug education in preventing and reducing drug-related harm.
- Responding to relevant social, legislative and policy changes and events, and on important developments in the sector.

The Daniel Spargo-Mabbs Foundation is a drug and alcohol education charity founded in January 2014 by Tim and Fiona Spargo-Mabbs in response to the death of their 16-year-old son Daniel having taken ecstasy. The charity aims to support young people to make safe choices and reduce harm, through increasing their understanding of the effects and risks of drugs and alcohol, and improving their life skills & resilience.

The DSM Foundation has developed an evidence-based, evaluated drug and alcohol education programme. This includes delivering workshops for students and parents and training for teachers and professionals, as well as providing planning and resources for teachers to deliver drug education in PSHE. The powerful verbatim play the charity commissioned award-winning playwright Mark Wheeller to write, 'I Love You, Mum – I Promise I Won't Die', was published by Bloomsbury/Methuen Drama in 2017, and is currently a GCSE Drama set text. It has been professionally toured into schools, colleges and communities as a Theatre in Education production and workshop since 2017.

For more information about the DSM Foundation, go to https://www.dsmfoundation.org.uk/.

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View Online

Additional Assets:
DEF launch video
https://vimeo.com/913257384/405cee22cf?share=copy

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